The title of this booklet, "UFIL' Umuntu, UFIL' Usadikiza!" (The person is dead but his/her spirit is alive!), is a slogan which was chanted by the workers during the Durban strikes of 1973.
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Khanyo College is an independent non-governmental organisation based in Johannesburg, South Africa. Established in 1986, the primary aim of Khanya College is to assist various constituencies within working class and poor communities to respond to the challenges posed by the forces of economic and political globalisation. Khanya College offers assistance through providing educational and training workshops, publications and research to organisations and individuals in these communities. Khanya College contributes to these challenges by emphasising solutions based on social solidarity, popular democracy and participation, organisation and mobilisation.
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*It has been such a long road by Alfred Temba Qabula*

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The 1973 strikes in Durban and the subsequent wave of worker uprisings are regarded as important landmarks in the making of the South African labour movement. The strike wave and the consequent revival of the labour movement have a direct bearing on the present labour movement. Key working class organisations that constitute the present labour movement can trace their origins back to the 1973 strike wave. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the country’s biggest trade union federation can also trace its roots back to the strikes of 1973 and commemorates its twentieth anniversary in 2005.

Over and above this, the traditions established by the Durban strikes and the struggles it gave rise to have greatly influenced the way we understand democracy and politics in South Africa. Some of these traditions and practices, such as the shop steward movement, the principle of workers' control and other democratic practices, continue to inspire those who are struggling for democracy in working class organisations and in society at large. Union practices such as leadership accountability, regular election of shop stewards and attempts to establish participatory democracy were replicated and adapted in student, civic and other mass organisations during the struggle against apartheid.

Purpose of the booklet
By writing this booklet we are not only commemorating the present labour movement and its roots, but we also seek to understand the various struggles that were waged by the modern labour movement. We think that an understanding of these struggles and traditions they gave birth to will assist with building organisations of the oppressed in the context of present-day struggles against globalisation.

The booklet is aimed at activists in trade unions, social movements, urban and rural communities, informal sector organisations, church organisations and service organisations. Its aim is to provide activists with an overview of the labour movement, its history, struggles, issues and debates since the Durban strikes of 1973. It seeks to provide information to activists to facilitate debates and discussions, to help them draw organisational and strategic lessons that can be used in the process of building organisations and struggles against neo-liberalism.
LIST OF ACRONYMS

M M  Anti-Apartheid Movement
AFCWU  African Food and Canning Workers’ Union
ANC  African National Congress
ARMSCOR  Armaments Corporation of South Africa
AZACTU  Azanian Council of Trade Unions
AZASO  Azanian Students Organisation
BAWU  Black Allied Workers’ Union
BWP  Black Workers Project
CCAWUSA  Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers’ Union
CCOBTU  Consultative Committee of Black Trade Unions
COSAS  Congress of South African Students
COSATU  Congress of South African Trade Unions
CNETU  Council of Non-European Unions
CPSA  Communist Party of South Africa
CUSAU  Council of Unions of South Africa
CWJU  Chemical Workers Industrial Union
FOSATU  Federation of South African Trade Unions
FCWU  Food and Canning Workers’ Union
GWU  General Workers’ Union
ICFTU  International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
IMF  International Metalworkers’ Federation
IMF  International Monetary Fund
ISCOR  Iron and Steel Corporation
MACWUSA  Motor Assembly Components Workers’ Union of South Africa
MAWU  Metal and Allied Workers Union
NAWU  National Automobile and Allied Workers Union
NP  National Party
NEUM  Non-European Unity Movement
NUM  National Union of Mineworkers
NUMARWOSA  National Union of Motor and Rubber Workers of South Africa
NUMSA  National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
NUSAS  National Union of South African Students
NUTW  National Union of Textile Workers
PAC  Pan African Congress
SAWU  South African Allied Workers’ Union
SACTU  South African Council of Trade Unions
SASO  South African Student Organisation
SASOL  South African Synthetic Oil and Lubricants
SRC  Student Representative Council
TAWU  Transport and Allied Workers Union
TGWU  Transport and General Workers Unions
TUACC  Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Committee
TUC  The British Trade Union Council
TUCSA  Trade Union Council of South Africa
UAWU  United Automobile, Rubber and Allied Workers’ Union
UDF  United Democratic Front
UTP  Urban Training Project
WPGWU  Western Province General Workers’ Union
WPWAB  Western Province Workers’ Advice Bureau

THE WORKING CLASS ON THE EVE OF THE DURBAN STRIKES

This chapter discusses the manufacturing sector and the growth of the working class; the crisis of capitalism and the rise of the National Party; key struggles in the 1950s; repression and the expansion of the urban working class in the 1960s and struggles on eve of the Durban strikes of 1973.

World War 2 led to the expansion of the manufacturing sector because some of the countries that were involved in the war purchased goods and services from South Africa. In addition, South Africa could not import goods from Britain on the same scale as before. These two developments led to increased demand on local industries and this stimulated the growth of manufacturing. The sector’s output grew by 81.6% between 1939 and 1944. The growth of manufacturing was accompanied by the intensive use of machinery and changes in...
Capitalism in crisis and the rise of the National Party

By the end of the 1940s the South African economy was in crisis because of the following factors:

- The growth in the mining industry during World War 2 had not translated into increased profitability.
- The "reserves", or homelands as they were later called, could no longer support the people living there, and this created problems for the continued sustainability of the cheap labour system.
- The militancy of the black trade unions in the 1940s - for example the black mine workers strike in 1946 - threatened the cheap labour system.
- The broader black population had also become militant and various organisations like ANC, the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) and the CPSA demanded the vote for blacks. This threatened the political system of white domination.

Against the background of these problems the National Party (NP) came to power in 1948. The nationalists represented the alliance of various class interests, namely white capitalist farmers, commerce, finance, Afrikaner middle class and white workers. As a ruling party it also had to represent the most powerful sector of the capitalist class, the mining bosses. The NP then intervened in the economy to increase profitability and intensify exploitation of black workers in town and countryside alike. The NP also consolidated racism and segregation.

The NP served the interests of various components of its support base. For example, Afrikaner banking groups received contracts to act as banks for government, and they also managed various government pension schemes. Afrikaner farmers were assisted with marketing and financial support through institutions such as the Land Bank. Job reservation laws protected jobs for white workers and the Group Areas Act eliminated competition for small white traders.

The apartheid policies of the NP would ensure greater control over the working class, which enabled capitalists to maintain and increase their profits. The passing of a myriad of racist laws that affected every aspect of black life in South Africa signalled a determination by the ruling class to crush all opposition and remove all obstacles to the profitability of the capitalist system. By 1950 the National Party government had passed a number of laws to crush black working class opposition and to entrench apartheid. Some of these laws were the Group Areas Act and the Suppression of Communism Act.

Struggles in the 1950s

The introduction of apartheid led to high levels of political mobilisation that involved labour and political organisations across the national spectrum. SACTU, the successor to CNETU, got involved in the Congress Alliance, a coalition that brought together the ANC, the South African Indian Congress (SAIC), the Congress of Democrats (COD), and the Coloured People's Congress (CPC). The Congress Alliance led a number of campaigns in the 1950s, including the Defiance Campaign in...
earnestly talk to the leadership of organisations and bodies, among them the African National Congress, representative of organised African opinion, with a view... to consider the advisability and possibility of calling a multi-racial convention to seek a solution to our pressing national problems.” Strijdom, needless to say, paid no attention.

What the leadership of the ANC was prepared to accept was, in fact, spelled out by Nelson Mandela during the Treason Trial. He argued that he was prepared to accept 60 seats for Africans in parliament and other seats which would have given the African majority less voice in relation to the white minority.

Neither in the stay-at-homes of 26 June 1957 nor that of April 1958, did the demand of the Freedom Charter for majority rule appear. Instead, the main political slogan of the June 1957 action was “Forward to a Multi-Racial Conference”. And in April 1958 it was “Defeat the Nats”.

As was pointed out by SACTU leader Dan Tloome - reflecting a widespread feeling among activists - this slogan sowed illusions among the people: “The slogan: DEFEAT THE NATS was wrong and misleading. It is highly probable that, taken at its face value, the slogan led a considerable section of the people to believe that the Congresses were in favour of the United Party coming to power, as a party capable of solving our problems in South Africa.”

Kliptown Congress at which the Freedom Charter was adopted. Photo: Eli Weinberg. Mayibuye Robben Island Archive.

1952, the campaign against the extension of passes to women in 1956, and the Pound-a-Day campaign which was spearheaded by SACTU.

Despite the harsh policies of the National Party, the ANC in the 1950s was also searching for a solution which would incorporate the Black elite into the apartheid system but the NP did not want to entertain such a discussion with the ANC leadership.

While recognising that the demands of freedom required the widest mobilisation of the masses, the leaders of the ANC also believed that the struggle could be short-circuited by appealing to the “progressive” capitalists and their supporters to join the “anti-Nats” alliance. They even appealed to the morality of the Nationalists themselves.

In May 1957, Chief Albert Luthuli, the President of the ANC, wrote the following to Prime Minister Strijdom: “The Government should
Women's struggles in the 1950s
Women also led important struggles against the pass system and apartheid and capitalism in the 1950s. In the course of the Cato Manor resistance, thousands of stick-carrying women engaged in mass confrontations with the police. Asked why they were carrying sticks, one woman commented: “It is true that African women never carried sticks before. But then, they never carried passes before either.” In August 9 1958, about 2,000 women marched to Pretoria demanding the scrapping of pass laws.

In October 1958 the government tried for the first time to issue women passes in Johannesburg. Local ANC women activists organised huge marches of Sophiatown and Alexandra women on the Johannesburg pass offices, where they courted arrest. At least 1,200 women were jailed, 170 of them with babies.

Under pressure from below, the Federation of South African Women called for an enlargement of the campaign, and for 20,000 volunteers to defy, refusing to pay fines or bail. This was overruled by the ANC Executive. After that, there were no further major organised protests against the issuing of passes to women.

The Secretary of the Transvaal ANC Youth League stated to the provincial conference of the League in October 1958: “I must say that I am disappointed as regards our struggle against passes. The struggle is rather haphazard as far as I can see it and slowly the number of women carrying passes is increasing...I would appeal to the ANC to set out a definite pattern of how our purpose would be achieved.”

In Natal in 1959-60 there was a mass upsurge of resistance by women, which began in Cato Manor in protest against deportations and intensified liquor raids, and spread into the rural areas as resistance to cattle-dipping. As Durban’s Town Clerk vowed: “The natives of Cato Manor have overthrown European authority. This has lasted for six weeks. They have maintained their success. The only things we have been able to do are the things the natives have allowed us to do.”

Repression in the 1960s
In 1960 the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), formed by a group which had broken away from the ANC in 1959, launched a campaign against pass laws and called on black people to burn their passes and submit to arrest. On 21 March 1960 a march to Sharpeville police station led to the massacre of 69 people, and many injuries. Following this massacre the ANC, PAC and other black political organisations were banned.

Leaders and activists of these organisations were banned, arrested and resorted to working underground. SACTU activists were also arrested and the federation decided to go into exile in 1965. Close links with political movements meant that SACTU was to be specially affected by the banning and imprisonment of many activists in the early 1960s.

TUCSA in the 1960s
Despite the banning of SACTU leaders, arrests and other forms of repression, some trade union activities continued under these very repressive and restrictive conditions. The Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924 compelled white trade unions to register so that they could be part of the collective bargaining system. The act restricted the right of white workers to strike while denying this right entirely to black workers. Blacks could only form unregistered trade unions. By excluding them from the bargaining processes, it made blacks dependent on white workers when it came to negotiating their wages in the Industrial Council. White unions would negotiate for black workers and unions in the sector. For example, SACTU’s African Food and Canning Workers Union worked with the Western Cape based white Food and Canning Workers’ Union.

The Bantu Labour Act of 1953 introduced liaison committees which were composed of workers and management. These committees had to advise the bosses on factory-based issues. The workers representatives in them were not elected by workers but selected by management.

Some African unions joined the liaison committees and became known as “TUCSA parallels”. In other words, TUCSA unions in the same sector were negotiating on behalf of these unions.

In 1963, TUCSA introduced the African Affairs Department to its constitution. Eric Taycke, the founder of the South African Roman Catholic Young Christian Workers, led the department. One of the African unions formed by the African Affairs Department was the Sheet Metal Workers Union which was renamed Engineering and Allied Workers’ Union in 1966. James Bandes who was part of SACTU also assisted the TUCSA’s African Department in organising workers.

The local initiatives of organising under TUCSA were heavily criticised by SACTU in exile because SACTU believed that genuine trade unionism was not possible under a fascist state in which workers’ organisations and rights were severely crushed.

In 1969, TUCSA decided to disaffiliate African unions claiming that this was the wish of its affiliates. Taycke and others were forced to leave TUCSA and formed the Urban Training Project which helped in the formation of unions such as the Commercial, Catering, and Allied Workers Union in 1975.

In 1967, TUCSA decided to launch a coloured automobile union in Port Elizabeth and within months NUMARWOSA was launched as a registered national union, which had access to the industrial council. The union decided to organise African workers in 1971 but was faced with legal obstacles. It then formed a parallel union called the United Automobile, Rubber and Allied Workers’ Union (UAWU). Because NUMARWOSA intended to organise workers across the racial divide, it allowed for UAWU to elect its shop stewards and UAWU office bearers were treated equally. In 1980, after the Volkswagen strike, NUMARWOSA, UAWU and a coloured motor union in the Western Cape merged to form the National Automobile and Allied Workers’ Union (NAAWU) which was part of the FCSATU unions in the 1980s. NAAWU merged with other unions to form NUMSA in 1987.

Repression, economic boom, and a new layer of workers in the 1960s
The 1960s were a decade of unprecedented economic growth in South Africa as the country became more attractive to foreign direct investment. The political and labour market environment was also conducive to high rates of profitability. It is during this decade that the industrial base of the economy was to be greatly increased and consolidated as the state embarked on a programme of expansion of parastatals. This is also the period when there was an increase in the number of monopolies and
The growth of an urban-based working class in the 1940s and 1960s was that a new semi-skilled layer of black workers emerged. This new semi-skilled layer had important consequences for the future of shop floor struggles and the broader political struggle in South Africa.

Firstly, unlike their unskilled fellow workers, semi-skilled workers were not easy to replace, which gave them more power on the shop floor. Secondly, these workers were relatively better educated which made it easier for them to acquire the organisational and political leadership skills needed to wage a sustained struggle against capitalism and apartheid.

Finally, the manufacturing industry's increased demand for semi-skilled workers led to a demand for skills in the labour force. In order to meet the labour needs of manufacturing, the state ensured that workers with minimum education levels required for semi-skilled work were available. The state also had to ensure that cheap black labour lived near the factories, and it accommodated these workers and their families close to their places of work. While manufacturing needed a stable workforce, black workers earned too little and were dependent on state housing. By 1949 about 200,000 squatters lived on the periphery of major cities. Research estimated that in the period between 1952 and 1960, 350,000 houses would be required to deal with the housing backlog for Africans.

As a result of shortage of houses for black workers in urban areas, the Native Building Workers Act was passed in 1951. Based on the act, African workers were recruited to construct houses for Africans in urban areas. Houses were sold on a hire purchase system or rented. In some cases local authorities bought building materials in bulk and sold it to Africans for purposes of building houses. The state's National Building Research Institute encouraged blacks to build their own houses by providing building plans free of charge. During this period, many townships sprang up near industrial towns such as Germiston, Springs, Pretoria, East London, Durban, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and the Vaal Triangle. Notwithstanding this building programme, housing shortages remained one of the main problems facing the black working class in the cities and towns.

Bantu Education and the new needs of capitalism

In addition to a stable workforce in the towns and cities, manufacturing needed a semi-skilled workforce. The growth of metal and engineering industries in the 1940s and 1950s, led to a demand for semi-skilled workers. Manufacturing required a black workforce with some levels of literacy and numeracy.

The apartheid state developed an education system which aimed to ensure that an African workforce was given education to enable it to conduct semi-skilled work for the manufacturing sector. This labour force, among other things, was taught literacy and numeracy. As a result, basic education enrolment increased from 1 million in 1955 to 2.5 million in 1969. The Bantu Education Act of 1953 removed the schooling of blacks from the churches and put it under state control. There were also important developments in higher education.

The Extension of University Education Act of 1959 allowed for the admission of black students to white universities on condition of government approval. The only exceptions were the University of South Africa, which gave instructions through a correspondence system and the University of Natal, which was permitted to run a "non-European" medical school. The Act mandated the formation of new universities, the University of Western Cape for so-called coloureds, the University of Durban-Westville for so-called Indians, University of Zululand for Zulu speaking students, the University of the North (Turklo) admitted
Sotho, Tswana, Venda, Pedi and Tsonga speaking students. Fort Hare, which was formed earlier, admitted Xhosa-speaking students. Racial hierarchical and despotic regimes controlled these "bush colleges" (black universities) and Afrikaner administrators were appointed by the NP regime to run these institutions. All three African universities were built in remote rural areas in order to avoid any interaction between student and the black working class in urban areas. Access to these campuses, curricula, library holdings and cultural life were strictly controlled and monitored. The university administrators attempted to incorporate and control elected Student Representative Councils (SRCs).

The primary purpose of the formation of the "bush colleges" was to create a new breed of administrators, functionaries, intellectuals and political leaders who would serve the new apartheid order. This layer would occupy lower supervisory levels in industry, the bureaucracy of the new Bantustans, an intelligentsia that would defend and justify apartheid and the political leadership structures of the Bantustans.

Workers' and Students' Struggles on the eve of the Durban Strikes

Even under conditions of intense repression in the 1960s, some workers resisted overtly. The number of strikers in 1965 was about 6,000 and this number increased to about 94,000 in 1973. Many workers were beginning to face unemployment, the prices of basic foodstuff and other commodities consumed by workers rising swiftly and in January 1973 train fares in Durban increased by 15%. Workers' wages were stagnant as these hikes were happening in the context of an economic crisis. Just before the Durban strikes of 1973, there were strikes at the end of 1971 and beginning of 1972 in Namibia, which was administered by South Africa at the time. PUTCO workers in South Africa also went on strike in 1972 demanding a 30% wage increase. The PUTCO workers' struggle led to the formation of the Transport and Allied Workers Union (TAWU). In the same year, stevedores in the Cape Town docks staged a work-to-rule campaign.

The new wave of resistance to capitalism and apartheid was given a big boost by the rise of the black consciousness movement in the universities and schools. The black consciousness movement also had connections with the civil rights movement in the United States. Leaders of the movement were also influenced intellectually, politically and culturally by one of the leading black liberation icons at that time, Frantz Fanon. In July 1969 the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) was formally launched at Turfloop. SASO's black consciousness philosophy emphasized that black people were to be their own liberators and should be proud of being black. The black consciousness movement was particularly strong among black university students. Its ideology became a framework for students' resistance to white rule in universities and high schools in the 1970s. It also found social and cultural expression among the black communities in urban areas. Township arts and culture attempted to express black consciousness and black culture.

On the other hand, the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), a predominantly white students organisation, and a few white intellectuals, were influenced by the radicalisation of black students in South Africa, and by the student and workers' uprisings in France (1968). In 1971 the Wages Commission in Natal was initiated by a group of radical white academics and students at the University of Natal.

The rise of the new trade unions was in the main a product of initiatives from the working class and activists from the 1950s and 1960s, who had been inactive in the years of repression. It was also a product of changes in capitalism, which created new forces for the struggle against capitalism itself and apartheid. In addition to these two fundamental factors, activists from other sectors of society, like the churches (for example the Young Christian Workers) and students, made important contributions to the resurgence of the workers movement in the early 1970s.

All these developments laid the basis for the Durban strikes of 1973.
DURBAN STRIKES AND THE REAWAKENING OF THE WORKING CLASS

This chapter attempts to explain factors that caused the Durban strikes: the sectors and workers that participated in the strikes; the responses of the state and liberation movements to the Durban strikes, international solidarity and the political significance of the strikes.

Why Durban?

The Institute for Industrial Education (IIE) argues that the strikes were a series of spontaneous actions by workers, which spread by imitation, and that the spread was “multiplied” by the fact that three quite independent factors happened to coincide. The first factor was the initial strike at Coronation Brick. The second factor was the existence, in Durban, of a number of factories belonging to one organisation characterised particularly by low wages and bad labour relations - the Frame Group. The factories from this group were also strategically placed in each of the major industrial areas. The third factor, according to the Institute, was the rise of transport costs linked to rumours of a train boycott.

Other commentators disagree with the fact that the strikes were “spontaneous” and instead argue that it was the economic crisis of the early 1970s which attacked the living conditions of workers generally, and union organisation which happened in the early 1970s that contributed to the Durban strikes.

The Strike at Coronation Bricks

The Durban strike wave started when 2000 African workers at the Coronation Brick and Tile Company, at the northern outer edge of Durban, went on strike on the morning of the 9th of January 1973. These workers demanded an increase of cash wages from the minimum wage of R8.97 to R20 per week. The strike started when a group of workers woke up other fellow workers at 3 a.m. and told them to go to the nearby football field.

The management of Coronation attempted to intimidate the striking workers but this failed to stop the strike. According to a newspaper report the Zulu King Zwelithini intervened in the strike at Coronation. He promised the workers that the wages would be increased in the near future. Workers were reluctant to stop striking until they were told that refusal to accept this intervention would undermine the King’s dignity. On the 14th of January 1973 workers elected a committee, which represented them in the negotiations with management. Workers rejected management’s first wage offer of an increase of R1.50 per week, but they grudgingly accepted an offer of R2.07 per week. Today this would be equivalent to an increase of R51.85.

The strike of the Coronation workers influenced other workers in Durban and surrounding areas. A brief work stoppage of about 45 minutes took place at the transport firm called A.J. Keeler on the 10th of January 1973. The stoppage was triggered by a wage offer of 50 cents increase per week. Workers went back to work after management had intimidated them and blamed the stoppage on agitators.

On the 11th of January a strike broke out at T.W. Becket and Co., a tea packing firm. One hundred and fifty workers went on strike demanding a R3 per week wage increase. Management responded by calling the police and threatened to dismiss workers who did not return to work within ten minutes. One hundred workers decided to continue with the strike regardless of management’s threats, and they were dismissed. The following Tuesday management informed the dismissed workers that they would be considered for re-employment at the same old wages. Most of the workers decided to continue the strike because management was not addressing their demands. Two weeks after the beginning of the strike, on the 25th of January 1973, management decided to offer a R3 per week increase and the workers returned to work.

While the strike of the T.W. Becket workers was in progress, African ship painters of several companies also went on strike in Durban. The companies that were affected by the strikes included J.H Akitt and Co., James Brown and Harmer. Workers in these companies were earning R2.60 per day and these workers worked three days per week. Their demand was a 90-cents increase in their daily wage. These workers went on strike for several days but it is not clear if their demands were met. The strikes kept spreading and on the 22 January 1973 another strike took place in Pinetown. Two hundred African convoy drivers employed by Mortovia also went on strike and organised a picket. The demand of...
these workers was a wage increase to R40 per week. Management called the police to intervene and the following day 250 workers were dismissed after they had refused management's first wage offer.

The workers formulated a new demand for a minimum wage of R15 per week and a minimum of R5 per convoy driven. Many workers returned to work after management made threats of dismissal and 100 workers were dismissed on the 25th of January 1973.

Textile Strikes

Large factories in Pinetown and New Germany industrial area joined the strike wave soon after it started. On the 25th of January 1973 at 8 am workers of the Frametex Textile factory left their machines and went to a gathering in a yard at the factory. These workers demanded a wage increase to R20 per week. They felt that the R5 to R9 per week wages they were getting were not adequate. On the 26th January 1973 strikes spread to other factories of the Frame Group. The strike affected about 6000 African workers as well as Indian workers. Management offered workers relatively small wage increases and workers rejected this. On the 29th of January 1973, management revised their offer and proposed an increase, ranging from R1.75 to R3.00 per week. The striking workers accepted this and returned to work. By this stage the strikes had spread to Natal Canvass and Rubber, a Frame Group factory in Durban, and numerous other factories in Pinetown and New Germany.

Workers at another major Frame Group in the south of Durban, called Consolidated Textile Mills, stopped working on the 31st of January 1973. The Department of Labour in Durban asked the striking workers to return to work so that negotiations between workers' representation and bosses could continue. Workers rejected this proposal and management locked them out. The neighbouring workers at the Consolidated Fine Spinners, Weavers, Wool-washing and Processing Mills also went on strike. A number of small firms also joined the strike and by the beginning of February 1973 it became difficult for the press to provide a detailed report on each strike because there were so many taking place.

There was better coordination of textile workers partly because there was one major employer in the industry and a registered non-African union intervened in the strike. The first mass meeting of the striking African workers was held at the headquarters of the Textile Workers Industrial Union (TWIU). A meeting of 300 African and Indian delegates elected by textile workers formulated a demand for a R6 per week wage increase. By the 7th of February workers had been out on strike for 7 days. Another meeting held at the Bolton Hall, attended by 800 workers, reaffirmed the demand of textile workers. The meetings happened at the same time with the textile industrial council meeting. At this meeting the Frame Group did not shift from its R2 per week wage increase offer. Workers returned to work after grudgingly accepting the R2 offer on the 8th of February 1973.

Municipal workers' strikes

On the 5th of February 1973 about 3000 African workers of the Durban Corporation stopped work. This negatively affected cleaning, drain, road and electricity work in the city. The workers demanded a R10 per week wage increase on the existing average wage of R13 per week.

Other workers of the corporation also joined the strike and the number of striking workers increased to 16 000. This was despite management's offer of wage increase of R2 per week on the 6th of February 1973. Many Indian workers joined the strike but management reported that some Indian workers were sent home because of fear of "intimidation".

The strike paralysed the city of Durban because garbage began to pile up, gravediggers were not working, market porters were no longer handling goods and the abattoir was no longer operational. Whites and the police were forced to work as scabs in the market place. By the 7th of February 1973 there were about 30 000 workers on strike, including the 16 000 municipal workers. Strikes were also starting in other parts of Natal such as Pietermaritzburg and Port Shepstone.

The Durban municipality gave workers an ultimatum saying that they should either accept the R2 per week across the board wage increase or be dismissed. Many municipal workers grudgingly accepted the offer returned to work on the 8th of February 1973.

The strike wave continues to spread

In the Hammarsdale industrial area near Durban, 7000 workers in 12 industries went on strike on the 6th of February 1973. The demand of the workers was a R3 to R5 per week wage increase. Initially the bosses in the industrial area offered a R2 per week wage increase but workers rejected this offer. The following morning there was a mass meeting of 7000 workers at the nearby bus depot. On two occasions the militant workers, waving sticks, marched defiantly to the factories.

The strikes continued in other sectors such as furniture because at that time the industrial council was reviewing wages, and workers were trying to influence that process. In March 1973 it was reported that there were 14 strikes throughout Natal involving 6 000 African workers.

The most publicised miners' action occurred in September 1973 at the Western Deep Level Mine at Carletonville near Johannesburg. Police opened fire at black mineworkers protesting against the rejection of their wage demand. Twelve workers were shot during the strike. In support of workers' demands the Lesotho government announced a temporary suspension of all recruiting for the mines. Between 1972 and 1973 the Anglo-American corporation increased the wages of black mineworkers by 70 percent. The strikes that erupted generally ended up with 15 to 18 per cent increases. The strike wave continued in the 1970s, but not on a big scale. The second wave of massive strikes hit the mines in the early 1980s.

By the end of 1973, about 100 000 workers had been involved in strikes in the greater Durban-Pinetown-Pietermaritzburg area. The Coronation Brick workers from the building and construction industry started the strikes and they were followed by other sectors. The majority of the striking workers were African. Indian and so-called coloured workers were also part of the strikes. The following sectors were affected by the Durban strikes: building and construction, clothing and textile, municipality, transport and harbours, food and food processing.

Transport boycott

In the context of the strike wave there were rumours about a transport boycott. The first reports of a potential train boycott circulated around the 27th of January 1973. The Daily News, a Durban newspaper, stated
that some employers phoned them and reported that their African employees informed them about a looming train boycott. It was also reported that the police and the railway police received similar calls. According to these reports, the boycott was scheduled for the 1st of February 1973. On the eve of the day on which the boycott was supposed to start some bosses arranged for workers to sleep in the factories and the Durban Corporation waived a curfew that did not allow African workers to be in white areas between 11:30 p.m. to 4:00 a.m. On the day of the boycott the police force was present in African townships as a show of strength and force. The boycott did not take place but the threat reinforced the strike movement.

Response of the state
The strike wave caught the government and the police by surprise. As the strike wave intensified, the police force was deployed in the black townships because of rumours of transport boycotts, and they guarded train stations and the townships. At times the police rushed to the factories in the city but were too few to crush the resistance. In a few instances the police managed to take sticks from the striking workers. Top police officials also reacted by saying that they had nothing to do with the strikes and that as long as the strikers respected the law they would not use force.

The government argued that companies were responsible for the strikes because they were paying black workers low wages. It also noted that minimum wages provided by the Wage Board were only minimum and therefore there was nothing that prevented employers paying higher wages if they wanted to do so.

On the other hand, the then Minister of Labour, Marais Viljoen, blamed the strikes on "agitators" and "people behind agitators". He also blamed the Black Workers Project that had issued a pamphlet in October 1972 criticizing low wages for black workers. He linked this organisation with NUSAS. The minister also linked the strikes with the 1968 student uprisings in France.

Changes to labour law
The government introduced labour law amendments pertaining to black workers in 1973. The amended Bantu Labour Relations Regulation Act made provision for liaison and works committees in workplaces with more than 20 workers. The liaison committee was a joint management and worker committee and management had the right to appoint a chairman to the committee. The function of the committee was to advise the employer on labour related matters. Certain members of the works committee were given a space to raise wage issues in the industrial councils but had no right to vote on the matter. The amended Act also gave black workers a limited right to strike. As is broadly the case today, strikes were prohibited either during the currency of the industrial council agreement, or within one year of a wage determination board looking into the matter in question, or if the matter has been referred by the Minister to the wage board. If these procedures were followed and workers were not happy, a works committee could issue a 30-day notice of strike. The amended Act also provided for employers to approach the minister for the extension of minimum wage rates.

Response of the liberation movement
The Congress Alliance made up of SACTU, the South African Communist Party (SACP), and ANC were in exile when the Durban strikes broke out. While they saw the strikes as a positive move, the concern was that they were not dominant in the strike and in the new unions that emerged out of this strike wave.

This led to a debate and contestation between them and those who built independent trade unions out of the strikes inside the country. SACTU had decided to operate in exile in 1965 because of state repression. SACTU and the Congress Alliance characterized the South African state as a fascist state and argued that the racist regime made it impossible or extremely difficult to organise openly inside the country. Even in 1977 when some attempts to organise militant black workers had taken off SACTU maintained its position on organising in the country. SACTU's Secretary General, John Gaetsewa, in June 1977 said, "There are ultimately two options open to legal African trade unions; either to advance taking up political as well as economic questions, and eventually being crushed or driven underground; or for the leadership to become co-opted".

But there were SACTU/ANC leaders who continued to organise regardless of the position taken by SACTU in exile. SACTU activists had been living low since the 1960s, some released from prison after serving long sentences. This group of activists saw the Durban strikes and its positive impact on workers as an opportunity for reviving SACTU. Some of the prominent ANC/SACTU leaders who were involved in organising trade unions included Harry Gwala and Oscar Mpetha. In 1972, a number of SACTU/ANC activists met and decided to form an advice bureau. The Western Province Workers' Advice Bureau (WPWAB) was formed with Zora Mehlokuzulu as a director.

Responding to the Durban strikes the SACP stated that the Durban strikes, earlier strikes in Namibia and struggles in the then Rhodesia and Mozambique were an indication that the balance of forces were in favour of the liberation movement. The SACP saw the strike action positively because it showed that black workers were prepared to struggle against a cheap black labour system even under conditions of intense repression. The statement then pointed out that the guerrilla strategy of the SAPC and the ANC would strengthen the efforts of black workers inside South Africa.

In an edition dedicated to workers and their struggle in South Africa, Sechaba, the official journal of the ANC, carried an article that European unions had relationships with the predominantly white TUCSA in South Africa. The Durban strikes of 1973 changed the nature of international relations between South African trade unions and trade unions in other countries. International union bodies had to contend with the fact that black workers were now involved in struggles for independent trade unions. A number of developments facilitated this change of attitude:

International solidarity
In the pre-1973 period International Trade Secretariats and some big European unions had relationships with the predominantly white TUCSA in South Africa. The Durban strikes of 1973 changed the nature of international relations between South African trade unions and trade unions in other countries. International union bodies had to contend with the fact that black workers were now involved in struggles for independent trade unions.
In 1974 the International Metalworkers’ Federation (IMF) decided to work towards the formation of a single metalworkers union in South Africa and it also gave support to shop floor organisation of black workers.

**Political impact of the strikes**

The political and economic impact of the Durban strikes can be seen at a number of levels:

- For the first time since the 1950s and 1960s, workers began to use their collective strength in dealing with their problems of low wages, poor working conditions and lack of trade union representation.

- The strikes were an indication that a new phase of struggle was emerging. This phase, which was started by the strikes, took the working class through various struggles such as the uprisings of 1976, strikes in the late 1970s and a strong movement for socialism that emerged in the 1980s.

- Although the strikes were about wages, they posed bigger political questions to the ruling classes and the apartheid regime. Under repressive conditions, black workers were willing to take the risk of challenging the system of cheap black labour.

- A survey conducted at the time revealed that whites were beginning to recognise the power of black workers in South Africa. It also became clear that there was a need for the apartheid regime to allow “space” for black workers to channel their concerns.

- Indian and coloured workers who were part of the strikes were forging a common working class identity with their fellow African brothers and sisters. This was resistance to apartheid, which divided workers along racial lines.

- At an international level, the strikes raised debates around questions of international solidarity. Trade unions in the North, which were closer to the white union body, TUCSA, had to respond to unions that emerged out of the Durban strikes.

- All these developments, and the strikes and new black workers’ organisations in particular, led to changes in labour law that took place in the late 1970s.
THE BIRTH OF A NEW TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

This chapter discusses the formation of trade unions in the 1970s and early 1980s, struggles for union recognition, labour law reforms and debates within the unions concerning the relationship of the new unions to the new laws of the state and to state institutions.

Black Worker Organisation on the eve of the Durban strikes

The most important outcome of the Durban strikes was the birth of a new trade union movement for black workers. The process that led to the revival of trade unionism for black workers began before the outbreak of the Durban strikes. This process took place not only in Durban, but also in other parts of the country.

TUCSA unionists who were from the church background and had connections with the Young Christian Workers attempted to organise African workers within TUCSA in the 1960s, but the TUCSA officials frustrated their attempts. Subsequent to the expulsion of African unions in 1968, TUCSA fired Erick Taycke and Lut Douwes-Dekker, who were leading the initiative of organising African workers in TUCSA's African department. Erick Taycke was the founder of the YCW in South Africa in 1949. The YCW encouraged its members to be active in trade unions and also organised workers. Taycke and Douwes-Dekker then formed the Urban Training Project with the help of the church in 1971. UTP was instrumental in the formation of CCAWUSA in 1975.

In 1971 a group of radical white academics and students at the University of Natal in Durban and Pietermaritzburg initiated the Wages Commission. Among other activities, the Wage Commission called meetings of black workers prior to the Wage Board determinations to formulate demands around wages and working conditions. Also in Durban at the time, black workers formed a General Factory Workers' Benefit Fund, which helped workers with death benefits and to deal with factory problems. At a Benefit Fund meeting, Alcan workers called for the formation of a trade union. This led to the first branch of the Metal and Allied Workers' Union (MAWU) in Natal.

In Cape Town, the Western Province Workers' Advice Bureau (WPWAB) which was led by SACTU activists of the 1950s and 1960s was formed in 1972, and by 1976 it claimed a 5,000 strong membership. The WPWAB advised workers to form works committees that were democratically elected by workers. These WPWAB committees later came together in 1977 to establish a democratic union, the General Workers' Union (GWU). The GWU later established branches in Port Elizabeth and Durban.

In 1972, the Black Allied Workers' Union was formed by organisations allied to the black consciousness movement. SASO as part of its black community projects formed the Black Workers Project which assisted in the formation of unions that subscribed to the Black Consciousness ideology.

TUCSA faces an organisational crisis

In 1968, some unions from TUCSA disaffiliated because TUCSA objected to initiatives to organise African unions. TUCSA lost membership and revenue because of disaffiliation. After the Durban strikes of 1973 and the rise in the unionisation of black workers, TUCSA readmitted the African unions as parallel unions, although it attempted to control these unions. NUMARWOSA disaffiliated from TUCSA in 1976 and looked for various ways of building trade unions in South Africa. The crisis in TUCSA was a reflection of the growth of unionism among black workers, and it signalled the beginning of the end for racially exclusive unionism in South Africa.

Struggles for recognition

There were many attempts by bosses to undermine militant trade unionism in South Africa during the Durban strike wave. This happened even after new unions had signed up a large number of workers. Bosses also launched a union bashing campaign by promoting the toothless liaison committees in the factories but these committees failed to attract many workers.

Workers and the new unions engaged in many battles for recognition. Two of the key struggles were waged at Smith and Nephew, in Natal, and at Heinemann in the Transvaal. In 1974 the Smith and Nephew bosses agreed to recognise and bargain with the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW). The agreement allowed workers in the plant to elect shop stewards. This allowed NUTW to build a democratic structure in the plant that was accountable to its members. The signing of recognition agreements became an important tool for building democratic union structures on the shop floor, and for improving wages and working conditions. Shop stewards had to operate democratically by obtaining mandates from workers on issues concerning the workplace and by reporting back regularly to members during and after negotiations with management.

MAWU started organising in Heinemann in 1975 and resisted the installation of liaison committees. The majority of workers joined the union and elected shop stewards. Workers sent a petition to the bosses demanding the recognition of the union and the elected shop stewards. The police and bosses harassed workers and their shop stewards. In 1976, the company fired 20 workers, including 3 shop stewards. Workers marched to the factory and demanded to see the managing director of the factory. The police and management locked the gates of the factory. As the workers left the factory singing, the police attacked them, injuring 28 workers. MAWU organizers involved in organising the workers were accused of inciting the strike and were arrested. Thereafter the bosses rehired those who accepted the liaison committee. It took some time for MAWU to recover the ground lost during the strike.

Although MAWU lost some ground in these struggles, it was involved in other organising initiatives which consolidated the emerging trade union movement. The most important of these initiatives was the formation of the Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Committee (TUACC) in Durban in October 1973. TUACC was made up of MAWU, the NUTW (also formed in 1973), the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU), formed in 1974) and the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU, formed in 1974).
In addition to the TUACC, there were other initiatives that brought the emerging black trade unions together. The Urban Training Project, a service organisation formed in 1970 by former TUCSA officials who organised black workers, facilitated the formation of the Consultative Committee of Black Trade Unions (CCOBTU).

Students’ uprisings
On June 16 1976, the Soweto Student Representative Council (SSRC) organised a students’ mass meeting at Orlando Stadium in Soweto. The aim of the meeting was to protest against government policy that forced high schools to use Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. As students moved to the stadium, the police opened fire. Many people died as a result of police brutality, and this led to a nationwide uprising. The state tried to smash the student struggles that followed the shootings. Hundreds of students were killed, others were arrested and large numbers of students went into exile and joined the banned liberation movements.

The apartheid government used the events of June 16 to justify attacks on the emerging black trade union movement. Leading trade unionists, and the student activists who helped in the building of the unions, were either arrested or banned. But government attempts to crush the new unions were made extremely difficult by the fact that these unions had strong shop floor structures.

The 1976 student uprising led to the intensification of the struggle against apartheid throughout the country. Even the most repressive measures by the apartheid government failed to suppress the new wave of resistance. For example, in less than two years after the banning of Black Consciousness organisations in 1977 two new national student organisations were launched in 1979. The Congress of South African Students (COSAS) organised in the high schools, and the Azanian Students Organisation (Azaso) organised university students.

The student movement gave a boost to the trade union movement. Many students began to join the union movement as organisers, while thousands of the 1976 and later generations of highly politicised students began to join the ranks of the labour force. By the beginning of the 1980s the student movement began to establish strong links with the trade union movement, and to organise solidarity actions with workers’ struggles. In 1979, for example, many students supported the strikes of the Fattis and Monis workers and that of the meat industry workers in Cape Town.

The struggle for survival, strong organisation and unity
When it became clear that repression alone was not going to destroy the new unions, the apartheid regime introduced a strategy including reform. Although the unions and the student movement that emerged in the early 1970s withstood the waves of state repression in the 1970s, there was a period during which unions struggled to survive. This struggle was due to several factors including the banning orders imposed on many union organisers, organisational weaknesses of the new unions, and the fact that the new union traditions of shop floor organising met stiff resistance from employers.

In 1977, a number of trade unions and coordinating bodies set up a committee to explore possibilities of forming a new trade union federation. These unity talks were not always easy because people had different opinions. The WPWAB argued that it was premature to form a federation. It argued that forming a federation would strengthen the positions of union officials, a development that would undermine the already established democratic shop floor structures. Eventually the WPWAB withdrew from the committee. The Food and Canning Workers’ Union (FCWU) also did not participate in the unity talks. Instead, the union concentrated on building its shop floor structures. The union talks led to a split in the CCOBTU. In 1978 the secretaries of CCOBTU unions rejected the idea of a federation.

The TUACC unions argued for a tight federation that would pool resources together and build strong shop floor based trade unions. Such a federation, according to TUACC, would have to be based on principles of worker control and democracy. Some of the unions from CCOBTU supported the TUACC call for unity, and two of them ultimately split from the CCOBTU.

The unions and coordinating bodies that supported the formation of a ‘tight’ federation formed the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) in 1979. At its launching congress FOSATU claimed...
The formation of FOSATU encouraged other unions and groupings to compromise the independence of unions because it implied working independently of whites, and through its community arm, it ran projects in black communities in the areas of education, health, co-operatives. In 1984 in Johannesburg. All CCOBTU unions joined the federation except General approach in the federation was to struggle for bargaining rights. The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) was accused CCOBTU of being run by general secretaries. In September 1980, CCOBTU formed the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA). All CCOBTU unions joined the federation except the Commercial. Catering and Allied Workers’ Union (CCAWUSA). CCAWUSA decided to remain independent. At the end of 1981 only three CUSA unions were registered. The general approach in the federation was to struggle for bargaining rights outside the formal structures. CUSA believed that registration would compromise the independence of unions because it implied working with the apartheid state. Its unions were generally smaller and spread over large areas. This made it difficult for CUSA unions to go on strikes as often as FOSATU unions. The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) was the strongest and most militant CUSA affiliate. At that stage CUSA had nine affiliates and a membership of 30 000. In 1984 CUSA’s membership had grown to over 147 000 with twelve affiliates. The policies and principles of the federation rested on the following three pillars:

- worker control.
- industrial unionism and,
- black leadership.

The Azanian Council of Trade Unions

The rise of the Black Consciousness movement in the late 1960s led to the formation of a number of organisations which subscribed to its ideology. The South African Students Organisation (SASO) was formed in 1969 and the Black People’s Convention (BPC) in 1972. The Black Consciousness movement encouraged blacks to organise independently of whites, and through its community arm, it ran projects in black communities in the areas of education, health, co-operatives and culture. As part of this movement SASO initiated the Black Workers project (BWP).

In 1972 a member of BPC launched the Black Workers Union (BAWU). BAWU was a general union, and the BWP serviced the union. However, the banning of various activists of the Black Consciousness movement, and the lack of resources, made the building of unions aligned to this movement extremely difficult. These difficulties became worse when nearly all the Black Consciousness organisations were banned in September 1977.

The launch of the Azanian People’s Organisation (AZAPO) in 1979 revived trade union work within this political tradition. AZAPO placed more emphasis on organising black workers, and a number of unions aligned to Black Consciousness were formed in the early 1980s. Towards the mid-1980s these unions held unity talks and that led to the formation of the Azanian Confederation of Trade Unions (AZACTU) in 1984. The new federation claimed a membership of 75 000.

The Unaffiliated Unions

There were also other general and industrial unions that did not affiliate to either CUSA. AZACTU or FOSATU. There were several reasons why these unions remained unaffiliated. In many cases this was because of ideological differences between these unions and the new union federations, and in others it was because of lack of ideological agreement about affiliation within the unions. Yet others did not affiliate because they feared that the new federations would undermine the shop floor traditions that were then emerging.

The Food and Canning Workers’ Union

The Food and Canning Workers’ Union (FCWU) was formed as a non-racial trade union in 1941. The membership of the union consisted of mostly so-called Coloured workers, with a smaller number of African and white workers. The African Food and Canning Workers’ Union was formed after the government had threatened to withdraw the registration of the FCWU in the 1940s. Although the FCWU and the AFWU were separate by law, they worked closely. Joint committee meetings and conferences were held, even after being prohibited by the 1956 Industrial Conciliation Act.

The FCWU was part of the Conciliation Board – a government created body which was meant to settle disputes in an industry – but it also negotiated for the AFWU. Demands to be taken to the board were decided in a general meeting attended by both union members. Despite arrests and banning of union leaders, the union was able to survive even through the 1980s and in 1985 was one of the founding unions of COSATU.

After 1976, FCWU grew stronger in the Western Cape. In April 1979 bosses at the Fattis and Monis mill in Cape Town fired workers after they had demanded the recognition of FCWU. Workers who went on solidarity strike were also fired. The FCWU built strong community support for the striking and dismissed workers. The union launched a boycott campaign against all Fattis and Monis products and demanded the recognition of the union. The boycott was a resounding success. Sales of Fattis and Monis products dropped and seven months later workers were reinstated and the union was
recognised. This set a good precedent and other unions started using the consumer boycott as a tool for building solidarity between workers and communities.

The Western Province General Workers’ Union (WPGWU) was formed in 1977. The union was the product of the work of the Workers Advice Bureau in the Western Cape. The WPGWU adopted an organisational strategy of building a strong union in a few plants. In 1980 members of the WPGWU went on strike at the Table Bay Cold Storage and National Meat Supply because the company refused to recognise a workers’ committee. The bosses responded by firing the striking workers. About 800 workers called a one-day strike in the meat industry in support of their demands. When they returned to work the next day, they realised that they had been locked out.

The union called for a boycott on red meat. Communities responded positively. In one week sales of red meat dropped by 40%. The bosses used the police to bash the union, and union officials were arrested. Workers had to re-apply for their jobs, and very few workers were reinstated.

The Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers’ Union (CCAWUSA) was formed as a parallel union of the National Union of Distributive Workers and the National Union of Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union in 1975. A number of strikes in the retail sector strengthened the union, and between 1981 and 1984 the membership grew from 5 000 to 33 000. By 1985 the union claimed a membership of 25 000 workers. The growth allowed the union to sign recognition agreements with all major stores in the country. The union was instrumental in fighting for a living wage and opposing retrenchments. CCAWUSA also managed to put gender issues and women’s rights on the agenda because the majority of its members were women.

The Motor Assembly and Components Workers’ Union of South Africa (MACWUSA) was formed in 1972. In November 1979 Ford workers in Port Elizabeth went on strike in protest against the dismissal of Thozamile Botha, a member of the executive committee of the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation (PEBCO). PEBCO was involved in militant mobilisation around issues affecting black residents in the townships of Port Elizabeth. Ford bosses acceded to the demands of workers and their union, the United Automobile Workers (UAWU), and Botha was re-instated. Following a series of other mobilizations among the workers in Port Elizabeth there were differences within UAWU, and this led to the formation of MACWUSA in October 1980, which was based at Ford. Other motor component workers formed the General Workers’ Union of South Africa, which had a close relationship with MACWUSA.

The South African Allied Workers’ Union (SAAWU) was formed out of a split in BAWU, and it adopted a ‘non-racial’ constitution. SAAWU had strong roots in East London industrial areas and Mdantsane township. From 1983 to early 1985, SAAWU led a bus boycott in Mdantsane.

Labour Law Reforms

Although the bosses and the state went to great lengths to crush the new unions, by the mid-1970s it was clear that the new unions were around to stay. As a result in 1977 the government appointed the Wiehahn Commission to investigate and make recommendations on labour laws, including issues pertaining to the right of African workers to form independent unions. At the same time, the Riekert Commission was appointed to examine the regime’s influx control laws. The reports of the two commissions led to a rethink of existing policies and a reform of the labour relations and urbanisation laws governing African workers. Between 1979 and 1981 new laws concerning African workers and trade unions were passed.

The labour relations laws:
- Granted African workers access to union rights and access to the Industrial Conciliation Act bargaining structures, including industrial councils.
- Allowed blacks to do jobs formerly reserved for white workers.
- Retained the right to strike, under certain conditions.
- The Industrial Court was also established.

For the first time, African workers were recognised as “employees” in the labour laws of the country and therefore had the right to form registered trade unions. But registering meant that the unions would be subject to certain controls by the apartheid regime. Another major feature of the new labour law was that migrant workers were denied the right to join trade unions. The law also said that unions would be registered on a racial basis. In other words, non-racial unions were not accepted by the new labour dispensation. As a result the labour law reforms caused major debates in the mass movement.

The registration debate

The debate on whether or not, and on what terms to register, caused major differences within the new independent trade union movement.
The unregistered trade unions were faced with tactical questions, which had a direct bearing on principles and strategy of these trade unions. Initially, all trade unions and major groupings - FOSATU, CCOBTU, the African Food and Canning Workers Union (AFCWU), the WCGWU, and even TUCSA's parallel unions - rejected the terms on which registration was to take place. Faced with a united opposition to labour law reforms, the apartheid regime conceded and accepted the right of migrant workers to belong to unions. After this concession TUCSA parallel unions and the CCOBTU decided to register under the new laws.

FOSATU unions, on the other hand, opted for registration on a non-racial basis. This was to be done despite the legislation's prohibition of "mixed" unions. FOSATU also threatened that if their terms were not accepted by the apartheid regime they would deregister. FOSATU argued that registration strengthened its hands against aggressive management and was also meant to respond to TUCSA's attempts to inflate its membership.

However, the WPGWU continued to oppose registration. It argued that registration would undermine workers control and democracy. It argued strongly that registration entails co-option of unions by the state apparatus. Trade unions, according to the WPGWU, had to be independent of state influence, and registration would undermine this. Ultimately, however, the WPGWU decided to register.

The ANC tradition and the registration debate
The upsurge in workers’ struggles in the 1970s led to a change in the position of the Congress on unionisation under conditions of apartheid. Up to then the Congress Alliance had argued that it was impossible to build and sustain militant and progressive unions without these becoming co-opted.

The consumer boycotts and Ford Strike of 1979 signalled the emergence of a new breed of unionism which rejected registration and argued that it was collaboration with the apartheid state. The ANC aligned unions argued that it was impossible to separate workers’ struggles from community issues. They aligned themselves with the ANC and affiliated to the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983. The Motor Assembly and Components Workers’ Union of South Africa (MACWUSA) and the South African Allied Workers’ Union (SAAWU) are examples of these unions.

Debating Industrial Councils
The debate on registration was followed by a debate on unions’ attitudes towards industrial councils. In 1983, some FOSATU unions - MAWU and NUTW - decided to participate in the industrial councils. FOSATU unions decided to enter the industrial councils on condition that plant bargaining and recognition rights were not sacrificed. Later on another FOSATU affiliate PMAWU joined industrial councils. FOSATU wanted to use industrial councils on its own terms. They wanted to have a right to negotiate at a plant level, where they had real control, as well as at a national level.

MAWU's struggles in the early 1980s represent an example of how FOSATU unions approached participation in the industrial councils. Metal workers on the East Rand were involved in a number of strikes in 1981 and 1982. In five months of 1981, there were 50 strikes involving 50,000 workers belonging to MAWU. By 1983 MAWU was stronger because of the strikes and worker militancy, and it decided to join the industrial council. MAWU set certain conditions for its participation in the industrial council. These were: the right to negotiate at a plant level, and only shop stewards with mandates were to participate in the council. Through this approach MAWU tried to demonstrate that participation in the councils did not automatically mean lack of militancy.

A new force in the liberation struggle
By the middle of the 1970s it was clear that the black trade unions were here to stay, and by the end of the 1970s the state accepted the reality of black trade unions. The recognition of black trade unions by the state did not mean the end of the struggle by the black working class. By the beginning of the 1980s it was clear that the state's attempt to co-opt the new movement had failed. The Durban strikes had given rise to a new power that would challenge the apartheid state in ways that no force had been able to do before. In the 1980s the black working class began to assume a leading role in the struggle for democracy in South Africa.
APARTHEID CAPITALISM AND THE CRISIS OF THE 1980s

The 1973 Durban strikes and the subsequent revival of the labour movement, the nation-wide student uprisings of 1976, the liberation of Mozambique and Angola in 1975, and the liberation of Zimbabwe in 1980 shook the confidence and the power of the apartheid regime. South Africa was also experiencing a deepening economic and political crisis in the 1980s. The crisis was to lead to intense class and anti-apartheid struggles in the 1980s. In this chapter we look at the nature of this crisis and its sources. We look at how the crisis affected the working class as well as other classes. By doing this we lay the basis for understanding why the 1980s saw a wave of struggles and resistance from the black working class, and why the ruling class faced the possibility of defeat.

The economic crisis in South Africa

The onset of the economic crisis in South Africa showed itself in a number of ways. From the mid-1970s the rate of growth of the economy began to slow down. Economic growth slowed in the late 1970s and the early 1980s because of declining gold revenues, rising prices for oil imports and increased international competition in other traditional export commodities. The first recession of this period occurred in 1976, following dramatic oil price hikes. Strong export growth based on higher gold prices helped in the recovery from this recession, but the country was hit by a series of droughts in the 1980s that seriously affected agricultural output. Further erratic changes in gold prices led to a series of booms and busts, reducing average annual GDP growth for the 1980s to only 1.5 percent. Negligible growth in the 1980s led to an overall decline in living standards. Per capita GDP declined by more than 10 percent during the decade, and for the average individual, real wealth in 1980 was no higher than it had been in 1970.

But GDP is not the only indicator of an economic crisis. The country also faced rising unemployment, inflation and deteriorating social services.

Unemployment

Unemployment probably the most obvious indicator of an economic crisis was unemployment and large-scale retrenchment. To keep wages low and profits high, employers used unemployment as a tool against the working class. Since the 1960s the bosses have been using machinery in the production process. This led to massive retrenchments, particularly in the 1980s. New workers who were looking for jobs could not find any and this led to what was called structural unemployment.

Inflation

The rise in unemployment was accompanied by the increase in inflation (the rise in prices). The location of the South African economy in the world economy assured that South Africa imported inflation from other countries such as the United States of America and European countries. This happened because South Africa imports most of the machinery for production from these countries, and in order to maintain their profits South African capitalists passed the cost increases onto consumers. Historically, South Africa's inflation rate was tied closely to that of its major trading partners. In the 1980s, annual inflation averaged about 3 percent. In line with world trends, it rose above 10 percent in 1974 and fluctuated between 11 and 14 percent through the early 1980s. During the late 1980s, however, South Africa's inflation rates did not decline along with those of its Western trading partners. Inflation reached a high of 18.6 percent in 1986, forcing a depreciation of the rand, and continued at these levels thereafter.

Inflation, however, affects the different social classes differently. The working class and the poor in general suffer more than the rich from inflation. This is because the working class spends most of its income on basic necessities like food, transport, clothes and so on. Over the past years the prices of these goods have been increasing faster than the average rate of inflation.

The deterioration of health and other social services

The increase in retrenchments and the rise in the prices of goods were also accompanied by falling wages. With fewer family members in employment and rising prices, the fall in wages increased the pressure on working class families and led to malnutrition and deteriorating health standards.
There was a sharp increase in the number of infants that died before reaching the age of one year, and there was also an increase in diseases that are caused by poverty, such as tuberculosis (TB). The other main areas affected by the crisis were housing and transport. The number of homeless people was increasing fast and the demand for housing was increasing at a rate of more than 300,000 houses per year. Transport costs rose out of control. Many municipal bus services were scaled down or closed down.

The effect on the middle classes
The economic crisis, however, did not only affect the working class. The middle classes were also badly affected by the crisis. Many small businesses went bankrupt and had to close down. The increase in inflation was accompanied by an increase in the bond rate and many middle class people had their houses repossessed by the banks and building societies. Many middle class people owed the banks a lot of money and some were declared personally bankrupt because they had been unable to pay their instalments.

The farmers were also hard hit by the economic crisis. The increase in the interest rates charged by the banks, and the drought which gripped the rural areas for a long time, drove many farmers into bankruptcy or deep debt.

The deterioration of the conditions of the middle classes led to an increase in what is called "white collar crime". Many middle class people turned to fraud and theft as they tried to maintain their living standards.

The sources of the economic crisis in South Africa
The sources of this crisis were closely related to the way capitalism had developed in South Africa. Let us now look at the sources of the structural crisis.

The mining revolution and the cheap labour economy
The development of capitalism in South Africa began with the discovery of diamond and gold in the 1870s and 1880s. Many of the problems of the capitalist economy in South Africa can be traced to the way the mining industry developed. There are two features of the mining industry that have had a fundamental impact on the development of the South African economy, and that also lies at the root of the structural crisis of the economy. The first one is the monopolistic nature of South African capitalism. This nature was a product of the need for large amounts of capital in the gold mines of the Witwatersrand. In order to ensure the profitability of the gold mines the mining bosses and the state had to ensure that the wages of black workers remained low. This was the cheap labour policy.

The limits of the internal market
The cheap labour economy led to a small internal market. For the capitalists the internal market is made up of those sections of the population who can afford to buy the goods and services offered by the capitalist market. In the South African context of the 1980s this meant the white section of the population. The size of the white population, however, was not large enough to create a large market. With exports limited by sanctions and other factors, the size of the internal market was a barrier to economic growth.

South Africa's place in the world economy
In the 1980s South Africa was primarily an exporter of raw materials and an importer of machines and other finished goods. In order to buy machines overseas the country had to borrow money from countries selling machines. In addition, it had to buy overseas currencies for purposes of purchasing machines. In order to finance these foreign purchases and to acquire foreign currency South Africa had to export more than it imported. The low economic growth in South Africa, and the sanctions, led to a decline in export. This meant that SA imported more than it exported, and this led to what is called a 'balance of payments' problem. These problems became worse when anti-apartheid groupings put pressure on the international banks not to lend money to South Africa. In addition, these banks were not sure if the country would repay its loans because of the economic and political crisis. South Africa had to use the little foreign exchange it had to repay loans from the International Monetary Fund. In the mid 1980s the reserves were so low that the apartheid regime decided not to repay the loans to the IMF and other creditors.

The foreign exchange problem and devaluation of the rand made it difficult for the regime to deal with the economic crisis. It became very difficult for the economy to expand.

Monopoly Capitalism and the crisis of the Economy
South Africa has one of the most uneven distributions of wealth in the world. Not only are there large inequalities between the wealth of the white population and that of the black population, but also the wealth of the country is concentrated in the hands of a few capitalist companies. The growth of monopolies in a capitalist economy is a development that arises out of how capitalism works. Monopolies come about because of competition. As a result of competition many capitalists go bankrupt and their factories are bought by stronger capitalists. So as long as capitalism continues to exist monopolies will always develop and grow stronger. But the growth of monopolies also leads to many problems for the capitalist economy, and this has also been the case in South Africa.

Unlike in many other capitalist countries, monopoly capital in South Africa was a significant and dominant sector of the economy from the beginning. Earlier on we said that one of the two factors that lies at the root of the structural crisis of the South African economy is that in order to operate the new mines in the 1880s large amounts of capital were needed. This meant that only companies that could mobilise large amounts of capital could operate the mines. So at the very birth of capitalism in South Africa the monopolies were very dominant. The dominance of monopoly capital in South Africa has led to two key problems for the South African economy.

As we know, in some cases during a recession capitalists lay off workers because of falls in orders from customers. When the economy begins to grow the capitalist sometimes rehires the workers who were retrenched. When this happens we say that unemployment is cyclical,
which means that unemployment rises and falls depending on whether the economy is growing. But when the monopolies systematically replace workers with machines this means that even if the economy grows unemployment will not decrease. In fact, in a number of cases when the economy begins to grow unemployment rises, as many capitalists try to take advantage of the growth in the economy. The consequence of this introduction of machines is that as the economic crisis continues, unemployment becomes structural.

The problem of Inflation
One of the problems faced by capitalist economies during the economic crisis has been inflation. There are a number of reasons why capitalist economies always suffer from inflation. We will look at some of the reasons, not all.

One of the important factors that contributes to inflation is the power and actions of the monopolies. Since the monopolies control the production of certain products in the economy, they do not face any competition. So when they are faced with a fall in their profits they prevent this by raising prices.

Another factor that contributes to inflation is South Africa’s place in the world economy. Earlier we said that South Africa is an exporter of raw materials and is an importer of machines. As with the raw materials that it exports, South Africa has no control over the prices of these machines. So when the prices of these machines rise overseas, South Africa is also forced to raise the prices of the goods that are made with these machines. In 1978, when inflation was high in the major capitalist countries, South Africa imported this inflation because of the rise in the prices of the machines.

Sometimes South Africa imported inflation even if the prices of foreign goods it buys were not rising. This happens when the value of South African money, the Rand, is falling relative to the value of foreign money. We said earlier that South Africa needs foreign money in order to buy the goods it needs overseas. Many reasons like sanctions, the fall in the value of the Rand, and as a result it became very expensive to buy local goods is called import substitution. South Africa developed a relatively large manufacturing sector in this way.

By establishing factories like ISCOR, SASOL, ARMSCOR, and by also entering into joint partnership with capitalists, the government greatly assisted the manufacturing capitalists by passing laws that made imported goods expensive, and therefore encouraged people to buy locally manufactured goods. This strategy of making foreign goods more expensive by taxing them and so encouraging people to buy locally manufactured goods was called import substitution. South Africa developed a large manufacturing sector in this way.

The fiscal crisis of the state
Government expenditure was above its income on a permanent basis. It was expensive for the apartheid regime to run the apartheid capitalist system. The apartheid regime had to pay government officials, bantustan officials, the police, the army and the rest of the apartheid apparatuses of control and repression and was not able to find enough money to do so. The bosses were also resisting paying high taxes because that meant a reduction of their profit. The apartheid regime printed more money as a way of tempering the crisis. The problem with this approach is that it causes the general rise in prices of goods and service (inflation).

The weakness of the manufacturing sector
We have already mentioned a number of factors that contribute to the weakness of South Africa’s manufacturing sector. Since South Africa is a capitalist country, it produces goods in order to make profit. The size of the internal market for both consumer goods for capital goods has meant that South African capitalists cannot produce on the same scale as capitalists from other countries because they have nowhere to sell their goods. We saw that they also cannot solve this by producing for an export market because of the conditions imposed on South African capitalists by the foreign capitalists who sell them machines. All these factors act as a barrier to the development of a strong manufacturing sector. But there are also other factors that contribute to the weakness of the manufacturing sector.

Although the manufacturing sector in South Africa faces the problems we have mentioned above, South Africa nevertheless had a fairly large manufacturing sector. Two reasons account for the size of this sector. The first one is that as the gold mines developed on the Witwatersrand large numbers of people were concentrated in towns around the gold mines and a manufacturing industry grew to service their needs. The government assisted the manufacturing capitalists by passing laws that made imported goods expensive, and therefore encouraged people to buy locally manufactured goods. This strategy of making foreign goods more expensive by taxing them and so encouraging people to buy locally manufactured goods was called import substitution. South Africa developed a relatively large manufacturing sector in this way.

The alternative is to invest in very expensive developments like large irrigation schemes. The other reason for this difficulty is that it takes long for capitalists to get a profit from their investment, and if it does not rain they might not get profits at all. For example, a capitalist who produces metal cans can buy flat metal sheets this week, make the cans in the same week and sell the product the following week and get his profit. If he chooses he can speed up the process of production and get his return on the investment even quicker. In agriculture capitalists cannot do this. If they plant maize they have to wait for it to grow. They
can assist this process of growth by using fertilisers, but if it takes about three months for maize to grow, then they have to wait for three months. Besides these general problems of capitalism in agriculture and natural disasters like drought, this sector in South Africa has faced a number of other problems. Firstly, the areas set aside for black farmers (within the 13 percent of land which blacks own) are extremely overcrowded and meaningful farming cannot take place there. On the other hand, white farmers, who own most of the fertile land, have been very inefficient. For example, there was a time when farmers in Zimbabwe produced four times more wheat per hectare than local farmers. As a result of this inefficiency and to a certain extent the drought, white farmers depended on subsidies from the government for their survival. This added to the fiscal crisis of the state. What also happened is that the monopolies were taking over some farms and they were introducing machines and so they were adding to the problem of structural unemployment.

The intensification of the class struggle

The root of the structural crisis of South African capitalism was that the working class did not accept the capitalist system. In other words, the system had no legitimacy in the eyes of the majority of workers because of the cheap labour system and the repressive and undemocratic political system that provided protection for it. Capitalism's lack of legitimacy gave rise to a series of intense class struggles between the bosses and the state on the one side, and the workers and their mass organisations, on the other. In the 1970s and 1980s the intensification of the struggle contributed to a deepening of the economic crisis in a number of ways.

Firstly, the struggles waged by trade unions challenged the cheap labour economy. For example, the wages of mine workers remained at the same level or even fell in real terms between 1911 and 1970. Although mine bosses tried to justify these low wages by arguing that the families of miners were feeding themselves from agricultural production in the rural areas, the collapse of the economy of the reserves did not lead to an increase in wages. It was only with the rise of the trade union movement that the cheap labour policy was challenged.

Secondly, the challenge that was mounted by the working class also threatened the whole political structure of apartheid. More importantly, however, the challenge to low wages and to apartheid led to the spread of ideas about socialism. This led to fear among the capitalists, and many responded by not investing in the building of new factories. This is the so called "investment strike". The dramatic fall in investment further weakened South Africa's already weak manufacturing sector. Since there were fewer capitalists and fewer factories, the government got less tax, and this added to the fiscal crisis of the state.

Finally, the political instability also scared off foreign capital, and this (together with the sanctions campaign) added to the balance of payment crisis since foreign governments and capitalists were reluctant to lend money to South Africa. In other words, the intensification of the class struggle made the structural crisis worse and also created new problems.

How did the capitalists and the government try to deal with this crisis and its sources? What effect did their strategies have on the crisis and on the economy?
realised that for these to succeed they must divorce capitalism from apartheid. From the late 1970s these sections of the ruling class began a series of reforms, which were meant to achieve legitimacy for capitalism. According to the apartheid regime these reforms were part of the total strategy aimed at the creation of a black middle class, winning over a certain section of the working class and repressing those that did not want to "co-operate" with the regime.

The first significant reform was the legalisation of black trade unions in 1979 following recommendations by the Wiehahn Commission. In the same year, the government also "relaxed" the influx control laws and restrictions. The reality, however, is that the labour reforms and the "relaxation" of influx control laws were merely formalizing what was happening in practice as the black working class had won these rights in the streets. At the beginning of 1978 the regime accepted the reality of a permanent urban black population by introducing a 99-year lease system for black township residents. An increase in state expenditure on schools and township development was accompanied by private sector development initiatives such as those of the newly established Urban Foundation. The state considered rural communities to be less threatening and therefore excluded them from these reforms. The strategy of creating nominally independent Bantustans was deemed sufficient to deal with black South Africans who did not fit into the new urbanisation reform strategy.

The second significant attempt at reform was the establishment of the tricameral parliament in 1983. The state introduced three chambers for 'white', so-called coloured and Indian citizens. For Africans, the government maintained the Bantustan system and also introduced the Black Local Authorities to run the townships. The balance of power in all these institutions was such that the 'white' chamber had power over all the other structures. Trade unions and communities saw these measures as part of the "divide and rule" strategy. Working class organisations called for a boycott of these bodies and as a result very few people participated in voting for these structures.

Some sections of the apartheid regime, in alliance with the bosses, started exploring regional solutions to the political crisis. One classic example of a regional solution was the formation of the KwaZulu-Natal Indaba, which brought together Inkatha and some white parties in Natal.

At the level of Southern Africa, the liberation movement was gaining momentum. Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe were liberated and that gave the liberation movement of South Africa and Namibia some confidence. The elections early in March 1980, which brought Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF to power were followed within days by the formation of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC). These two events derailed the strategy of a "Constellation of Southern African States" which Prime Minister PW. Botha had put forward in 1979. The SADCC's aim, among other things, was to struggle for the liberation of South Africa.

The proposal for a constellation of Southern African states was intended, firstly, to entrench South Africa's regional economic domination; secondly, to facilitate black African political recognition of the apartheid system, and thirdly, to restore de facto recognition of South Africa's regional hegemony.

promoting the growth of a black middle class
The cheap labour road to capitalist development in South Africa also had the effect of leading to the destruction of the black middle class. The absence of a strong black middle class was a problem in two ways. The first was that a large black middle class would contribute to the solution of the problem of the limits of the internal market. The buying power of such a middle class would provide a market for durable consumer goods. The second was that a strong black middle class would have acted as a buffer against socialism within the mass movement. Such a middle class would have a stake in capitalism and would thus be the allies of capital within the black population.

So one of the most important elements of the ruling class response to the crisis was to promote the growth of this class. All the ruling class's reform proposals during this time were informed by this approach. For example, the approach to the housing crisis emphasised private home ownership, which implied a move away from state provision of housing. At an ideological level the ruling class also launched an offensive to promote what it called "free enterprise". Once again, private institutions and foundations such as the Urban Foundation and the South African Institute of Race Relations went the extra mile to promote the growth of a black middle class. On the other hand, capitalist enterprises played their role in this process by promoting some blacks into junior and, in a few cases, even middle management positions.

Economic Restructuring
From the late 1970s, but especially in the 1980s, the apartheid state began to introduce neo-liberal policies. One of the first signs of this shift was the introduction of General Sales Tax (GST, later renamed Value Added Tax, or VAT) in the late 1970s. Various forms of sales tax such as the GST (and now VAT) shift the burden of taxation from the rich to the poor, and have been favoured by most neo-liberal governments. Neo-liberal policies include reducing state expenditure on social services, privatising, supporting policies that undermine workers' rights, and also reducing tax on the rich and on companies. A process of liberalising exchange controls was also initiated in the 1980s, although the intensification of the struggle led to the programme being slowed down, or sometimes even reversed.

At the end of the 1970s the apartheid state set up a commission of enquiry to look into South Africa's industrial policy. This commission recommended trade liberalisation and a shift to an export-led industrial strategy, favoured strategies pursued by neo-liberal governments all over the world. In the 1980s the apartheid government began a process of liberalising trade, including the lowering of tariffs.

The apartheid regime also started the privatisation of parastatals. Parastatals such as ISCOR were often a target in the political struggle because they were owned by the apartheid regime. One of the reasons for privatising these was that the regime would get some relief from political pressure. This fitted in well with the notion of promoting "free enterprise" by attacking solidaristic practices of the working class and promoting individualism and the "free" market. The bosses welcomed this strategy because they argued that government's over-spending to support the parastatals caused inflation and a fiscal crisis.
At the same time as it introduced some reforms, the apartheid regime intensified its repression of democratic forces. From 1984, troops occupied one township after another, thus plunging the country into a state of civil war. This also indicated that the regime was recognizing the failure of its political solution.

The Joint Management Centres (JMCs), constituted by government departments working in the townships, businessmen, some school principals, the police and the army, took control of the townships. The JMCs took over when the local authorities collapsed in the townships between 1984 and 1986. The JMCs were nationally linked to the National Security Management System.

Another attempt that was used to crush resistance in the townships was the use of vigilantes. In some instances it was difficult for the regime to remove people in the townships because of mass resistance and overseas pressure. The regime then sponsored vigilantes, which perpetrated violence and war against working class communities. The regime called this "black on black" violence.

Government restricted media activities and some media organisations were banned. Many activists and leaders of the struggle were detained and the regime thought that would stop the struggle. Contrary to that many people joined the struggle.

In 1986, the apartheid regime imposed a state of emergency that suppressed the holding of mass meetings, mass funerals and other political activities and also increased the repressive powers of the police and the army. The state also recruited "kitskonstabels" in the townships. These were 'instant constables' who were taken through very short crash courses in policing and were then deployed in townships across the country. They gained notoriety because of their incompetence due to a general lack of formal education and because of poor training as well as the spate of murders, thefts, rape and similar crimes that they unleashed on township residents. The regime also used right wing squads to assassinate and murder activists and trade union leaders. These squads bombed and burnt offices of progressive and working class organisations. A well-known incident in this regard is the bombing of COSATU House in 1987.

**The response of the working class**

The working class and its organisations responded to the crisis of apartheid capitalism by building strong, mass based trade union federations, student, women, youth and community organisations. In addition to building strong shop-floor structures, the unions also forged unity among themselves. A second element of the response of the working class was to intensify struggles against apartheid and capitalism. The 1980s witnessed the intensification of struggles on all fronts. Lastly, the working class movement began a process of formulating programmatic positions on various issues that were important in advancing the struggle of the working class.
Building Mass Organisations
The formation of shop steward councils

In April 1981, FOSATU in the Germiston area formed a shop steward council. Only three organised factories on the East Rand formed the council and this happened at a time when metal workers were struggling for the right to bargain at plant level. FOSATU had a conveniently located office in Katlehong. The council elected shop steward representatives who had to hold it together.

The shop steward council brought together workers from different industries and that created a common identity. The council took up issues of retrenchments in the area. It proposed a ban on overtime and the shortening of the working day so that workers could share jobs.

In 1982, the council also took up the housing struggles in Katlehong, on the East Rand. The council felt that it should also provide leadership on community issues.

In 1982, the FOSATU constitution recognised the shop steward councils ('locals') and this had a positive spin-off because other areas also started building councils. Industrial unions also built their own shop steward councils in different areas. Following this there was a spread of the shop steward councils and shop steward movement in the country.

The National Forum (NF) and the United Democratic Front (UDF)
In 1982, the apartheid regime published its proposal for political reform aimed at including so-called Coloureds and Indians in the racially based tricameral parliament political system. This compelled local organisations and trade unions to begin to look at developing a national campaign against the proposals.

In June 1983, a number of political organisations and trade unions came together to launch the National Forum (NF). Both CUSA and AZACTU affiliated to the Forum which included AZAPO, the Azanian Students Movement (AZASM), Azanian Youth Organisation (AZAYO) and the Cape Action League (CAL). SAAWU and the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) sent observers to the first meeting of the NF, but then withdrew. All in all, there were 800 delegates from over 200 organisations represented.

By December 1984 four meetings of the NF had been held. In July 1984 the 'Manifesto of the Azanian People' was formally adopted.

The NF was built as a loose structure. It was seen as a forum for discussion and debate, where a range of issues could be discussed. The Forum was meant to provide minimum programmes by consensus for local organisations to take up. As a result the Forum did not try to initiate any major national campaigns.

Two months after the formation of the National Forum, the UDF was launched in Cape Town. The UDF was made up of groups which supported the ANC, and saw the Freedom charter as the basis of their political platform.

By its first conference in December 1983, the UDF claimed to represent over 560 affiliates. The UDF was to be loosely organised with regional co-operation, although a number of UDF regions set up UDF area committees. The major policy statement of the Front, was the UDF Declaration which commits affiliates to unite “all our people wherever they may be...to fight for freedom”. The organisation also believed in the ANC’s Freedom Charter as a guiding document and believed in the inclusion of whites in the struggle against apartheid and hence was referred to as “charterist”.

The highest decision-making body was the General Council. Each affiliate was entitled to appoint two delegates to the General Council. Affiliates were given independence so long as their actions did not go against the aims of the UDF Declaration. A number of unions joined the UDF when it was formed in 1983., The WPGWU, FCWU, the East London based SAAWU and the Johannesburg based GAWU were mostly general unions with links to the ANC. These unions affiliated to the UDF in 1983., CUSA participated in both the UDF and NF.

Both the UDF and the NF accepted the principle of “working class leadership” in struggles against oppression and exploitation. They repeatedly called on trade unions to affiliate and join their ranks. But.
FOSATU and a number of the larger independent unions refused to affiliate to either organisation. Initially, the FOSATU leadership did not want to have close ties with the UDF citing the fact that SACTU was smashed in the 1960s because it associated itself with the ANC. The leadership also argued that its shop-floor democracy did not fit well with the UDF’s multi-class alliances and loose organisation.

However, throughout the 1980s workers and trade unions actively shaped struggles outside the factory. The difficult question of alliances between trade unions and organisations in communities was on the agenda. The unions that did not affiliate to the UDF and NF were willing to co-operate with these organisations in joint campaigns. These unions also encouraged their members to participate in township-based organisations.

Some trade unions were wary of what would happen if they affiliated to either of these organisations. In the UDF, each organisation was only given two delegates. This would give small organisations the same decision-making power over policy matters as a mass based trade union.

The fact that many trade unions did not affiliate to the UDF did not mean that unions did not participate in politics. This meant, however, that at times trade unions took up political issues independently of other organisations.

**The struggle for trade union unity**

The 1980s was a period during which the new non-racial unions grew by leaps and bounds. Workers used their newly found rights to organise themselves and to engage in militant mass action. They also began to search and strive for a united labour movement. During this period, there were a number of obstacles to unity amongst the existing unions - those within FOSATU, CUSA, Azactu and unaffiliated unions.

Amongst some of the issues and problems that separated the unions were the following:

- How to respond to the state reform programme, including the recognition of the black trade unions. The set of issues arising out of this question became known as the “registration debate”.
- The role of factory floor organisation in the building of the trade union organisation.
- The organisational nature of the trade unions to be formed, i.e. whether industrial or general unions.
- The role of trade unions in community struggles and politics, and related to this, the relationship between trade unions and other political and community organisations.
- Policies and principles of the new federation in relation to the struggle for national liberation and the struggle for socialism.

The search for unity formally began at Langa, Cape Town, in 1982 and culminated in the formation of COSATU some three years later. A number of meetings (the so-called unity talks) took place, with the last one being held in August 1985 to decide on the date for the launch of the new federation. A few months later and four years since the first unity talks were held, COSATU was launched at Kings Park Stadium, Durban. December 1985.

Thirty-three trade unions from all sectors of the economy attended the launching congress of COSATU. FOSATU unions, the NUM and other UDF affiliated unions formed the core of the new federation.

At its launch the federation claimed a total membership of over 500,000, and thus become the largest trade union federation in the history of the South African working class. Although this was a major step towards unity, not all unions joined the new federation. Other unions went on to form the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU).

**COSATU's founding policies**

COSATU was formed at the height of township struggles that started in the Vaal Triangle. At that time the troops had occupied the townships. Civil war intensified and this forced unions, community and student organisations to be united. In 1984 COSAS played a major role in forging unity in struggle by approaching FOSATU, the UDF and CUSA asking them to support student demands. In the Transvaal students and workers called a joint stay-away on 5 and 6 November 1984. The stay-away was extremely successful because 800 000 workers and 400
000 students stayed away. These struggles had a major impact on the development of the new federation and its policies.

One of the founding slogans of the federation was ‘one union, one industry. The early days of the federation saw its consolidation through mergers of its affiliated unions to form one union within each sector or industry. By 1987, COSATU had grown into a massive federation representing 712,231 workers from twelve industrial unions.

Probably the most important policy adopted by COSATU at its founding congress was that of working class leadership in the struggle against apartheid and capitalism. In the preamble to its constitution the federation committed itself to “encourage democratic worker organisation and leadership in all spheres of our society together with other progressive sectors of the community”.

COSATU’s emphasis on working class leadership was a reflection of its commitment to a society “which will allow the creation of wealth to be democratically controlled and fairly shared”.

The second congress of COSATU in 1987, fiercely debated political questions facing the country. At this congress, there were differences among various affiliates but consensus was achieved on all the central political issues. The resolutions gave expression to the federation’s political policy, particularly around the following:

- The Freedom Charter was adopted as a guiding document for the struggle. There was also agreement that a working class understanding of its demands had to be developed.
- COSATU committed itself to a struggle for democratic control of the South African economy.
- COSATU resolved to remain politically independent, but resolved to develop alliances with progressive organisations at local, regional and national level.
- The congress also supported economic and sports sanctions against South Africa. Sanctions were instrumental in the isolation of the apartheid regime.

The adoption of the Freedom Charter as a political platform of the federation did not happen without a struggle. In fact, although the debates between those supporting the Congress Alliance and those supporting a more left or so-called ‘workerist’ position reached their peak at the 1987 congress, the debates had been taking place since the 1970s. Peter Mokaba, one of the guest speakers at the congress and a leader of the Congress aligned South African Youth Congress, attacked those who were opposed to the charter and labelled them “political hobos”. He also argued. “The Freedom Charter remains the only programme that correctly represents the transitional post-apartheid South Africa. Sanctions were instrumental in the isolation of the apartheid regime.

The birth of NACTU
In 1986, the black consciousness trade unions were also united. CUSA and AZACTU merged to form NACTU which had a membership of over 400,000 workers. However, NACTU’s membership dropped dramatically to about 169,485 at the time of its second congress.

At its launching congress, NACTU stated that it believed in worker control, black working class leadership, non-affiliation to political organisations and union independence within NACTU policy. In 1988 the NACTU congress passed the following resolutions:

- To intensify support for liberation movements in Azania (South Africa).
- The struggle should also entail the repossession of land.
- To work towards building one federation in the country.
- To also struggle for the rights of domestic workers and farm workers.

The death of TUCSA
The growth of unions for black workers in the 1980s challenged the hegemony that TUCSA had enjoyed since the disappearance of SACTU in the mid-1960s. In the early 1980s, TUCSA opposed the emerging democratic unions and argued for government control over these unions. It called for the banning of unregistered unions and often put pressure on management not to recognise them. TUCSA also used close shop agreements to keep the new unions out. This led to a situation where workers would not know the fact that they belonged to a TUCSA union. But the new unions persevered and embarked on vigorous recruitment campaigns to organise factories that had TUCSA members, something which contributed to the decline of TUCSA.
1983, the federation claimed a membership of 500,000, but by 1986 the membership had dropped to 150,000. The decline in membership and influence led to the disbandment of the federation in 1986.

**The intensification of struggles in the 1980s**

The 1980s were a period of sustained mass struggle by all sections of the working class. In many of these struggles, the organised working class or trade unions played a central and leading role. The new trade unions and their cadre of shop stewards played this role at a number of levels. Firstly, they provided the organisational axis around which many struggles took place. This means that the unions were direct leaders of these struggles. Secondly, the union supplied the leadership cadre that led many struggles in communities. Many of the leaders of civics were themselves shop stewards. Thirdly, the unions lent their support to many struggles that were initiated by other sections of the working class. Finally, the unions and the various service organisations that supported them provided the ideological and theoretical framework - the call for socialism and the idea of working class leadership - that informed the rest of the mass movement.

**The living wage campaign**

One of the struggles waged by the two federations along with independent unions was the struggle for a living wage and decent living conditions. COSATU embarked upon its Living Wage Campaign soon after its formation. This struggle was a response to the economic crisis and deteriorating living conditions of the working class in the country.

The economic crisis during the 1980s was reflected in rising inflation and starvation wages. Some of the key demands in COSATU’s Living Wage Campaign were:

- A guaranteed annual income,
- A forty hour working week,
- Job security,
- Retrenchment pay of one month for every year of employment,
- Six months paid maternity leave with guaranteed employment,
- Decent education and training,
- An end to the hostel system and creation of decent housing near work.

The campaign was never able to realise its stated objectives and impact due to organisational weaknesses and the full force of state repression. Sectoral and individualised struggles, however, continued to happen around the demands raised by the campaign. The federation and its affiliates also took up struggles around factory floor issues, community as well as political issues. Some of the structures of the federations like locals, became organs through which workers united with community activists to take up common issues of struggle.
The struggle for May Day
In 1986, despite the repressive apartheid state, COSATU organised a successful stay-away, demanding, among other things, that 1st May should be a public holiday. Over 1.5 million workers heeded the call and COSATU finally won the demand in 1990. COSATU also demanded a living wage, free education and housing for all workers as part of its demands.

The intensification of the strike movement
There were many strikes in the 1980s. The strike wave reached a peak in 1987, and in that year South Africa experienced the largest number of strikes since industrialisation. Below we provide a few examples of some of the key strikes in this period.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTOR OR INDUSTRY</th>
<th>STRIKE AND OTHER INDUSTRIAL ACTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mine Workers</td>
<td>In 1981, 13 000 mineworkers went on strike over death benefits. In the following year, 70 000 miners went on strike. CUSA had launched the NUM in 1981 under conditions of war on the mines. NUM was consolidated around three key demands and issues. These were wages, health and safety and job reservation. In 1984 there was another mineworkers’ strike over wages and working conditions. About 50 000 NUM members participated in the strike. In 1987 there was a major miners strike. The strike involved about 340 000 mineworkers and was the biggest and the most expensive strike in South Africa. During the strike the lowest paid worker was earning R230 per month in the gold mines. The strike lasted for 21 days.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Retail Workers</td>
<td>Between December 1986 and January 1987, 10 000 OK workers fought for a living wage. OK workers from all over the country mobilised communities not to shop at OK stores. The strike increased the profile of CCAWUSA.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Railway Workers</td>
<td>In 1987, railway workers in various depots demanded the recognition of the South African Railways and Harbours Workers’ Union (SARHWU) but instead railway bosses recognised a sweetheart union called BLATU. The police tried to kill the strike by breaking into a workers’ meeting held at COSATU House. The police shot at seven railway workers. Eventually the bosses recognised SARHWU.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metal Workers</td>
<td>In 1980, 3 500 motor workers at Volkswagen in Uitenhage went on a ten-day strike over the recognition of their trade union. In 1985, 960 workers at BTR Samcor went on strike. The management responded by firing the workers. In 1988, workers in the metal industry came together in a struggle for a living wage. The dominant unions that were involved in the struggle came from NACTU and COSATU.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm Workers</td>
<td>The National Union of Farmworkers (NUF), a NACTU affiliate, held an inaugural congress that was attended by 1200 workers. One of the major objectives of the congress was to challenge the exclusion of farm workers from the Labour Relations Act. Since its inauguration, the NUF signed wages and working conditions agreements with companies in the agricultural sector. About 100 NUF members were dismissed while on strike in Impala Nurseries in the Magaliesburg. The court ordered the eviction of these workers on 18 June 1988.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemical Workers</td>
<td>In 1988 workers in Sasol led by the NACTU affiliated South African Chemical Workers’ Union (SACWU) went on strike. Two days after the strike action, the bosses evicted workers from the hostels. Local police and vigilantes also harassed workers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Sector Workers</td>
<td>Between August 3 and September 3 1988, 21 000 postal workers throughout South Africa went on strike. These workers were striking against racial discrimination, lack of uniformity in wages and working conditions in the Post Office. Management responded by dismissing 3 000 workers and refused to negotiate. The Post Office was forced to negotiate when Postal Telegraph International threatened to disrupt the communications links of South Africa. The strike came to an end after the talks between the Postmaster General and the Post and Telecommunications Workers’ Association (POTWA). The dismissed workers had to re-apply for their positions but management only re-employed 1 400 workers of out 3 000 dismissed workers.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The Anti-Labour Relations Bill Campaign of 1988
In September 1987, the employers and government introduced a new labour bill. The Minister of Manpower at that time said, "the bill would
hang like a sword over the heads of the unions". The bill was a direct response to militant struggles of organised workers and especially to COSATU's Living Wage Campaign. The aim of the bill was to attack workers' main weapons of struggle (strikes, solidarity strikes, blocking actions and boycotts), weaken workers' organisations, and attack workers' rights by making unfair dismissals and retrenchments legal and by letting the minister decide what unfair labour practice is.

COSATU and its membership showed their rejection of the bill by holding lunchtime factory demonstrations. In addition, meetings with the bosses were held at factory, industrial and national level. A bigger meeting was held where about 1 500 delegates from COSATU affiliates discussed the bill and restrictions imposed on COSATU, the UDF and other organisations. About 120 UDF, church, community and sports organisations attended the meeting. Discussions entailed the rejection of the labour bill and the banning of the UDF.

From the 6th to the 8th June 1988, South Africa experienced one of the biggest strike actions in its history. Almost 3 million workers (75% of workers in South Africa) stayed away from work for three days. The strike action was called to show mass opposition to the labour bill, the state of emergency and the February restrictions on political, trade union and community organisations. The strike also saw close cooperation and unity between COSATU and NACTU.

Because of the strength of the stay-away, government and the employer organisation SACCOtA indicated that they were willing to negotiate with the trade unions. Subsequently COSATU and NACTU held negotiations with SACCOtA about the bill. But this was all in vain because the government informed COSATU and SACCOtA that the bill would come into effect on 1st September 1988.

COSATU convened a special congress later in 1988, which decided on convening an "anti-apartheid conference" in 1989. The conference was to be attended by various progressive organisations and would discuss labour law, repression, the October municipal elections and banning of political organisations. The government responded by banning the conference and placing severe restrictions on trade union leaders.

**Students and struggles against apartheid**

COSAS, AZASO, the Azanian Student Movement (AZASM) and other student formations led militant student battles in education institutions during the 1980s. These student struggles were consistent with other struggles that were waged by students in the 1960s and 1970s. Here we provide just a few examples of those struggles.

In March 1980, COSAS called for a boycott of Soweto schools to protest against the uniform requirement and school fees. In 1980 a "committee of 81" (81 representatives from various secondary schools in the Western Cape) called for a national boycott of schools. The boycott spread from Cape Town to other parts of the country. In mid-November 1980, the apartheid regime announced that it had closed schools because students were rendering the system ungovernable! By the mid-1980s students and other mass formations were calling for "people's education for people's power". In the struggle for an alternative education and society, students built alliances with workers and community. These struggles and alliances led to the formation of the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC), which mobilised around education issues at a national level. Students, trade union and community representatives constituted the NECC.

**Township struggles**

In the 1980s, most township struggles were directed at the black local authorities, or BLAs. Rent increases by the BLAs in the mid 1980s resulted in township uprisings. Many councillors fled the townships fearing for their lives and the system collapsed. The communities formed street committees which had the task of running the townships democratically. Resistance from communities was also against the tri-cameral parliament and the Koornhof bills. Towards the end of 1984, townships had become an important site of organising in the struggle against the apartheid state. The rising cost of living and rent increases led to an intensified struggle for control of the township. Workers, Students and other community members participated in rent boycotts that undermined the political authority of the BLAs. The boycotts
crippled the financial base of the black local authorities.

In August 1984, the youth and students in the townships gave support to the strike organised by the South African Food and Allied Workers Union (SAFAWU). By September 1984, the consumer boycott, called by the union and the communities, spread to many areas in the Transvaal.

Workers forged alliances with communities in the struggle for a living wage, and began to use the consumer boycott as a weapon of the anti-apartheid struggle. The consumer boycott was not only meant to pressure employers to accede to worker demands, but was seen as an attempt to bring down the apartheid regime. The boycotts were accompanied by a call for the withdrawal of apartheid troops from the townships.

The working class also built people's organs in townships such as civic organisation and street committees. In Durban, Lamontville, the rent crisis led to the formation of a civic organisation. In Port Elizabeth, a similar crisis led to a formation of the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation (PEBCO) which was led by a group of workers. In the 1980s, the Alexandra Civic Organisation was formed with the aims of taking up local struggles.

Unemployment and Working Class Responses

Unemployment was one of the key issues that trade unions had to contend with. COSATU set up the National Unemployed Workers' Coordinating Committee. In 1988 NACTU passed a resolution entailing the setting up of a co-operative. In 1985 MAWU (later NUMSA) members at Sarmcol were dismissed. To keep the workers united, MAWU set up a Sarmcol Workers Co-operative in 1985. ACTWUSA set up the Zenzeleni Co-operative for dismissed Frame workers. The co-operative was involved in clothing manufacturing. NUM established a T-shirt co-operative for workers dismissed by a Phalaborwa mine.

COSATU's National Unemployed Workers' Coordinating Committee faced many problems such as inability to mobilise the unemployed, and allegations of corruption. The committee was ultimately dissolved in 1992.

Issues facing women workers

In 1988 COSATU convened a women's conference and over 300 women from COSATU unions attended. The women discussed women's oppression under apartheid capitalism, at home and in the unions. They also resolved to take up women's struggles in COSATU by forming women's forums at local level. Several other demands emerged out of the conference, including the following:

- COSATU should educate its members so that men and women can have equal relationships at home, at work and in politics,
- COSATU should educate its members about rape and train women in self-defence so that they can defend themselves against attacks by men,
- COSATU should fight together with other organisations for the right to safe, free and legal abortion,
- Women should discuss how they face sexual harassment from men in the union, at work and in the community.

At least nine months paid maternity leave,
- paid time-off for pregnant women to attend clinics,
- Free and safe contraception and proper sex education for all.
- Safe working conditions.
- Domestic workers and farm workers should also get unemployment benefits from the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF).

COSATU unions took up struggles around issues facing women workers. MAWU won a demand for six months paid maternity leave at a national level during wage negotiations in 1986. CCAWUSA, which had a majority of women workers, got a better deal from Pick 'n Pay in 1988. The agreement granted women 11 months and men 18 days of leave as well as time-off to care for sick children and to attend clinics. NACTU formed a women's unit which was meant to assist the federation in taking up women's issues.

Culture

Mine worker dance.
Photo: The Star
Many cultural groups emerged out of FOSATU and COSATU. These groups were expressing setbacks and celebrating victories of the working class during that period. The groups sang songs, enacted drama and recited poems. Besides the performing arts, workers also produced banners and T-shirts. During this period there was a remarkable growth in the publication of books about the lives of workers. Some of these were autobiographical accounts by worker activists and leaders such as Petrus Tom and Alfred Temba Qabula.

Debates on programme, strategy and tactics

The growth of the trade union movement, and its increasing role in the struggle against capitalism and apartheid gave rise to major debates about political orientation, strategy and tactics. The beginning of the 1980s saw the first such major debate, the so-called registration debate and participation in industrial councils, which we discussed in Chapter 3. Three other major debates on strategy and tactics flared up in the 1980s. The first debate was about the forms of trade union organising - about the issue of general as opposed to industrial unions. The second and related debate was about the relationships between unions, community and politics.

The third one was about the adoption of the Freedom Charter as the political programme of COSATU. The other debates that took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s were about a Workers' Charter and the constitution, the "two hats" and the "united front" and the "popular front".

General vs Industrial Unions

There were three types of competing union forms in the 1970s and early 1980s, namely general unions, industrial unions and general unions that also participated actively in community issues.

SAAWU is a classical example of a general union that combined its traditional union work with organising in the community. The union was strong in the East London area and believed that workers were also part and parcel of communities. The union used to call meetings in the community where worker and community issues were discussed.

The union took up issues of rent and transport in black townships in the East London area. In the 1980s, SAAWU was involved in the 1981 anti-Republic Day protest and the Durban bus boycott. The union together with the community in East London struggled against the Ciskei regime. But the SAAWU leadership was not opposed to industrial unionism. It argued that a priority for the general unions was the building of shop floor structures across industries. Later on, argued the leadership, the union would formalise its industrial structures. The leadership cited state repression and harassment as one of the obstacles towards reorganising itself into an industrial union.

The WPGWU is an example of a general union that organised across various industries. The WPGWU believed that unity of workers across industries was possible. The union was particularly strong in the harbours and the meat industry in the Western Cape. In the 1980s, faced with bosses who did not want to recognise it, the WPGWU called for a boycott of red meat and this action was supported by the communities.

Sectors such as railways and mining have always been organised along industrial lines. In the 1970s and 1980s, FOSATU as a federation robustly defended industrial unionism. One of its policies was the building of industrial unions. It believed that organising workers at industry level allows the union to focus on building workers' structures from the plant to the national level in an industry. That, in turn, would facilitate struggles and gains at an industry level. This also made it possible to negotiate on common demands of workers in an industry. The industrial union form became dominant and was subsequently adopted by COSATU at its launching congress.

Unions, community struggles and politics

One of the important debates within the labour movement in the 1980s was the relationship between the unions and community issues and struggles. The debate was important because it was about strategies and tactics for building the labour movement in a context of the struggle against apartheid and capitalism.

SAAWU was one of the unions that organised workers in various industries and was particularly strong in the East London area. The union believed that workers were part of communities and should therefore be involved in community struggles and issues. The union argued that for example bus fare hikes are an issue to be taken up by a community structure. The union posed the question: who uses the bus? SAAWU argued that it is the worker who uses the bus when travelling to work. As a result SAAWU got involved in many community struggles. In 1983, the union also joined the UDF. FOSATU and its intellectuals criticised SAAWU’s method of struggle and organising by citing the manner in which SACTU was crushed in the 1950s and 1960s. The argument was that SACTU was crushed because it never built strong shop floor structures in the factories and “rushed” into politics by being part of the Congress Alliance and its political campaigns.

Based on those lessons, according to FOSATU, the first step was to build strong shop- floor structures controlled by workers. Once that was done, these strong structures would then decide when and how to branch out into community struggles and politics. Moses Mayekiso, MAWU’s general secretary, agreed with this strategy of building shop floor structures and added that workers’ strength was at the point of production or the factory, and that building shop-floor structures should be the basis for trade unionism in South Africa. Mayekiso noted that full entry of the trade union movement into community struggles and general politics happened in the context of protest action as happened in the Vaal in 1984.

The Freedom Charter and Socialism

During 1985 a debate raged within COSATU about whether or not to draw up a workers’ charter. The debate on the workers charter was initiated by MAWU in the context of COSATU’s formulation of the political programme, alliances, relations between COSATU and Organisations such as UDF. The debate was highly polarised between those who were for the full endorsement of the charter and those who were critical of it.

At its second congress in 1987, COSATU delegates debated whether to adopt the Freedom Charter as a ‘guiding document’. The Freedom Charter was adopted by the Congress Alliance in 1955. The Congress Alliance was made up of the ANC and its allies, the SAIC...
The debate became so intense in the various unions that it led to a split in the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union (CCAWUSA). Outside of the trade unions, the debate sometimes led to violent confrontations and threats of violence, especially against those who differed with the perspective of the ‘two-stage theory’ of the South African revolution. This theory, developed by the SACP, argued that the South African struggle must first go through a ‘national democratic’ phase, and only later will the struggle be for socialism.

The Workers’ Charter and the Constitution of a democratic South Africa

At COSATU’s third Congress in 1989, a resolution was tabled calling for a Workers’ Charter to be drawn up after thorough consultation and debate. The time was ripe for the development of a Workers’ Charter, as a clearer understanding had developed within unions and the progressive movement on the role of workers in the struggle for democracy and socialism. On the other hand, the ANC’s constitutional guidelines, also published in 1989, had made a provision for a Workers Charter. This meant that it was no longer the case that the idea of a Workers’ Charter was a political alternative to the Freedom Charter. However, many union activists who disagreed with the Freedom Charter continued to see the Workers’ Charter as the only basis for a socialist programme.

The Congress resolved to launch a Workers’ Charter Campaign to draw up a Charter that would “articulate the basic rights of workers” and be “guaranteed by the constitution of a people’s government”. It was hoped that the Workers’ Charter would reflect the demands of the “broadest section of the oppressed and exploited masses of our country”. In the end, however, demands were collected only from members of COSATU unions.

A special Workers’ Charter conference in 1990 debated key demands of workers. Besides developing positions on issues such as the lock-out and closed shop agreements, discussions on gender and the constitution covered the state’s responsibility for childcare and creche facilities, equal rights in marriage, the legalisation of abortion, non-sexist education and equal pay for equal work. While a draft workers’ charter was tabled, it was never extensively discussed or adopted at COSATU’s 1991 Congress. Some of its demands would later make their way into the RDP and the constitutional debates at the World Trade Centre.

On the 4th and the 5th of March 1989, COSATU, NACTU, and several unaffiliated unions attended a Workers’ Summit in Johannesburg. The aim of the summit was to strive for greater unity of the working class and also to respond to the newly amended Labour Relations Act. NACTU affiliates attended the summit despite the lack of attendance by their leadership. At this summit workers formulated a Workers Charter that included the right to work, the right to strike, to engage in sympathy strikes and an opposition to retrenchments. The Summit also agreed that the Labour Relations Act should cover farm Workers, public sector workers and domestic work.

The Workers’ Charter led to a debate about its role and its
relationship to other boarder demands and the negotiations for a future South Africa. There were those who argued that the demands of the Workers’ Charter should all be included in the future constitution so as to give workers leverage and space to advance their struggles in the post apartheid South Africa. There was also a criticism that COSATU was not involving all sections of the working class in its campaign for promoting the charter. On the other hand, COSATU’s Campaigns Bulletin argued that some of the demands should be part of the future constitution and others should not.

**United Front or Popular Front?**
The popular front position argued for the inclusion of the middle class and people that supported capitalism but opposed apartheid into struggle initiatives and discussions of the working class and all the oppressed people. Trade unions such as FAWU and NUM argued for a popular front which was to include working class organisations and all those who were opposed to apartheid including small business, big business, the middle class, banstutnan leaders and liberal parties.

On the other hand, a united front was understood to be an alliance of working class organisations guided by mass activities with the objective of linking spontaneous action and demands with the struggle for socialism. This united front position was opposed to the inclusion of the capitalist class (regardless its opposition to apartheid), ideologues of the capitalist system, elements that were associated with apartheid structures, and banstutnan leaders and their parties.

In the build up to the COSATU Congress in 1989, NUMSA noted that the apartheid regime had smashed the organisations of the working class. The task, according to the union, was to rebuild working class organisations. NUMSA argued that the working class should build a united front of all democratic working class organisations. NUMSA was opposed to working class alliances with big business, banstutnan leaders, their parties, and tri-camera parliment structures. The union argued that COSATU should drive the formation of a united front that should include all the oppressed and exploited regardless of their ideological and political orientation.

**Defiance Campaign**
In the late 1980s, the United Democratic Front, COSATU and other mass formations embarked on a “defiance campaign” to force the bosses and the regime to dismantle apartheid and engage in negotiations with the liberation movement. The campaign aimed at undermining apartheid by targeting the Group Areas Act and other forms of racial segregation that gave whites better residential and recreational areas. Workers in factories occupied places that were reserved for whites and in towns and cities people occupied recreational facilities that were preserved for whites only. Arrests and repression failed to stop the campaign.

**The beginnings of the transition**
In the Nkomati Accord, a treaty concluded between South Africa and Mozambique in 1984, both countries agreed not to give material aid to opposition movements in each other’s countries. This in effect meant that South Africa pledged itself not to support the Mozambique National Resistance (Renamo), while Mozambique committed to not helping the outlawed ANC. The accord also gave the apartheid regime some leverage because it meant one of the frontline states, an ally of the ANC, had to police ANC presence in that country. The accord was also a setback for the struggle to establish socialism in the region.

There were other important political developments in the Western part of Southern Africa. In 1988 SADF/Unita forces were defeated by MPLA/Cuban forces in a 137-day battle at Cuito Canavale in southern Angola. The battle of Cuito Canavale is regarded as one of the turning points in the liberation struggle in Southern Africa. After this battle Namibia got its independence.

In 1985, the ANC leadership in exile met a South African business delegation led by the Anglo-American chairman, Gavin Relay, at Kafue, in Zambia. In 1987, the ANC also met a delegation of white Afrikaners in Dakar, Senegal. The whites that met with the ANC in Dakar were concerned about the protection of individual and cultural rights and the use of armed struggle. In 1989, secret talks were also held between the South African government and the ANC in exile. After a succession of secret talks involving several government officials in 1986, Mandela was granted a meeting with President P.W. Botha in 1989 to discuss an early release. Botha offered him his freedom if he renounced the use of violence but Mandela refused. Botha subsequently resigned following a stroke and was replaced by F.W. de Klerk. Mandela met with de Klerk in December 1989. Negotiations on the terms and conditions for Mandela’s release began.
FROM APARTHEID CAPITALISM TO NON-RACIAL CAPITALISM

Introduction

In February 1990, State President De Klerk announced the unbanning of the ANC, SACP, PAC and other mass organisations, the release of political prisoners including Nelson Mandela, the return of exiles and the start of the negotiations about the future of the country. Political negotiations between the liberation movement and the apartheid regime took place at the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) in 1992. The negotiations paved the way for elections in 1994. At the same time, the National Party, while "talking" to the liberation movements, unleashed unprecedented violence against the working class.

In Natal the civil war started in the early 1980s and continued till the mid 1990s. The province became known as the ‘killing fields’ of South Africa.

Media revelations in the early 1990s confirmed that Inkatha was on the payroll of the National Party government. The reports revealed that Inkatha, the Kwa-Zulu Police and the Internal Stability Unit of the apartheid regime carried out killings and massacres in Natal.

In March 1990, a total of 80 people were killed in a raid by thousands of Inkatha supporters in Edendale and Imbali, two townships outside Pietermaritzburg, Natal.

In the early 1990s Inkatha and security forces killer squads carried out a campaign of murder of train commuters, almost all of them black workers and job seekers from the townships in and around Johannesburg.

In September 1990, about 80 people were killed in two days in Phola Park squatter camp near Johannesburg. According to Amnesty International the raids were led by Inkatha members and masked white men.

Inkatha used single-sex hostels as bases for launching attacks against ANC members and supporters in the townships.

ANC supporters had a practice of holding night vigils on the eve of funerals for victims of the violence. Often the security forces and Inkatha attacked mourners attending such vigils.

On 17th June 1992, while the CODESA negotiations were in progress, armed Inkatha hostel residents killed 50 men, women and children in the Vaal township of Boipatong. On 7 September 1992 Ciskei homeland bantustan troops killed 29 and injured hundreds of ANC supporters in Bisho.

On 10 April 1993 a member of an Afrikaner right-wing organisation assassinated Chris Hani, the general secretary of the SACP. This led to mass mobilisation of the working class. Millions of workers stayed away from work on 14 April and 19 April, the day of the funeral.

The regime portrayed the violence as "black on black" violence or "Zulus and Xhosa" combat. However, evidence which emerged later, including that which was presented to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), showed that violence was perpetrated and funded by the regime as part of its strategy for destabilising the working class and its organisations. These organisations were compelled to defend themselves against the onslaught of the apartheid regime and its supporters. Activists in the townships formed self-defence units that played a major role in preserving organisations and defending communities.

The violence was also an attempt to disrupt the activities of COSATU. The dispute at the British multinational corporation BTR
Sarmcol was a turning point. In May 1985, the company dismissed 900 striking workers from its plant in Howick near Pietermaritzburg. All these workers were members of MAWU. Following the dismissals the union called a one-day stay-away and a consumer boycott as tactics to pressure management to reverse its decision. Buthelezi, the leader of Inkatha, publicly opposed the boycott and the stay-away. In 1986, Sarmcol worker leaders were abducted and killed by the vigilantes after an Inkatha rally in Mpophomeni (Howick).

The violence spread in Natal targeting COSATU and the UDF. COSATU was involved in peace initiatives in the region which did not yield any results because of the intransigence of Inkatha and security forces of the apartheid regime. Inkatha and UWUSA used violence against COSATU members in the East Rand. Workers showed that they were prepared to defend their unions by contributing financially to the defence units established in the communities and also by participating in the running of the units.

The context within which negotiations happened

Besides the apartheid regime's use of violence against the black working class during the negotiations process, the negotiations happened in a context of an economic and political crisis. The South African economy continued to suffer from a chronic decline even after the Western economies had recovered from the economic decline of the early 1980s. The rising militancy, popular unrest and strikes led to a decrease in foreign investment in the country. In 1989 the apartheid regime acknowledged the fact that the economic crisis was largely caused by the maintenance of duplicate apartheid structures and expenditure on security forces which were meant to suppress the popular uprising.

By the early 1980s there was consensus among the leading layers in the capitalist camp that apartheid was expensive and inconvenient. According to capitalists apartheid interrupted the process of accumulation because workers were generally on strikes and townships had turned into sites of mass mobilisation. In 1985 leading elements of capital held discussions with the ANC in Zambia regarding the future of the country. In 1986 the Federated Chamber of Industries, a business organisation that was largely constituted by the manufacturing sector, published constitutional proposals for a post-apartheid South Africa.

The economic and political crisis led to further divisions among whites. The Afrikaner Resistance Movement (AWB) intensified its fascist rhetoric and was also involved in violent attacks on black people. Ultra-right wing police force members were also involved in the assassination and kidnapping of activists. The military was also facing a crisis after its withdrawal in Angola and its involvement in the township. Soldiers were committing suicide and some were not reporting for duty.

On the other hand the liberation movement and the left wing were faced with political challenges during the negotiations process. The fall of the Soviet bloc in the late 1980s and early 1990s led to a crisis of credibility for socialism. The Soviet Union had been providing military and financial support to liberation movements and states in southern Africa that were opposed to apartheid. The debate on the future of socialism was a real debate because from its inception the labour movement had viewed socialism as a path towards a future South Africa, and the fall of the Soviet bloc questioned this vision.

in southern Africa, the combination of destabilisation by South Africa and the global economic crisis had forced many of the Frontline States, particularly Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe, to seek help from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. This help was granted, but the condition was that these countries should adopt neo-liberal policies. This undermined these countries' commitment to socialism.

Outcomes of the negotiations

Towards the end of 1993 the CODESA negotiations resulted in a political settlement. The central aspects of the settlement were as follows:

* One-person-one-vote irrespective of colour or class was enshrined in the agreement and in the constitution.
* Private property was protected in the interim constitution, and in the final constitution.
* Nationalisation was abandoned as an economic approach of the ANC.
* Power sharing between the liberation movements and the parties of apartheid, and the formation of a government of national unity for a Period of five years.
* The results of the election would not alter the power sharing arrangement.
Amnesty for the apartheid army and police officers who disclosed their activities.

Honouring of existing contracts of civil servants (including the police and the army) and retirement packages to those who wanted to retire.

Integration of the armies of the liberation movements into the old apartheid army.

The entrenchment of proportional representation as an electoral system instead of a constituency based system.

The negotiators also agreed on the 27th of April 1994 as the date for the first non-racial general election in South Africa.

Trade Unions in the transition

The unbanning of the liberation movements, the return of exiles and the opening of spaces for workers, particularly those in the public sector. Rallies and marches organised by the ANC and COSATU were widely supported.

During this period workers were involved in large-scale mobilisation around a number of issues. For example, as part of the campaign against the 1988 amendments of the Labour Relations Act (LRA), COSATU demanded that all workers, including farm, domestic and public sector workers be covered by the LRA. In the Laboria minute, signed in 1990 after years of protest action, the apartheid state finally agreed to negotiate an inclusive labour relations law for the country. The state had wanted to exclude teachers and security forces from the legislation and this often triggered some struggles in these sectors. Towards the end of 1992, the South African Democratic Teachers’ Union (SADTU) was involved in struggles for recognition and the right to strike.

Unionisation in the public sector

In addition to the militant campaigns undertaken by the unions in this period, there was also rapid growth of unions, and the penetration of unions into new areas like the public sector. This process of unionisation was often carried out through a wave of strikes. Wages, union recognition, solidarity with dismissed or harassed workers and racism were some of the main causes of the strikes. In parastatals such as the Post Office, Telkom, Eskom, and Transnet, strikes and protests in the 1990s were also about rejecting the privatisation process.

In the first six months of 1990 there was a wave of strikes by public sector workers, and these led to a rapid growth of unionisation of the sector. Some of the landmark events were:

- In early November 1989, SARHWU demanded recognition, a wage increase and an end to privatisation. When these demands were not met the workers went on strike. In the course of this struggle workers were dismissed, but Transnet management ultimately recognised SARHWU and re-employed the dismissed workers in April 1990. Over 23 000 SARHWU members were on strike for three months.

- In early 1990 POTWA, representing post and telecommunication workers, was also involved in strikes in Durban, Nelspruit, Rustenburg, Pretoria and Verwoerdburg over wages and racism. According to the union the strikes ended successfully.

- In early 1990 municipal workers in major cities and towns in all four provinces went on strike.

- The bantustans were also affected by strikes. Clerks, magistrates, cleaners, prosecutors working in the Bophuthatswana Justice Department went on strike.

- In mid-March 1990 public service workers in Garankuwa went on strike and were dismissed. The dismissal led to mass action which brought the public service in Garankuwa to a standstill.

- In Venda, public servants and sections of the armed forces were involved in strikes. Support for the strikes and stay-aways by security and legal personnel made it difficult for the bantustan officers to bring in scab labour.

- In Gazankulu, public sector workers went on strike for eight weeks demanding a wage increase and an end to the bantustan system.

- In Lebowa, public servants also went on a strike but returned to work shortly thereafter.

- Police, Prisons and Civil Rights Union (POPCRU) members in various towns and cities in the country were involved in strikes. The demands of the police and prison warders included wage increases, better working conditions, recognition of the union and an end to racism. The union also demanded an end to discrimination of prisoners and also marched against police brutality and violence against communities.

Other struggles during the transition

Alongside the dominance of the public sector struggles during the transition, there were other struggles that were waged by other sections of the working class. Among other things, these struggles were about the political negotiations process and the introduction of VAT.

In November 1991, a COSATU-led coalition of organisations embarked on an anti-VAT protest campaign. The campaign added momentum to moves to unite the trade union movement given COSATU’s and NACTU’s close co-operation in the coalition.

The anti-VAT campaign was launched after the ‘Laboria Minute’ of September 1990, which laid a framework for union engagement with the state. In the Minute COSATU had agreed to participate in the statutory National Manpower Commission (NMC). During the anti-VAT struggle COSATU criticised the apartheid regime for taking unilateral decisions on the economy at a time when the country’s political future was being negotiated by all concerned groups. It therefore called for the establishment of a ‘macro-economic negotiating forum’, which would be some kind of an economic CODESA forum. Then Finance Minister,
Derek Keys, responded by setting up the National Economic Forum (NEF) in November 1992, as a forum in which labour, business and the government were represented.

Not only did labour demand the right to participate in the process of restructuring the economy through the proposed NEF, but it also demanded membership rights at CODESA. The demand was rejected, but the COSATU leadership was offered participation through a working group consisting of its alliance partners, and four COSATU representatives sat in the SACP delegation to CODESA.

During the negotiations period, COSATU and the ANC alliance called for a stay-away on 5th and 6th August 1992. According to the ANC the strike was meant to “bring down the walls of apartheid”. The highlight of the stay-away was a march to Pretoria at which the marchers demanded an end to apartheid.

The changing composition of COSATU

Up to the early 1990s the membership of the independent labour movement was largely made up of blue-collar workers, mainly unskilled or semi-skilled workers from the manufacturing and mining sectors. At its launch in 1985 55% of the COSATU membership came from the manufacturing sector, and unskilled miners made a significant portion of the membership. However, neo-liberal restructuring of the South African economy led to massive retrenchments and work reorganisation in both the manufacturing and mining sectors. There were striking changes in the nature of employment in the manufacturing sector as a result of work
reorganisation. More insecure, casual and part-time jobs were created. Smaller and dispersed business units were created and these created difficulties for organising workers. Furthermore, trade union membership as a proportion of the economically active population declined from 24% in 1992 to 21% in 2001. By 1999 the manufacturing sector contributed 27% to COSATU's membership, and the mining sector declined from 25% of COSATU membership in 1989 to 15.2% in 1999.

At the same time, the levels of unionisation of public sector workers increased dramatically. Public service unions in COSATU grew from 4% of the federation in 1987 to 37% in 1999. The period of transition was accompanied by unionisation of all government departments and state owned enterprise workers. Public service workers from the bantustans joined unions in large numbers. General workers in lower grades, supervisors, teachers and senior managers in the public service, academics and magistrates were unionised. COSATU's NEHAWU and SADTU, both public sector unions, are not only the biggest public sector unions in South Africa, but they are among the biggest unions across all sectors.

The increased unionisation of public sector workers, however, happened in a context where these workers faced the state's neo-liberal restructuring. The state's privatisation and "right-sizing" programmes led to the decline of employment in the sector. For example, the public service declined by 14% in the period between 1996 and 1999. There has also been a general decline in employment in state owned enterprises. This has slowed down growth in the unionisation of public sector workers, and much of COSATU's growth has happened through traditional white-collar unions joining the federation. This process has led to a further shift away from COSATU's traditional base of blue-collar workers. However, blue-collar workers continue to constitute a significant proportion of the federation's membership.

Realignment and FEDUSA

Another process of realignment was taking place in the 1990s. Many of the trade unions that were affiliated to the old TUCSA never formally joined a federation. The largest of these unions organised public sector workers, who were mainly white bureaucrats. When it became clear that the Nationalist Party would not be in government indefinitely, some of these unions began to see the need for a trade union federation that could protect the interests of their members in the public service. As a result, the Federation of South African Labour (FEDSAL) was formed. By 1994, FEDSAL had 230,000 members. In 1997, however, FEDSAL merged with a number of other unions to form the Federation of Unions of South Africa (FEDUSA), and succeeded in expanding its membership among black employees. FEDUSA currently has a membership of 540,000. Today FEDUSA has surpassed NACTU in membership size.

From Socialism to GEAR

Economic strategy in the transition has been one of the most hotly contested issues within the labour movement and between the labour movement, the state and business. The debate has always been an important one for labour because the future of the movement continues to depend on the way in which the economy is restructured. In addition, the labour movement's position on the economy has undergone some shifts, particularly with regard to its position on the state, its attitude towards business and its position on the management of the economy. Under pressure from the new government and capital, the position of the labour movement, and of COSATU in particular, has shifted from a radical socialist platform towards some accommodation of the market.

The economic strategy of COSATU in the early years

COSATU was launched at the height of the uprisings against the apartheid state. The uprising that began in the Vaal Triangle in 1984 represented the first sustained entry of the unionised industrial working class in the struggle against apartheid. This entry of the industrial working class as an organised force followed intense debate on the relationship of the struggle against apartheid to the struggle for socialism. At the time FOSATU, then the largest federation of black unions was dominated by a political tendency that was suspicious of nationalism. But COSATU incorporated both the contending political currents: those committed to national liberation, on the one hand, and those committed to socialism, on the other.

This dual commitment was captured most clearly in the resolutions of the second congress of COSATU, held in 1987. At the launching congress, Cyril Ramaphosa had posed the question of the role of COSATU in the struggle for national liberation in terms of developing a consciousness among workers, not only of racial oppression but also of their exploitation as a working class.
The congress resolved that while COSATU adopted the Freedom Charter, it must develop and “strengthen among all workers a coherent working class understanding of the demands of the Freedom Charter and encourage the fullest discussion on socialism and democracy within its structures and amongst all progressive and democratic forces”.

The 1992 Economic Policy Conference
It was, however, in the period following the unbanning of political organisations in the early 1990s that COSATU had the legal space to elaborate its vision of socialism. The economic policy conference, held in 1992, provided the opportunity for the federation to translate its pledge, made at its launch in 1985, to struggle for the restructuring of the economy in the interests of workers, and for workers to democratically control economy. At the conference COSATU adopted a “growth path”, which spells out its position on the South African economy. The key positions of the conference in this regard were that workers must have the right and capacity “to decide on production processes, the distribution of surplus and the allocation of investment according to social needs”.

Of significance was the fact that while championing a key role for the state in the realisation of its programmatic goals, COSATU went further and argued that issues concerning economic policy should not only be left as a matter of state policy, but should be actively campaigned for by militant and democratic organs of civil society. In other words, not only must the state be strong with majority support, but also strong mass organisations of civil society must complement the role of the state. But it was when taking up the issue of ‘building workers power’, that the platform was at its most radical. According to the conference, the building of workers power relates to workers control and democracy and ownership of the means of production.

The platform interpreted this to mean a struggle to “increase democratic decision making at all levels of the economy”, the right for workers to participate in planning, and the right for workers to control investment. COSATU committed itself to social ownership which included nationalisation of the leading heights of the economy. This was seen as an instrument “to achieve full socialism” and to “build a society based on production for need rather than for profit”. Further, the limitations of nationalisation were noted and the platform argued that state ownership does not automatically mean control by workers. Nationalisation should therefore take place under workers control, COSATU argued.

From socialism to the RDP
Side by side with the call for “workers’ control of the commanding heights of the economy”, intellectuals and leaders of the trade union movement were floating ideas that constituted a break with these positions of the labour movement. The shift from radical socialist positions to a more conservative position made itself felt with the adoption of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). The federation spearheaded the process of formulating the RDP, which later became the electoral platform of the ANC in the 1994 elections.

The following were the basic principles that underpinned the RDP:

- The need for a sustainable and integrated programme,
- People driven development,
- Peace and security for all,
- Nation-building,
- The need to link reconstruction and development, and
- The need to democratisre society.

The following were some of the programmes proposed by the RDP to realise the six principles:

- The meeting of basic needs,
- Development of human resources,
- The building of the economy, and
- The democratisation of the state.

The RDP argued that the problems of the South African economy were due to a history that has been “dominated by colonialism, racism, apartheid, sexism and repressive labour policies”. As can be seen, this analysis of the crisis - apartheid and mismanagement as key sources - differs sharply from the critique of capitalism presented by COSATU from the late 1980s and the early 1990s. Up to then COSATU argued that it was the peculiar combination of capitalism and apartheid, which gave the crisis its deep and structural character.

The COSATU platform of 1992 identified the forces on whose behalf it spoke as “the working class”, and in its founding documents the working class is defined in a way that goes broader than unionised workers. The RDP, on the other hand, identifies “the people” as the “most important resource”. The RDP went on to focus on the role of civil society in the implementation of the RDP. It calls on civic, unions, sectoral social movements, CBOs to develop programmes of action to implement the RDP. These organisations were called upon to participate in a range of activities, from deciding the composition of the constitutional court, to international trade agreements, and in general these formations were encouraged to participate in multipartite policy forums as part of Participation in decision-making.

What was lacking in the RDP, however, was any analysis of social forces which were likely to be obstacles to realisation of its objectives. The ‘people’, in other words, includes all the different and contending social classes in society. The RDP did not challenge capitalist social relations, a position which was consistent with their focus on racism, apartheid and economic mismanagement as the key sources of the economic crisis.
Although the ANC adopted the RDP as its electoral platform in the 1994 election, these limitations meant that anything was still possible in terms of macro-economic policy direction. This was to become the preoccupation of policy debates in the immediate post-electoral period.

The turn to the right is consolidated: Social Equity

In the immediate post-apartheid period the pressure on COSATU from the ANC and capital, intensified and this could be seen in the adoption, by COSATU, of the Social Equity and Job Creation (SEJC) in 1996. At the time it had become clear that the ANC, under the pressure of capital, was about to abandon the RDP and move further to the right.

The orientation adopted by the SEJC document was one that blames 'bad capitalism' for the problems faced by the working class and the poor in South Africa, and unlike COSATU's founding platform, does not identify capitalism itself as a source of this impoverishment and inequality. Like the RDP before it, the document proceeded to present the view that the old order mismanaged capitalism, and had allowed a bad capitalism to flourish. What this position implied was that the task of the new government should be to inaugurate a 'good capitalism' which will lead to social equity for all. Thus, instead of an analysis of economic concentration and monopoly that demonstrates that these are inevitable results of the processes of capitalist accumulation, the concentration of economic power was presented as a result of 'weak competition policies'.

In general, whether with respect to the local economy, or when it took positions on the international economy, the SEJC document sought the incorporation of trade unions into the existing power structures so as to 'modernise our industrial base', 'to train and develop the workforce', and to 'raise productivity'. The federations did not confront the evidence on how 'modernising the industrial base' and increasing 'productivity' increased unemployment, or that very little training was taking place even though productivity was rising.

From RDP to GEAR

In June 1996 the ANC government adopted a 'new' macro-economic strategy, called the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy. In many ways, the strategy was a culmination of shifts in ANC economic and political thinking that had been underway since the beginning of the 1990s. GEAR advanced the standard prescriptions of the various neo-liberal policy think tanks from the World Bank to the South African Chamber of Business.

GEAR argued that the private sector (or capital) should be the driving force behind growth and development. The general strategy was therefore to improve the profitability of capital. The argument was that once profitable opportunities are created business would re-invest its profits, thus creating growth and development. The engine of development in the context of this model was therefore profits. This philosophy, which might be called 'profit-led growth', has also been extended to all aspects of government policy since the launch of GEAR. For example, the new land reform policy unveiled in 2000 is a market-led strategy. Like all neo-liberal approaches, GEAR's overall approach to the role of the state was that the state must not participate in the economy as a producer of goods and services. This, according to neo-liberal policy, is the role of the private sector.

GEAR committed the ANC government to liberalisation of financial markets, a 'flexible labour market', trade liberalisation, a conservative fiscal policy including cuts in social expenditure, and export led growth.

GEAR and GEAR

Since the adoption of GEAR in 1996 COSATU has voiced criticism of the policy. COSATU's attitude to GEAR, and the nature of the criticisms, varied over time and swung from mild criticism to radical and back to mild criticism. At certain times COSATU has indirectly endorsed GEAR as a policy, and at other times it has chosen to remain silent on GEAR.

COSATU first registered its rejection of the newly launched GEAR at its Executive Committee held in July 1996, within a month of the June launch of the programme. In a press statement issued after the Executive Committee meeting, the federation argued that the macro-economic framework would take the country on a growth path diametrically opposed to the RDP. This criticism of GEAR was confirmed by the September Commission, which was set up by COSATU to investigate the future of the trade union movement in South Africa.

The Commission argued that the positive aspects of GEAR were "overwhelmed by the right-wing aspects". Aspects of GEAR cited in this context were the policy's commitment to conservative fiscal deficit targets, its commitment to end exchange controls, its commitment to high interest rates as a way of controlling inflation, its emphasis on privatisation, and the central role of the market and private sector investment as engines of growth. The September Commission report further concluded that the aim of the GEAR was to meet the demands of "financial capital and financial markets for conservative macro-economic targets".

The Sixth National Congress, which met in 1997 to debate the Commission Report and take an official position, adopted a "Declaration on GEAR". In the declaration, largely following the September Commission, COSATU rejected GEAR as a "neo-liberal" policy that was "unsuitable for South Africa's socio-economic transformation".

The congress resolved that GEAR was a departure from the principles enshrined in the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), and would lead to increasing job losses, would sacrifice job creation, reduce expenditure on social services, lead to labour market deregulation, and give rise to unacceptable industrial and trade policies. The critique of GEAR adopted by the 6th Congress was carried into the Inaugural Central Committee of COSATU in June 1998. In that meeting the federation reaffirmed its rejection of GEAR and the government's macro-economic policies.

By October of the same year (1998), however, COSATU endorsed a declaration at the Presidential Job Summit which noted that GEAR's targets would have to be revised but that this "would be done in the context of retaining the coherence and strength of [GEAR]". Although Gomomo, then President of COSATU, is said to have voiced the federation's unhappiness about the inclusion of this formulation in the declaration, the inclusion of this formulation was symptomatic of
a broader COSATU accommodation to GEAR. The occasion of this accommodation was the looming second democratic elections in 1999, and the ANC’s turn towards a rhetoric that borrowed from the RDP.

By the time of the election campaign, COSATU had become silent on GEAR. In its publication “Why workers should vote ANC”, the federation downplayed all the criticisms of GEAR it had advanced up to that time. In the election publication COSATU argued that the ANC government had undertaken to reduce taxes on middle-income families and workers, invest more in social spending and economic infrastructure, regulate the financial sector and bring down the level of interest rates. COSATU also said that the ANC was committed to promoting investment by the public sector and to channelling private sector investment into employment. In a direct reference to GEAR, the COSATU election platform said that despite GEAR’s failure to stem unemployment, the ANC government had delivered on many fronts and “in some cases had gone beyond our expectations”.

The period of accommodation came to an abrupt end immediately after the elections when the ANC government announced a large number of impending retrenchments in state owned enterprises, thereby dramatically changing the landscape of debate about GEAR. It was the political atmosphere of the post-election period, and struggles that COSATU had been forced to take up as a result (the anti-privatisation fight, in particular), that provided the context for a new turn in the federation’s critique of GEAR.

This period of tensions and criticisms of GEAR was however short-lived, and in early January 2002, the ANC and COSATU emerged out of a bilateral meeting to announce that “what binds us is much stronger than our differences on specific issues of policy”. The irreconcilable contradictions had been reconciled.

In June 2003 COSATU, NACTU, FEDUSA and business participated in the Growth and Development Summit (GDS), organised by the ANC government. The ANC was preparing for the 2004 general elections. Just like the Job Summit of 1998, the GDS was a platform to present a class collaboration project between government, business and labour. Class collaboration was presented as another “victory” for workers and the poor. Notwithstanding the retreat of the COSATU leadership on policy issues, there were some struggles in the period after the first general elections in 1994.

Workers struggles in post-apartheid South Africa

Soon after coming to power, the new government initiated a programme of reviewing the labour market. As part of this process, the government enacted a new Labour Relations Act (a law regulating relations between employers and unions) and the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (a law dealing with individual conditions of employment).

When the Labour Relations Bill was released, it became clear that some of the long-standing demands of the labour movement were not covered. These included the legal duty to bargain, the demand not to use scab labour during strikes, the demand not to lock out strikers, and an unlimited right to strike. The federation developed a programme of marches and pickets culminating in a one-day national strike in which millions of workers took part in 1995. Despite their success in terms of mobilisation of workers, these struggles did not manage to move the government and the demands were not met.

When the new Basic Conditions of Employment Bill was released in 1997, the labour movement also organised marches and pickets in opposition to the labour flexibility spirit embodied in the variations of the Bill. Other demands included the 40-hour week, 6 months paid maternity leave and a ban on overtime and Sunday work. These demands are not yet codified in law, and many unions within the federation continue to struggle for them in the industries in which they organise.

The anti-privatisation struggles

The government adopted a programme of state assets restructuring which called for the privatisation and commercialisation of state-owned companies. The National Framework Agreement (NFA), agreed to between state and trade unions, provided for negotiations over the restructuring. The key objective of the NFA was to evaluate restructuring possibilities with a view to ensuring full privatisation, partial privatisation or strategic equity partners.

The South African Municipal Workers’ Union (SAMWU) did not endorse the NFA process and saw it as legitimising privatisation. The union rejected privatisation on the grounds that it would lead to falling living standards in poor communities, job losses and poor working conditions. The union called for the restructuring of the public sector to ensure a strong and efficient public sector for the delivery of basic needs.
From this standpoint, SAMWU went on to oppose attempts by local governments to privatise a number of social services at municipal level. These ranged from water services, refuse collection and general maintenance services. The union developed an anti-privatisation campaign that ran over a period of eight months in 1998. The campaign mobilised all the regions of the union, some regions of COSATU, and other community organisations behind the campaign. As a result, a number of local councils were forced to reverse or at least suspend their privatisation plans.

The rest of the union movement either did not take up the struggle against privatisation, or the struggle was taken up in an inconsistent way. In the communication industry, the Communication Workers Union (CWU) set up an investment company which bought a privatised unit in 1999. All this was done in the name of black economic empowerment. COSATU also wanted to buy Aventura, a state holiday resort chain, but could not raise the required capital.

Faced with the determination by the state to carry on with its privatisation programme, COSATU supported by NACTU and other formations called an anti-privatisation stay-away on 30 and 31 August 2001. According to COSATU the two-day stay away was a success because about 50% to 70% of workers in the main economic centres participated in the planned demonstrations and marches. In addition, COSATU shop stewards in the secondary economic centres and smaller towns argued that participation was much better.

In its protest action to NEDLAC, COSATU persisted on not taking a principled position on privatisation. In its statement to NEDLAC the federation demonstrated how privatisation negatively affects the workers and communities, but this was watered down by the position that contended that there should be wider consultation before privatisation. These confusing signals by the federation have often undermined its mass action. According to unionists in Gauteng some of the factories did not come out in support of the campaign against privatisation because workers' instincts told them that COSATU would once again compromise on these issues because the leadership is shielding the alliance. According to these workers having a full and principled fight on privatisation meant that the leadership must be prepared to break away from the alliance.

The workers party debate and the alliance
One of the major debates during the transition has been the question of a workers' party. The debate on the workers' party dates back to the early 1980s when FOSATU questioned the political leadership of the ANC and the SACP. In his address in 1982, Joe Foster argued, "before it is too late workers must strive to form their own powerful and effective organisation within the wider popular struggle." Foster's address was followed by a response from the SACP which attacked Foster for doubting the SACP as the authentic leader of the working class. According to these workers having a full and principled fight on privatisation meant that the leadership must be prepared to break away from the alliance.

The NUMSA and SACTWU resolutions caused a major debate in the mass movement. Unions such as NUM and FAWU attacked NUMSA and SACTWU for calling for an end to the alliance. These organisations argued that it was inappropriate to call for an end of the alliance when there was still a need to implement the RDP. They further recommitted themselves to the "historic" political leadership of the ANC and the SACP. NACTU's position argued that in Africa and other Third World countries liberation movements collaborated with the bosses in the post liberation period. Therefore trade unions should remain independent and protect the interests of workers and the working class in general.

Notwithstanding this debate, COSATU elected 20 union leaders and sent them to parliament as part of the ANC team in an attempt to make the "voices of workers heard" in the corridors of parliament. On the other hand, this election of worker leaders to parliament did not end the debate on the Alliance within COSATU.

In 1998, the Wits region of the Chemical Workers Industrial Union called for the formation of the workers party because the ANC had shown its disdain towards workers by privatising state assets and adopting a neo-liberal GEAR policy. In response COSATU and ANC leadership argued that such a move would be "playing into the hands of the enemy" and CWIU instituted a disciplinary hearing in the region. Following this the workers' party debate lost momentum in the unions as the alliance asserted its hegemony in the labour movement.
This chapter deals with the cycle of struggle that began with the Durban strikes of 1973 and is now coming to an end. The most active workers in this cycle of struggle were the blue-collar workers of the manufacturing sector. The decline of the manufacturing sector has been accompanied by generalised retrenchments, high unemployment, and the rise of casual and informal labour which have led to the fragmentation of the working class. The social and economic crisis facing the working class has also been accompanied by the decline of the shop steward movement; the retreat of intellectuals aligned to the labour movement; and by the decline of working class intellectual and cultural life.

Unemployment and poverty within the working class

Unemployment in South Africa has reached crisis proportions. The unemployment rate according to the extended definition of unemployment which includes those who have given up looking for jobs, is around 40%. Between 1996 and 1999, 400 000 jobs were lost in the formal and non-agricultural sector of the economy. Job losses in the manufacturing sector have been most pronounced. With rising unemployment has come increased informalisation and casualisation. The share of informal workers in the labour force rose from 17% in 1995 to 20% in 2002, and the number of workers in part-time employment also increased rapidly.
Unemployment affects African youth and women more severely. Over half of all the unemployed are young people aged 30 years or younger, and unemployment among women is 50% higher than among men. In September 2002, 53% of African women were unemployed, and 75% of those were under 30. Rising unemployment and declining incomes have been associated with a declining share in the national income for working people. In 1995 the poorest 20% of households received 1.9% of total South African income. By the year 2000 the poorest of the poor received 1.6% of national income. In the past three years, however, profits rose from 29% to 34% of the national income. In 2002 the gap between capitalists’ profits and wages/salaries was the widest since 1981.

Aside from rising unemployment, declining income and rising poverty, the working class has had to contend with a decline in state provision of social services. Budget cuts in the late 1990s had a devastating impact on service provision.

For many working people basic services such as water, electricity, education and healthcare remain poor in quality and often high in price. Most of the unemployed have no access to these social services. The deteriorating health services are made worse by the prevalence of HIV/AIDS among the working class and the poor. At the start of the millennium estimates of those living with the virus ranged from 10% to 25% of the total population. This was a substantial increase from a decade earlier. By 2003, some 600 South Africans were dying of AIDS every day.

Unemployment, the rise in casual work and the informal sector has had a negative effect on the labour movement in particular and the working class in general. These factors have led to the fragmentation of the working class. Moreover, the decline of the manufacturing sector has led to the decline in the number of unionised workers in the sector and this is the sector which was the backbone of the labour movement that emerged in the wake of the 1973 Durban strikes wave.

The decline of manufacturing and blue-collar workers

The blue-collar workers of the manufacturing sector led many struggles in the 1980s. These workers defined the militant struggles on the occasion of the federation’s formation 55% of its membership came from the manufacturing sector. In 2004, the COSATU leadership also noted that the manufacturing unions who used to lead COSATU campaigns, such as NUMSA, had ceded that leadership role to the public sector unions.

Together with the rise in the unionisation of public sector workers, the increasing retrenchments in the manufacturing sector have resulted in a decrease of manufacturing workers in the trade union movement. In 1999 the manufacturing sector accounted for only 27% of COSATU’s membership. The table below shows that all major trade unions in the manufacturing sector have lost membership and there is a decline in the number of unionised workers who are in the sector (union density). This decline in union density is also an indication that the general militancy and the political consciousness of workers in this sector is on the decline.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTOR</th>
<th>UNION</th>
<th>MEMBERSHIP</th>
<th>UNION DENSITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metal industry</td>
<td>NUMSA</td>
<td>220,000</td>
<td>200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing and textiles</td>
<td>SACTWU</td>
<td>150,000</td>
<td>119,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food processing</td>
<td>FAWU</td>
<td>139,800</td>
<td>119,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemical, wood, paper</td>
<td>CEPPWAWU</td>
<td>94,400</td>
<td>73,700</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: COSATU, 2003

The general level of trade union organisation across all sectors has also declined. Trade union membership as a proportion of the economically active population declined from 24% in 1992 to 21% in 2001.

Notwithstanding this decline in the levels of unionisation, the labour movement has failed to develop and implement strategies to organise the unemployed, casuals, part-time workers, and the informal sector. Despite resolutions taken at union congresses about organising these sectors, the labour movement has not done much. The leadership has not even begun to experiment with models that allow workers who are losing jobs every day to remain union members.

The decline of worker militancy

Working class militancy has declined dramatically since the early 1990s. During the 1970s and 1980s, the working class built vigilant unions, which went beyond the boundaries between factories and communities. Factory and community struggles were part of the general struggle against apartheid and capitalism. Workers experienced growing strength and confidence in their unions despite dismissals and other forms of intimidation that the owners and the state used against them. But in post apartheid South Africa, the levels of militancy and collective action have declined tremendously despite the fact that the social and economic conditions of the working class have worsened. This decline in militancy can be seen in the general decline in strike activity since 1987. In 1987 there were 9 million man-days lost as a result of strikes and lockouts. In 2002, the figure declined to 945 000 man-days, a decrease of about 8 million man-days.

The growing use of flexible labour, the reorganisation of work, the use of information technology in the labour process and globalisation has led to the fragmentation of the working class. The bosses prefer to create and maintain a pool of casual workers and to outsource work in order to weaken the labour movement. South Africa now has a massive informal sector where workers are unprotected. All these factors have weakened the labour movement and its traditions of solidarity and militancy.
COSATU and the nascent social movement

Another important indicator of the decline of worker militancy and solidarity, particularly among COSATU's rank and file membership, is the lack of participation by unionised workers in struggles waged by the new or emerging social movements and community-based organisations. When one looks from the 1970s to the 1990s one can easily identify many examples of solidarity and common struggles between workers, communities and students. Many activists and participants in the struggles of social movements, see unionised workers as privileged elite that does not want to dirty its hands in struggles for social services.

The decline of the shop steward movement

The shop steward movement that was the backbone of the present labour movement is now in decline. During struggles in the 1970s and 1980s, the shop steward movement developed and consolidated a distinct political culture and practice which combined the following elements:

- workers' control,
- democracy,
- accountability to the rank and file,
- ability to link community and shop floor struggle,
- ability to link the struggle against apartheid with the struggle against capitalism.

This political culture and practice was then replicated in other structures of the mass movement such as the student and trade union movements in the 1980s. The decline of the labour movement and the defeat of the working class are graphically expressed in the demise of the shop steward movement.

In 1997, COSATU's September Commission was mandated to investigate the challenges facing the labour movement in post-apartheid South Africa. The Commission noted that only 35% of the union staff believed that shop steward committees were strong and that it was only 30% of the union members that were happy with union service from shop stewards and union officials. The Commission cited the transition to democracy as one of the key destabilising factors of the shop steward movement.

Since the 1994 transition, the shop steward movement has lost many shop stewards who came from the militant period of the 1980s. Leading shop stewards have been leaving unions for higher positions in the workplace, particularly managerial positions in personnel and human resource departments, but also for positions as supervisors and technicians in the production process. In the post 1994 period, some leading shop stewards were elected as local councillors, members of provincial legislatures and members of the national parliament. Some became salaried government officials. This mobility of shop stewards has also been facilitated by affirmative action and "empowerment" of black people. In many cases shop stewards were the most vocal workers on the shop floor, and their union training on many issues, including organisational skills and broader economic issues, made them prime affirmative action candidates.

Another indicator of the decline of the shop steward movement is the dominance of organisers and full-time shop stewards in the unions. A large number of shop stewards have come to put their faith in the expertise of the full-time official. This has resulted in a shift in the balance of power from workers and shop stewards into the hands of full-time officials, particularly those with specialised expertise.

Realising the decline of militancy in the labour movement and the demise of the shop steward movement, the bosses have also introduced their own shop steward training programmes as an attempt to ideologically and politically weaken the labour movement. In dealing with issues of work reorganisation, employers have often by-passed unions and dealt directly with shop stewards. PG Bison and Nampak were among the first companies to introduce these strategies, which unions found extremely difficult to respond to. The two companies went further and recruited shop stewards and union officials into supervisory and junior managerial positions.

Management's provision of shop steward training is also a way of shifting the allegiances of shop stewards away from the unions, which provide them with little support and no education, towards management which is supposedly meeting their needs and providing them with personal opportunities. There are many stories of shop stewards who have participated in management provided training, and have then moved into management themselves.

The organisational renewal proposals of COSATU in 2003 concede that with a few exceptions, trade union and shop steward education has declined. Union resources going towards education have dropped. Besides the decline in resource allocation, the content of shop steward education has some shortcomings. Many trade union education courses for shop stewards on 'organisational development' borrow concepts and principles contained in standard business management textbooks. In addition, mainstream economics and industrial relations theories find their way into the unions via shop stewards who enrol for custom-made courses at local universities and technikons, many of which run courses jointly with mainly British and Australian universities.

The decline of the "activist organiser" and the new business unionism

During the rise of the labour movement, and during its highpoint in the 1980s, union organisers or officials were also key activists and militants in their own right. The activist organiser embodied two roles, that of a political activist as well as that of a full-time official of the union. The liberation struggle created a context within which it was possible to fuse these roles. As a consequence, working for the union was regarded by many as being part of a commitment to the goals of national liberation and economic emancipation. Thus, in spite of their severely limited material resources and the risks involved in working for "struggle organisations", unions were able to attract hundreds of highly politicised and energetic young people, many of whom were prepared to work
for little or no financial reward. Union employment was thus non-
-hierarchical, collectivist and driven by selflessness. In addition, it relied
on self-supervision and political co-ordination rather than management
in the corporate sense of the word. The disappearance of the activist
organiser occurred because of the dissolution of the link between the
role of political activist on the one hand, and full-time union official on
the other. In the course of the dissolution of this link, the latter role has
been emphasised by unions and officials themselves with the result that
for many officials today working for the union has become a form of
employment like any other conventional job in the labour market.

The changing political environment and the decline of an "activist
organiser" layer has paved the way for a new type of union official,
namely business unionists and careerists who treat full-time union
employment as a "waiting room". The emphasis on formal education in
union appointment has also contributed to the emergence of this layer
of organisers. Business unionists treat union work as a stepping-stone
to mobility up the social scale. They seek to abolish worker control and
see unions as business organisations.

There is a convergence between the interests of these officials
and the emerging trend of "business unionism" in the form of union
investment companies. Business unionism creates entrepreneurial
opportunities and avenues for upward mobility for some union
officials. Well-known examples are those of Marcel Golding, former
assistant general secretary of the NUM and Johnny Copelyn, former
general secretary of SACTWU, both of whom have become wealthy
businessmen through their leading roles in investment companies of
their former unions. More recent examples include Tony Kgobe, a former
national organiser of NUMSA who is now the chief executive officer
of NUMSA's investment company, and Paul Nkuna, a former national
treasurer of NUM who is a senior executive in the union's investment
company.

The rise of business unionism has been accompanied by increasing
instances of corruption within the labour movement. Although these
allegations have not been tested in the courts they raise serious
questions about the practices of some of the leading layers in the labour
movement. NEHAWU, in the shop steward publication in 2000, admitted
that "COSATU is currently faced with immense challenges trying to free
unions from corrupt careerist elements who are not committed to the
working-class agenda but are instead committed to self enrichment,
sectarian and factional interests. Even in unions like SAMWU, corruption
has reared its head.

The rise of business unionism has been accompanied by unequal
power relations between men and women officials in the union
movement. This inequality translates into occupational differentiation, a
phenomenon that relegates women officials to office-bound, clerical and
other low-status positions.

**The retreat from socialist politics**

The organisational and political direction of the labour movement and the
struggle for working class emancipation was the subject of many debates
in the 1980s. Despite political differences that existed at that time, the
leadership of the labour movement provided a framework that facilitated
a struggle against apartheid and capitalism. Although there were
differences in opinion on the best strategies to adopt to arrive at the long-
term goal of socialism, there was some agreement that the intensification
of struggles against apartheid and capitalism was a necessary condition
for such advancement. The post 1994 period has seen a retreat from a
militant socialist politics, even though resolutions on socialism continue
to be passed at congresses of the labour movement.

In the immediate post 1994 period COSATU and the SACP
convened a conference of the left. One of the key objectives of the
conference was to develop a programme for the left that was meant to
assist in clarifying the vision of a socialist path. Since the conference,
not much has happened despite the calls for similar conferences by

While resolutions that support the struggle for socialism and a
commitment to the "national democratic revolution" continue to be
passed at union congresses, the leadership of the labour movement has
not crafted an independent programme and a path to socialism.

Despite the worsening social and economic conditions of the
working class under ANC rule, the leadership of COSATU remains in
the ANC alliance. As a result the COSATU leadership has had to tone
down its criticism of the ANC's neo-liberal GEAR because of pressure
from the alliance. The leadership went as far as embracing GEAR and
talking about the post-GEAR consensus in 1999, as a way of cementing
relations within the alliance on the eve of the national elections.

The formation of union investment companies is another indication
of this retreat from socialist politics. Leading figures in the labour
movement now argue that that the investment companies are principally
aimed at altering ownership patterns in the economy in favour of the working class.

Privatisation
Another indication of the retreat from socialist politics has been the labour movement’s response to privatisation. In 1996, the leadership of the three trade union federations, namely COSATU, FEDSAL and NACTU signed the National Framework Agreement which accepted privatisation and argued that “Where restructuring potentially has negative consequences for workers, a social plan must be negotiated with the relevant unions at the enterprise level which takes account of the worker’s interests”. The acceptance of privatisation by the leadership has undermined the struggle against privatisation by workers. It is also a major shift from the position of COSATU, which argued for the nationalisation of the ‘commanding heights’ of the economy prior to this.

The acceptance of privatisation by the unions can also be seen in the activities of the union investment companies. Companies established by the labour movement have been involved in buying stakes in privatised state assets. In the communications industry, the CWU set up an investment company, which bought a privatised unit in 1999. COSATU also wanted to buy Aventura but could not raise enough money. In 1999, NACTU had a substantial stake in Umanzano, a company active in the micro lending market, and was directly involved in the appointment of its management, and NACTU shop stewards were encouraged to promote the company.

Tripartism
The ideological integration of the labour movement into neo-liberalism and accommodation of capitalism is also expressed in the leadership’s full support for tripartite forums made up of labour, state and capital. This goes back to the early 1990s establishment of the NEF, a tripartite forum which was supposed to bring consensus between labour, state and business on economic issues. In 1995, NEDLAC was formed out of a merger of the NEF and the NMC with the primary objective of creating social partnership between labour, state, business and communities. NEDLAC has played a major role in integrating labour into the neo-liberal project and in promoting a belief that the working class, the state and capital can find a joint solution to the present economic crisis. This despite the fact that workers have continued to suffer job losses and impoverishment as a result of state policy and neo-liberal restructuring by capital.

The NEDLAC process has led to a number of agreements between the state, labour and capital, including agreements on labour laws and industrial restructuring. It was during the Job Summit hosted by NEDLAC in 1998 that the labour movement indirectly endorsed GEAR. NEDLAC has also given rise to a number of other ‘sectoral’ processes or sector summits, where bosses and workers’ organisations in specific sectors negotiate around issues specific to the industry. The result is that instead of seeing employers’ search for profits as a key source of the current wave of retrenchments and decline in working conditions, unions have in many instances seen themselves as allies of employers. One such case is in the mining industry, where the mining bosses are now portrayed as victims of ‘global markets’, and are no longer seen as primary sources of the crisis facing workers in the Industry.

Besides statutory bodies like NEDLAC, the leadership of the labour movement has also been drawn into informal arrangements with capital and with the state. The Presidential Trade Unions Group, whose objective is to conduct “open dialogue” between labour and the State President, is one such informal group. In this forum delegates are not required to have a mandate. The discussions of the forum may be formalised into agreements in NEDLAC.

A similar forum with capital is the Millennium Labour Council. The establishment of the Millennium Labour Council in 2000 consolidated the ideological integration of the labour movement. Comprised of 12 leaders each from business and labour, the council seeks to promote “social dialogue” between labour and capital with the intention of creating economic growth and eradicating poverty. The forum is said to be strengthening NEDLAC. Joint “fact finding missions” of labour and business are undertaken to foreign countries, and so labour and capital are seen as jointly responsible for the resolution of the current crisis facing workers and their communities.

Suppression of democratic traditions in the labour movement
Another indication of the decline of the labour movement’s militant tradition is that the leadership has discouraged local shop floor initiatives that seek to entrench workers’ control and undercut “cooperation” between management and workers on the shop floor. In 1998, the Volkswagen (VW) management in Uitenhage introduced, in agreement with the NUMSA leadership and without the voice of workers, workplace changes which were aimed at increasing productivity in the face of global competition. In 1999, workers elected shop stewards who were opposed to the trade union and management productivity deal. The union leadership rejected the duly elected shop stewards. In opposition to that the general meeting of VW workers went on strike against the union bureaucracy. The union leadership sided with management in undermining the issues and struggles of the VW workers. The COSATU leadership supported the union and labelled workers who participated in the strikes as agent provocateurs.

Another example where the union leadership undermined workers democracy is the case of the Chemical, Energy, Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers’ Union (CEPPWAWU) Wits region. The Wits region of the Chemical Industrial Union (CWU) was renowned for its independence, radical politics and the promotion of workers’ control. In 2003, faced with national elections of 2004 and COSATU’s inability to wage serious struggles against GEAR and privatisation, the regional leadership was mandated by the membership to argue for a workers’ referendum on whether COSATU should continue with the alliance. The call for the referendum was based on the fact that workers in the region saw the political alliance between COSATU, SACP and ANC as compromising the workers’ struggle and independence. Besides the disaffection with the alliance, workers in the region also passed a vote of no confidence in the CEPPWAWU leadership because of mistrust in the union. The response of the CEPPWAWU leadership was to suspend the regional leadership thereby forcing workers to form an independent union.
The retreat of radical intellectuals

The retreat of the mass movement and the labour movement has been accompanied by the retreat of the intellectuals who promoted radical politics and contributed in various ways to the building of the labour movement since the 1970s. Beginning with a few dozen, mainly white, intellectuals and activists in the 1960s, this generation of intellectuals came to maturity in the late 1970s and had a powerful presence on South Africa's political landscape in the 1980s. These intellectuals formed organisations that helped build unions in the 1970s. They published journals and magazines, which often conveyed their views on labour and political issues, and their ideas shaped the academic curriculum in universities. These intellectuals were also critical of the liberation movement, including the SACP and the ANC. There were constant debates between them and the intellectuals aligned to the SACP on the relationship between trade unions and the national liberation movement.

However, in the early 1990s some of these intellectuals began a shift to the right, and many joined the ANC and the SACP. They strategically located themselves in key positions dealing with economic and industrial issues. Some of them were nominated as members of parliament by COSATU and took key positions in the state apparatus. As the movement was weakened politically and ideologically, this layer of intellectuals’ drift to the right was accelerated. Some participated in the drafting of economic policies such as GEAR, which undermine the interests of the working class. In the field of industrial relations, this layer argued for codetermination and the need for “international competitiveness”. The implementation of these policies has contributed to the wave of retrenchments that have weakened the labour movement.

The decline of intellectual and cultural life in the labour movement

In the 1980s workers developed their own culture, which reinforced their social identity as workers opposed to apartheid and capitalism. FOSATU workers formed grassroots choirs, which promoted the federation as a leader and a fighter for workers. A movement of worker poets was instrumental in giving the working class a sense of identity and coherence.

Some of the shop floor workers’ leaders began to write autobiographies that also captured the working class history and the struggle against apartheid and capitalism. Many workers with little or no formal education became organic or grassroots intellectuals. They could debate theoretical questions with intellectuals who had formal university education.

The rise in unemployment, retrenchments and the general decline of the living conditions of the working class has led to the decline of the intellectual life within the working class. These changes started taking place in the 1990s, and today the workers’ culture movement - poetry, drama, dance, music, and the like - and the workers’ education movement has lost its dynamism and richness.

The result of this decline in worker cultural activism is that there is a layer of former cultural activists and grassroots intellectuals and activists that has been relegated to the margins of society during the last ten years. A classical example of this is the late Alfred Temba Qabula. Qabula, a former Metal and Allied Workers’ Union (MAWU) shop steward at Dunlop in Durban and a cultural activist, died in 2002 in isolation in a rural village in Pondoland. At the time of his death Qabula was unemployed, poor and disillusioned with the new social order. In his last published poem entitled “It has been a long road” which was released in 1995, Qabula expressed disappointment with former comrades who used the working class to climb to the top and then turned their backs on their comrades as soon as they were sitting comfortably in high positions.
It has been such a long road
Alfred Temba Qabula

It has been a long road here
with me, marking the same rhythms
everyday
Gentlemen, pass me by
Ladies, pass me try
Each one greets me, "eita!"
and adds:
"comrade, I will see you on my return
as you see I am in a hurry
but do not fear, I am with you and
understand your plight."

"Do not worry
no harm will greet you
as long as I am alive.
We shall make plans with the guys
and we for sure will solve your problems.
You trust me don't you?
I remember how hard you struggled
and your contribution is prized.
In fact everyone knows how hard it all had turned
when you were fighting for workers
and for the community's emancipation."

Nothing lasts forever
and our friends now show us their backs
and they avoid eye-contact
pretending they never saw us.
Even those whom by chance our eyes did meet
would rush and promise and leave behind
a "see you later".

"What is your phone number comrade?
I will call you after I finished with the planning
committee on this or that of the legislature
and then we shall work something out for you, be calm."

Days have passed, weeks have passed
years have also passed
with us waiting like ten virgins in the bible.

I remember the old days
while we had become used to calling them
from the other side of the river.
Some of them were in the caves and crevices hiding when we called
but we hollered loud
until they heard and responded to our voice.
As they came to us dust sprang up
and spiralled high all the way up to the sky.
When the dust of our struggle settled, there was no one there.
The dust covered my body.
it cursed me into a pathetic fate
disguising me, making me unrecognisable
and whoever recognises me
is judged to be deluded, deceived
because the dust of their feet still covers my body.

And now we, the abominations, spook them
as the dust of their feet covers our bodies.

And they run away
each one of them saying "hold up the sun
dear friend, doesn't the fog cover each and every mountain?"

Although you don't know us, we know ourselves:
we are the movable ladders that take people up towards the skies
left out in the open for the rain...
left with the memories of teargas, panting for breath.

Winter and summer come and go and leave us the same
the wind or the breeze has not changed us
here is a summary of our praises
the iron that doesn't bend, even
Geneva has failed to bend it
the small piece of bath-soap about which,
meetings and conspiracies were hatched to catch it and destroy it.
It still continues to clean men and women who desire to be cleaned.

It has been a long road here
see you again my friends
when you really need us
when the sun clears the fog from your eyes.

The poem by Qabula represents a widespread feeling within the working
class that the demands and ideals they struggled and died for over the
last 30 years have been lost or betrayed.

RECOMMENDED SOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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Penguin.
Bramble, T. and Barchiesi, F (eds.). Rethinking the labour movement in the new South Africa. Ashgate: Aldershot.
Johannesburg: Ravan Press


The following list of journals and magazines that discuss labour and politics can be found on the website address: *http://disa.nu.ac.za*

- Abasebenzi
- East Cape Update
- NUM News
- Afra Newsletter
- African Communist
- Fosatu Worker News
- Phakamani
- Africanist News and Views
- Frank Talk
- Pro Veritate
- Amandla-Matla
- Apdusa Views
- Grassroots
- Rixaka
- Arise! *Vukani!*
- *Ikwezi*
- Sash
- Black Review
- Inqaba ya Basebenzi

**SASO Newsletter**

**Isisebenzi**
- SASPU Focus
- Clarion Call

**Isizwe**
- SASPU National
- Congress Resister

**Izwilase Township**
- Sechaba
- Cosatu News
- Speak
- Crisis News
- Journal of Black Theology
- Speak: the voice of the community
- Critical Health
- Contact

**Liberation**

**TRAC Newsletter**

**Dawn**

**Mayibuye**

**Umsebenzi**

**Democracy in Action**

**Work in Progress**

Other important sources that were used in the book

**COSATU** *http://www.cosatu.org.za*

Ditsela *http://www.ditsela.org.za*

FEDUSA *http://www.fedusa.org.za*

Khanya College *http://www.khanyacollege.org.za*

NACTU *http://www.nactu.org.za*

NALEDI *http://www.naledi.org.za*

South African Labour Bulletin For back copies on the labour debates since the 1970s, the bulletin can be contacted at 27 11 403 3075.

South African Labour History Project *http://www.labourhistory.org.za*