

TRADE UNIONS COMMUNITY ORGANISATION AND POLITICS

A Local Case Study on the East Rand



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This dissertation sets out as a challenge to two trends in the analysis of the trade union movement. The first trend implies that there is no fundamental difference in political strategy between the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) which was formed in 1985 and included amongst others all the FOSATU affiliates. Swilling for instance writes that the unions established in the 1970s "shunned distinctions between economic and political issues and stridently challenged state policies" (Swilling, 1987: 2). Maree too implies that the involvement of the industrial unions in community and political struggles in the mid-1980s was not incompatible with their earlier position (1987: 10).

The second trend argues that there has been a shift away from "independence" to an alliance or "subordination" of the trade union movement to the national liberation movement, and greets this with varying degrees of dismay or confusion (Plaut, 1987; Friedman, 1987; Browne, 1987; Innes, 1986).

It seems to me indisputable that there has been a profound shift in the politics of the labour movement, marked by the different public positions of FOSATU and COSATU. One only has to compare papers produced by former FOSATU officials (Forster, 1982; Erwin, 1985) or FOSATU Worker News, with the speeches of COSATU officials (Naidoo, 1986a and 1986b; Mafumadi, 1986; Ramaphosa, 1986) for this to be clear.

On the basis of the assumption that a fundamental shift **has** occurred, this dissertation then sets out to explore three questions.

The first question is: how did this change occur? What was the role played by rank and file membership, by shopfloor leadership, and by union leadership in this process? What bearing did the formation of UDF in 1983, and the escalation of popular struggles in 1984/5 have on it? How was it that one federation, claiming to be democratic and thus expressing the will of the workers, could align itself with the liberation movement, whereas three years previously its major predecessors, also claiming to be democratic and thus to express the will of the workers, would have very little to do with the UDF?

My case study of a group of worker leaders in Springs, conducted through interviews, is an attempt to explore some of these questions. Since their experience forms only one uniquely coloured piece in the mosaic of national experiences in the first half of the 1980s, the case study can in no way pretend to definitively answer these questions. Moreover, the case study is itself incomplete, since there are a number of events that still need to be clarified through further discussions with the workers and others, and also because the interviewees by and large belong to one political tendency in Springs. There were others, and their leaders have still to be interviewed.

My second aim was to explore a range of theoretical problems in Marxism, with the purpose of trying to establish a theoretical framework that could explain why the political shift happened, why the present leadership of COSATU, with a Congress political position, came to dominate the union movement.

To this end I discuss various Marxist theories of contradiction in society, and more specifically, Marxist theories of politics.

The third aim of the dissertation, closely linked to the second, was to develop a coherent theoretical critique of and answer to those who express dismay at the betrayal of working class interests by their subsumption into African nationalism; to provide in a sense a theoretical foundation to the strategies

chosen by the workers in Springs. This too involves a discussion of political theory, and particularly of the 'national question'. Essentially, it involves an attempt to explain the relation of class to national struggle.

Implicit in these discussions is the question whether Marxism could analyse and grasp all these processes, or whether Marxism is inherently class reductionist and becomes incoherent once it attempts to grasp the specificity of the political terrain.

This dissertation, then, takes the following course:

Chapter 1 is the introduction, with a note on methodology.

Chapter 2 analyses the material context of the case study. It describes the origins and growth of FOSATU, the changes in the labour process that laid the conditions for the emergence of mass based industrial unionism in the 1970s and 80s, as well as the historical development of Springs. I try to analyse some of the factors that make Springs a distinctive industrial town, and that could explain the political developments there.

Chapter 3 is a composition built out of my interview material. It is the story of the experiences and struggles of workers in Springs, both within their community and in the wider organisation of FOSATU, **as seen by leading worker activists themselves**. It is therefore, not a statement of truth, or of what happened, but rather, the story of how important participants in a series of struggles now interpret them.

Chapter 4 is a theoretical critique of three position papers that emerged within FOSATU and its tradition. This critique draws on some of the ideas and strategies of worker leaders recorded in Chapter 3.

Chapter 5 moves on to an extended discussion of theoretical problems in Marxism, and ends with an attempt to theorise the 'national question'. This chapter aims to develop a Marxist position that can analyse and grasp the experiences and strategies of the interviewees. It also aims to provide a coherent theoretical foundation for the political position and

strategies that characterise COSATU.

Chapter 6 is a brief conclusion which attempts to tie all the strands of exploration together.

1.2 METHODOLOGY

The only research method used in this study was to interview participants. The following were interviewed:

Zakes - former SFAWU shop steward in Springs, and former senior office-bearer of FOSATU. A talk given at a FAWU seminar (1987a); an interview (1987b); a discussion of my draft write-up of the interviews, ie. a draft of Chapter 3 (1987c).

Vincint, George and David - three shop stewards at Packers, a key SFAWU factory in Springs. Interviewed as a group (Packers shop stewards, 1987).

Vincint - as above, interviewed alone (1987).

Moses - former SFAWU official in the Transvaal branch. Lives in Soweto (1987).

Mzwakhe - former MAWU office-bearer and then official; then UMMAWOSA official. Moved to Springs in 1983. One interview (1987); one discussion of draft of Chapter 3 (1987b).

Robert - former MAWU shop steward at Raleigh cycles; then member of Amalova; then full-time organiser for Amalova. Two interviews (1987a and 1987b).

Nomathemba - organiser for PWAU in Springs from 1981-3. Lived in Tsakane (1987).

Alec Erwin - general secretary of FOSATU 1979-82; then education secretary of FOSATU; education secretary of COSATU (1987).

Human Resources Manager at Packers (1987).

Most of the names used are pseudonyms, as is the name of the factory, Packers.

I also attended one general meeting of Amalova in KwaThema.

The interview methodology provides insights into the perceptions and interpretations of the participants, and gives one access to the strategic debates that take place (see Lambert 1987b).

It does have a number of limitations as far as accuracy is concerned, though. Firstly, interviewees are interpreting the past from the vantage point of the present. They will attempt to make the past coherent and consistent with their present viewpoints.

Secondly, in this case study, the interviewees are all comrades who have shared the same experiences and continue to discuss and interpret both the past and the present together. As a result, they will present a fairly coherent picture with few contradictions or discrepancies.

Thirdly, the interviewer himself has a great but unmeasurable impact on the evidence. The attitude of the interviewees to him or her, the questions he/she asks, which slices of the interview are regarded as important and are thus quoted - all of these will shape the kind of evidence that is 'discovered' through interviews.

For the most insightful use of interviews it is best to cross-check them against other interviews with participants who have different views and different experiences, and against other kinds of historical records. I was, however, unable to do this because of lack of time. This has to be considered, then, as an unfinished piece of research, or as work in progress.

I believe that the people whose experiences one is researching have some right to participate in interpreting the material. Accordingly, when I first met each interviewee I explained that I would come back with a rough draft of the material I had written up, for their further comment. I was unfortunately not able to follow this process through to its conclusion - a further reason

why this is to be regarded as an unfinished project. I was able to meet with two interviewees after they had read my draft (Zakes, 1987c and Mzwakhe 1987b). The discussions were extremely interesting, and opened up new questions, new events, and further qualifications of the views expressed in the first set of interviews. I have not had time to incorporate these discussions fully in the dissertation. Mzwakhe proposed that all the interviewees meet as a group with me to discuss discrepancies and interpretations. This will be a very exciting way of taking the project forward and deepening its analysis.

Such a process of active dialogue between researcher and objects of that research has been proposed by Touraine. He argues that, for the investigator who is trying to understand a social movement there appear to be two options:

On the one hand we might listen to individuals, on the other to an organisation, ie on the one hand we could hear reasons for participating individually in a movement, and on the other we could hear the political, strategic and tactical form given to the movement. But between these two, the movement itself would be missing... (quoted in Sitas, 1983: 9)

In order to grasp the movement Touraine suggests "a) that the nature of social movements is most fully revealed in the experiences, conflicts and struggles of the smaller 'molecular' groups which comprise it; b) that these 'molecular' groups must be understood through a process of group self-analysis in which the sociologist plays an active part." (Sitas, 1983: 9).

These are extremely suggestive ideas. The group of trade union activists interviewed for this study do form such a molecular group, and my approach has entailed, or begun to entail, a form of group self-analysis. I feel, however, that I do not yet fully understand the methodological implications of my approach, nor what the authentic relationship between an academic investigator and the activists whose struggles he/she is investigating ought to be. Once again, I can only plead that this is an unfinished project.

In the end, then, it has to be stressed that in my case study I am telling a story based on the stories told to me by a group of worker activists, who share a common political position, about their experiences and struggles.

One challenge is to distill, to recognise the edges of our stories and of the stories being told to us from the past, and to work towards comprehending the forces and processes through which both develop and at times are unravelled (Cohen, 1986: 22).

The growth of FOCATE

This study comprises one tentative step towards this goal. The full story has not yet been told - it will have to contain many other stories that are as yet untold.

1.2 THE FEDERATION OF SOUTH AFRICAN TRADE UNIONS (FOCATE)

FOCATE was formed in 1979 as a national federation of industrial trade unions, with a paid up membership of 18,000 and a stated objective of 21,000 (FOCATE, 1987: 1, 2). Its first membership included the metal, motor, printing, electrical, food, glass, paper/wood, and transport and general industrial unions.

The unions that formed FOCATE had a long history of struggle. The metal and allied workers union (MAMU), National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW), Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) and Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) had been affiliated to the Trade Union Advisory and Co-ordinating Council (TUACC) which had started in 1977 in Natal and already associated with the Industrial Aid Society (IAS) in Transvaal. The TUACC and IAS trade unions were registered with the help of white university students, especially TUCKA, the then-anti-apartheid, predominantly white Trade Union Council of South Africa officials, and former FOCATE members. These unions formed the core of the new federation, and it was essentially built on their possession of worker control and a right to participate in decisions.

Another group of unions in the Transvaal, including the South African Training Centre and Printing Union (SATC) and the Co-ordinating Council of Black Trade Unions (CCBTU) were part of the talks that led to the formation of FOCATE. The members of

CHAPTER 2

THE CONTEXT OF THE CASE STUDY

The growth of FOSATU

The development of Springs

2.1 THE FEDERATION OF SOUTH AFRICAN TRADE UNIONS (FOSATU)

FOSATU was formed in 1979 as a national federation of industrial trade unions, with a paid up membership of 18 000 and a claimed membership of 37 000 (Maree, 1987: 3, 8). At its formation FOSATU had affiliates in the metal, motor, textile, chemical, food, glass, paper/wood, and transport and general industrial sectors.

The unions that formed FOSATU had a variety of origins. The Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU), National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW), Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) and Transport and General Workers Union (T&GWU) had been affiliated to the Trade Union Advisory and Co-ordinating Council (TUACC) which had started in 1973 in Natal and was closely associated with the Industrial Aid Society (IAS) in Transvaal. The TUACC and IAS trade unions were organised with the help of white university students, sympathetic TUCSA (the non-militant, predominantly white Trade Union Council of South Africa) officials, and former SACTU members. These unions formed the core of the new federation, and it was essentially built on their principles of workers control and a tight federation (Bonner, 1979: 13, 14).

Another group of unions in the Transvaal, initiated by the Urban Training Project and falling under the umbrella of the Co-ordinating Council of Black Trade Unions (CCOBTU) was part of the talks that led up to the formation of FOSATU, but withdrew out

of discomfort with the idea of worker involvement in the talks, with the principle of worker control, and with the presence of whites in the federation (Bonner, 1979: 15). However, two CCOBTU affiliates, the Glass and Allied Workers Union (GAWU - later to merge with CWIU), and the Paper Wood and Allied Workers Union (PWAU) broke away and participated in FOSATU's formation. The executive of the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union (SFAU) broke with their officials and also joined the new federation (the CCOBTU was later to form another federation, the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA)).

The other important founding affiliates of FOSATU were the three motor unions that broke away from TUCSA to join the emerging democratic trade unions. They combined to form the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union (NAAWU).

FOSATU had four key policy principles. Firstly, it was non-racial, believing in "the maximum unity of workers at the workplace". The principle of non-racialism distinguished FOSATU from the CCOBTU unions, which had a policy of black leadership..

Secondly, FOSATU held the principle of worker control. This meant that there was a "majority of worker representatives at all policy making levels" of the federation. "Those workers must be the authentic representatives of organised factory groups who have the capacity to report back and be controlled by the workers they represent." (Bonner, 1979: 22) As an example, the Branch Executive Committees (BECs) of FOSATU affiliates were composed of representatives elected by the shop steward committees in each factory; thus they were directly accountable to their factory base, rather than being elected at a general meeting of all union members, as was the case with CCOBTU executives (Maree, 1987: 6).

Thirdly, the affiliates of FOSATU were to be industrial unions.

Fourthly, FOSATU was a **tight** federation. According to TUACC this meant, "The principle of co-operating is not one of basically independent bodies co-operating with each other as and when they feel like it. Rather the principle is one of the unions pooling their resources and placing them under the control of the federation. In this way membership of the federation gives one

access to the pooled resources... and the costs of withdrawal are higher." (Bonner, 1979: 14) In addition, FOSATU would "selectively grant admission so ensuring a high degree of policy consensus among the affiliates", and policy decisions by regional councils would be binding on affiliates (ibid: 23).

The structures and policies of the FOSATU unions helped to sustain the most solid and consistent growth of all the emerging democratic unions. FOSATU had a paid-up membership of 118 950 in early 1985 (SA Review 3: 99). Several of its affiliates had a national industrial presence. By 1983 FOSATU affiliates had signed 285 recognition agreements, which was 70% of the total number. They had also engaged in a range of industrial struggles over wages, retrenchments, dismissals, health and safety and other issues. Together with the other democratic trade unions FOSATU had made significant inroads into management's unilateral right to control the workplace.

But FOSATU's growth was not just quantitative. It is generally acknowledged that the non-racial industrial unions, ie FOSATU, Food and Canning Workers Union, and the General Workers Union had the best and most consistently organised workplaces. Since their structures were based on shop steward committees elected at each workplace, the growth of these trade unions entailed the growth of a cadre of disciplined worker leaders. In 1983 there were about 6000 shop stewards in democratic trade union structures. By 1985 the figure for 70% of the democratic trade unions stood at 12 462 shop stewards (Maree, 1987: 9). These worker leaders were increasingly able to control and lead their trade unions, as well as begin to take an active part in community organisations beyond the factory gates.

In the early 1980s the militant layer of shopfloor leaders in FOSATU spearheaded a new form of working class organisation, most notably on the East Rand - the Shop Steward Councils (SSCs). Initially aiming to organise and consolidate new factories, and co-ordinate the rolling strike waves of 1981 and 1982 on the Near East Rand in the face of a chronic shortage of union organisers, some of the SSCs began to take up community issues (Baskin, 1982; Swilling, 1983; Maree, 1987: 9-10). That process is, in part, the subject of this dissertation.

Generally speaking, FOSATU unions tended to avoid participation in community struggles, or any form of alliance with other organisations. They were marked by a profound distrust of popular politics, which they termed 'populist', and of the dominant political tradition within popular politics, represented by the exiled ANC and SACTU, and later by the UDF. This particular attitude and practice, which is best described as 'workerism', is analysed in much greater depth in the body of this dissertation.

The workerism of FOSATU and some of the other industrial unions was sharply criticised by a group of general unions that rose to prominence in the early 1980s - the South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU) and the General and Allied Workers Union (GAWU) being the most important. Their fiery and charismatic leadership argued that trade unions had to participate in community struggles since workers were part of the community. The working class had to engage in alliances as a component of the national democratic struggle. When the United Democratic Front was launched in 1983 as a front of civic, youth, women's, church, political and other organisations, most of these political trade unions affiliated too. FOSATU, GWU and FCWU greeted the new political body with at best lukewarm enthusiasm, and decided not to affiliate.

Whatever the political merits of the critique of the workerist unions by the UDF unions - and I shall argue it did have merit - it is incontestable that by the time COSATU was launched the workerist unions were bigger, more powerful and better organised at the workplace than the UDF unions. Although 14 of the unions present at the inaugural congress were UDF affiliates, they accounted for less than 20% of its membership (Maree, 1987: 11).

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to analyse the reasons for this slow growth of the UDF unions, it may be taken to reflect an important tension in the relation of trade union organisation to politics. Trade unions have limited resources and person-power. Generally, the more time spent by the union leadership on political activities, the less time there is available for strengthening and extending organisation on the shopfloor. Thus it appears that the UDF unions tended to neglect

consolidating their organisational base in the factories.

One must be careful, however, not to see political and trade union activity as inherently mutually exclusive: Lambert argues that during the 1950s some regions of SACTU were **strengthened** by their alliance with the ANC (Lambert, 1985: 270), and the rapid increase in membership of COSATU affiliates since the formation of the new federation also suggests that its political profile has increased its appeal to workers.

None the less, despite the political critique of workerism by the UDF unions, and despite the fact that COSATU has adopted a political policy fundamentally different from that of FOSATU, it is the organisational strength of FOSATU which has provided the foundation of COSATU's strength, and its ability to withstand two States of Emergency and in fact grow through them. It was the painstaking organisational efforts of FOSATU and similar trade unions that constituted the working class as a powerful social force able to play a significant political role. This shopfloor strength, inherited in large part from FOSATU, has not only enabled COSATU to withstand state repression, but has also increased the power and gravitational attraction of the trade unions and the working class within the national democratic class alliance, probably one of the key factors in placing the issue of social transformation at the centre of the agenda for resistance politics. The importance of this heritage from FOSATU and other workerist unions is well-recognised by COSATU's present leadership:

COSATU is first and foremost a trade union federation... Its roots are on the factory floor. Its starting point is its organisational strength at the point of production...

Our political and economic strength lies in building powerful, militant, democratic organisation in the workplace. This strength will guarantee that workers' aspirations will not be suppressed. Such organisation is also the basis for the real democratisation of production (Naidoo, quoted in Maree, 1987: 19).

The material basis for the new trade unions

Innes (1983) shows how the shift towards monopoly capitalism in manufacturing created new conditions for the trade union organisation of the working class. "Small factories employing 10-20 workers have given way to factories employing hundreds and often (in heavy engineering for instance) 2000 - 3000 workers under a single roof." "This concentration of workers at the point of production provides a material basis for the unity and organisation of the workers on a mass scale in production itself." (ibid: 181)

At the same time monopoly capitalism has ushered in a change in the labour process. The increasing mechanisation and automation of the labour process that accompanies the shift to large scale production "opens up the need for a massive layer of semi-skilled workers" which has been recruited from the black working class. This has increased the strategic power of black workers, both in their ability to bring production to a standstill, and in the difficulty of replacing them (ibid: 182).

It is these developments in production that created the conditions for the emergence of powerful, mass-based industrial unions in the 1970s and 1980s.

2.2 SPRINGS: ITS INDUSTRY AND ITS AFRICAN TOWNSHIP

Springs developed in the last years of the last century as a mining camp located around a number of very profitable coal mines. In the first decade of the twentieth century a number of gold mines were opened up. Some of these were extremely profitable, and during the 1940s Springs mines were producing 25% of South Africa's gold output (Gilfoyle, 1983: 5).

However, during the 1940s and 1950s the local commercial bourgeoisie, aware of the limited life of the gold mines, pressurised the Town Council to find ways to expand the industrial base of the town. Accordingly the industrial areas of Nuffield and New Era were laid out, infrastructure built, and a publicity campaign financed (ibid, 11-13). This process mirrored

that in a number of other East Rand towns, for example Benoni and Germiston.

This strategy met with considerable success. By 1950 there were 77 manufacturing industries in Springs, and by 1960 there were 116. These new industries were financed by national or international rather than local capital, produced for the national market, and were bigger producers employing larger workforces (ibid: 13). A "considerable number of food processing plants" were established because of the position of Springs between the towns of the East Rand and agricultural areas of the Eastern Transvaal" (ibid: 14). The growth of manufacturing in Springs continued. By 1970 there were 187 enterprises, by 1976 there were 203 employing 18 647 black workers (Swilling, 1983: 49).

Many of these factories were owned by large multinational companies (Kelloggs, Gillettes, Fagersta Steel) or by South African monopoly capital (Boart Hard Metals, Pilkington's, SAPPI, Telephone Manufacturers of South Africa, Mondi, I&J, Impala Platinum Refineries, Ringrollers, Jabula Foods, Funa Foods).

By the mid-1980s the industries of Springs were producing a gross output of R2200 mil. p.a., accounting for 10% of the total output for the Witwatersrand (Springs Chamber of Commerce, telephone interview, 1987).

The African township which services Springs, KwaThema, was developed in the early 1950s as a model township to which Africans were resettled from the slums of Payneville. It was hoped that KwaThema would provide for the reproduction of a contented healthy working class appropriate to the needs of the modern industries which were being wooed to the industrial sites of Springs. The Chamber of Commerce could claim:

Some 40 000 Bantu have been housed in KwaThema, which is regarded as a model Bantu township, with a civic hall, churches, large sports stadium, playing fields and parks where the children can play in safety (Gilfoyle, 1983: 69).

Again, the building of model townships was not unique to Springs:

Katlehong, the township outside Germiston, was also considered to be a model township. By 1960, 57 000 people were living in KwaThema.

I have tried very briefly to describe the industrial growth of Springs. Many of the industries established in the town are owned by monopoly capital, and exhibit those characteristics described by Innes as do those of the other industrial centres on the East Rand. This industrial base provided the conditions for the development of militant mass industrial unionism on the East Rand in the 1970s and 1980s.

It must be stressed, however, that Springs is still a relatively small town. It is the fourth biggest industrial centre on the East Rand, with the third biggest African industrial workforce, as the following tables show. It has a quarter the number of manufacturing concerns of Germiston, with a third of the number of African workers.

Total number of manufacturing establishments per magisterial district

	1970	1976
Germiston	557	832
Boksburg	161	266
Benoni	176	209
Brakpan	80	104
Springs	174	203

Total number of African workers per magisterial district in 1976

Germiston	48 627
Boksburg	31 064
Benoni	16 999
Brakpan	3 121
Springs	28 645

To sum up: Springs is relatively small in terms of its industrialisation and its black population. None the less, it is characterised by large scale monopoly industry. It has one township which provides labour to two industrial areas. It seems to have a relatively smaller proportion of heavy engineering than Germiston, with a higher proportion of light manufacturing and food processing (Mzwakhe, 1987b; Sitas, 1983: 5a).

These factors are important in contextualising the views and experiences of the workers discussed in the next chapter. In the first place, the smaller size of Springs, and the close relation between township and industrial area, facilitated an early involvement of organised workers in community struggles and organisation, since organised workers could easily become the leading force in the community. The industrial areas of Germiston, in contrast, attract workers from a wider spread of townships (Erwin, 1987). Other parts of the East Rand exhibit a similar lack of correspondence between residential and industrial areas.

Secondly, the high proportion of food processing in Springs made Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union (SFAWU), of which most of my interviewees are members, relatively more prominent than it was in other locals (none the less, there are still more organised metal and engineering factories in Springs (70 plus) than organised food factories (about 12)). The other locals tended to be dominated by MAWU (Erwin, 1987).

As the next chapter shows, a tension came to develop in FOSATU between SFAWU and the workerist trend which was dominant in FOSATU. At times this came to focus on differences between SFAWU and MAWU, with MAWU arguing for "caution" as far as entering into community struggles or alliances with community organisations was concerned (Erwin, 1987), and arguing that SFAWU was small, that in the Transvaal its base was on the East Rand and Johannesburg, whereas MAWU had organisation that spanned the province. This was the fruit of painstaking organisation on the shopfloor, MAWU argued, an approach which the SFAWU militants from Springs would do well to emulate (ibid). By early 1985 MAWU had 34 000 members while SFAWU had 12 000 (SA Review 3, 1986: 99-100)

One factor that may have contributed to this difference of approach is the different structure of the sectors in which they organised. MAWU confronted a highly organised and intransigent body of employers, who often relied on extremely coercive management strategies to control the workforce in factories that were often labour-intensive. A large proportion, if not the majority, of metalworkers are migrant workers. There is therefore on average a low level of literacy and formal education in this sector.

Employers in the food sector were not highly organised. Factories were often capital-intensive, employing a more highly-skilled and highly-paid workforce. The Packers factory, for instance, where most of the interviews for this study were done, and which was one of the strongest bases both for SFAWU on the East Rand and for the Springs SSC, is a multi-national with a highly sophisticated "liberal" management. It has a capital value of roughly R3 million, and employs 350 people, of whom 250 are black workers (Human resources manager, Packers, 1987). The degree of capital intensity is shown by the fact that these 350 employees produce for 70% of the market in its product range.

Mzwakhe remarked that SFAWU shop stewards were noticeably more articulate with a higher level of formal education. This meant they would be more aware of what was going on, through reading newspapers, political journals and pamphlets (Mzwakhe, 1987b).

Thusa where MAWU was forced to build its strength in the industry as a whole before it could really alter conditions in individual factories, and where it had to fight the most militant battles in order simply to survive - where in short it was forced to concentrate all its energies on building and consolidating its factory base - SFAWU on the other hand was able to rely on a relatively secure factory base in individual factories, and engage in political struggles with less fear of dismissal (Erwin, 1987) (It must be stressed that these points are tentatively made: more research is required in order to verify them).

It ought also to be pointed out that by early 1985 a much greater degree of consensus had emerged within FOSATU on how to approach the relation between unions and community organisation. Erwin

referred to a national policy seminar at that time which provided an extremely fruitful forum for discussion between the different trends (Erwin, 1987). This consensus is practically demonstrated by the involvement of Moses Mayekiso, general secretary of MAWU, in the 1984 stayaway (he was the FOSATU representative on the coordinating committee), and in organising the community of Alexandra (Erwin, 1987):

CHAPTER 3

People were disorganised in Alexandra and they wanted to be united. There were meetings - little meetings - of residents discussing how to organise Alexandra. At the end of the day we held meetings street by street trying to hear how people wanted to organise Alexandra. People decided that they should form yard, block and street committees leading up to the Alexandra Action Committee. Most of these people were workers so the structures were based along the lines of trade union structures - accountability, elections every year and so on (Mayekiso, quoted in Maree, 1987: 20).

To return to Springs and SFAWU: the point that needs to be extracted from the foregoing analysis is that the case of Springs, and of SFAWU in Springs, is by no means typical of the experiences of FOSATU. Moreover, SFAWU was a relatively small union. These are points that must be born in mind, particularly in reading the next Chapter.

CHAPTER 3

WORKERS AND ORGANISATION IN SPRINGS

3.1 THE UNION AND THE SHOP STEWARD COUNCIL (SSC)

Three shopstewards from Packers are discussing how the union first came into their factory. One of them, David, was at that time a full-time organiser for UTP.

DAVID: The response of the workers was very poor. I was coming to wait outside the company gates at 5.45am, to meet the morning shift, then I picked them up at the gate and went to the location to make some kind of caucus meeting. And afternoon 3 pm, 5 pm, pick up few, few, few. It was a poor response to start, but after time people began to get involved.

GEORGE: At that time people were not aware what was a union, what was a union's duties, how does a union help workers. They saw it as an insurance company.

VINCINT: During that time people never had experience of trade unions...

DAVID: I started in 1978 to organise strongly. Early 78. People started to come clear to the union 1979.

Vincint recalls a strike in 1981, when he first joined the company, over management's attempt to retrench supervisors. The workers at Packers struck for a day:

It didn't only work for the benefit of Packers workers, but

neighbouring companies were also asking themselves, How did these workers go on strike and yet they still remain in their jobs? That's when SFAWU decided to have volunteers going around organising on weekends - people like George and Maseko, and I was involved in Nigel. I was living there at the time. Well, it brought some light to people, that if you are united in a union there's something that you can do.

It also strengthened the power of the workers in the factory. They went all out in supporting the union, because they saw now they'd got a shield for protection.

The volunteers were shop stewards at Packers.

GEORGE: The idea behind it was to get more strength, it mustn't be only Packers, because by that time we were joined under one federation, FOSATU. MAWU and Chemical and other affiliates were not yet organised in that area. Now we took it upon ourselves that this is our duty, to go and organise. In case of any action, we must do it jointly, in order to be effective. That's how MAWU came into the area. We used to have huge factories in Nigel, like Union Carriage, about 1000 members there. It was organised by SFAWU.

VINCINT: The idea came from the shop stewards, that we cannot always be fighting all by ourselves, watching other people just sitting outside. It came from Packers.

In fact we at Packers were already discussing that even in the townships we are faced with problems, so for the people to be ready to tackle these problems they've got first to be organised in their places of work. Then when they're going outside the factory they're still meeting the very same people but now in the township.

We saw that it would be difficult for people to just in the township be united, and fight whatever problems they were having, whereas they were still unable to fight their employers at work. But that was proved in KwaThema after the bus boycott that the community can be united, provided now that we preach the gospel that they should be united under

unions. And it would be easier to fight any problem that might be faced by them (Packers shop stewards, 1987).

A PWAUWU organiser, who was based in Springs in the early 1980s, recalls how the SSC was started:

The Springs local was formed around the end of 82, or the beginning of 83, during that time when things were rather hot and people needed each other for solidarity. Workers would distance themselves from a strike, thinking that that kind of dispute would never come to them. That kind of unity made other workers aware that a problem affecting metalworkers is the same as a problem affecting food workers... So workers were learning how to go about solving their problems, because they will learn from other shop stewards in the area...

The Springs local started so that affiliates could get to know each other, shop stewards could know each other...

By a hot time, I mean there were community activities affecting the workers... It was then that the East Rand came up very strongly in the community... by that time workers felt if they could divorce themselves from the community then they would really land in problems...

Locals were not so, under FOSATU, it was only towards the formation of COSATU that the whole structure of locals came up, by seeing the importance of having links with the community. That was how locals came to be formed, in my understanding. I think in fact that was the main aim. Workers on their own could not push everything, in fact even now they cannot push everything without aligning with other organisations... so that was the main aim.

At the beginning

The main factories were in the food industry, some PWAUWU, also MAWU, Textile had about 1. About six as a rough estimate... By the time COSATU was formed the East Rand was mature, straightaway, because that local assisted in

organising even unorganised factories. Chemical did not have factories in Springs, but Gillette, Fibreglass, they were organised by the SSC. Going out and organising, and also meeting them at community organisations, they would talk to them, and it was then that the whole spirit of joining the unions grew higher and higher...

At the local each union had to give a factory report, and it would be then that SFAWU would come up and say, "Comrades, we are having this problem and we need your support in this way." If a person is needing solidarity, then they need to come up clearly as to what it is exactly, and it would be best if it is referred to the community.

The local discussed factory developments, wage achievements, disputes, that's how shop stewards taught one another... Ways of tackling management, others would learn from others. Coming back to community issues - education, community councillors, rising prices at shops and fares (Nomathemba, 1987).

Where the PWAUWU organiser sees the formation of the locals as being integrally linked to a concern with community issues, the Packers shop stewards saw the locals as being based on the FOSATU constitution. As a result they were being formed in different areas around 1981/82. They were formed to strengthen FOSATU and its affiliates, rather than to take up community issues:

When we started we discussed factory problems, but eventually we saw we were also having township problems, we cannot just leave them like that. So we asked ourselves how are we going to tackle them. I think the first problems we had were with the councillors because people were dissatisfied with the way they were operating - bribes, high rents, housing shortage was the most crucial (Packers shop stewards, 1987).¹

1. See also interview with Mzwakhe, quoted below, where he describes the need to build solidarity and extend organising as the reason for starting Katlehong local.

Vincint also spoke about the beginnings of the local:

The council met once a week, or twice a week if it came to a push. At that time there were still few companies organised. SFAWU played a role organising most of the companies into FOSATU... We organised workers regardless of industry, only to bring them into FOSATU, because we were short of organisers... By now about 60% of the companies in Springs are under COSATU.

We did face difficulties because we lacked experience. There were only a few people experienced in unionism - Chris Dlamini, Enoch Godongwana, Nelson, the Textile president - they gave us all the guidelines we needed then.

Then we had some problems with some other affiliates, because of political differences, the local went a bit slow. Most of the things we were supposed to do came to a standstill. Until at a later stage we decided to resume our local and iron out our differences.

SFAWU was moving very fast, and even the shop stewards in SFAWU were proving more experienced, because we were participating more, also in other organisations like community organisations, though they were not as strong as they are now. We as SFAWU, if we didn't have any meetings on weekends, called in comrades from other affiliates and had seminars to look in our progress as a local and our progress in FOSATU...

FOSATU was gaining ground, and there were some stoppages here and there. The local did support any company that was under pressure... For example, there was a strike at TEMSA. All the workers were dismissed. The local played a very big role, we even donated, we assisted in negotiations, we assisted in their meetings. Well, it took us some time to bring the workers back to the union, because management won the case even in court, and very few were reinstated. But we told ourselves we'll never leave TEMSA like it is. Even now it is again organised, under NUMSA.

I&J at that time was organised by Food Bev [a CUSA affiliate]. Other companies in that area assisted SFAWU in organising the workers and we eventually got the majority. The local also organised PUTCO under T&GWU (Vincint, 1987).

According to Mzwakhe, a MAWU shop steward who became Springs organiser in mid-1983,

When I arrived here there was no strong local. SFAWU was the only strong union here, there was no other union. So with us coming in here, having strong factories, we decided to launch a SSC. That was launched in 1983. Before I was employed we already had a number of factories. The Packers guys pulled out a number of factories from Engineering and Allied - Ringrollers, GEC, Raleigh, Boart. Then the need for an organiser came. That was through the Packers guys.

To me the local started because of the tradition that developed at Katlehong, that a local is needed in terms of organising, in terms of solidarity, in terms of discussing issues that affect us as a trade union movement. Already Chris [Chris Dlamini, SFAWU shop steward and FOSATU president] had this thing in mind, but the problem was there was only SFAWU in the East Rand. We discussed that we need to have a local like other areas. What was advantageous was that there were no guidelines from the FOSATU CC, so each local could approach its problems as it sees. Hence, in our local we had delegates from the students, the youth and ERAPO, although that was not FOSATU policy. That was later, in 1985 (Mzwakhe, 1987).

Mzwakhe had been a shop steward on the executive of the Katlehong SSC, which was initiated by MAWU organiser Moses Mayekiso to help organise and consolidate factories in the area, although later it began taking up a specific community issue, the demolition of shacks in Katlehong. This SSC was then copied in other areas, particularly in the Transvaal (ibid).

The Springs SSC also started to take up community issues:

GEORGE: At that time [1983 or 1984 - see Mzwakhe (1987)] there were a lot of problems in the location. PUTCO took over the bus service. After 6 weeks it came with an increase, and at the other end we were faced with a rental increase. It was then people started to realise, that they are the people to stand up and challenge them.

VINCINT: The bus boycott was organised through the FOSATU SSC, so shop stewards were asked to go back to their factories and find out whether the workers were accepting the increase. But already the feeling was that workers are not going to accept. So you must know that if workers are going to discuss this today in their factories, they are also going to discuss with their neighbours, who are also workers. So that discussion went round in the township, and it was decided the time was ripe. That's how it was organised...

GEORGE: In fact we made it a point that every shop steward, he must take it upon himself that it's his duty, whether he's in a bus or a taxi, wherever the people are, in a shebeen, or wherever we meet together, that we preach this thing, that people should be aware that there is this thing, to take place tomorrow. That's how it was supported...

What you must also understand was that we were operating when there was no civic body in the township that could co-ordinate that kind of action...

It was just called **azikwelwe**. No name of the affiliates. Because if we came out openly we might be under attack by the state. It was also said that when people are riding the buses they should also preach the gospel. It was not only workers who were in those buses (Packers shop stewards, 1987).

According to the shop stewards the boycott lasted about a month, but was then called off because of the suffering of old people, the cold, and confusion sown by the community councillors. But PUTCO was forced to meet a delegation of shop stewards, and to accept the principle of consultation. The shop stewards argued

that the boycott stimulated union organisation because people were aware that "they can do anything under a union", as well as student and youth organisation (ibid). In a later interview Vincint felt that the boycott was not a complete success, because the community had not been correctly approached, and that they had taken it for granted that shop stewards would spread the word, which they in fact had not done systematically enough (Vincint, 1987).

It was this sort of perception that led to the formation of a branch of the East Rand People's Organisation (ERAPO) in KwaThema:

DAVID: Another thing was people felt they needed to fall under organisation, because ERAPO was formed then.

VINCINT: A few months after the boycott a civic organisation was formed... called ERAPO. It was started just before the state of emergency, 1984. [there was some discussion as to whether it was 84 or 85, but they settled on 84].

The idea for ERAPO came from the SSC, because we felt that now there were community issues that cannot be tackled by the SSC alone. Whilst some of the things are in the factory, there are other things in the township which need to be attended to. We as the SSC can't address ourselves to all the community problems we are having. So it is important that we preach the gospel that a civic body be formed, to cater for all the organisations in the township (Packers shop stewards, 1987).

Zakes, a shop steward in Springs and senior office-bearer in FOSATU, describes a similar process, but focuses on different events:

In our area at the time we had the FOSATU SSC meeting almost every week. At some stage it was only the members of the trade union that were attending. But some factories retrenched people, some others closed down, which meant that the members of the trade union did not have any work any more. They were now a burden to the workers who were still

employed. Sometimes they would lose direction, sometimes they would act against the interests of those employed. On the other hand there were students who had formed themselves into student organisations which were waging the struggle for a better education and for SRCs, and DET [The Department of Education and Training] was not prepared to accept that. In some areas the unemployed were used by certain elements to attack the students, and we were sort of in the middle, because we were still employed, but an organised grouping, and we were called on to intervene, I mean we felt that we must intervene. The only way to intervene was to start organising the unemployed into their own union, allowing them to participate in our council, and allowing the youth also to participate in our council, so that they can give their side of the story. That happened. But at the time, 1984, there was a lot of killing by the state.

Those killings demanded that the workers should also do something about it. It was felt that it was not enough to have the unemployed and the youth together in the SSC, the vast majority of our people were still outside. They were not involved in what the students or the unemployed or the shop stewards have decided to do. So they formed themselves in what is called ERAPO, affiliated to UDF. That included shop owners, shebeen owners, taxi owners, and civic organisations. That embraced the whole of the township. Every week there would be a meeting of the SSC. Every fortnight there would be a meeting of ERAPO. That organisation included youth, students, unemployed, employed and other organisations like I have mentioned, taxi owners and shebeen owners. That in itself brought together everybody. Now, when a decision was taken [for example] there was going to be a funeral, all these organisations would be part of the decision. If it was decided that the funeral would take place during the week, it means taxi owners, shop and shebeen owners would close down on that day. That was not imposed on them, they were part of the decision. So you would find at the funeral taxis were ferrying people because PUTCO was boycotted at the time. Shopowners would contribute some groceries to the funeral. Everybody would be there. So that's how the whole thing

developed into one, until the state of emergency, and the leadership of ERAPO was detained, as it is now still in the township. So ERAPO is not functioning well now. But the SSC still invites the unemployed, and the youth, to their meetings.

People become members of ERAPO as individuals. People do not represent their organisations there. In the SSC the youth do represent their organisation. If the shop stewards had discussed any issue they would send delegates as representatives to ERAPO, although some members of ERAPO were members of the SSC, they would send people as representatives of SSC. They would send the chair and secretary.

Q: Where did the initiative for ERAPO come from?

It came from the workers. They started rallying round some known figures in the township, some were professionals, some were personnel officers in some factories, some were shopowners, some were just ordinary people, started getting those together, and then started organising in the area where they were living, and they started this ERAPO thing.

Q: So the main initiative was coming from the organised workers?

From the organised workers, yes. Yes it was discussed in the SSC.

ERAPO covers Kwathema, and there was a branch in Daveyton, a branch in Boksburg, one in Wattville, one in Duduza, and Tsakane.

Q: How was the parents' organisation formed?

It was initiated by the SSC. First of all it invited teachers. At that meeting we discussed the uprisings, the boycotts, whatever. It was felt that the teachers would talk to the parents to appeal to the children to go back to school. And we appealed to the teachers to look at the

question of the SRCs, because that was the main problem. We then decided to call a meeting of all the parents in the township, all the teachers and students. We had a meeting in our hall at Kwathema, where elections took place. People were elected to be the convener of this type of meeting. About 8 people were elected, and that was called the students-parents-teachers committee.

The initiative came from the SSC. It was endorsed by ERAPO. Because in fact the chairman of ERAPO was chairing that meeting (Zakes, 1987b).

It was this committee that organised the KwaThema stayaway on October 22, in support of the demands of the students.

The picture painted in these interviews is of the SSC as an organ closely bound up in community issues, and stimulating the formation of a number of community organisations. Besides the formation of the organisation of the unemployed called the **Amalova**, the Springs branch of ERAPO, and the students-parents-teacher committee discussed above, key members of the SSC were instrumental in setting up the local COSAS branch as well:

Other organisations had already spoken about establishing youth and student organisations, but the local, the executive of the local invited some high school students and youth, and discussed the need for such organisations. It started from there, it grew, and they elected their own executive. Today we still work hand in hand with the students and youth.

That was in late 83 or early 84. There was no COSAS here until we called the Joburg branch to come and assist us. So that tomorrow it mustn't be said that FOSATU is behind the whole thing, we said that the people who are belonging to it should take over. Even as far as Duduza and Heidelberg whilst organising workers we preached that the students and youth must get organised (Vincint, 1987).

The SSC's strong roots in the community were demonstrated when a split developed in MAWU's Transvaal branch, resulting in a

breakaway union, UMMAWOSA, which was at its strongest in the Springs-Nigel-Brakpan area. Mzwakhe, one of the officials who went with the new union, described the response of the SSC:

People were insisting that if it's a FOSATU council we should not be in because we were no longer affiliates of FOSATU. But shop stewards felt that no, we cannot sit away from these workers. The fact that they are not affiliated to FOSATU does not necessarily mean that they are not workers. So we had to change the whole structure and have an East Rand Workers' Council rather than a FOSATU SSC. The ERWC was progressive in the sense that it linked up with community issues such as the bus boycott, and had a strong alliance with COSAS since 1984 (Mzwakhe, 1987).

This is echoed by Robert, former MAWU shop steward, and then UMMAWOSA shop steward:

MAWU said we should be taken out of the meeting because we weren't affiliates of FOSATU. Most of the unions didn't agree. Because this local was built by the people of KwaThema, not by FOSATU. And because these are workers, we also feel that we are not chasing any workers out of KwaThema. At some stage MAWU withdrew, saying it's a community local, not a FOSATU local, because we discussed township problems and gave other organisations speaking rights (Robert, 1987b).

My interview sources give me a variety of dates for the founding of the Springs SSC. Vincint indicates that it started around 1981/2, and that the idea for it came from the FOSATU constitution which specified that local SSCs be formed. Mzwakhe found no SSC when he arrived in Springs as a MAWU organiser in mid-83, and helped to found it in that year. For him what inspired the formation of the Springs SSC was the tradition of the Katlehong SSC, of which he had direct experience. The PWAU organiser recalls the SSC starting in 82 or early 83 in order to build union solidarity as well as engage in community struggles. Baskin writes that the Springs Council was formed in 1981, and that its proposed aims were to make "links with community organisations to encourage solidarity between the community and

the workers' struggle." The Council aimed "to meet only 'once a year' and for its work to be carried out by sub-committees." (Baskin, 1982: 53) When Baskin's article was shown to Vincint he said it was wrong in that they met once or twice a week.

The discrepancy in dates is explained by the lull in the SSC's activities mentioned by Vincint and confirmed by Zakes (1987c), when MAWU apparently withdrew because of political differences in 1982/3. This issue needs further researching.

The interviews show how, as organisation became stronger in the few organised factories, workers saw the need to spread the message and organise other factories so as to strengthen their union and their federation. Since there was a shortage of organisers, shop steward volunteers took up the challenge, organising not only in Springs but in other parts of the East Rand, and as far away as Pretoria, and not only for their own union, SFAWU, but for other FOSATU affiliates as well. The SSC was then formed in order to facilitate this organising, to enable shop stewards to learn from each others' shopfloor struggles, and to build solidarity between the different affiliates.

Thus the trade unions, by organising several factories, generated a momentum towards the increasing consciousness amongst workers of shared problems, of a common situation, and of the need to build solidarity, build organisation that could unite workers as a class at the point of production. The formation of the SSC was a stage in developing greater solidarity and class as distinct from factory or sectional trade union consciousness.

As for the relation to community struggles, it is difficult to say whether that was an aim of the SSC from its inception. Certainly with hindsight all the participants I interviewed see engaging in community struggle as inseparable from the role of the SSC. But Mzwakhe insisted that SSCs that were started at that time aimed simply to develop trade union organisation, not to engage in community struggle (Mzwakhe, 1987b). Possibly SSCs that were formed later in FOSATU's history, and which would have been modelled on the Katlehong and Springs locals, were set up with the intention of engaging in community struggles, as the PWAU organiser's interview suggests.

Certainly, by 1983 or 1984 the Springs local had developed enough cohesion and strength to become a forum in which burning community problems could be discussed and action considered. Hence the 1983 (1984?) bus boycott. Although with its mass base and firm structures the SSC proved effective in extending the boycott into the community, the limitations of a structure which was based on organised factories and had only informal means of organising the community became apparent to the shop stewards. The SSC had to deal with its own business, and could not cope with all the community issues. Most important of all, even when it included representatives from the youth, the students and the Amalova, "the vast majority of our people were outside."

So it became necessary for shop stewards to "preach the gospel that a civic be formed." The advantage of ERAPO was that it "embraced the whole township", including youth, unemployed, employed, women, as well as petty bourgeois elements such as shop-, shebeen- and taxi-owners, ie all residents. Thus all sectors would be involved in making and supporting decisions. Although people were members of ERAPO as individuals, it seems to have had powers of calling meetings where various organisations (ie students, shebeen-owners, SSC, etc) would meet as organisations to consider a programme of action. Vincint mentioned an action committee which consisted of representatives of various organisations, but which also formed part of ERAPO structures (Vincint, 1987).

But despite the structural limits imposed on the SSC by its base in the trade unions, the solidarity it gave birth to extended beyond the realm of shopfloor struggles and generated a powerful sense of community, and of the need to organise all sectors in the community. Thus activists stimulated student organisation, but called in COSAS, recognising that the student sector needed its independent form of organisation, just as they had recognised that the civic sector should fall within ERAPO's structures.

Although the SSC was based in the factories, the fact that it represented workers from the same community turned it into a forum where common community problems would almost inevitably be raised. The experience of community struggle demonstrated the

need for a range of community organisations and these meshed with national initiatives (COSAS, UDF). Thus there was an extension of workers' consciousness and organisation into the community and into the terrain of national political struggle, as they took up the task of organising the people.

KwaThema appears to have been a relatively unorganised township, with no previous traditions of Congress organisation (Mzwakhe, 1987). There was an AZAPO branch until the early 1980s, which then "vanished". The lack of organisation gave the SSC a vitally important role in organising the community.

In this the Springs SSC does not seem to have been typical. The Katlehong local, for example, manifested the same shift towards engaging in community struggles, but with two differences. Swilling noticed a "subtle dampening" of these issues by union organisers in 1982 (Swilling, 1983: 139-40), which culminated in the FOSATU Regional Executive's decision that the SSC should not take action over shack demolitions (Mzwakhe, 1987). (This interpretation is, however, contested; another is that FOSATU had no policy to deal with such an issue and did not know how to take it up. This led to much dissatisfaction on the East Rand. Erwin, 1987). Swilling also noted that "SSC members were extremely wary, as evidenced in their negotiations with ERAPO, about forming alliances with non-workers and elements of the middle class." (ibid: 157) That was, of course, in 1982, whereas the Springs shop stewards established the KwaThema branch of ERAPO in 1984; much had changed in the meantime, not least ERAPO itself. Mzwakhe, himself a founder member of ERAPO, a member of the executive of the Katlehong SSC in 1982, and instrumental in setting up the KwaThema ERAPO branch when he was an organiser there in 1984, described ERAPO as being exceedingly weak in Katlehong at the time.

Still, having noted these points, the attitude of the Springs workers to community organisation seems to have been very different to that of the Germiston workers. Perhaps if the FOSATU REC had been able to assist the Katlehong workers in taking action over the shack demolitions the experience of community struggle might have had the same affect on them as the bus boycott had on the Springs workers.

The process of becoming involved in community struggles was facilitated in the case of Springs by its relatively small size, and the fact that most of its industrial workers come from one township.

The point, however, is that the Springs SSC had a history of close involvement with community struggles and organisations, and of sympathy to the UDF and Congress politics. Thus the mass struggles of 1984/5 did not precipitate a struggle within the SSC over whether to participate or not; rather, Springs SSC became a force in other locals and affiliates of FOSATU **pushing** for participation in the escalating popular struggles of those years, as will be shown below.

3.2 SCHOOL BOYCOTTS, STAYAWAYS AND THE STATE OF EMERGENCY

The object of this section is to examine the impact of the popular struggles of 1984/5 on organisation and consciousness in KwaThema. This theme will re-emerge below, where I will examine the effect of popular struggle on FOSATU more generally.

For Vincint

1984 was a tough year, but it was the starting point for most organisations. Organisations saw the only way forward was **as organisations** [rather than as single organisations isolated from each other].

Students and youth were militant, civics developed. He was on the executive of the Duduza Civic, where he lived at the time. They invited Motlana from the Soweto Civic to give them advice. The ERAPO branch in KwaThema was launched.

The school boycotts exposed the whole community to the reality of the state, when they were harassing students, because maybe you are on night shift, you wake up, there is teargas, students being beaten up, things like that. So people flocked to our meetings, specifically to find out

what to do about the plight of the students. So I think that conscientised most of the people. Even the pensioners, I remember we had 3 or 4 combis just for the pensioners (Vincint, 1987).

Zakes makes the same point:

... there was a feeling from workers on the ground that they cannot just observe students being killed or detained without workers being involved, because the very same students were children of the workers, so we saw workers at the time starting to push to form parents organisations... (Zakes, 1987b)

School grievances were linked to community grievances in mobilising for the October 22 stayaway organised by the parents/students/teachers committee discussed by Zakes, and which was 80% successful according to Vincint (Vincint, 1987).

The next step in the developing mass struggles was the Transvaal-wide stayaway on the 5 and 6 November 1984. Vincint saw the Springs SSC playing an important role in recommending or even initiating the stayaway in the FOSATU structures. The local had suggested the stayaway should take place in 7 days time to give the government no time to prepare. But this was modified, in the CEC he thought, to give the federation time to approach progressive political organisations, which Springs agreed to. The Springs local also played a role by "going out and preaching in other locals." (ibid)

The PWAU organiser remembers it somewhat differently. She recalls the initiative for the stayaway coming from COSAS, which wrote a letter to the federation inviting it to a meeting. Through the arguments of FOSATU shop stewards the date for the stayaway was shifted from the 30 October, which prevented "some commotions that might have happened", since workers would have been unhappy about missing payday.

Our delegates knew they were going to discuss the stayaway, but what they had in mind was not to be pushed into a date that would not be suitable to the workers, that would not

have given a chance to go and discuss with the shopfloor (Nomathemba, 1987).

Zakes, from his vantage point as FOSATU office bearer, remembers the internal struggles over the stayaway:

It came about because Transvaal region took a decision, and that decision was taken to the Central Committee, and in the end people agreed that we have to work closer with the students, but not that we should take action. Transvaal capitalised on that loophole. But after the stayaway there was a complaint within FOSATU that people have taken their own decision and now they've put FOSATU in this position. But Transvaal capitalised on the fact that look, we did agree to start working with the youth and trying to direct the youth, and that was one of the actions people took to get the youth to come closer and start working with them...

It was the Transvaal region, together with COSAS, that initiated the stayaway call (Zakes, 1987b).

1985 was politically a highly charged year. According to Vincint, initially ERAPO did not enjoy the support of the whole community, since it was formed just after the Community Council elections, and many had high hopes of the councillors. But in early 1985 ERAPO became popular. When students had problems, ERAPO would send a delegation to meet the principals and inspectors. They met with councillors and the township manager over housing problems, and managed to prevent some evictions. ERAPO started to build a street committee structure:

At first it was difficult, people were quite afraid, because already there was this state harassment, but in other areas they were very strong and functioning. In an area there would be say 15 streets with 15 street committees, but they would elect one area committee. So if this street was having a problem it would go to the area committee to seek advice. From the area committee it goes straight to the executive (Vincint, 1987).

During this period

People took a decision here that for every child killed there would be a stayaway... Hence the stayaway was 100% because it wasn't a decision taken by a few, it was taken by the parents, ERAPO, the unemployed (Zakes, 1987b).

But then came the first State of Emergency, imposed by the state in mid-1985:

Unfortunately, when the street committees were functioning really properly, then came the state of emergency and they were crushed. That was one thing that killed ERAPO in KwaThema and other East Rand areas. Most of the executive were picked up, some of the youth ran away, comrades went into hiding. Very few were left. Only a few of the street committees were left. Most of the leadership in the street committees was also detained. ERAPO was only a few months old, so once you remove such people... that's how ERAPO was crushed...

ERAPO did continue to operate, but in a very low key fashion, meeting in small groups, helping organise funerals and so on.

I think an additional problem, if the shop stewards had really wanted to keep ERAPO alive they wouldn't have left it just after the state of emergency, but most of them panicked. They were also afraid to attend their locals. Only a few attended, because there were always hippos standing nearby. But we simply went inside and said, if they want to pick us all up it's their baby, it's not our baby.

The other problem was we no longer had places to meet, for ERAPO. Various places were used, but then the owners said no, you're bringing the police to me.

So people at the forefront had a tough task, they also had to visit other townships to see that they're going all right.

After a few months attendance at the local improved, after we visited all the companies and told the shop stewards that we've got to continue. We even decided to have our local meetings at the companies, and approached management about that. I remember we had one meeting here at Packers. Until the Springs Chamber of Commerce pressurised the authorities to give us back our venue in the township. Then the shop stewards came back to us.

As a response to the emergency the SSC and ERAPO organised a boycott of white owned shops in Springs, Nigel and Brakpan, which was "very successful". The demands of the boycott were to address the students demands, an end to harassment of organisations, and the release of detainees.

You could see if you went to the union offices on Friday, the place was empty. It was only a few people from the farms who'd come in and buy, because they never knew what was happening.

Some businessmen exploited the situation, so as a local and as ERAPO we met them, we also met the East Rand region of NAFCOC. Prices were varying from shop to shop. NAFCOC was very positive, they produced a price list which we could use to check prices. We could then insist on the right price, or send the address of the shop to them.

The Chamber of Commerce sent telexes to the government, promised money for bail and for supporting families of detainees, and helped in many ways, although they were unable to ensure the community's demands were met. The Chamber also arranged a meeting between the local Nationalist MP and the boycott leaders. The boycott was called off after 4 months, when the Community Council started a KwaThema Action Committee to persuade people to break the boycott, and used buses to transport people to town to buy. This caused "misunderstanding" in the community, and it was decided to call off the boycott until the community was reorganised (Vincint, 1987).

With ERAPO inoperative, the SSC with its student, youth and **Amalova** representatives has to stand in on civic issues (See

above, Zakes; interview with Packers shop stewards 18.6.87; Vincint 6.8.87.). However,

But what we've seen is the local cannot cope with all the work and problems, so we are thinking of reviving ERAPO again (Vincint, 1987).

This period of popular struggle was characterised by a massive politicisation of the community, and increased participation in organisation and action. It needs to be emphasised how important the role of the youth and students and their struggles were in this general politicisation. The turmoil in the schools and the brutality of repression was brought right into the heart of the family. The fact that parents now had organisations themselves, as well as experience of struggle, combined with the general political climate created by the Tricameral elections and the UDF's campaigns, gave them the understanding and the means to support their children, unlike in 1976.

The wave of mass mobilisation crystallised out in new forms of organisation under the umbrella of ERAPO - street and zone committees. The interviews show how effective the State of Emergency was in crushing this initiative and instilling fear in the people. None the less, an effective boycott of white-owned shops was launched which forced the Chamber of Commerce and the Nationalist MP to meet the boycott leaders. The boycott also opened the way for an alliance with township traders and a degree of popular control over prices.

The UDF was an important presence in these struggles.

Immediately after ERAPO was formed [referring to the KwaThema branch] we met the UDF to discuss affiliation. We went back to the people and they gave us the go ahead. UDF also helped us in the boycott, with a pamphlet, things like that. Also in strategies to be used. They also helped with detentions, with legal representatives. That's why the UDF is today so popular within our communities (Vincint, 1987).

UDF also provided speakers from outside the township at meetings, which made them more interesting to the people. It was through

these sorts of involvement in community struggles that the popularity of the UDF and the whole national liberation movement deepened in the townships.

3.3 THE EAST RAND PEOPLE'S ORGANISATION

The story of the SSC entailed the story of how the KwaThema branch of ERAPO was formed. But it is necessary also to tell the story of ERAPO itself, from the point of view of one of the activists who was involved in it from the start. Mzwakhe became a MAWU shop steward in Germiston in 1982, MAWU organiser in Springs in 1983, and UMMAWOSA organiser in 1984.

ERAPO was formed in Thokoza in 1979 or 1980 by Elijah, Sam Ntuli, Mzwakhe and others.

We started ERAPO because we saw we needed a vehicle to challenge the day to day problems of the people. We saw the people were ready, but there were no organisations. We were looking at the problems in the whole East Rand. We saw a link between the problems on the whole East Rand...

We did not know what our position was. Most of the people were BC inclined. We had no link with AZAPO, although some of the guys were involved. Probably they thought we would develop an alliance or even become part of AZAPO...

Most of us became union organisers. Elijah became an organiser for SAAWU, Sam was employed by FOSATU Workers Project and later became a MAWU organiser, I became a member of MAWU, Vuyo Nduna became an organiser for T&GWU. This shaped our thinking and injected a class content within the thinking of ERAPO, before we became a strong organisation. ERAPO only became strong in 1983/84...

Our experience in MAWU shifted us to adopt a non-racial position, but Elijah shifted more and had more of a broader position than we had because SAAWU already had a clear

position. While on our side, Sam and myself and others, were still vacillating, while adopting the non-racial position but not clear about the broader congress position. People like Elijah shaped ERAPO's direction. By 1984 we all had a similar position.

Mzwakhe joined MAWU in 1982, and became factory delegate at the BEC; Transvaal treasurer; member of the MAWU NEC; and national chair of the FOSATU Barlow Rand shop stewards council.

I must be honest, the whole idea of class analysis came through those discussions in MAWU, because of its emphasis on the question of class. That also shaped my thinking, I must be honest on that point.

It [ie class analysis] influenced ERAPO in that we discussed the nature of our struggle in our country. And injecting working class practices in ERAPO - having proper structures, mandates, recall - those are working class practices. And looking at the nature of the society we would like to create...

Through discussions and reading, through "looking at the concrete conditions" and "at the history of the struggle and the working class movement", Mzwakhe became convinced that the Congress political position was the "scientific position" with a correct grasp of oppression and exploitation.

I became critical of Joe Forster's position, as if FOSATU was the beginning of the working class movement.

The story of the political and intellectual development of Mzwakhe and his comrades provides insight into the close relation between national oppression and class exploitation in working class townships. The group of dynamic young men with vaguely Black Consciousness leanings start a community organisation with no clear idea of how it is going to organise; a number of them, being politically aware and talented, are drawn into harsh shopfloor struggles being waged on the East Rand at the time. They become union shop stewards and organisers. There they learn about non-racialism and class analysis, reject Black

Consciousness, and become committed to the idea of making ERAPO a working class organisation. All of them, however, having started off as community activists, find FOSATU's abstention from community struggles and down-playing of the struggle against apartheid unsatisfying, and start to turn to the political tradition that contains all of these elements: non-racialism, a national struggle against oppression, a presence at all sites of struggle, and a powerful working class component in a popular alliance. Some become leading figures in the more Congress-sympathetic affiliates of FOSATU; others have political clashes with FOSATU leadership and become part of the breakaway UMMAWOSA; others of course are already in unions with a Congress political position. But their experience as unionists shapes their practice and their ideology within the Congress tradition: they are firmly committed to working class hegemony in the national liberation movement. Shop stewards play a leading role in the community organisations they develop and the struggles they lead.

ERAPO started in Thokoza, but the first mass campaign it engaged in seems to have been the Daveyton campaign against rent increases.

In 1983 the stronghold shifted to Daveyton, with Solly Klaas, Vuyo Nduna and others becoming prominent...

At that point, I must be honest, we were inexperienced in the first place. We'd sit as a committee, not trying to recruit membership, look at the issues, and simply appeal on the masses, call large mass meetings and so on. To borrow Dave Lewis' term, "appealing to the masses out there".

That's how we stopped the rent increase in Daveyton. With pamphlets, calling on people. drawing about 15000 people in Daveyton [to a mass meeting?], so they had to back down on the rent increase. That was Tom Mboya (the mayor of the community council). Daveyton became a stronghold of ERAPO as a result of that. But what we failed to do, and that was inexperience on our part, was to transform that into concrete organisation with relevant structures...

When I was appointed by MAWU to operate as an organiser in

Springs, we had some problems. There was a strike at Union Carriage in Nigel on the 11 and 12 October 1983, and then a two week strike in 1984. Because the Community Council blocked us from having meetings, workers decided to challenge the council. So my argument was that you cannot challenge the council through a trade union, a trade union is not the right forum to do that. The Duduza Civic Association was already defunct. When we thought about it we said, Look, people, the best way is not to form a new organisation, but to try talk to the guys and actually revive the DCA. That's how the Civic Association was revived. We also thought we needed allies within the community by building strong organisation at community level.

In KwaThema, since there was no civic association, we decided to go another direction, by forming ERAPO. Our view of ERAPO was that it operated at two levels, as a civic and also at the political level. Where there's no civic it would operate as a civic. Where there's a civic, it would operate as a political organisation rather than restricting itself to civic matters. That's how we developed ERAPO...

We had a lull in 1982/3, where we never had an active structure, until Mboya tried to increase rent in Daveyton. Pamphlets and mass meetings were called, and that revived the spirit. Daveyton was our strongest base. Now we started moving to other areas trying to make it really an East Rand organisation.

We tried to link with the Duduza Civic, which we revived in 1984, because where there was already a civic we decided not to form an alternative organisation, but rather operate at a political level. The Wattville branch was started late 84, KwaThema 85. We decided not to interfere with Tembisa, Duduza and Rotanda, because they already had civics. We had a close relation with Duduza and Rotanda civics. In 1985 there were shack demolitions in Katlehong, where ERAPO took a leading role...

We were moving at a time when there was such a lot of

activity in the townships. We were a lot of inexperienced people in terms of the broader democratic struggle. You cannot compare us to either the Eastern or Western Cape. The reason is that in those areas there were veterans who were part of the Congress movement who assisted people in developing. We were just people who were committed, who wanted an end to the Botha regime, but how? Then we lacked that experience.

So even in 1985 we were busy only with the mobilising aspect, also with COSAS coming up in all areas. So we had mass mobilisation without transforming that into organisation. Then when UDF analysed the situation and came up with the slogan, "From protest to challenge, from mobilisation to organisation", and clarifying what that actually means, we had to sit back and do some homework and see how do we actually do that.

In Duduza and even in KwaThema we tried forming zone committees and street committees. Unfortunately the state smashed that at an early stage when it declared the state of emergency on 20 July 1985. Then all of us had to be inactive for quite a long period of time.

When they came out of detention at the end of the first emergency, activists tried to concentrate on rebuilding organisation. ERAPO was to be restructured, so that civics would be established in each township, with ERAPO as the overall co-ordinating body for civics. This was partly because it was felt people would identify more readily with a KwaThema Civic, for example, than with an ERAPO branch. But harassment and detentions in this period culminated in the second emergency on June 12, and these efforts were smashed.

The process of transforming mobilisation into organisation in ERAPO was not a straightforward one. On the one hand Mzwakhe describes the impact on the early ERAPO activists of their experience as trade unionists, and how this shaped their ideology, political position and conception of working class structures and practices; but on the other hand they were not able to immediately put this conception into practice: ERAPO

branches were started and strengthened in various townships, and became involved in a range of struggles, but it was only in 1985, with the political guidance of the UDF which was crystallised in the slogan of "From mobilisation to organisation" and "Forward to People's Power!" that ERAPO activists started to build the structures which are most analogous to trade union structures - street committee and zone committees.

This time lag may well have something to do with the specific nature of organising in the civic arena: the constituency is vastly bigger, broken down into small house units, and consists of a range of differing and sometimes antagonistic interests; the source of oppression, ie local authorities and the central state, are far more intransigent than management in the factories; and the capacity of a community to directly cause a loss to the local authority is less than a workforce's capacity to halt production. It would not make sense to organise a community street committee by street committee before a mass mobilisation of residents around a common demand has been achieved, because a small number of street committees would be unlikely to achieve much, and would therefore find it difficult to sustain their members' interest. However, once mass mobilisation has been achieved, it might be easier to transform it into mass organisation.

It also seems to indicate that there is no one-to-one correspondence between solid organisation on the shopfloor and solid community organisation; that militants schooled in trade union struggle do not necessarily thereby gain the skill necessary for broader community and political organising. The experience of the East Rand activists was probably reproduced in hundreds of townships around the country. Flung into the need to organise and lead communities in the midst of a national uprising, without theoretical or practical training, it is small wonder that they often made mistakes, or relied on mass rallies without solid organisational work. In this crisis the national leadership and experience of UDF proved crucial in assessing the needs of the time and guiding and training community activists, providing resources. And all this at a time when the UDF leadership, itself undergoing a learning process in the startlingly fast-changing conditions, was overextended and seriously hampered by the state.

Mzwakhe saw the fact that ERAPO was guided and dominated by activists based in the trade unions as important for the process of building strong grassroots organisation:

At the same time the influence of the trade unionists became dominant in ERAPO. Most of us decided not to be at the executive level, for instance in the 1985 congress of ERAPO we decided to decline executive positions, because we wanted leadership to grow up in the structures while we are assisting in **building** the structures and shaping the direction of ERAPO. In KwaThema also there were one or two leading trade union activists who were never part of the executive, but actually shaping the direction.

One reason for such an approach was demonstrated a short while later in the experience of Duduza:

There is the problem of cross-leadership, like for example in Duduza, where most of the guys on the executive of the civic are shop stewards and members of the SSC. Experience has taught us that is incorrect. If the state moves in it smashes two organisations at the same time. In Duduza most of our shop stewards are in detention. We need to train our membership so that they can assume leadership. [At this point in the interview Mzwakhe said that this was the only reason for keeping union activists out of civic executives. (Mzwakhe, 1987)].

The fact that so many shop stewards were active in ERAPO, which in turn was affiliated to UDF, and in fact comprised the UDF presence in the area, must have had the effect of penetrating the trade unions with the Congress political tradition; while the presence of affiliates such as ERAPO in UDF would contribute to the building of working class leadership in the political struggle.

3.4 AMALOVA

The Amalova is the organisation of the unemployed, the "loafers", started by retrenched workers in 1983, and affiliated to the Springs SSC. Weekly meetings are held in a school in KwaThema. A meeting was observed in July². The meeting started with about 110 people present, which later swelled to about 140-50. Roughly half the members present were women, some of whom clearly had union or political experience and were very militant, others of whom were shy about using the clenched fist salute while singing the national anthem. There were many men who appeared to be unemployed workers, several elderly greybeards as well as numbers of youths.

Two of the four executive members present, including the chair, were women (the absent executive member is also a woman). The meeting conveyed the sense of a strong organisation. Meeting procedure was clear, and there was a great deal of participation from the floor. People were in good spirits, with plenty of laughter and jokes. There was no sense of despondency or apathy, such as might be expected from unemployed people.

The executive reported placing 2, 4 and 6 amalova respectively in jobs at three companies over the previous week. They described problems at three companies. The first was encountered at the company which had places for 2 amalova: apparently there were actually 5 vacancies, but only two were reserved for amalova. This problem needed investigating. At another company a foreman had dismissed 13 newly-employed amalova, and hired his own people. This would have to be solved.

The third problem was an ongoing one with shop stewards at Jabula, who had decided that they would rather fill vacancies with their own relatives than with amalova. The executive reported meeting with them; the Jabula shop stewards had claimed that Amalova was dominated by one man (the full time organiser), and that amalova were not interested in the struggle, but simply

2. The meeting was conducted in Zulu, and I was not able to understand it all.

in getting jobs. They gave as an example a work stoppage in which the amalova in the factory did not participate.

There was a great deal of audience response to this report. One woman who clearly had a lot of political experience, explained to the meeting:

This is not a struggle for power or revenge, it is a struggle for liberation. We must guide the Jabula shop stewards in the right direction.

The executive also reported on meetings with the Unemployed Workers' Co-ordinating Committee, to which Amalova is affiliated, in Johannesburg.

Under General there was a lengthy argument about the treasurer, who was accused by the rest of the executive of failing to attend meetings and of going to factories on his own without the executive having discussed it. "There is a danger when people go alone. We need to know why," said the full time organiser. A point was made about financial control.

Woman: You know the rule. You have to be accompanied by others. If you get to the factory and they are not there, you must turn around and not go in.

Youth: We can't refer to the constitution, because many have not seen it. We need justice and peace, not violence. I am against expelling the treasurer. (audience approval)

Young ex-union organiser: We are being divided by this issue. We can't solve it because we don't know the facts. We should elect a committee of neutral people to meet the two parties and ascertain the facts.

This was agreed and a committee elected.

The ex-organiser continued: we need to make copies of the constitution, circulate them, and have a special meeting to discuss it (agreed by the house). We must also organise more of the unemployed. Our slogan should be - every unemployed

an amalova. The unemployed are part and parcel of the working class. We need to organise a rally, posters and pamphlets. We need to organise street and area committees.

A Fedtraw meeting was advertised, and the ex-organiser suggested women should be organised by all means, such as at their weekly prayer meetings. A DPSC request for white youths to meet their township counterparts was reported, and it was suggested that the whites come into the township so that both black and white could be shot by the police.

Then the treasurer read out a list of amalova who had been placed and had paid their dues of R1 each, and envelopes containing money for amalova who had been employed temporarily but had been short paid by the company, were handed out.

The executive read out the names for 19 casual jobs, 11 for men and 8 for women, for that weekend. The pay was R67 for the two days. Many of the people whose names were read out were not present, so it took time to finalise the 19.

The meeting ended with an education section. The subject was the second clause of the Freedom Charter - "All national groups shall have equal rights." It was explained that the authorities had divided people by colour in order to create a cheap labour reserve; this was linked to unemployment. Such a policy maintained control of the economy in white hands, and divided and weakened the people. The terms "kaffir", "boesman" and "baas" need to be overcome and eradicated from the speech of the people. Everyone will have equal rights. Those present must go out and teach the people this.

Finally, various slogans of the democratic movement were shouted, and the meeting closed with Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika.

Amalova was started in 1983. Workers at Packers, faced with retrenchment, had negotiated with management for setting up a co-op that would take over the maintenance contract at the factory. At about the same time, Raleigh Cycles, which was organised by MAWU, retrenched workers. These workers formed Amalova. Amalova was important, according to Robert, ex-Raleigh shop steward and now organiser for Amalova, because at that time there were many retrenchments.

People were saying when they were retrenched that unions are the cause of losing their jobs. Rather than people leaving the struggle we started this organisation called Amalova. When we started this organisation we put postcards here in KwaThema asking people to come to a meeting. The postcards said even school-leavers can come.

Some school-leavers did come to the meeting. In the meeting we talked about politics, things that were affecting the community of KwaThema. So they saw, some of them being former members of COSAS, that this is the right organisation for them, they should stick to it, because it does their aims and objects.

Aside from these activists, not many youth participated in Amalova until 1985 when it began entering into agreements with factories whereby vacancies would be filled by members of the organisation. That seems to have been the breakthrough for the Amalova, and many people joined, including the youth:

Others who were not coming to our meeting started realising this is a good organisation. If you want a job you better go to this organisation. When they got inside they realised this is an organisation which is going to keep people in the struggle. We even give lectures about civics to people who don't know anything.

Problems that cut very close to the bone for unemployed workers are UIF and furniture repossession. In 1985 the Amalova threatened a sleep-in at the Labour Department unless they got their UIF money without delay. They did get it. As for furniture

repossession:

We wrote some letters convening a joint meeting with the furniture shops... We told them people bought these things because they need these things. And they don't want to lose these things. They are prepared to pay but they haven't got work. They said people must come and pay at least R30 per month. We said that people cannot afford to pay even R2 per month because they are not working. We are telling you we don't want to see any truck coming to repossess things in KwaThema. You cannot repossess a thing of someone who is not working. They said they've got a right to repossess if a person doesn't pay. We said if you've got a right to repossess we've got a right not to sign any paper which you bring to us... You are now promoting that people must go and steal. We don't want people to steal but we need people to survive. If you are fair enough you've got to listen to what people are saying. If a person comes after 3 months and pays R3 or R4 you've got to accept it because he's not working. If you feel a person must pay why don't you hire him in your shop so you can deduct from his wages? He must get something from you because you've got something.

The furniture shops agreed on that point, that they'll only repossess from people who are working, but they won't repossess from a person who's not working. We told them if a person says they are not working they can check at the Labour Dept...

In 1985 the Amalova decided to try getting jobs for people. They went to the SSC and told the shop stewards they were going to write to management and ask for a ban on overtime and a 40 hour week in order to create jobs. Management was not prepared to accede, so they went back to the SSC and asked the shop stewards to ban overtime as management was not prepared to. The shop stewards agreed "to support their brothers" in this way. The Amalova would write a letter to a specific management, and at the same time the shop stewards would approach management. A meeting would then be held with management, Amalova and shop stewards present. Agreements were made in a number of companies that amalova would be taken for overtime work, and also for casual

work cleaning factories over the weekends. By January 1986 Amalova membership stood at 1700. They are not sure of their membership at the moment (Robert, 1987a).

At its inception the aim of Amalova, besides keeping retrenched workers in the struggle, was to organise co-ops (the Packers co-op is still the only one they have managed to establish) and take up issues affecting the unemployed, such as UIF and pension funds, as well as broader community struggles and campaigns. They had to elect a new executive in 1984 when the old executive all found jobs. Many members felt that this was wrong, since rank-and-file members remained without jobs. Robert was prepared to stay without a job and was elected to the executive.

Amalova now has agreements with 7 companies, one of which is "tricky" because the agreement leaves a gap for recruiting workers who are not amalova. The agreement with Jabula is threatened because of the attitude of the shop stewards discussed above. Letters have been sent to other companies, and meetings are being arranged.

The role of the shop stewards is crucial to the success of Amalova:

Before we go to management we always approach the shop stewards. Then when we meet management we need at least two shop stewards to go with us to negotiate with management. If management hires somebody without notifying the shop stewards and ourselves, the role of the shop stewards is to attack management and say, We don't need this somebody because we've got an agreement with Amalova. How did you hire him? We don't need this somebody here, you better contact Amalova.

Organised workers can experience problems with amalova, as the Jabula case shows:

We are still teaching people about the struggle, but if he gets work he can forget about the struggle because he's not used to that thing. We are teaching them that they must be used to the struggle.³

But Robert rejected the claim by Jabula shop stewards that Amalova are scabbing. According to him, Amalova who got jobs at Jabula joined the union, and two have become shop stewards. Moreover, when Jabula workers went on strike they called Amalova to come and check whether any of their members were amongst the unemployed workers queuing up to take the strikers jobs: none were. Robert felt that the real problem is that Jabula shop stewards want jobs for their sisters who are not members of Amalova.

But Amalova is well aware of the divisions that can exist between unemployed and employed workers:

We know exactly about that division. We've already told our people if there's a strike they mustn't go there. We've also spoken to shop stewards who don't want us to approach their management, that one day they'll be on strike, they mustn't say we've taken their job, because if we hear that such a factory's on strike we are going to phone the bosses and say, Look, we've got more than 600 people, how many do you need? Now they are realising that if they don't give in to us we are a threat to them. But if they don't do that they know we'll support them and no-one will take their jobs.

We preach in different locals that, People, if you don't want to hear what we say, don't cry tomorrow. Because we also need you, if you need us we will help you.

To a question about the relation between retrenched workers and youth who have never been employed, Robert gave this answer:

There can be a little division, because the youth always say

3. This point was echoed by Ken, a member of the Packers Amalova co-op: "Sometimes people join Amalova to get a job, and when they get a job they sell out and don't support the union. It's because they are new and don't know about the struggle." (Conversation, 6.8.87)

they are pushing the struggle, whereas the organised workers who are retrenched are a little bit slower... The youth are used to this thing, but there are some times when they take the wrong direction, and you have to bring them back to the right direction. But they are used, because they were members of COSAS.

Some retrenched workers have no understanding, because they were never unionised, or because they were passive members of unions.

But we try to shift these things, saying, We are here as a team, and we are working as a team. We are going to work according to records, not saying this one was working, that one was not working.

People fill in membership forms on joining Amalova. Attendance records are taken at each of the weekly general meetings. These records determine who is eligible for jobs as they come up. If someone is absent without a written excuse he or she has to start afresh.

To a question about the role of women in Amalova, Robert gave this reply:

In fact if a person is capable of leading us, she will lead us. We don't say men must take front seat all the time, because women can lead us to the light, and men can lead us to darkness, because we believe in men.

Amalova is trying to build area structures based on street committees, so that each area can discuss "local issues that they can tackle", or ideas such as co-ops. They would refer issues or ideas to the general meetings for guidance or help. At the moment, however, there are only four strongly functioning street committees. There seems to be a degree of overlap with structures of a civic. Robert agreed that Amalova is in many ways playing the role of a civic at present, because of suppression of ERAPO. Amalova will take up any issue affecting the community, for example school problems. This was echoed by a student congress member who explained the importance of attending Amalova meetings.

When the civic is revived, Amalova will send its members to the civic, and discuss the issues raised in the civic and then take Amalova's decision back to the civic. Both the student and Robert emphasised that "in KwaThema we work as a team". All organisations encourage their members to attend the meetings of other organisation.

Through forming Amalova the workers of Springs have done a great deal to overcome the divisions within the working class between employed and unemployed workers and, within the ranks of the unemployed, between those who have lost their jobs and the youth who have never had a job. By combining the latter two groups in one organisation they are helping to overcome the conflict that so often ravages communities, between politically committed but often adventurist youth and their more cautious and often conservative elders. While the youth are curbed and disciplined by this combination, they can also charge it with their political energy.

There can be very real conflicts of interest between employed workers and unemployed workers. Amalova has achieved considerable success because it has recognised these conflicts and has been able to offer the unemployed concrete benefits. It does not only try to dissuade the unemployed from scabbing by appealing to a higher and idealistic "unity", but it also demands from the organised workers that they commit themselves to building Amalova by controlling access to jobs at their factories. Thus they are building a unity in practice, a unity to which both parties have to be actively committed. In at least one factory a form has to be signed by shop stewards before a worker can be paid, so it is impossible for workers to be employed from outside Amalova. There is, in effect, a closed shop (Zakes, 1987b).

Local activists see the role of organising the unemployed and "keeping them in the struggle" as politically important, since the unemployed are often recruited as vigilantes. It also reduces the danger of scabbing, and prevents foremen or indunas from recruiting anti-union workers: "If he comes from the Amalova he knows about organisation... He joins the union the very first day he comes in." One of the aims of Amalova is to start co-ops for

unemployed workers, but so far the only co-op established is the factory maintenance co-op at Packers (Zakes, 1987b, and Robert, 1987b).

Amalova leadership see the organisation as not simply concerned with bread and butter issues, but as very much part of the broader struggle. Other organisations are encouraged to attend Amalova meetings, and Amalova members are encouraged to join the civic and other organisations. Amalova is part of the broader democratic struggle, symbolised by the Freedom Charter. The struggle against national oppression and for non-racial democracy is seen as intimately linked to their position in an exploitative economy that cannot provide them with jobs.

3.5 FOSATU AND POLITICS

Perceptions of FOSATU

All of the people interviewed saw FOSATU as a federation which concentrated on shopfloor issues to the exclusion of community or political struggles. Shop stewards from Packers discussed their involvement in community struggles and in setting up ERAPO:

GEORGE: We were saying there was just no way we could sit back and say we are not part and parcel of the thing that was being imposed [ie community councils], that was affecting us.

VINCINT: We were also having discussions in FOSATU itself about whether it's proper for shop stewards to be involved in community organisations. This thing did not start with COSATU, it started in FOSATU, whether there is a danger for shop stewards to participate in community organisations or not. But fortunately in Springs area we found shop stewards were participating in whatever actions in the township. In other areas the response was poor, even though we had people going around, some were involved in Kempton Park right up to Pretoria, others to Heidelberg, Nigel. Even though the response was poor, people were keen to listen... There were

problems in other unions where there was that feeling that shop stewards cannot participate in other organisations. It came to where other unions saw shop stewards from Springs as a threat misleading shop stewards in other unions.

GEORGE: I think the comrade is quite correct. Even in our own federation we have been attacked by other affiliates there, saying the guys from East Rand are moving too fast and they are now trying to swing the whole direction into politics. I think that was 83-4. Some affiliates were saying they don't like the way we are operating. Their argument was that if we are saying unions we should specifically concentrate on union business. In other words, they were saying we were challenging the state and we don't want that kind of line as unions.

DAVID: That line was saying we must negotiate wages and working conditions, that was union business.

VINCINT: ... We did have that kind of response here in Springs amongst some affiliates, but eventually it faded away because they saw it's working, it's a reality, you cannot run away from it. Even though I believe in regional meetings they were attacked for being party to such organisations or actions (Packers shop stewards, 1987. See also Zakes 1987a and 1987b; Robert 1987b; Mzwakhe, 1987.

This was put more succinctly by Zakes:

If you remember, in FOSATU we were having no problems, we were sleeping at home everyday, no politics. No problem (loud laughter) (Zakes, 1987a).

A concrete example of abstention from community struggles was given by Mzwakhe. In 1982 the Katlehong SSC was ready to take action against shack demolitions. The FOSATU Regional Executive "couldn't agree" (or was unable to develop a strategy for taking action: Erwin, 1987), so the issue was dropped. The shop stewards told the SSC that they had to follow FOSATU structures, so they could not accommodate demands to take up the issue. Mzwakhe's comment was that for some people

Workers' control is just a slogan. They talk of mandates, but there are no mandates when it suits them (Mzwakhe, 1987).

But FOSATU policy was not simply to avoid engaging in community struggles. There was a deep mistrust of the tradition of national liberation politics in South Africa, and of the organisations situated in that tradition:

Moses, a SFAWU official, recalls a seminar held at Wits University:

In the Federation the political understanding was that there are those populists, and we saw populists as really not having the interests of the workers.

In the seminar the ANC and SACTU were "attacked" for their errors in the 1950s, and the Freedom Charter was interpreted as being similar to the constitution of the PFP (Moses, 1987).

Mzwakhe saw FOSATU policy at the formal level being similar to that of COSATU: no political affiliation, provision for participation in joint campaigns, and individuals could participate in other organisations.

But the interesting aspect was that if you were seen as part of broader organisation, or even an organisation like AZAPO, they would treat you with suspicion. That was a problem. Because their position - I do not regard them as reactionaries, I simply disagree with their position - was that the interests of the class would be submerged in those structures, and they would cite SACTU and what what...

FOSATU's position was to form a new party. There was no talk of it, but that was the direction...

They would concentrate on wages and conditions, but having a hidden agenda, because they would talk about the broader political economy, but without actually addressing the question of state power. Because once you do that you that

you have to come up with a clear position as to how do you take over, and how do you relate to the organisations that do have such a programme.

The hidden agenda is the workers' party, hence they do not address themselves to the question of state power (Mzwakhe, 1987; see also Zakes, 1987a) (See Chapter 4 for further discussion of whether FOSATU had a hidden agenda or whether it simply lacked a political agenda).

The development of SFAWU's political position

SFAWU as an affiliate of FOSATU developed a Congress political position relatively early on, and then played a important role in the development of Congress politics in the federation as a whole, and particularly in the Transvaal region. It is therefore instructive to analyse the development of this position in the union through the eyes of one of its officials, before looking at the struggles within the federation.

Moses took a job at a Johannesburg salt factory in 1981, was instrumental in organising it into CUSA's Food Beverage Union, and then in carrying it into FOSATU's SFAWU because the CUSA officials did not attend their meetings. He was dismissed after a strike in January 1982, and was then employed by the union as an organiser. The union was small at the time, with only 3 factories and two other officials. It's base was Springs. Moses had very little union experience, and was assisted by the Springs shop stewards, particularly those from Packers. They helped with negotiations and general meetings.

Organisation improved during 1983, as Moses attended FOSATU training courses, and they organised Simba Quix and T.W. Beckett in Isando. Moses described their political understanding at the time as "not sharp". But in that year the NEC elected Jay Naidoo as general secretary, because they needed someone with energy and initiative; they also needed internal education. During 1984 a number of branch and national seminars were held. Moses referred to a national seminar addressed by Curnick Ndlovu and Billy Nair, both former SACTU activists who had spent long terms on Robben

Island. "This motivated our people."

The next major event which deepened the political understanding of the union was the Simba strike and boycott in 1984. After the dismissals at Simba workers, seeing that they would not win a legal case, "challenged the union" to initiate a boycott of Simba products. Workers had already been "motivated" by the national seminar program, and the Tembisa workers in particular "were part of the community organisations and were working closely with COSAS".

There was that pressure of the workers on the union to take that decision, to support them.

There was support from FOSATU, but it "could not give enough." So the union called a meeting with other organisations and unions outside FOSATU in order to gain support for the boycott. They did this "knowing very well it would not be popular in FOSATU." Community organisations and UDF played a major role in mobilising the boycott, and campaigning door to door in the coloured area of Reiger Park, where the company had recruited scab labour - so effectively that "at one stage they just said, Thank you, company, we are no longer prepared to scab." These pressures resulted in a settlement in the union's favour.

That Simba boycott opened our eyes still further and showed the rank and file that once we are working hand in hand with other progressive organisations we can go somewhere else.

There was a problem after we had embarked on the boycott. We were criticised in the FOSATU Central Committee and regions: why do we involve popular organisations? There were accusations that workers are no longer in control of the boycott, the boycott is in the hands of the populists. There was a very heated meeting in Pietermaritzburg where SACOS, SACHED and so on were making the very same allegations.

We started to debate these things even in the NEC of SFAWU, as to how we should approach these criticisms. We had more national seminars. Our members decided the position they had adopted of working hand in hand with other progressive

organisations in the boycott was the right one. We came out clearly that this is going to be our position.

According to Moses there was no swamping of workers by "populists". In the first place, the Simba workers had initiated the whole campaign. There were regular report backs to the forum of organisations that had been created, both by the union and the workers and by the community and student organisations.

So on that thing of being overcome by populists there was nothing. We never saw each other as populists or workers. We were equal.

Struggles in FOSATU

It is clear that the formation of the UDF in August 1983, as well as the range of popular struggles in the townships during 1984 and 1985 had an impact on the members of the FOSATU trade unions:

The obvious change was the coming up of the youth, and the UDF, which was formed I think in 1983, and the struggles the UDF was involved in, calling on all the people in the country to be involved, because it was not calling on workers who are employed, or who are paying subscriptions to the unions, but it was talking about the society, that the society should be involved in trying to stop the tricameral Parliament in the first place from going ahead. That was in line with what the workers were wanting, but they did not have an idea about how to go about that, although at the end workers felt that they should plug into that sort of campaign. We saw FOSATU coming up with some stickers but as an independent organisation. It did not work hand in glove with other progressive organisations at the time. But as that campaign mounted, and other campaigns led you know by the students at the time, there was a feeling from the workers on the ground that they cannot just leave or observe students being killed or students being detained without workers being involved, because the very same students were children of the workers, so we saw workers at the time starting to push to form parents organisations in the

township, where students would also be called in at some stage to explain the problems they were having, and workers in some areas took this up with management, saying our children are being harassed and we are not going to tolerate that. So there was no way that people, even those that we term workerists, could stop that move from the people.

The campaign against the councillors, and the rent issue, took place in the township. That involved the whole of the working class. It was not only the people who were unemployed who were concerned about this, it was the employed as well because rent would be getting very high, and the councillors did not try to consult with the people. So that campaign was also taken up by the people working and the people who were not working, and the community organisations, the youth, and all such organisations that existed at the time. So that's how the whole thing evolved into the position that we see, both in COSATU and in other progressive organisations in the country (Zakes, 1987b).

FOSATU did not exactly greet the new political front with enthusiasm. Mzwakhe recalls a meeting of shop stewards that UDF leaders had been invited to attend:

At that point in time I was pro-affiliation to UDF, and they called me a populist. I admit I was mistaken on that point. But there was no debate about that. For instance, Popo Molefe and Terror Lekota were invited to address a council of shop stewards. The meeting was due to start at 1, but the shop stewards were called in at 9, to hear a lecture about all rubbish about the Freedom Charter. So that when Popo and Terror come in, they must be ready to pose questions and attack the Freedom Charter and that sort of stuff (Mzwakhe, 1987).

This sort of approach did not convince all the shop stewards, however. After a meeting of the Transvaal region (possibly the same as that attended by Mzwakhe) which was addressed by Molefe and Lekota, the Springs shop stewards discussed the UDF in their local and decided that if they formed a community organisation it could affiliate to UDF, since it was a progressive organisation

(Vincint, 1987).

The student struggles and boycotts also had a deeply politicising effect on the workers. As the PWAWU organiser put it,

...by the growing militancy of the youth and the students they [older people] are being forced, because these things start right in the family, where a mother meets another mother in the street and says, Hey, my son, my daughter told me this and this. It's then that people feel they cannot take a back seat...

A change can never be brought about by one force because there are other forces fighting for the same getting rid of oppression. It was then that FOSATU was forced to get together with the students... (Nomathemba, 1987; see also Zakes, above)

Many workers who started to participate more actively in stayaways and community events were influenced to do so by their children:

They participate because their children are telling them at home. They say, Father, when we have a stayaway you always say you're going to work? Why do you not support us? Then the father sees, Eh, even my child is like those who are doing this. Sometimes one who is not participating finds out his child has been arrested. Then he must come to the people and say, Can you help me, people, to get my child out. He realises now he has made a mistake, because he'll need our help. Another goes to work and when he comes back his child is shot. Already he is participating, because already they shoot his child. When you tell him he must not participate in things outside the factory, he'll say, No, they are killing our own children. There is a lot of change now. About 99% are participating (Robert, 1987b).

Popular struggle against the Community Councils and rent increases escalated during 1984 and after, and this contributed to the heightened political consciousness in the communities and the trade union membership. Virtually every interviewee referred

to burning grievances against the community councils. No doubt the fact that the UDF and its affiliated civics spearheaded the campaign increased the standing of these organisations in the eyes of the workers.

The popular actions were those that were led by the UDF or UDF affiliates, and that in itself drew more people into the progressive UDF sector, which was ERAPO because it was affiliated to the UDF. All the effective actions were organised by the progressives, and this made people feel well there is no alternative, this is the organisation of the people (Zakes 1987b; see also section 3. 2 above, especially Vincint).

The Transvaal stayaway on the 5 and 6 November 1984 was a powerful reflection of the political consciousness and anger of the workers. Zake's description of how the Transvaal region organised the stayaway in FOSATU structures has already been quoted. Here he assesses the significance of the stayaway:

Some of you remember 1984, we saw some shift in FOSATU, we saw workers taking a great step forward, starting to meet with students, starting to talk with community based organisations, starting to get involved in the stayaway... In certain quarters of FOSATU that was curbed. It was said that was dangerous, certain dangerous people have misled the workers into taking part in a stayaway which was called by the populist UDF. That started to tell some of the workers that there's something wrong in this federation of ours. How can people condemn an action that was taken by workers demanding that the troops should go out of the townships, that the students should be given the right to organise themselves in SRCs? How can these people say that was wrong? So that started to show people that we need to move to a certain side. That added to the shift of some of our people (Zakes, 1987a).

In the struggles that developed within FOSATU over political direction, the Springs local seems to have played an important role (it is beyond the scope of this paper to try to assess the role of other locals). In organising for the November stayaway it

"went out and preached in other locals." According to Vincint, the Springs local "was powerful in FOSATU".

Other locals operate differently - they have differences between affiliates. We do too, but we work hand in hand - if another union has a strike and there is no organiser, we will go and help negotiate....

The Springs local was politically advanced because it was the first local to work with community organisations. Because we had that problem in FOSATU, certain people saying we don't have to meet. But we as a local, consisting of different affiliates, decide to give it a try. By meeting other organisations you gain a lot and they also gain something about trade unions.

This unity and common experience in the local also served to introduce new ideas into affiliates that were opposed to alliances with community organisations. Vincint cited one example where the Springs members of a particular affiliate were criticised in the affiliate's BEC: "You people from the East are always bringing..." (Vincint, 1987).

The PWAUWU organiser also remembers Springs as pushing for participation in broader community struggles:

There was that sort of opposition to the East Rand in particular, because the other areas were not as observant, if I can call it, as the East Rand people. I am not quite sure why...

Other areas were less observant... FOSATU was concentrating on a strong shopfloor, I think people at that time were just concentrating on that, and not thinking as to why do I have to wake up and go to work every morning... (Nomathemba, 1987)

The Springs members of SFAWU see their union as playing a key role in the struggle within FOSATU to push for closer links with community organisations and, later, to assert a congress position inside the federation. This was evident in the way they lobbied

for the 1984 stayaway. But the position of SFAWU is perhaps best highlighted by their role in re-opening the unity talks to the UDF-affiliated unions in 1985.

According to Moses SFAWU motivated an extended regional meeting of all shop stewards in the Transvaal to discuss politics and unity. At the meeting SFAWU motivated that the UDF unions be invited to come to a meeting and explain whether they had any problems with the 5 principles laid down by the Feasibility Committee. There was some resistance, with people claiming that the UDF unions "were only involved in politics, they've got no membership on the ground" (Zakes, 1987a), but in the end the meeting agreed. "We pushed FOSATU to open its doors again." (Moses, 1987) SFAWU also lobbied in the various SSCs in the Transvaal. "Springs was no problem, Katlehong accepted, Kempton Park accepted, the problem was with Johannesburg and Benoni." (Zakes, 1987a).

The Transvaal decision was taken to the FOSATU Central Committee, which did not object, and then to a meeting of all the Feasibility Committee unions. "There we were taken to task" for changing the position of the Feasibility unions, but none the less the decision was accepted (Zakes, 1987a). Thus the groundwork was laid for the Ipelageng meeting where the Feasibility unions, the UDF unions, as well as CUSA and AZACTU met to discuss the new federation. The outcome was a new unity of Feasibility and UDF unions, with CUSA and AZACTU withdrawing to form their own federation.

So the Transvaal region won the battle on that day....

In actual fact it was the SFAWU people who initiated the move and started to caucus other unions (ibid).

SFAWU had motivated to reopen the talks because they believed the exclusion of other unions would defeat the purpose of the whole project, because it would leave numbers of workers outside and result in rival federations. This would result in demarcation issues, and difficulties in negotiating nationally (Zakes, 1987a and 1987b; Moses 1987).

We also argued that we were involved in struggles in the townships, not as union members but as members of the community, and some of the people we work with are members of SAAWU and other general unions, and to leave these people out is not going to work to our favour... (Zakes, 1987b)

Many SFAWU militants also felt that the political position of the UDF unions was close to their own, and so wanted them in the new federation (Vincint, 1987).

Zakes explained the significance of this development to his comrades in FAWU:

You must understand that you are marrying two tendencies, that of the radicals and that of the workerists to some extent. A correct line will always come out to be correct. That is why there is a debate now about whether to adopt the Freedom Charter or not. That was a tendency practised amongst the UDF unions... You can see this other [workerist] tendency being narrowed down, because some of the unions within this [Feasibility] grouping are starting to move towards this line that was practised by the radicals. We started to see SFAWU moving in that direction. At one stage it was almost kicked out of the federation. We started to see a shift of the majority of unions which represented the workerist view.

Now because that view was not shared by the workers, it was shared by certain individuals, specially intellectuals, it is shrinking now. People are moving towards the left...

What is interesting is that the resolutions that were adopted at the COSATU launch, they are more towards the left. People started to ask, how did it come that we adopted these resolutions, because these resolutions mean we are fighting for the liberation of the people rather than jobs and wages (laughter).

That is how our federation called COSATU was formed, comrades (Zakes, 1987a).

The interviews show that a number of factors combined to produce the political shift within the union movement that is expressed at the formal level in the different political positions of FOSATU and COSATU.

Firstly, there was the impact of the intensifying political struggle in the country, which began with the formation of the UDF and its campaigns against the Tricameral Parliament and the Black Local Authorities, and combined with the school boycotts which spread nationally through 1984, to culminate in community uprisings on a national scale with a depth never before seen in South Africa.

The UDF was able to capture the national imagination and build a popular unity both ideologically and organisationally in a way that was quite simply beyond the scope of trade unions. Zakes captures the difference between a trade union and a political organisation very clearly when he describes a union as speaking for its members or for workers with jobs, whereas the UDF was "calling on all the people to be involved... it was talking about the society..." The involvement of UDF in national campaigns as well as local struggles and organisations, in providing leadership as well as back up resources, rapidly placed it in a hegemonic political position.

Since FOSATU's attempt to provide a political alternative to the Congress tradition had nothing to offer beyond trade unionism and therefore could not contest the terrain of national opposition politics, its membership turned to UDF for political leadership. Although the federation tried to maintain its distance, running a parallel anti-Tricameral campaign rather than a joint campaign with the UDF, this position was increasingly out of joint with the feelings of the membership.

The mass struggles against rent increases, against community councils, and most importantly in support of the students, their children, obviously affected and involved workers deeply and made these political questions of burning importance. Workers had their own fighting organisations at the workplace, and they saw no reason why these should be isolated from all the other fighting organisations that were struggling against oppression.

At a more institutional level one can see the role of the SSC's and of the more Congress-sympathetic unions such as SFAWU in capturing the political mood and anger of the rank and file, and engaging in a struggle within FOSATU over its political direction, firstly in relation to the 1984 stayaway, and then in reopening the unity talks to the UDF unions. By the time COSATU was formed the Congress position was clearly dominant, supported by some of the former FOSATU affiliates such as SFAWU, as well as by UDF unions and, crucially, by the biggest union in the new federation, NUM. These unions were probably not only expressing the political feelings of their members, but also finding echoes amongst the membership of the unions whose leadership was more sceptical about the Congress tradition.

An anecdote related by Moses captures this point:

Other unions showed no remarkable change. But we were encouraging workers to lead on these issues. When debating it workers from other unions would simply understand it. For instance, there was a group that went overseas, and they had to make a report back at a large regional meeting of shop stewards. Discussing the very same thing of populism and workerism. One of the shop stewards from that group reported that, No, we have met those people in London, SACTU and ANC are just a bunch of communists and under communist control, you see? That person was shouted down, really. Even shop stewards from other unions came out straightforward and said, No, we are the ANC, and so on. We realised that what we see as the union policy at times is not a reflection of the members. That was in 1985, just before the meeting at Ipelageng. Some decisions were taken that we must instruct FOSATU to go and meet ANC and SACTU because already some businessmen had gone there. There was also a mandate that the UDF unions be part of the new federation (Moses, 1987).

The foregoing analysis makes it clear that the changing political position from FOSATU to COSATU was not the simple result or reflection of a changed political mood amongst the membership. It was the outcome of a conscious struggle on the part of union activists and structures with a Congress political position

against other activists and structures opposed to the Congress position (of course the climate of political struggle had resulted in many leading workers and officials adopting a Congress political position). Because of the national context of intense and violent community and political struggles, the Congress activists and structures were able to capture the heightened political consciousness of the membership and express it in a coherent political position.

The story of these struggles also clarifies the point that trade unions are not simply working class organisations that directly express working class interests and consciousness because of their location in the relations of production. Trade unions are themselves sites of struggle, a contested terrain of organisational and ideological practices. Trade unions do not simply express the consciousness of their members. They are organisations with shopfloor, local, regional and national structures, and the representatives, office-bearers and officials at each level are likely to have different experiences, training, interests, and ideas, and be subject to differing pressures and forces.⁴ These structures constitute a complex organisational terrain of struggle over political ideology and practices. I will return to this point later, since it has important theoretical implications.

4. Several of my interviewees made the point that there is a distinction between shop stewards and membership. See Mzwakhe, 7.8.87; Robert, 7.8.87; Vincint, 6.8.87.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF THREE FOSATU POSITION PAPERS

In this chapter I will analyse some of the position papers about the role of trade unions in political struggle that emerged from FOSATU in written form over the years. In South Africa most of the debate and argument about theory and strategy take place in oral form, and rarely find their way into print (which is why the previous chapter, based on oral interviews, is so important). Those debates that do find their way into print are not a direct expression of struggle and debate on the ground, since they often come from an intellectual leadership which is more or less distant from the base. Moreover, security considerations mean that arguments are often presented in an elliptical or ambiguous way.

None the less, printed position papers are important, since they can reveal the theoretical and strategic concerns of the leadership, and these concerns do exert a powerful influence over the positions and strategies of the organisations they lead.

4.1 Joe Forster's (General Secretary) keynote address to the 1982 FOSATU Congress

This speech was seen as a major policy document, and was adopted by the congress. Before analysing the document itself, it is necessary to place it in its organisational and political context.

The 1982 Congress occurred at a time when unions, in contrast to the late 1970s, were not simply struggling to survive, but had established their right to exist. Legislation which followed the Wiehahn Commission in 1979 laid down procedures for registration

and recognition of trade unions. Between 1979 and 1982 FOSATU's membership increased from 37 000 to 90 000. By 1983 the democratic trade unions had approximately 6000 shop stewards. Also by 1983 there were a total of 406 signed agreements with companies (of which 285 were with FOSATU affiliates) compared to 5 in 1979, and a total of 756 workplaces organised. The growing confidence of the working class was reflected in the fact that 1982 saw the highest number of strikes since the Second World War (Maree, 1986: 8-10).

But the increased strength and confidence of the trade union movement was paralleled by the development of new political forces and the re-emergence of old ones. This placed new pressures on the trade unions. The first sign of the tensions this would entail was the breakaway from FOSATU's affiliate, United Automobile, Rubber and Allied Workers' Union (UAW), of the Ford Cortina plant in Port Elizabeth in 1979. The dispute began when workers at the plant struck in support of a colleague who had been dismissed because his duties as president of PEBCO, a local black community organisation, entailed a great deal of absenteeism from work. The workers later left UAW, charging that it was too close to management and that it was unsympathetic to community struggles and organisations (SALB, 6, 2 & 3; Friedman, 1987: 188ff).

1979 also saw the Food and Canning Workers Union initiating a boycott of Fattis and Monis products in alliance with a range of community, sporting and traders organisations, as part of a campaign for reinstatement of dismissed strikers. After 7 months the campaign succeeded in its demands (Friedman, 1987: 187-8). The following year Western Province General Workers' Union organised a red meat boycott in support of striking members. The boycott gained massive community support, coming as it did in the middle of militant community struggles around education and transport, but it did not succeed in reinstating workers (WPGWU, 1980).

All of these unions, as well as the general unions that grew rapidly in 1980-82, and which saw themselves as part of the congress tradition (they would later affiliate to the UDF) were highly critical of FOSATU's workerism, its abstention from

community struggles. Aside from these developments in the union movement, the congress tradition of popular politics was beginning to re-emerge inside the country, in the form of the Release Mandela Campaign, the anti-SA Indian Council campaign, and other organisations and struggles.

Thus it was that, at its 1982 Congress, FOSATU was under pressure to spell out its political position and its relation to the developing political and community movement. Joe Forster's keynote address was an attempt to do just that. It is not an easy document to summarise, because it is often couched in vague, ambiguous and abstract terms. However, I shall begin by quoting Forster's own summary:

1. That worker resistance such as strike action helps build worker organisation but by itself does not mean that there is a working class movement.
2. There has not been and is not a working class movement in South Africa.
3. The dominant political position in South Africa is that of the popular struggle against an oppressive, racist minority regime.
4. That this tradition is reasserting itself in the present upsurge of political activity.
5. However, the nature of economic development has brutally and rapidly created a large industrial proletariat.
6. That the size and development of this working class is only matched by its mirror image, which is the dramatic growth and transformation of industrial capital.
7. That before it is too late workers must strive to form their own powerful and effective organisation within the wider popular struggle (Forster, 1982: 78).

Forster takes the labour movements of the advanced capitalist countries as his model for a "working class movement", and then draws the conclusion that South Africa does not and never has had a working class movement (ibid: 69-71). This is clearly an "illegitimate analytical method of imposing ready made, extraneous and historicist models onto the concrete South African reality", ("The workers struggle": 2) the consequence of which is to prevent any consideration of the significance of the

national question for the working class movement in South Africa.

The imposition of the labour movements of advanced bourgeois democracies as a model for South Africa also demonstrates a fundamental political ambiguity. Forster does not discuss the ideology, politics or organisational structures of the labour movements he holds up as a model. He does not raise the question of reformism and socialism. Is he posing the reformist politics of the British labour movement, for example, as a model for the South African working class? He does not ask the question as to why such labour movements have failed to pose a fundamental challenge to capitalism. Has this failure got anything to do with their narrow 'labourism', their inability to link up with wider popular struggle, their inability to throw off their image as part of the 'established order', and win legitimacy as a leading force for social change? As I shall show, a number of the formulations of FOSATU's leadership imply - if only by default - a reformist, gradualist approach to politics.

The silence on these points signals a fundamental problem that we shall see surfacing in each of the position papers analysed here - a dislocation between the trade union movement and politics, an inability to specify the relation of trade unions - or the working class more generally - to political struggle.

This dislocation between politics and economics runs through Forster's speech. In the sphere of politics, there is a populist struggle, headed by the ANC, against the apartheid regime. In the economy, there is a working class struggle against capital.

Workers and their struggle became very much part of a wider popular struggle. An important effect of this development was that capital could hide behind the curtains of apartheid and racism...

Capital did its very best to keep in the political background and as a result this helped prevent the creation of capital's logical political opposite, which is a working class political movement...

...behind the scenes of the great battle between the

apartheid regime and its popular opponents... the capitalist economy has flourished and capital emerges now as a powerful and different force...

So there is a growing gap between popular politics and the power of capital and as a result the potential power of workers...

In the economy capital and labour are the major forces, yet politically the struggle is being fought elsewhere... (Forster, 1987: 72-4).

Our concern is with the very essence of politics, and that is the relation between capital and labour (ibid: 83).

In these passages capital and the state seem to have no relation to each other. The struggle against the state (apartheid) is something completely different from the working class struggle against capital. Capital hides "behind the curtains", in the "background", or "behind the scenes". The moment workers take part in the broader struggle they cease struggling against capital, which can then conceal itself elsewhere. Working class participation in the struggle against apartheid has no potential for deepening the anti-apartheid struggle into an anti-capitalist struggle; on the contrary, it immediately dissipates workers amongst the people. The struggle against the state is by its nature populist and cannot take on an anti-capitalist dynamic:

All the great and successful popular movements have had as their aim the overthrow of oppressive - most often colonial - regimes. But these movements **cannot and have not in themselves** been able to deal with the particular and fundamental problems of workers (my emphasis) (ibid: 77).

This is a surprising statement, ignoring as it seems to do, popular socialist revolutions in Cuba, Vietnam, China, Yugoslavia, Nicaragua, amongst others.

But more particularly, it demonstrates the a priorism of the workerist argument that the liberation movement in South Africa is populist. It is clear that their assessment of the South

African liberation movement will not be based on a concrete analysis of its composition, history and programme, but on an a priori judgement that all popular movements are populist. Such a priori judgements prevent Forster from a concrete analysis of the potential for "a serious attempt to build on those traditions and practices of ANC open to the development of a working class perspective" ("The workers struggle": 10).

It is noteworthy that South Africa's capitalists did not share Forster's assessment of the popular movement in the 1950s: far from the capitalist economy flourishing "behind the scenes of the great battle between the apartheid regime and its popular opponents"; the economy stagnated during much of the 1950s and went into shock in 1960 when Sharpville and the resulting explosion of popular anger triggered a massive outflow of capital. It was the smashing of the popular movement that restored investor confidence and paved the way for the economic boom of the 1960s.

Forster's argument is based on a very superficial conception of what political activity consists of:

In the present context all political activity, provided it is anti-state, is of equal status. In the overall resistance to this regime, this is not necessarily incorrect. In fact, without such unity and widespread resistance it would not be possible by means of popular mass movements to seriously challenge the legitimacy of the present regime (Forster, 1982: 76).

There are two problems here. Firstly, popular politics has been reduced to a struggle for legitimacy, and it is this overriding need for "legitimacy" that makes it impossible for the political movement to explore questions of socialism. Forster does not regard political activity as essentially a struggle for **power** (of which one element is the struggle for legitimacy) at all levels from the local to the national. The second problem is that Forster assumes that class forces do not exist outside the economy, in the realm of popular struggle against the state. It is precisely because popular struggle is a struggle for power that it raises all the questions about strategy, ideology and

organisation which are, at least in part, class-questions, and which are struggled over within the popular movement.

This analysis of politics produces Forster's puzzling ambivalence towards the liberation movement. On the one hand the mass mobilisation achieved by the Congress Alliance was "essential", a "great task" and the ANC "rose to be one of the great liberation movements in Africa." On the other hand, these organisations threaten to "hijack" the workers' struggle and "swamp" the workers, and "in the end will have no option but to turn against their worker supporters." (ibid: 77)

Forster's analysis makes it impossible to specify what the working class alternative to populism is, because he has defined all politics, ie. anti-state struggle, as populist. Thus, he complains that, while capital and labour are the major forces in the economy, the political struggle is taking place "elsewhere". It is difficult to imagine how the political struggle could take place in the economy, since political struggle involves struggle against the state which is manifestly not the same thing as the economy. If working class political struggle is to consist of the direct political struggle between capital and labour, then it can only consist of trade union struggle - an economistic or syndicalist position based on class reductionism.

I would argue that if the working class is absent from the political struggle that is because it is isolated in its trade unions and not contesting the terrain of political struggle. It seems to me that Forster's statement that the "essence of politics" is "the relation between capital and labour" is quite simply wrong; if it is true, then it is only true at such a high level of abstraction that it can provide no guide for political strategy: the essence of politics is concretely the relation between the people and the state, and it is around this contradiction that strategies have to be developed.¹

In the end it is not quite clear what Forster is talking about at

1. See Laclau, 1977, for a discussion of popular struggle and the contradiction between the people and the ruling block.

the level of practical strategy. He argues that

FOSATU must set itself the task of giving leadership and direction to the building of a working class movement...

FOSATU as a trade union federation will clearly not constitute the working class movement, nor would this place FOSATU in opposition to the wider political struggle or its major liberation movement.

FOSATU's task will be to build the effective organisational base for workers to play a major political role as workers" (Forster 1982: 78).

There is a degree of ambiguity here about whether the trade union movement is to constitute the organisational base for a working class movement, or whether Forster is contemplating FOSATU giving birth to a specifically political organisation. But the practical tasks outlined in his paper are concerned with building the powerful industrial unions of FOSATU, as the real base for workers to develop their strength, and from which they can then intervene in community politics. Without such a base "we will destroy a clear worker identity since workers will be entirely swamped by the powerful tradition of popular politics." (ibid: 82) This means, then, that trade unions are the organisational source for a real working class politics. This is of course the logical conclusion to be drawn from his analysis of politics and populism, capital and the state. As an anonymous critique of his speech argues, Forster does not address the question of state power, and ultimately implies a deferral of alliances and "a retreat into trade unionism" ("The workers struggle": 9).

Such a position rests on a class essentialism which "assumes that left to themselves the trade unions will naturally and unproblematically adopt a "real" proletarian politics, will arrive at an undiluted "revolutionary" position which is somehow naturally imprinted on the working class." (ibid: 10) It is the same class essentialism which lies behind the argument that the labour movements of the advanced capitalist countries constitute a model of a working class movement, without examining what the political content of that movement is. Precisely the **struggles**

within FOSATU that I explore in Chapter 3 reveal the falseness of such a class essentialism, showing as they do that the political identity of trade unions is the subject of struggle, and that it can in fact be constituted in a number of different ways.

Forster states that FOSATU's tasks "will contribute to the wider liberation struggle" rather than placing FOSATU "in opposition to the wider political struggle or its major liberation movement." (Forster, 1982: 78) But since he nowhere indicates how the working class movement could contribute to the wider struggle or relate to the ANC, but rather stresses the dangers and pitfalls of any link with "populism", this can be regarded as rhetoric which was probably necessary in order to reassure his audience that FOSATU was not opposed to the liberation movement. Several of the interviews quoted in Chapter 1 support the view that FOSATU was in fact opposed to SACTU and the ANC.

It is not my intention here to discuss the problems with Forster's version of the history of the ANC and SACTU in the 1950s. Suffice to say that his a priori definition of the nature of "populist" politics makes his judgement that SACTU and the working class were subordinated to petty bourgeois interests inevitable.

4.2 Unity in the struggle? - paper by Alec Erwin, FOSATU Education Secretary (1985)

This paper, delivered to the 1985 ASSA Conference and published later that year in SA Labour Bulletin, is essentially an attempt to come to grips with "liberation politics", which had developed so rapidly in the country since Forster's 1982 speech, and with its relation to "transformation politics".

More specifically, the government's Tricameral Parliament reforms, and the formation of the United Democratic Front in 1983 to oppose these, had placed politics firmly on the agenda. The UDF campaigns, and the intensifying popular struggles of 1984-5 had demonstrated the durability and appeal of the congress

tradition, as well as the seriousness of its activists and their organisational and political abilities. Despite - or maybe because of - the fact that the trade union movement was close to achieving new unity in a 'super-federation' and thus would have even more industrial and political weight, the political developments within the country had increased the political pressure on the trade unions, both from within and without their structures, to clarify their position in relation to the country's political crisis in general, and the liberation movement in particular (some of the pressures are discussed in Chapter 2).

The immediate background to Erwin's paper was the Transvaal stayaway of November 5 and 6, 1984. The stayaway was co-ordinated by the Transvaal Regional Stayaway Committee, representing the Transvaal region of FOSATU, the Council of Unions of South Africa, the Congress of South African Students (COSAS), community and youth organisations, and the Release Mandela Committee. It was thus an unprecedented display of joint co-ordination and action, and led to heightened debate as well tensions over the role of trade unions in popular resistance (LMG, 1985; and Chapter 3 above).

A shift is apparent between Forster's and Erwin's papers. The liberation movement is treated with more respect, and Erwin's recognition of the importance of the liberation struggle is less rhetorical, more real than Forster's. He acknowledges the central role of this struggle in South Africa. But his analysis of liberation politics shows exactly the same flaws as Forster's.

Erwin uses the same "illegitimate analytical method" as Forster, drawing up three ahistorical models of national liberation struggle, "national defence", "nation-building" and "populism".

These forms impose upon political activity certain imperatives and shape the basis for mobilising mass support... and [the] programme of mobilisation in general terms (Erwin, 1985: 54).

Erwin deduces from his definition of these forms that the programme in all three cases must be precisely maximum unity and

the suppression of class interests. This is an entirely ahistorical and non-materialist approach to the problem, preventing a concrete analysis of the forces and relations that constitute the national liberation movement, and of its history and programme. Erwin ignores, (as does Forster) the variety of national struggles in our century in which the working class has won the leading role, a point which is made by Cronin (1986: 30).

Erwin argues that liberation struggle is characterised by the need to gain maximum unity in opposition to the regime within the country, (Erwin, 1985: 54ff) and to win legitimacy for the movement's efforts in the international arena (ibid: 57ff). Both of these imperatives demand that the liberation movement suppress class differences and avoid "debates and practices related to the transformation of the economy and society" (ibid: 55).

Thus it is inevitable that national liberation or popular struggle takes a **populist** form that denies class differences and erases the issues of socialist transformation from the political agenda. Erwin recognises the necessity for liberation struggle, but poses the problem that it excludes a struggle for socialist transformation. One notes here precisely the same theoretical dead end as that created by Forster. Liberation struggle is a priori populist because it is concerned with international legitimacy and domestic unity.

One might ask, if this is the case, how it is possible for any socialist struggle to succeed, since the overthrow of any regime would appear to require unity amongst the people and isolation of the regime. Erwin's answer is that where liberation struggle assumes a military form the need on the part of the guerrillas to maintain a voluntary support base amongst the peasantry requires "practices that address the whole problem of transforming society." (ibid: 56) But he sees little comparability with South Africa (ibid: 68).

Like Forster, Erwin has an extremely limited conception of what political struggle entails. Liberation politics is "in essence an attack on the legitimacy and authority of the ruling regime and... will in large part be fought out in the international arena." (ibid: 59) Like Forster, he fails to conceptualise

political struggle as a struggle for power at all levels, and that this entails building organisation and developing strategies and ideologies that do necessarily raise questions of class and transformation. Jeremy Cronin, at the time Education Officer for the Western Cape region of the UDF, makes precisely this point in his response to Erwin's paper. After giving several examples from the rich variety of popular struggle that developed in the 1984/5 period, Cronin concludes that

...transformation politics can, and has emerged from the impetus of liberation politics. They do not belong to two irreconcilable tracks, forever presenting us with a dilemma (Cronin, 1986: 36).²

Cronin argues that the populist unity regarded by Erwin as inseparable from popular struggle is dangerous:

It is a dangerous, undialectical error to imagine that the cause of unity runs counter to an understanding and articulation of differences within that unity... such unity requires an understanding of both the unifying interests as well as the crucial class and strata differences within the people's camp.

Cronin also notes that

Common interests are not all political, and the divergent interests are not all economic in a popular multi-class alliance (ibid: 32-3).

Erwin's proposed strategy for putting transformation on the agenda is to build democratic organisation in workplace and community. In addition, problems of transformation need to be addressed in the spheres of culture, health, education, engineering, science, administration, technology. He concludes

2. The same point emerges from the story of the struggles in KwaThema, told in Chap. 3. The massive political mobilisation that took place in 1984/5 develops multiple forms of democratic mass-based organisation which pose issues of transformation.

that

Unity must now be based on the politics of transformation that will secure the interests of the working class and rural population. It must address the problems of the economy and evolve practices that will establish the basis for transformation. This requires analysis and debate so as to locate the nature of alliances. It also requires acceptance of the centrality of the working class (Erwin, 1985: 70).

This is a startling conclusion, since the previous 20 pages of the paper had been at pains to prove that liberation politics excludes the possibility of transformation politics, but that liberation politics is necessary for any challenge to the regime. Does this mean that Erwin is suggesting liberation politics be abandoned in favour of transformation politics? If so what becomes of the struggle for state power, or the struggle for popular unity and international legitimacy? Or does it mean two parallel struggles, a liberation struggle against apartheid, and a transformation struggle in the economy and society? Erwin's paper is utterly silent on this score. His solution, therefore, remains idealistic and abstract, offering no practical political direction to the strategic choices facing the trade union movement.

It is revealing that both Forster and Erwin define liberation politics almost solely in terms of a struggle for legitimacy, while legitimacy appears to have nothing to do with transformation politics. But surely the central strategic issue in the struggle for transformation is the struggle of the working class and its close allies - ie. the forces for transformation - to win a position of leadership over the popular struggle as a whole - precisely to establish their legitimacy and the legitimacy of socialism as an alternative to capitalism. The struggle to win popular legitimacy for transformation is precisely one that can only take place within the framework of national political life and the popular struggle that occupies centre stage. It cannot be won by withdrawing the working class from national struggle, or running a transformation struggle parallel to liberation struggle. The working class has to

demonstrate that it is the only class capable of organising and leading the nation to thoroughgoing liberation. This is the real struggle for legitimacy - or hegemony - in a national liberation struggle. Of course, the struggle for the other kind of legitimacy - legitimacy in the international arena - is a key component of any liberation struggle, but there is nothing inherent in this that imposes a suppression of the problems of transformation.

4.3 "Discussion paper - March 1986"

This was a discussion paper circulated in COSATU as a response to a discussion paper produced by SFAWU just before the launch of COSATU (in November 1985), and to the political position taken up by the new federation. Specifically, the writer was alarmed by a statement made by the newly elected President of COSATU at its launching rally, to the effect that unless the government abolished the pass laws within 6 months COSATU would launch an anti-pass campaign. This threat was made without any mandate. Likewise, the writer was alarmed by the action of the newly-elected general secretary of the federation in meeting the ANC while at a meeting of the World Council of Churches in Harare and issuing a statement, again without a formal mandate. These were indications of a dangerous ascendancy of 'populism.'

This paper has the virtue, in comparison to Forster's and Erwin's, of being concrete and explicit, and therefore easier to discuss. It is also less sympathetic to the liberation movement, being openly hostile to all forces outside the union movement. The differences notwithstanding, it suffers from the same theoretical and strategic problems as the previous two papers.

The earlier SFAWU paper had argued that the recent period of mass political struggle demonstrated that it was "imperative that workers seek alliances with other classes and organisations." (SFAWU, 1985: 4) The anonymous response opened by discussing the dangers of populism in the new federation, which threatened to destroy democracy and lay the unions open to external control. It noted the struggles around the unity talks, and argued that the

UDF unions had been neutralised by the democratic structures of COSATU and by their absorption into the larger industrial unions.

The paper went on to caution against "complacency" in the face of the dangers of populism. As with Forster and Erwin, the writer characterises populism as necessarily inimical to the interests of the working class. It is characterised by "a recklessness about the very notion of order and control" and leads to a "destabilisation of township life" ("Discussion paper": 3). Populist leaders are demagogues who are neither elected nor accountable, subject to no control or discipline (ibid: 6).

... this brand of politics has a very limited capacity for self-criticism or self-discipline. Without the necessary organisational structures it has a very limited capacity to develop democratic organisational practices (ibid: 8).

As with Erwin, the nature of the political circumstances determines that political activity will have these characteristics:

Populism is an inevitable political response in the circumstances at present. To ignore the factors giving rise to a massive upsurge in populist politics is as mistaken as to ignore the undirected, erratic and undisciplined political actions that are all too easily a part of populism (ibid: 4).

The writer criticises SFAWU for arguing that unions need to enter into alliances and so ensure that "the politics of the working class becomes the politics of the entire people." SFAWU misunderstands "the very nature of populist politics" (ibid: 7) - "populist politics is not 'governable' through intervention." The writer gives an interesting example of what he/she means:

Let us analyse the conduct of worker leaders in the recent consumer boycotts of white shops.³

They do not suggest in a meeting of township residents that we should end the boycott - it is only traitors to the struggle that make such suggestions. They do not stand up as leaders and propose disciplinary action to be taken against a comrade who has proved himself to be an overzealous 'cowboy' in the course of the campaign - only fools who don't mind their houses being burned down make such suggestions. They don't stand up and draw attention to the fact that the local traders in the township have not significantly lowered their prices and as a result are getting fatter, richer and wealthier on the continuation of the consumer boycott by the day.

On the contrary, they JOIN the populist leadership.

Despite the rhetoric about socialism and the need for working class aims and objectives... the practices and statements of such leadership constantly compromises the politics and organisational practices of the working class. Far from widening the terrain of class politics, such attempts to govern the ungovernable simply neutralise the workers as a class in their 'communities' (ibid: 7).

This makes an interesting contrast to Vincint's description of the boycott organised in KwaThema in response to the state of emergency, in Chapter 3, above. There the organisers did call the boycott off when it threatened to be divisive, and they also managed to ensure the co-operation of the local traders.

The fact that something like a consumer boycott can have different forms, depending on how it is organised, illustrates the point that the writer does not actually define populism, nor show why it is so inevitably the form that anti-apartheid politics must take. Ultimately it appears that he/she is not

3. Presumably this refers to incidents in Natal, since the paper originated from that province.

talking specifically about populist politics, but that all anti-state politics is necessarily ungovernable. There is here a profound fear of and hostility towards all popular political struggle. Perhaps Parliamentary politics is orderly enough not to be 'populist', but then it is hardly working class politics.

The writer fears that

locking ourselves into structures with unstructured organisations as a basis for action could drag us into each and every adventurous action... the new alliance will not recognise when confrontationist practices are exhausting our unions rather than the state. (writers emphasis) (ibid: 8).

The writer argues that the only way forward is for COSATU to strengthen the SSCs and clarify their role. The SSCs should be the vehicle for engaging in community struggles.

We need to address ourselves to the ongoing problems in the townships and develop projects to assist such communities on an ongoing basis. In short, we need to ORGANISE in townships... unions need to develop the same capacity [to lead workers] in areas where workers live...

Such projects can

co-operate with other community organisations that are supportive of any programme on which we are working. Crucially, however, our right and ability to act on our own and in accordance with those principles... of democratic worker-controlled shop floor based industrial unions must remain the cornerstone of our practices...

It is in this way that we retain prospects of actively promoting class politics and the independence of the working class (ibid: 10).

The writer fetishises shopfloor organisation as the only appropriate form of organisation for the working class - to such an extent that he/she sees the shopfloor as the base for taking up community issues, rather than building organisation in the

communities themselves.

Finally, it is important to notice the silence in this paper on the question of state power. There is more than a hint of a gradualist, reformist approach to politics. Any consideration of the tactics and strategy of working class organisation ought to take place within an overall framework of a strategy for achieving socialism. Yet this writer completely separates immediate strategic and tactical issues from the long term objective:

We will not attempt in this paper to deal with the question as to when and how we might arrive at Socialism (ibid: 8).

4.4 Summary of the theoretical and strategic positions of FOSATU leadership, as formulated in the three position papers

1. In all three papers we find that the anti-apartheid struggle is a priori populist and undemocratic, suppressing class interests and socialist questions. It is therefore incompatible with working class interests. This analysis is underpinned by ahistorical, static categories which are subjected to no concrete materialist analysis: 'populism', 'working class movement', 'national defence', 'nation building'.

2. In the case of Forster and Erwin, political activity is reduced to one element, the struggle for legitimacy as against an illegitimate regime. This entails building the unity of the people, and establishing legitimacy in the international arena. It is these imperatives that dictate the suppression of class interests.

3. Class forces do not appear to exist at the political level. The working class does not have specific political aims or a political programme - thus it inevitably dissolves amongst the people.

4. There appears to be no relation between, on the one hand, the

state, politics and popular struggle, and on the other, capital, the economy, and working class struggle. These are two distinct and separate domains.

5. Class appears to be located in the economy only. The trade union is the natural form of organisation for the working class. Trade unions, if kept out of popular struggle, express a pure working class consciousness. An argument rooted in class essentialism. The emphasis on trade unions also entails the fetishisation of the model of shopfloor organisation, which is most apparent in the anonymous discussion paper. Trade unions should take up community issues as trade unions rather than help build community organisations.

6. The abstention from the struggle for state power, and the almost exclusive focus on trade unions, means that the politics of the trade unions is economistic and reformist.⁴

7. The analytical schema employed in these papers leaves no space to theorise the struggle for **hegemony** on the part of working class organisations, nor to think through the concrete strategy through which hegemony might be achieved. Coupled with that these papers do not grasp the **specificity** of the political terrain and the tasks this imposes on the forces for transformation.

4.5 The determinants of workerism in the FOSATU trade unions

In this Chapter I have analysed the theoretical and strategic ideas held by some of the leading intellectuals in FOSATU. Clearly these ideas had a great influence on the federation, particularly as they were passed on to shop stewards in training courses and seminars. But it would be unsatisfactory to try to explain the political position and strategy of so large an

4. This is most explicit in Friedman, 1987, pp. 484-5. Friedman's book is written from within a classic workerist framework, extolling the virtues of shopfloor organisation and bargaining, and warning about the dangers of 'populism'.

organisation, particularly one based on democratic structures, in terms of the ideas of some of its leaders only. One needs to look at the variety of forces acting on the organisation in order to understand its political position.

Repression

During the 1970s trade unions were subject to fierce repression. It was a struggle simply for the right to exist. Under these circumstances, it was a tactical decision for trade unions to avoid any sort of action that might be construed as political. This practice then persisted into the period when unions had established their right to exist, and were facing pressures from the popular movement to engage in politics.⁵

On the other hand, Mzwakhe reflected that FOSATU's argument had some merit in it: his union (UMMAWOSA) had been paralysed by repression against its leadership because of their political activities in the community (1987b).

Absence of a political movement

The trade unions of the 1970s were the first reassertion of mass democratic organisation after the defeat of the popular movement in the 1960s. There was no legal political organisation. In the circumstances, organising trade unions was in itself a political action since it was developing the power and the voice of the masses. By the early 1980s, with the re-emergence of the democratic movement addressing a wide range of material and political grievances, the political task facing trade unionists was no longer simply to build unions, but to engage in the wider arena of democratic struggle. However, again, the attitudes and practices of the earlier years persisted.

5. See Zakes, 25.5.87, on the the avoiding of repression as a reference point for FOSATU politics.

The dynamics of trade unionism

Trade unions are located in the economy. Their day to day concerns are struggling for recognition, bargaining over wages and conditions, striving to regulate the relations between management and labour. This is the necessary work of unions, and it does tend to create a collective bargaining practice and consciousness that favours the development of economism⁶ (there are however countervailing tendencies which emerge in the interviews in Chapter 3, and are theorised in Chapters 5 and 6). Nomathemba describes it like this:

During the time of FOSATU even myself, I was not very much looking at other community problems, because I was just working to get the workers good wages, better working conditions and all that...

As I've already said, FOSATU was concentrating on a strong shopfloor, I think people at that time were just concentrating on that and not thinking as to why do I have to wake up and go to work every morning... (Nomathemba, 1987)

Migrant workers and urban communities

The position of migrant workers as 'temporary sojourners' in urban South Africa could influence the attitude to politics of those unions with a large migrant membership, such as MAWU. Although migrants were at the forefront of many militant shopfloor struggles, they could be a conservative political force, as witnessed by the clashes between hostel-dwellers and urban youth in Langa and Soweto during 1976.

Again, Nomathemba raised this point:

Migrant workers at that time simply sat in their hostels.

6. See Hyman, 1971, for a detailed discussion of these tendencies and counter-tendencies.

They thought township people were mad to get involved in the action of students or youth. They would think the youth are controlling the parents. They would think of losing their job. They would not think of why do I have to be a contract worker, and stay like this. If then I am entitled to this job why then should I come under such conditions?

Things have changed drastically. Workers are criticising the migrant labour system. Migrant workers are now very co-operative with the community organisations...

That change has happened through the unions, because workers have learnt that the problems in the homelands and the problems in the townships are the same... In fact, that is one thing I preach to the workers when they join the union, to close that division... (ibid)

Zakes also spoke about the struggle to overcome this division:

... in KwaThema we've never had a clash between the community and the hostel-dwellers, because when we organised ERAPO we also organised the hostel-dwellers, organising them in the factories, and also organising them in their own block committees... at one stage there were people trying to defy the stayaways. The people living in the hostels - which are at the exit - they were blocking everyone from taking a bus to work, and they were checking who was coming from work... the hostel-dwellers were the people who were stopping people from going. So there was that kind of co-operation among the people (Zakes, 1987b).⁷

7. See also Nomathemba, 17.8.87 for a description of similar events at Daveyton.

Conservatism of the family

There is an overlap between the political conservatism of migrant workers and the conservative attitude of older people towards the youth. Since political action in the 70s and 80s has by and large been spearheaded by the youth, this could reinforce the abstention of the unions from politics. Zakes notes this problem when he discusses the forging of closer links between trade union structures and the youth:

At the beginning it was not easy. Because some workers felt that they cannot be bulldozed by children, and some felt the children and the students have taken the right position and we need to support them. So it wasn't easy, in some factories you would get a clear division among the workers and the shop stewards, with workers feeling that the shop stewards are entertaining that the children are playing... [inaudible], because of the lack of clarification. But after people were clarified about the position, that division diminished (Zakes, 1987b).

Different experiences of community organisations in different regions

Erwin analysed one of the causes for FOSATU's lack of political direction as being the differing experience of community and political organisations from region to region. He argued that the different regions drew different conclusions from their different experiences, and FOSATU then found it very difficult to develop a coherent political strategy out of this. It was only out of the experiences of the 1984 Transvaal stayaway, and of the building of street committees in the communities, that a more unified position of involvement in community organisation began to emerge (Erwin, 1987).

The role of intellectuals

The role of intellectuals such as those who produced the papers analysed above, was clearly very important in shaping the

political position of FOSATU. Several interviewees stressed the importance of seminars and courses in shaping the political attitudes of shop stewards. They also spoke about the skills and resources that intellectuals, often university-trained, had, and which objectively gave them a degree of power in deciding the political direction of the federation. They pointed out, too, that a distinction exists between shop stewards and rank and file membership, and that shop stewards do not necessarily reflect the views of those to whom they are accountable.

The question remains, though, as to **why** these particular intellectuals held the views that they did. One would have to examine the influence of the student milieu on white campuses during the late 60s and early 70s, and in particular the experience of student radicalism in 1968, much influenced by the 1968 uprisings in France and the United States, for a full discussion of the intellectual roots of their views.⁸ But certainly one crucial determinant of their views is their social position in South African society. As whites who did not experience racial oppression it was easy to regard this as 'appearance', as a curtain veiling the reality. At the same time, it was an appearance that separated them from the workers; by stressing class consciousness rather than racial oppression they could attempt to overcome this separation. Also, in the late 60s and early 70s black consciousness, which rejected whites as having no progressive role to play, was the dominant trend in black politics. White intellectuals tended to respond by asserting that the fundamental problem was 'class not race', and that black consciousness was a petty bourgeois movement founded on false consciousness.⁹

8. For instance, the influence of anarchism in the events of Paris '68, and the conservative role of the PCF, are echoed in the syndicalism and the hostility to the ANC and SACP of the workerist intellectuals.

9. Some of these points are made in 'The social background of working class leadership', handed in as evidence at the trial of Barbara Hogan for ANC activities. 'The social background' is highly critical of the political view of white intellectuals in the labour movement who, it argues, controlled the direction of

It seems reasonable to assume that the particular political views of leading intellectuals in FOSATU meshed with, and possibly to some extent were formed by, the various tendencies towards economism and away from politics that I have described above. There were of course countervailing tendencies pushing the unions towards politics: these have been explored in some detail in Chapter 3, and will be returned to in my final chapter.

4.6 THEORETICAL CRITIQUE OF WORKERISM

I have described the dominant political position and practice within FOSATU as **workerist**. Taken together the three papers analysed above express a fairly consistent position, which, I show below, can best be described as a form of **syndicalism**. No doubt the workerist practices of FOSATU were able to shelter a variety of political trends, some of which may have been rooted in class reductionist Marxism.¹⁰ However, in this theoretical critique I will concentrate on the position represented by the three papers.

Class reductionist forms of Marxism tend to reduce all political social and ideological issues directly to class issues, in the

the unions.

10. Barbara Hogan, convicted in 1982 on a charge of treason for being a member of the ANC, assessed the political agenda of FOSATU as being to build a Bolshevik type party ('Social background of working class leadership', court document). Mzwakhe also believes this. But while some individuals in FOSATU may have held such a position, there is no concrete evidence for it. In fact, as I have shown, the evidence shows a vague theory of politics closer to syndicalism than to Leninism. It is more than likely that the 'hidden agenda' was imagined by Marxist critics of FOSATU, who would naturally suppose that FOSATU's practice pointed towards the formation of a political party.

belief that they are expressions of class interests. In the three position papers, however, we find a curious kind of class reductionism: rather than reducing political forms directly to class relations, it defines politics, ideology and the state as non-class issues, or as bourgeois class issues, and tends to avoid or ignore them. Working class issues are located in the economy and in the relation of workers to capital, not to the state. Thus for Forster the "essence of politics" is the capital labour relation. Only the essence is important for working class struggle: the rest is populism. This position bears a striking similarity to that of syndicalism.

It is class reductionism that produces the metaphor of apartheid as a "curtain" behind which capital can hide (Forster, 1982: 72). The class struggle between capital and labour is the real terrain of struggle, while the terrain of popular struggle against apartheid is mere appearance and draws workers' attention away from what is essential.

Class reductionist Marxism tends to discount the specificity of the state and the terrain of political struggle, in favour of its essence, ie. its class nature. The three position papers however, particularly Erwin's, do try to grasp the nature of the state and political struggle in South Africa through such concepts as "national defence", "nation building", "populism", and the struggle for "legitimacy". However, these concepts are static and ahistorical, resting on broad generalisations rather than a materialist analysis of the historically specific; they in fact prevent a knowledge of the specific. Moreover, they do not conceive of any relation between the development of capitalism and the development of national oppression and apartheid in South Africa. Apartheid has its own history, while behind its curtains capitalism has its autonomous history. The working class has no role to play in the history of apartheid, and so it retreats to the sphere of class relations, the economy.

Syndicalism denies the importance of political and ideological struggles. It cannot conceptualise the people/power block contradiction, which is specific to the political terrain (see Laclau, 1977), and has a particular national historical character in any given country. Nor does it analyse the relation between

this political contradiction and the development of capitalism and its class contradictions.

The syndicalism analysed here is underpinned by a theoretical belief very closely related to class reductionism - **class essentialism**. Class essentialism assumes that the relations of production bestow on workers an essential class nature. Organisation located in the relations of production comes to represent the **class nature of the workers** and thus their essential class political programme. This is the theoretical source for a persistent conflation of trade union with working class with socialist movement. The working class cannot exist as a class in other forms of organisation, at other levels of society or sites of struggle.

Class essentialism also assumes that workers' experience of exploitation in the relations of production, and of class struggle in trade unions, produces a **pure class consciousness**, undiluted by populism, nationalism, etc.¹¹ Thus the importance of maintaining the distance of the trade unions from populist or nationalist organisations. It is only this trade union-based

11. It is illuminating in this regard to examine back-copies of the Federation's newspaper, **FOSATU Worker News**: it avoids almost at all costs carrying news on the UDF or its affiliates. One extraordinary example of this is a front page article on the anti-Tricameral campaign run by FOSATU: the UDF campaign is not referred to once; a mass rally organised by UDF, CAL and the trade unions in Cape Town is described as organised by "all the independent unions together with other progressive organisations", and the only speaker quoted is a FOSATU office bearer (**FWN**, 31, August 1984). Another extreme example is the front page article on the Transvaal stayaway in November 1984: according to the report it was called by "the independent trade union movement and other progressive organisations". No organisations besides FOSATU, not even COSAS, are mentioned by name (**FWN** 33/34, Oct/Nov 1984). It is as if the working class is a **tabula rasa**: if only 'populist' organisations can be prevented from inscribing their populism there, the trade unions will guarantee a pure class consciousness.

class consciousness that can guarantee change in the interests of the working class.

Syndicalism tends therefore to give sole organisational privilege to the site in which class relations are constituted. This accounts for the invariable tendency of syndicalism towards **economism**, either because of an explicit position that the economic struggle is the most important struggle for the working class, or because in reducing the political struggle to the economic, it fails in any concrete practical way to engage workers in political struggle. It is forced to fall back on educational programmes that show how capitalism is the 'real' problem and socialism the 'real' solution. There is therefore an inevitably reformist practice at the heart of workerism.

It must be stressed that the analysis and arguments put forward in the three position papers have nothing to do with **Marxism**, class reductionist or otherwise. Their absence of political theory, their antagonism to political struggle, and their complete separation between the state and the economy, constitute a **syndicalist** position, and historically syndicalism has always differed with Marxism on these questions. This is not to suggest that this is a conscious position derived from any historical model of syndicalism: it is, rather, syndicalism by default.

4.7 STRATEGIC WEAKNESSES OF WORKERISM

The analytical weaknesses of workerism result in a number of strategic blindspots.

In the first place workerism abandons the site of national political struggle to other social forces, thus isolating itself from the burning issues of the day, and failing to grasp the importance of national liberation to workers. The UDF in contrast, drawing on the Congress tradition with its decades of experience in mobilising and organising around national oppression, was able to mobilise massive support against the Tricameral Parliament. Both Zakes and Vincint testified to the importance of the UDF calling on "society" as a whole, rather

than on trade union membership only. The struggles of that period placed national liberation high on the public agenda, and as a result the Congress position grew amongst the people. Some of the interviews quoted in Chapter 3 show this graphically.

During this period of intense political struggle, workerism became more and more isolated, less and less able to deal with political issues in a convincing way. In contrast, the SFAWU paper argues that

It is clear to us that one cannot separate the struggle for national freedom from the struggle for our rights in the factory (SFAWU, 1985: 3).

Worker leaders in Springs had practical experience of building their leadership in the community:

What we discovered was that organised workers were always giving direction because of the experience that they had, because of them being somehow in the majority, so the intellectuals in the community could not have their way open because they did not have a programme, whereas the organised workers had a programme and everybody else understood their programme and followed them. The fear was there that professionals, like teachers, doctors, and maybe shopkeepers might want to dominate and be at the top at all times because of being fluent in English, being in business for some time, being teachers... but they did not have an organisational idea. So that theory was completely not there. Organised workers were taking the lead, together with the students.

By a programme, I mean organised workers would talk about an action, which would be effective. If workers talk about a stayaway it means there will be a stayaway. If they talk about striking because DET [The Dept. of Education and Training] will not grant something to the students, it will mean an action. Whereas you find a businessman saying he can't close the whole day, he will lose business. But because of being a minority, they ended up accepting the direction given by the workers.

Q: Some tendencies argued that workers would be misled or submerged in the communities.

In practice it doesn't happen that way. I mean that's the theory we were also given at some stage, that we shouldn't make a mistake if we wanted to keep our organisation intact, and get involved in all those mass organisations. But in practice when we started to go in that was not the case. That marks the end of AZAPO in our area, which was the only organisation which existed at one stage. But when we started to organise and get into the masses, and encourage the youth, encourage the civic, encourage the taxis to organise themselves, AZAPO vanished, because ERAPO affiliated to the UDF, so anyone who came in there had to belong to the UDF, and nobody wanted to be left out. So AZAPO had to call it a day, join the masses as individuals and agree to the UDF.

Zakes saw the workers as a powerful force for organising the **unity** of the townships:

That is why you find clashes in places like Joburg, where you find AZAPO fighting UDF. The workers in that area do not take the initiative of moving into the township, forming one organisation, getting everyone together under one flag. So AZASM started to grow freely. COSAS grew also. So you had these two pillars, parallel, coming up equally in some respects, and the clashes started to happen.

But because we moved in early, started to get the students organised. We didn't want another ideology coming up, we wanted one ideology, that of the people. So the AZASM that started coming up... was suppressed, it never got off the ground. That is why we've never had clashes at Springs, students clashing... (Zakes, 1987b)

(This comment does need to be placed in the context of the vastly differing social structure of Soweto and KwaThema: Soweto is massively bigger, with a much greater class differentiation. It is much more difficult for organised workers to have an impact on such a township.)

This experience of engaging in 'populist' politics and forging alliance stands in stark contrast to the FOSATU position papers analysed above, particularly the anonymous 'Discussion paper'. The specific case of the boycott of white shops in Springs, described by Vincint in Chapter 3, contrasts radically with the 'Discussion Paper' version of the inevitable populism of such a campaign, and reveals the emptiness of the argument: popular politics is, in organisational, ideological and strategic terms a **contested terrain** in which different social forces struggle for hegemony.

Zakes also referred to the unity of hostel-dwellers with the community, that had been built by organising them at the workplace and in ERAPO (see above, Chapter 4.5). Both he and Nomathemba referred to the violent clashes between migrants and township residents in another East Rand township, Tsakane, after students burnt down the beerhall. The only organisation in the township was COSAS.

There was nothing as such that was happening in the civic in Tsakane. And the workers were not unionised either. Hostel dwellers were scantily unionised. It was premature for union members at the hostels to even talk about workers' struggles, let alone other struggles...

... they were still having that problem of isolating themselves from the community (Nomathemba, 1987).

The low level of unity seems to have been a result of the fact that Tsakane workers work in factories in a number of different industrial areas, often far away from each other. At any rate, the result was a disastrous conflict that ended with migrant workers forced to leave the hostels and live elsewhere.

It was sad, many people said so, it was sad when the buses came to fetch the hostel-dwellers... They left many belongings, they did not have a chance to fetch them (ibid).

For Zakes and Nomathemba, this is a graphic illustration of the need to organise communities:

The whole thing was out of hand, no-one was able to give any direction, because the system had already made use of the opportunity, saying it was supporting the hostel-dwellers (ibid).

At the heart of workerism's abstention from politics is the absence of any strategy for addressing the question of state power. The SFAWU paper puts forward the reasons why trade unions on their own cannot address this question:

We cannot engage in a wide range of activity that is necessary to successfully challenge the state and create a society where workers have control.

It is this wide range of activity that escapes the attention of workerism, focussed as it is on one form of organisation and one kind of activity.

Mzwakhe made several references in the interview to his experience that FOSATU did not address the question of state power. In his view the need to address this question dictated an immediate strategy of participating in the broader democratic struggle:

...the workers are involved in boycotting rent, boycotting buses, but what we've got to do, as workers and as working class leaders, is inject working class practices within those structures. We should not postpone working class leadership within those structures until a later date. What sort of government will take over when we lift the flag over Union Buildings will be determined by the class composition of those who will be in power. That is why it is so important not to postpone working class leadership... (Mzwakhe, 1987)

This is an argument for alliances between the working class and other classes, both within multi-class organisations such as UDF and civics, and between working class organisations such as trade unions and the organisations of other classes, eg. taxi-drivers or traders. It is an argument for the working class to develop

and assert its leadership within such alliances.

Workerism, in contrast, is exceedingly suspicious of alliances between trade unions and other organisations. Partly this is because of a general mistrust of politics, partly because of a more specific mistrust of any class alliances, because they are held to compromise working class practices and independence. The dismissal of alliances has the practical consequence that workers cannot build their leadership over other classes and within various other organisations. In some cases the result was mistrust and suspicion towards the trade unions on the part of community organisations, rather than respect for the capacity of the organised workers to lead struggle.¹²

Partly, too, the argument against alliances rests on a conflation of the question of alliances between trade unions and other popular organisations with the question of alliances between the working class and other classes. Source of the conflation is workerism's class essentialism. The trade unions represent the working class and other organisations represent other classes. Such an analysis generally produces an incoherent strategy, since it assumes that there is no worker membership in youth organisations, civics and UDF. In other words, these organisations in themselves constitute class alliances. But workerism is prevented by its analysis from taking on the task of organising the working class wherever it is found - in civic organisation, youth organisation, amongst the unemployed, in political organisations. As the SFAWU paper puts it,

... the East Rand, where our unions built up a powerful shopfloor organisation, but were not able to represent fully the social interests of the workers in the townships like in the case of rent, transport and other community based struggles (SFAWU, 1985: 5).

Continually stressed by SFAWU members was that the working class

12. Zakes describes a case in the Eastern Cape where workers were prevented by the organisers of the funeral of a worker from their factory from wearing FOSATU T-shirts.

is much more than employed workers who are organised at work. Their conception of the working class extended to unemployed workers, to the youth who have never worked, and even to the children of working class parents who are studying at school. They saw it as important to organise all these various sectors of the working class around their immediate problems, to organise the working class for struggle at the **various** sites of oppression, whether as unemployed (Amalova), as township residents (ERAPO), as school students (COSAS) - or **politically** as oppressed and exploited people in the liberation movement (UDF). Only through organising the working class in this way could the unity of the working class be built. And only through organising the class in this way could it achieve hegemony in the overall struggle of the people for freedom.

CHAPTER 5

THEORETICAL ISSUES IN MARXISM AND THE 'NATIONAL QUESTION'

The critique of workerism as class reductionist in Chapter 4 raises a critical theoretical question: if class reductionism, Marxist or otherwise, does not produce useful political insights, what is a non-reductionist Marxism? Is a non-reductionist Marxism possible?

There is a strong tendency in Marxism, starting with Marx and Engels, to view the capital/labour contradiction as fundamentally antagonistic and therefore the source of a class conflict that inevitably culminates in revolution. The struggles that take place in production generate a basic class consciousness that, when extended (under the leadership of a working class party) beyond the workplace to confront the class state, is transformed into revolutionary class consciousness in a struggle to overthrow capitalism and build socialism. Such is the conception explicitly developed in texts such as **The Communist Manifesto**; **Socialism: scientific and utopian**; Chapter 32 of **Capital 1**; and **What is to be done?**

The assumption that the relations of exploitation produce class consciousness makes it difficult for Marxism to explain cases where workers do not exhibit class consciousness (white workers in South Africa, for example) without resort to the unsatisfactory notion of false consciousness. Marxism also confronts a problem when it leaves the sphere of production, exchange and distribution of commodities for the sphere of civil society and the state. Marxism holds that in some sense the forms and struggles on the terrain of politics and ideology are determined by class relations in the economy. In what precise sense they are so determined is the subject of long and rich

theoretical debate which has yet to be resolved.

The class reductionism and class essentialism which, I have argued, is integral to workerism, obviously can find some support in particular texts of Marxism. (This would be more the case with Marxist trends which might exist within workerism than with syndicalist trends: syndicalism, as argued above, tends to differ radically from Marxism on political issues) These are **problem areas** in Marxist theory; so much so that some theorists have foresaken Marxism altogether for the dubious benefits of post-structuralist relativism. In this section I want to reflect on some of these theoretical issues, in order to see what light the experiences and struggles of workers on the East Rand, discussed in the previous chapters, can cast on them.

5.1 Trade unions and class consciousness

The struggles within FOSATU described in Chapter 3 show quite clearly that trade unions do not simply reflect or express class consciousness.

On the one hand, this is because trade unions are organisations with complex structures at shopfloor, local, regional and national levels. Officials, office-bearers and representatives at the different levels have access to different experiences, educational programmes and information, are subject to different pressures and demands, and identify with the organisation differently. Several interviewees stressed that one has to distinguish between shop stewards and rank and file membership, and that shop stewards do not necessarily represent the views and interests of the rank and file. In particular, shop stewards are exposed to intensive union education programmes which often have political content (Mzwakhe, 1987; Robert 1987b; Zakes, 1987a).

Even more so is it the case that officials do not necessarily directly express the view of their membership:

We must draw a distinction between the position of a few

officials in FOSATU and the position of most of the workers - and in COSATU for that matter. That is an important distinction, because all of us claim to speak on behalf of the workers (Mzwakhe, 1987).

Mzwakhe also drew attention to the skills and theory that organisers with a university training have compared to those who develop organically from the shopfloor, and the power this places in their hands.

Furthermore, the consciousness of the members of trade unions is not 'produced' by trade union experience only. Workers have a range of experiences of different kinds of oppression, and this has just as important a bearing on consciousness as trade union and workplace experience. Mzwakhe interpreted the effect of different experiences like this:

Workers are caught in a situation where they've got allegiances to trade union officials because they are pushing better wages and conditions. They've also got allegiances with the community, which is pushing for total liberation. So they're aligned with the union, but not necessarily adopting its political position (ibid).

He quoted the example of the Port Elizabeth stayaway in 1985, opposed by the unions, but "supported 100% by the workers" (the stayaway was in fact not supported by coloured workers - which supports Mzwakhe's thesis, since coloured communities have been historically far less involved in liberation politics (LMG, SALB 11.7)).

Thus workers consciousness and attitudes are constituted by a range of different experiences and organisations. The local civic, or UDF, or the trade union, all 'call' or interpolate him/her differently, and there is nothing inherent in the workplace or trade union which necessarily takes precedence over other interpolations. In fact, in a society so dominated by national oppression as South Africa, and where political power is so immediate an issue, the organisation or force which can present itself as a coherent political oppositional force is more likely to influence political consciousness than is the trade

union (that is, if they are presented as alternatives rather than as complementary).

But if we restrict ourselves simply to the question of how trade union organisation constitutes the consciousness of its members, even here there is a contested terrain, a struggle over the identity of the workers, of the working class, and of the meaning of trade union struggle. There could for instance be a struggle over whether the trade union task is to do a better deal with capital in the bargain over wages and conditions, or whether it is to increase workers' control within production, or whether it is part of a broader political project. Thus the struggle described within FOSATU was in part over whether the working class was to be constituted as part of the national liberation movement, or outside of it as a pure class. It was also a struggle over whether the working class was to consist solely of workers organised at the point of production, or whether it was to encompass workers organised elsewhere, as well as the unemployed and the families of workers. Organisations and ideologies are constantly constituting social forces and struggling over their constitution.

This raises the question of the role of leadership. Nomathemba explained that she always "preaches" to workers to close the gap between migrants and urban-dwellers. Zakes described the role of shop stewards in explaining to members why they should co-operate with the youth. These are examples of the tasks that fall to leadership, and that are an aspect of constituting the working class in a certain way. Thus one of the **necessary** distinctions between shop stewards and rank and file membership lies in the role of the shop steward as leader.

There is a complex interplay between leadership and accountability, between the need for strategic and analytical experience, clarity and training, on the one hand, and mass initiative and creativity on the other. This complex dialectical process is not adequately captured by the notion of 'workers' control', so often referred to by workerism (Zakes, 1987a; Mzwakhe, 1987), and used as a justification for not co-operating with organisations which lack 'it' (workers' control).

Although one could perhaps describe a struggle between members and officials of petty bourgeois origins as a class struggle, it would seem misleading to describe a struggle between different political tendencies in a trade union, for example that between a workerist and a Congress position, as a class struggle. Workerism does not imply a purer class consciousness, nor does a congress position signify an abandoning of class: most of the interviewees suggest that constituting a working class position within the liberation movement comprises a more advanced form of class consciousness since it is aware of its national tasks.

This ideological struggle is not in itself a class struggle, and cannot be reduced to such, since it takes place within the class: it is a struggle over how the class is to be constituted. To sum up my argument: trade unions do not 'reflect' or 'express' some essence of what the working class is. They are one of a number of organisations located in different terrains or sites, that struggle to constitute the working class as an organised social force. Class is an abstract category that cannot specify how workers - or any other class - come to exist as an organised social force.¹ How the working class is constituted - organisationally, ideologically and politically - is not determined by 'essential' class interests but is itself the subject of more or less intense struggle.

The way in which the working class is constituted, however, is not arbitrary; it is constrained by real material, social and ideological interests and issues. It would be exceedingly difficult, for instance, to constitute white trade unions as UDF affiliates. The workerist leadership in FOSATU lost their dominant position because they were unable to address the burning political question - which in South Africa means the national question (national oppression, of course, does not only exist outside of the workplace). Other organisations were organising the oppressed in a national struggle for freedom, addressing both immediate material grievances as well as the widest political

1. Wolpe, 1987, discusses the difference between class as an abstract concept, and the internal divisions and differences that characterise the working class in reality, p. 62 - 3

issues. The congress leadership came to dominate the union movement because they were able to link trade union issues with the broader national movement, and thus articulate the range of workers' experiences into a coherent whole, a whole from which the workerist position appeared to exclude them.

5.2 The trade union as a category of analysis, and the primary contradiction in a capitalist social formation

Hyman (1971) discusses the question of whether trade unions are intrinsically reformist or whether they have revolutionary potential. He describes two main trends in the Marxist tradition, an optimistic trend which believes trade unions have great revolutionary potential (Marx, Engels), and a pessimistic trend which believes they are intrinsically reformist 'managers of discontent' (Lenin, Trotsky and various bourgeois theorists).

Hyman discusses the bargaining relation that develops between unions and management, and the tendency for union leadership to develop into a bureaucracy with interests distinct from their membership. He discusses too, as countervailing tendencies, the pressure of democracy, the need to 'deliver the goods', and the inability of the capitalist economy to actually deliver the goods when in crisis. He concludes

Pure and simple trade union activity **does** pose a substantial threat to the stability of the capitalist economy in certain circumstances. The iron law of oligarchy is subject to important constraints. Attempts to extend the process of incorporation **do** meet significant obstacles to success. To this extent, the 'optimistic' interpretation of trade unionism cannot be rejected outright (ibid: 37).

Trade unions embody "a revolt which can challenge the fundamental basis of capitalism on two fronts". This is so because, firstly, "unionism represents a reaction against economic exploitation", and secondly "and less coherently, unionism also raises issues of power and control" which lead the working class to develop (quoting Hobsbawm), "a general discontent with the existing system, a general aspiration after a more satisfactory one, and a

general outline (co-operative against competitive, socialist against individualistic) of alternative social arrangements..." (ibid: 38-9)

Hyman does manage to capture the contradictory tensions within the role of trade unions, but his analysis is ultimately unsatisfactory because he limits it to a consideration only of the capital/labour contradiction and the role of trade unions. Thus he discusses only one condition that has the potential to impel trade unions into a strongly anti-capitalist position: when there is an economic crisis such that the ruling class is forced to attack the living standards of the working class. He does not discuss the potential impact of **political crisis** on the political position of trade unions, nor does he discuss the importance of political forms (bourgeois democracy, feudal rule, colonial rule, military dictatorship, apartheid) in shaping the political consciousness and response of workers, and creating the framework within which the **political response** to economic crisis is constituted.² My analysis has shown, however, the crucial significance of national oppression for explaining the political struggles within and strategies of the trade unions in South Africa. Webster makes the same point:

...the transformation of the labour process has created the potential for mass-based industrial trade unions, while failing to provide the conditions for their political incorporation (Webster, 1985:279).

Webster captures here the importance of a consideration of both the labour process and the political configuration in determining the political direction of trade unions. It is the transformation of the labour process into the form of large scale mass production based on semi-skilled operators that provides the material basis for militant mass-based industrial unions (see

2. Hyman does note the British labour movement's traditional reverence for parliamentarism, but does not draw out the implications of the particular **national political configuration** for the politics of trade unions that are suggested by this observation. ibid, p. 39

Chapter 2.1); it is the political configuration that determines whether these unions will take on a fundamentally political character and become component parts of the struggle for democratic rights, or whether they will restrict themselves to collective bargaining.

It is the specific national question in South Africa which made the workerist project an impossible one: the model of a working class movement based on the British model of collective-bargaining unionism and a reformist social-democratic Labour Party simply could not develop in a different social and political context.

The implication of my argument is that one cannot consider the problems of class, class struggle and class consciousness, political struggle and revolution in terms only of the capital/labour contradiction as specified by the concept of the capitalist mode of production. Of course, the attempt to do precisely this has noble (not in the class sense of the term!) origins: not only the more polemical and determinist of the classical Marxist texts (such as the **Manifesto** and **Socialism: scientific and utopian**), but also the greatest project of Marx's life, *Capital*, contains passages, especially in the famous Chapter 32, which predict the demise of capitalism because of the irreconcilable contradiction between capital and labour, which creates not only capital's gravedigger in the form of the proletariat, but ever greater crises of capitalist accumulation. Large sections of Marx's text, especially in Volume 3, read as a struggle on Marx's part to prove that according to its own contradictory laws of motion the capitalist mode of production is bound to produce the revolution which will usher in a new social order. It is this belief that explains his optimism about the revolutionary potential of trade unions.

Unfortunately, proving this is an impossible project. Marx did not discover the laws that could demonstrate that revolution and socialism are necessarily produced by economic contradictions. Which leaves Marxists with the question - how do revolutions occur?

Althusser and Balibar tried to solve this problem by moving away

from the economic reductionism of the focus only on the capital/labour relation. Althusser based his argument on Lenin's analysis of the Russia as "the weakest link" in the chain of imperialist states. It was the weakest link because it contained "the accumulation and exacerbation of all the historical contradictions then possible in a single state": contradictions of a feudal regime ruling viciously over a vast peasantry at the dawn of the twentieth century; of large scale capitalist exploitation in the cities; of colonial exploitation and wars in the reaches of the Empire; between advanced capitalist production and medieval countryside; contradictions within the ruling classes; the history of revolutionary organisations that produced the Bolshevik party; the imperialist war; and others (Althusser, 1977: 96).

Althusser draws the following theoretical conclusions:

...if the general contradiction (... the contradiction between the forces and relations of production, essentially embodied in the contradiction between two antagonistic classes) is sufficient to define the situation when revolution is the task of the day, it cannot of its own simple, direct power induce a revolutionary situation... If this contradiction is to become active in the strongest sense, to become a ruptural principle, there must be an accumulation of circumstances and currents, so that... they fuse in a ruptural unity: when they produce the result of the immense majority of the popular masses grouped in an assault on a regime which its ruling classes are unable to defend...How else could the class divided popular masses throw themselves together... How else could the ruling classes... find themselves reduced to impotence, divided at the decisive moment, with neither new political solutions nor new political leaders, deprived of foreign class-support, disarmed in the very citadel of their State machine, and suddenly overwhelmed by the people they had so long kept in leash and respectful by exploitation, violence and deceit? If, as in this situation, a vast accumulation of contradictions comes into play in the same court, some of which are radically heterogeneous... but which nevertheless merge in a ruptural unity, we can no longer talk of the

sole, unique power of the general contradiction... these contradictions... derive from the relations of production... from the superstructures, instances which derive from it but have their own consistency and effectivity, from the international conjuncture itself, which intervenes as a determination with a specific role to play (ibid: 99-100).

Thus Althusser attempts to theorise the significance of superstructural forces and crises, of contingent events that are not produced by the structure but none the less affect it, and of the national and international conjuncture.

Balibar argues the same point, basing it on Marx's analysis in **Capital 3**:

...the result of the contradiction is always a certain **equilibrium**, even when this equilibrium is attained by means of a crisis.

Thus the only intrinsic result of the contradiction, which is completely immanent to the economic structure, does not tend towards the supersession of the contradiction, but to the perpetuation of its conditions...

... [but] the effects within the structure of production... may be **one of the conditions** (the 'material basis') of a **different result**, outside the structure of production (Althusser and Balibar, 1979: 290-93).

Ultimately Balibar's attempt to resolve this problem is unsatisfactory, since he does not theorise the place of class and other struggles adequately: class struggle seems to belong to another 'instance' of the social structure, ie. it is something **external** to the economic structure and which under specific conditions **intervenes** in it (ibid: 293-305).

Although Althusser and Balibar point the way to the 'relative autonomy' of the political terrain they conceptualised it more as a structure than as a site of struggle. They were unable to move away from a highly abstract notion of 'class struggle', and in his later texts Althusser returned to a rather crude,

fundamentalist exposition of the necessity and inevitability of the relations of production producing class struggle (Althusser, 1976: 203).

Laclau, in a very fruitful essay, (Laclau, 1977) tried to think through concretely the implications for political struggle of the concept of the specificity and relative autonomy of the political structure, reflecting particularly on the experiences of populist struggle in Latin America. He argued that the political terrain is marked by a contradiction peculiar to it, a contradiction between the **people**, on the one hand, and the **ruling block**, on the other. This contradiction is constituted by the political structure, in the same way as the class contradiction is constituted by the relations of production, and it cannot be reduced to the latter contradiction. Laclau thus enables theory to grasp the way the institutions and practices of apartheid and national oppression have so structured social and political life in South Africa as to define the terrain of struggle for political power.

The political contradiction shapes a particular terrain of ideological and political struggle. It is a terrain occupied by **popular** ideologies, symbols and traditions, many of them with no particular class belonging or class nature. Although popular ideologies have no particular class nature, they cannot be articulated independently of class discourse; thus there is a continuous struggle between the fundamental classes, proletariat and bourgeoisie, to articulate popular ideologies into their own class discourse. Class discourse cannot appear on the political terrain other than articulated with popular ideology - there is no such thing as a pure class ideology at this level.

This struggle within popular ideology is the struggle for **hegemony**, the struggle on the part of the fundamental antagonistic classes to become **the representative and main organising force of the 'people'**. The working class tries to incorporate populism into its revolutionary project, the bourgeoisie tries to maintain its position as representative of the nation.

The contributions of Althusser, Balibar and Laclau are attempts

to go beyond the class reductionism implicit in much of Marxism, and which reduces politics, the state and ideology to epiphenomena of the fundamental class contradictions determined by the relations of production. Their work suggests that the attempts by such theorists as Hyman (1971), Burawoy (1985), and Cressey & MacInnis (*Capital and Class* 11) to analyse the political position of the trade unions and the working class solely in terms of the primary contradiction and workplace experiences, without reference to the nationally specific political and ideological terrain, is misguided. The early Gramsci, too, focussed on the worker councils at the workplace as the embryonic forms of the new society, neglecting the wider political arena and the contest for state power, which imposes on the working class the task of building a hegemonic bloc in opposition to the bourgeois regime (Gramsci, 1968). It was the failure of the factory council strategy and the defeat of the working class movement by Fascism, a movement which drew on profoundly popular roots, that turned his attention to the work for which he is famous, ie precisely work on the question of hegemony and national-popular ideologies.

These issues are not new ones to the political struggle in South Africa. The early history of the Communist Party of South Africa is the story of a theoretical, ideological and strategic struggle to overcome the prescriptions of class reductionism for a unity of white and black workers against capitalism. The adoption of the Native Republic thesis and the strategy of alliance with the ANC, initiated in the late 1920s, mark the realisation that the character of the national question must define decisively the appropriate political strategy to be pursued by working class organisations.³ Of course, the Native Republic thesis did not mark the end but only the beginning of the quest for a proper relation between class and national struggle in South Africa.

5.3 The 'National Question': the specificity of politics

3. See Bunting, 1975, esp. Chap. 2, and Simons and Simons, 1983, esp. Chap. 17.

The foregoing discussion of attempts within Marxism to move beyond the confines of class reductionism, to theorise the existence of a combination of contradictions, and the specificity of the political terrain, brings us to the national question, ie. to the question of the specific form of political struggle in South Africa, in both its theoretical and its political aspects.

The issue that needs to be examined in relation to this question is that of the relation, theoretically and practically, between the concepts "class" and "nation", and between class struggle and national struggle. The national liberation movement asserts, in contrast to the workerist position discussed above, that national liberation struggle and class struggle are not mutually exclusive but dialectically linked; yet until recently insufficient attention had been paid to theorising this relation.⁴ Simons and Simons, for example, describe the adoption of the Native Republic thesis by the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) as

... a great advance in the analysis of the relations between national and class forces in the liberation movement. The party had at last found a firm foundation in Marxist theory for an unequivocal affirmation of the African's claim to govern his country (Simons & Simons, 1983: 411).

But they do not actually explain how Marxist theory does - or might - affirm the strategy chosen by the CPSA or analyse the relation between national and class forces. Their book is primarily a description of the developing relation between the CPSA and the ANC, and is disappointingly silent on the theoretical issues.

It is my contention that the most fruitful way to explore the relation between class and nation is to recognise the irreducible specificity of the political terrain. "Nation" is a concept defined by the structures and contradictions of the political terrain, and primarily the state; whereas "class" is a concept defined primarily by the relations of production, at the level of the economy.

4. Wolpe, 1975, makes the same point. See p. 234

Gelb makes this point in an interesting discussion of the determinants of nationalism. He points out the inadequacy of Stalin's "mechanistic and schematic" notion of the nation, according to which a nation is defined by having a common territory, economy, language and culture, and turns instead to Benedict Anderson's concept of the nation as "an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (quoted in Gelb, 1984: 10).

Thus the nation is seen to be an ideological concept, relating to the political arena and expressed through being represented by a sovereign state...

... it is possible to argue that the SA state is premised on the exclusion of blacks from the racially divided "imagined community" whose sovereignty it represents...

The nationalist response... perceives racial domination in all its manifestations as being rooted essentially in the exclusion from the "imagined community"... [which] gives rise naturally to an alternative conception of the "imagined community", a different nation. This conception also suggests that nationalist struggle involves a process of ideological construction of this different nation, rather than simply reflecting a pre-given nation (ibid).

Thus it is clear that the nation is the object of a struggle, of efforts to constitute it in various ways, and that these struggles are crucially defined by the nature of the state. In South Africa the Nationalist government has, through the state, striven to organise and constitute a white nation, while disorganising any attempt to constitute a black or non-racial nation, attempting to constitute instead a variety of ethnic "nations" based on the bantustans.

There have historically been a variety of responses on the part of organisations of the oppressed: Inkatha is the strongest example of an effort to constitute an ethnic nation; for its part, the Congress Alliance represented an effort to combine, primarily, a militant African and Indian nationalism, but

including also organisations of coloured people and white democrats, in building a non-racial South African nation as envisaged in the Freedom Charter. Rejecting this, the PAC broke away in 1959 on the platform of an exclusive African nationalism. Where the black consciousness movement in the late 60s and early 70s picked up this theme in the effort to constitute a black nation that excluded whites, the non-racial movement took up the Congress tradition's task of building a non-racial nation as the antithesis of apartheid's racist policies. Anderson's concept of nation allows us to theorise these struggles to constitute a nation in opposition to the nations constituted by apartheid. It shows us that the nation is not pre-given, but nor are the struggles to constitute it arbitrary - the options and limits available to oppositional forces (or phrased differently, their national tasks) are defined by the structures and strategies of the state.

This is an important point because it indicates that the nation is not simply an imagined community - it is material in that it is constituted by structures, institutions and organisations as well as by ideology. Racially exclusive parliaments, bantustan governments, administration boards, population registration, Group Areas, pass laws, job reservation, land and capital ownership - all of these structure the terrain on which different "nations" have to be constituted and "imagined". For their part, trade unions, community, political and cultural organisations amongst the oppressed are inseparable from the struggle to construct an alternative "imagined community."

Unfortunately, Gelb's useful remarks peter out as he does not come to grips with the issue of how class struggles might relate to such a definition of the nation. He asserts, but does not demonstrate, that national struggles are "concerned quite narrowly with issues of citizenship and political equality" (ibid: 11), whereas a working class perspective requires more than this - it requires an extension of democracy beyond the state to all spheres of social existence. He criticises the Colonialism of a Special Type thesis (CST) adopted by the South African Communist Party (SACP) in 1962, and which became current in the ANC at least by the late 1960s, as necessarily entailing a separation of the struggle against capitalism from that against

national oppression, because it is based on a transposition of **analytical** categories into substantive regions of social life.⁵

As an alternative, Gelb proposes a theory which recognises that "it is not possible to distinguish the economic, political and ideological instances or moments of concrete social relations **except analytically**" (my emphasis) (ibid: 15) , and suggests a strategy of mobilising and organising the black working class against both its exploitation and its oppression **as a class**, in place of the CST strategy of mobilising a multi-class alliance "based on an ideology with no class content" (ibid: 11). While these remarks are interesting, they have clearly lost sight of the concept of national struggle - inevitable so, because the state is defined here as an **analytical** category which can only be distinguished from the economy analytically. This robs the state and the political terrain of its concrete and specific existence as a set of institutions and practices which is distinct from the economy. Gelb confuses the observation that the state and the economy cannot exist without each other, ie that the existence of a capitalist economy necessarily entails the existence of a state, with the idea that they are indistinguishable. The state and political contradictions then collapse into the economy, and the national question disappears.

Nolutshungu takes the discussion several steps further with an extended argument for the specificity of the political terrain. "The most important political concerns are also, naturally enough, the most potent symbols in the ideological struggles of the day. In our time they are those of freedom , self-determination and democracy... These are irreducibly political concerns." (Nolutshungu, 1983: 37). These concerns refer to "power and powerlessness, domination and submission, authority and obedience - notions that are at the centre of what, in any language, we mean by 'politics'." (ibid: 38)

5. ibid, p. 3ff. His argument here is unconvincing, since it is based on a limited number of texts and a selective reading of them. The quotes he uses to substantiate the argument can be contradicted by other quotes from the same sources, at least in the cases of "AP" and Nolutshungu.

Politics as a distinct terrain is less amenable than economics to comprehensive theorisation:

It is not a simple end-directed process conducted with measurable objects in a fairly limited range of probable combinations. It has either no object, or many objects that are both material and ideal, with the relation of means to ends often obscure. It is, strictly, not a system of processes but a field of practices, contingent and strategic... largely influenced by contingent historical circumstances often specific to each country, making generalisation difficult (ibid: 42).

Nolutshungu argues that political domination does not simply correspond to class domination; it can entail a "range of distinctive political and ideological relations as its supports... [which] may widen or narrow the range of those who are dominated..." (ibid: 55)

Nationalist resistance arises, then, "principally in relation to political domination and its very particular effects." (ibid: 56) The "problem of nationalism and nationalities, which so often seems difficult to understand in class terms alone, and is yet so important in the process of political change", can then best be understood in terms of the distinctiveness of politics, ie as a response to particular forms of domination (ibid). Although nationalism is primarily a response to relations of domination it can disrupt the order of exploitation as well and open the way to its overthrow. Nationalism can have different class meanings - it can provide a point of entry for socialist ideas, and it can be violently opposed to socialism. Its class meaning depends on class struggle within nationalism (ibid: 59).

Nolutshungu concludes that

The different mobilisational alternatives in relation to racial/national assertion were themselves profoundly influenced by the distinctive structural characteristics of the polity in such a way that they could not merely represent, with total fidelity, the contending interests of

classes economically defined... (ibid: 64)

It is in this sense that "the national struggles that have dominated black resistance are historically appropriate."

While Nolutshungu does point towards nationalism being a contested terrain itself, in which different class forces strive for hegemony, he does not adequately theorise the relation of class and class struggle to politics and national struggle. None the less, he does advance the search for a non-reductionist Marxism further than most other writers on the national question.

An anonymous writer in *Africa Perspective* (hereinafter referred to as AP) (*Africa Perspective*, 1983), for instance, attempts to provide an alternative to the economism of Wolpe (1975). Wolpe had criticised the SACP's formulation of CST as not specifying the relation between class exploitation and national oppression, and suggested that the specific form of class exploitation in South Africa, resting on the exploitation of labour power reproduced outside of the capitalist mode of production in the rural reserves, determined a colonial state form which would conserve pre-capitalist social relations in the rural reserves. This is a highly unsatisfactory account, for several reasons. As AP points out, it cannot explain the continuation of the colonial state form in the face of the accelerating economic and social 'dissolution' of the rural bantustans. It incorrectly locates the major contradiction in South Africa as existing between capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production (AP: 78, 81). Nor can it account for the fact that social formations such as Kenya and Botswana exhibit similar economic relations between rural areas and capitalist enclaves, and yet could hardly be characterised as 'colonial' in state form. This points to the fundamental economism of Wolpe's argument.

AP tries to move beyond Wolpe's economism by utilising Althusser's theoretical conception of a **principle determining contradiction** and a **dominant contradiction**. AP argues that in South Africa, while the principle determining contradiction is that between capital and labour, the dominant contradiction is that between the "white colonial block" and the "black colonised majority" (ibid: 80). This is an important move beyond the

monocausal determinism of Wolpe's argument. However, it is unsatisfactory because it does not succeed in specifying the relation between the two contradictions, nor on what basis the dominant contradiction is said to be dominant. AP describes the principle determining contradiction as relatively more abstract, since it is defined at the level of one instance only, ie the economy, although its effects reach throughout the social formation. The dominant contradiction on the other hand, which "designates the dominant line-up of social forces" is "relatively more concrete" since it "refers to the configuration of social forces across the social formation, and is not therefore abstracted from one specific instance." (ibid: 80)

The distinction between the two contradictions in terms of relative concreteness presumably could support a claim that racial oppression is closer to people's experience than is class exploitation and is therefore the correct contradiction to mobilise around. Gelb draws such a conclusion, as does Hudson (1986: 27ff), and both proceed to demonstrate that this argument cannot be sustained. However, to make such a claim seems to me something of a dead end. Likewise, AP's theoretical approach is unsatisfactory because he/she does not explain the nature or origins of the dominant contradiction.

However, the theoretical picture changes radically if one follows Nolutshungu's line of argument and locates the dominant contradiction at the level of the state and politics, ie it corresponds to Laclau's contradiction between the people and the powerblock. Then the claim that in terms of political strategy the dominant contradiction is that between the white colonial block and the black colonised block no longer rests on the claim that this contradiction is more concrete or that it is closer to subjective experience, but on the nature of this contradiction as the dominant political contradiction constituted by the state form and the relations of domination and subordination this entails. It is this that makes national liberation struggle the "historically appropriate" political strategy.

The question still remains though, as to what the relation between the class contradiction at the level of the economy, and the political contradiction at the level of the state, might be.

Wolpe (1987), for example, points out - as does Gelb - that 'pure' class does not exist - that class in South Africa is racially structured, or that racial categories are internal to class relations. The class contradiction is thus fractured and shaped by the political contradiction. The state, on the other hand, does not simply secure 'white' interests - it secures the interests of the capitalist class. Its structures and practices are, therefore, shaped in a fundamental way by class interests. For their part, nationalism and politics do not transcend class interests either, but, in the end, support the interests of one or other fundamental social class.

It is clear, therefore, that these two contradictions - and other secondary contradictions - are not isolated from each other, but act and react dialectically upon each other. This is a highly abstract and general statement. It seems reasonable to accept, however, that it is impossible to discover theoretically any determination more specific than this. The **only way** to uncover and analyse the relation between these two major - and other secondary - contradictions is through **historical** analysis of the concrete development of the social formation. It is impossible to arrive at a **structural** explanation for a particular state form, or for the content of ruling class or popular ideologies, or for the constitution of various social forces. The only possible explanation is an historical explanation that can capture the development of forces and structures in struggle.

Cutler et al (1978) put forward a formulation which conceptualises this point. They argue that for a particular form of economy to exist certain political, ideological, etc., conditions have to be met. These are the **conditions of existence** of that economy. Thus for example a capitalist economy presupposes certain political, ideological and legal conditions of existence; for instance, "a legal system with definite forms of property and contract". However, "these are abstract and general conditions"; "the concept of determinate relations of production does not tell us in what precise form those effects will be secured, nor does it tell us the precise character of the relations that secure them." (Cutler et al, 1978: 209) The actual way, then, that these conditions of existence are secured is a matter for historical, empirical investigation.

5.4 The leadership of the working class

Although Laclau claims that popular democratic ideologies are necessarily articulated with class discourses and therefore cannot exist distinct from fundamental class forces, he does not demonstrate why this should be so. In his concrete analysis of Fascism in Germany he fails to show any concrete organisational link between the fascists and monopoly capital (Laclau, 1977: 159). This connects with a deeper problem in his argument: classes are taken as pre-given forces, constituted by the relations of production, which are then able to engage in struggle for hegemony at the political-ideological level. Laclau argues that 'the people' and their popular democratic ideologies have to be articulated into a class force, but evades the question of how the working class comes to be constituted as a political force capable of articulating 'the people' and winning a leading position in popular democratic struggle (Nolutshungu's discussion suffers from similar flaws).

However, as I have argued above, classes are not already given as constituted social forces: they have to be organised and built, and there is a struggle over how they are to be constituted. Cutler et al allow us to conceive of a classless nationalist struggle, ie one in which the working class is not constituted as a political force, and in which the bourgeoisie is not detectably present. Such a struggle would be organised in opposition to the particular forms of domination in that society, ie national oppression. Thus it would constitute a direct challenge to the dominant political powers, particularly the state. Yet it would not challenge the conditions of existence of capitalism. In other words, it would challenge the particular political forms through which, historically, capitalism's conditions of existence have been secured in that country, yet it would not necessarily entail a challenge to capitalism as such. In the event of success new social groups might come to power, the state might be radically restructured, and it would entail a definite defeat for the social groups that had controlled the state; and yet it would continue to be a capitalist state maintaining the conditions of existence of a capitalist economy. It could be argued that such a

form of nationalist struggle, is objectively in the interests of the bourgeoisie, although organised and led by the petty bourgeoisie.

For such a nationalist challenge to actually ensue in the end of capitalism and the construction of socialism, it would have to entail a fundamental challenge to the conditions of existence of capitalism as such. Such a challenge cannot be conceived of only at the level of ideological discourse (which is a definite weakness in Laclau's discussion): it also has to be conceived of organisationally.

Since the domination of the working class in all these sites is the most critical condition for the continued existence of capitalism, a challenge to capitalism would necessarily entail organising and building the working class as a social and political force at all those sites where it is exploited, socially reproduced, oppressed and dominated. This means organising and engaging in struggles at the workplace, in the community, in schools, and more generally against an oppressive state. Since the working class needs powerful, resilient organisation with a depth of leadership and a mass base if it is to mount a serious challenge to capitalism, organisation at all these sites needs to be democratic and ensure mass participation and control. Such organisation is also in itself a challenge to the structures and practices of capitalist society, which are designed to rob ordinary people of power and control over their lives.

It is clear that FOSATU made a historical contribution to the development of the working class by building such organisation at one site of struggle, the point of production. This particular site is, again, critical for the challenge to capitalism, since it is the site of production and appropriation of social wealth.

Furthermore, such a challenge to capitalism would entail linking the various sites where the working class is organised, through a network of organisation, so that the working class becomes a powerful whole, a social force, able to combine the range of local, particular struggles into one overall struggle against a system of exploitation and oppression. Building the working class

as a social force in this way gives it the capacity to exert leadership over a range of popular struggles, which is part of the process of building hegemony. If organisation is conceived of in this way, it entails organising, or stimulating the organisation of, not only workers, and not only the working class more broadly defined, but also other popular classes and strata, so that they coalesce around the organisations of the working class.

Some of the more populist unions that affiliated to the UDF took seriously the task of linking and combining struggles, but in the process tended to neglect building resilient, democratic organisation at the point of production. It is apparent that there is a tension between putting energy and resources into building shopfloor organisation, on the one hand, and helping to build community organisation and participating in political campaigns on the other. It is this tension that accounted for some of the differences between SFAWU militants and MAWU militants in FOSATU.

Finally, a challenge to capitalism would require that the working class take up the political issues and tasks of the day in relation to state power. In a country characterised by national oppression, it would require that the working class take up the national task of liberating the people. Working class organisations would have to become the main organising force within the nationalist struggle so as to become hegemonic. This would involve a range of organisations - trade unions, popular fronts located in the community, working class political organisations, etc.

It is in these various ways that the working class, defined by the primary contradiction in the economy, would become the leading force in the dominant political contradiction. Political victory would then pave the way for economic transformation.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has ranged far and wide in its attempt to understand the political changes that have taken place in the trade union movement between 1980 and 1986. It has ranged from an exploration of the experiences, struggles and ideas of a particular group of worker activists in Springs, through a general critical analysis of workerism in FOSATU, to a discussion of class reductionism, politics and the 'national question' in Marxism. At times the connection between the Springs case-study and the theoretical reflections may seem tenuous.

But my intention in the theoretical chapters has been twofold: firstly, to find the theoretical tools that will explain the experiences and struggles of the Springs workers and explain the rise to dominance of their political position in COSATU; and secondly, to use their experiences to help me elaborate the theoretical foundation of the political position which they hold, ie., the Congress position of the national liberation movement.

In terms of social analysis the implication of my line of argument is that the trade union as an analytical category has limited value in trying to explain the political consciousness and actions of workers. While there are certain similarities between trade unions in Britain, for example, and trade unions in South Africa (in terms of their collective bargaining functions), politically they are completely different, and this difference cannot be explained with reference to the different structures and practices in the trade unions, nor can it be explained simply in terms of the character of the primary contradiction, ie the different labour process, the different character of exploitation and economic crisis in the different countries. The difference

can only be explained with reference to the historically specific nature of the political contradiction and political terrain. This means, too, that the sociological enterprise of comparing the 'social movement unions' of Brazil, South Africa and Poland, while it captures the common element, ie. large scale mass production, can only provide limited insight if it leaves out of account the historical specificity of the 'national question' in each country. Thus the rise to dominance of the Congress position in the trade union movement, a development which the Springs case-study seeks to explore, cannot be explained without reference to the specifically political terrain on which the forces of national oppression and national liberation are organised.

In terms of **political practice**, the implication of my argument is that the trade union can only achieve its full political potential if it is part of an alliance: in the first place, an alliance of organisations located in different sites of struggle - precisely in order to grasp, deepen and link Althusser's "circumstances and currents", his "vast accumulation of contradictions"; and in the second place, a popular alliance of the different classes and strata that make up the oppressed people. The Springs case study clearly illustrates an attempt by organised workers to build this sort of alliance; in doing so they provide challenges to and insights for political theory in its attempt to understand the significance of their strategy.

The necessity for alliances can be illustrated with reference to civic associations. A civic association on its own is not an **organ of popular power**, since it is not part of a fundamental challenge to the relations of domination and subordination. It only develops into an organ of popular power once it is linked with a network of such organisations - amongst the youth, the unemployed and the women, at the workplace and in the schools, and once that network is perceived by the participants in it to be part of an overall challenge to the current social order as maintained by the state, ie as a struggle for the liberation of all the oppressed people.

The same applies to trade unions. While the struggle to **establish** trade unions in the face of intense repression appears to be -

and is - in itself a political struggle and a political task, once the trade unions have established their right to exist and become part of an institutionalising of industrial conflict, their shop steward committees and shop steward councils cannot be considered to be organs of working class power in the transformational sense. They only become such organs when they are linked in with other organs of popular power as one component of a general struggle for power at all sites where the relations of domination deny power to the people. Thus the workers interviewed clearly **perceived** FOSATU as tending towards economism and avoiding politics for bread and butter issues - whatever the **intentions** of the workerist leadership may have been - precisely because it avoided alliances.

But for trade unions - and other popular organisations - to attain their full political potential the popular alliance of which they are part cannot restrict itself to localised sites of struggle around local grievances; it has to take on the political struggle which is determined by a terrain structured by historically specific political and ideological institutions and practices. In other words, the popular alliance, and the trade union movement as a component of it, has to organise itself as a liberation movement engaged in a national liberation struggle in all arenas - national, international, within the ruling block, as well as amongst the oppressed people. If liberation is to open up the possibility of a transition to socialism the working class has to become the leading force in the liberation movement. The working class can only win such a position if its organisations become the major organisational and ideological forces in building the movement, organising the necessary alliances and promising victory through their demonstrated power and militance.

Again, the case-study of Springs shows a group of working class leaders coming to this realisation and engaging in a struggle within the trade union movement to align it with the national liberation movement.

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