

**“THIS THING IS HISTORICAL!”:
UNDERSTANDING NUMSA’S SPLIT WITH
COSATU THROUGH THE LENS OF
PERMANENT CONTENTION**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the processes that have led to the fracturing of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), South Africa's largest trade union federation, in the wake of the federations largest affiliate, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, (NUMSA), resolving to break with the Tripartite Alliance at its December 2013 Congress. The Alliance between COSATU, the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party has been in power in South Africa since the end of Apartheid in 1994, and the split that has taken place within COSATU is closely related to the political dynamics of this partnership. Furthermore, the thesis considers the implications for the labour movement, and for labour relations in general, in South Africa. The thesis represents an examination of competing traditions and political agencies of labour unionism in South Africa that predate the formation of both COSATU and the Tripartite Alliance. This is done to provide a fresh perspective on debates around the relationship between COSATU in the ANC, which have generally focused on the durability and desirability of this Alliance between organised labour and the ruling party, rather than on the heterogenous political and organisational tendencies that exist within the COSATU itself. In doing so, while acknowledging the role that the ANC's record in government and the response of the state towards labour mobilisations has played in the split that has taken place, the thesis argues that the political dynamics of competing traditions and agencies within COSATU itself must be understood in order to develop a complete analysis of what has taken place. The thesis is informed by qualitative fieldwork conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews and participant observations, carried out within NUMSA grassroots structures and among grassroots NUMSA representatives. The contribution to knowledge made by this thesis is two-fold. Firstly, the thesis draws upon fieldwork to provide an account of the Tripartite Alliance as it has been understood by NUMSA activists, and an understanding of what led the union to resolve to break with the Alliance and begin the process of exploring new working-class political formations such as the United Front and the establishment of a worker's socialist party. Secondly, while the thesis situates its understanding of the South African labour movement in both the pre- and post-Apartheid contexts in the theoretical framework provided by John Kelly's (1998) Mobilisation Theory, the thesis proposes an adaptation to this theory in the form of the concept of Permanent Contention, in order to allow for the development of an account that considers both the dynamic interaction of contention between labour movements and the state, but also the dynamic interaction of competing political and organisational tendencies, traditions and models of unionism within labour movements themselves. Through this process, the conflict that exists within the South African labour movement is conceptualised as primarily representing a conflict between populist and shopfloor traditions of labour unionism, and it is argued that the split that has taken place within COSATU, and even the new labour federation that has been formed in the wake of this split, the South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU) represents the re-emergence of a historically contingent tradition of labour unionism; the tradition of the shopfloor.

ACRONYMS

AMCU - Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union

ANC - African National Congress

BEE - Black Economic Empowerment

CEC - Central Executive Committee

COSAS - Congress of South African Students

COSATU - Congress of South African Trade Unions

CPSA - Communist Party of South Africa

CSAAWU - Commercial Stevedoring Agricultural and Allied Workers Union

COPE - Congress of the People

CUSA - Council of Unions of South Africa

DA Democratic Alliance

EFF - Economic Freedom Fighters

FAWU - Food and Allied Workers Union

FOSATU - Federation of South African Trade Unions

GAWU - General and Allied Workers Union

GEAR - Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy

GFWBF - General Factory Workers Benefit Fund

ICU - Industrial and Commercial Workers Union

LIMUSA - Liberated Metalworkers Union of South Africa

LRA - Labour Relations Act

MACWUSA - Motor Assembly and Component Workers Union of South Africa

MAWU - Metal and Allied Workers Union

MICWU - Motor Industry Combined Workers Union

MIEU - Motor Industry Employee's Union of South Africa

MWT - Marxist Workers Tendency

NAAWU - National Automobile and Allied Workers' Union

NDP - National Development Plan

NEC - National Executive Committee

NUM - National Union of Miners
NUMSA - National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
PA - Patriotic Alliance
PDF - Political Discussions Forums
RDP - Reconstruction and Development Program
RDO - Rock Drill Operator
SAAPAWU - South African Agricultural, Plantation and Allied Workers Union
SAAWU - South African Allied Workers Union
SACLA - South African Confederation of Labour
SACP - South African Communist Party
SACTU - South African Congress of Trade Unions
SAFTU - South African Federation of Trade Unions
SARHWU - South African Railways and Harbour Workers Union
SMU – Social Movement Unionism
SRWP - Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party
TGWU - Transport and General Workers Union
TUACC - Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Council
TUCSA - Trade Union Council of South Africa
UDF - United Democratic Front
UMMAWOSA - United Metal, Mining and Allied Workers of South Africa
WASP - Workers and Socialist Party
WOSA - Workers Organisation for Socialist Action

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1. Introduction: NUMSA, the Tripartite Alliance and the Split Within COSATU

In December 2013, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) was by far the largest federation of organised labour in South Africa, representing some 1.8 million workers from across 21 affiliate trade unions. The federation, which was formed in 1985 in a bid to unite politically and organisationally disparate unions and federations in struggle, boasts a militant activist history and played a pivotal role in organising resistance to the Apartheid regime both in workplaces and in the poor black South African townships. The federation enjoyed an established reputation among the black South African working class, and indeed around the world, as a force which had been key to the struggles against Apartheid and was at the forefront of defending the rights and living standards of the working class in South Africa and internationally. Throughout the history of South Africa in the post-Apartheid period, it has retained its position as the key representative of organised labour in South Africa and boasts a political significance reaching far beyond workplaces.

For almost the entirety of its history, COSATU has been a partner in the 'Tripartite Alliance' alongside the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP). The federation and its predecessors played a fundamentally pivotal role in the struggle against the old Apartheid regime and for the transformation of South Africa into a multi-racial democracy, in addition to supplying the support of the black working-class social base upon which much of the ANC's support has historically been built. The social importance of COSATU is therefore intimately connected to the capacity of the ANC government to reproduce

the legitimacy, support, and hegemonic position in relation to the black working-class majority in the country, and to continue its unchallenged position as the sole party of government in South Africa. As such, political developments within the labour federation are of huge importance, not only in terms of the South African labour movement and to labour relations within the country, but to the political situation in South Africa in general.

However, in recent years the Tripartite Alliance and COSATU itself has faced the most serious challenge in its history, because of the political stance adopted by the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA). Following a sharp decline in the membership of the National Union of Mineworkers, NUM, NUMSA became for a short period the largest affiliate union within COSATU. At their December 2013 Special National Congress however NUMSA passed a series of resolutions which would permanently alter the landscape of relations between labour and the state in South Africa. The union resolved that, “the Alliance is dysfunctional, in crisis and paralysed”, and further that “COSATU is no longer a campaigning federation” and was at risk of becoming a “labour desk” for the ANC and therefore was guilty of “consciously or unconsciously advancing the neo-liberal project underway in South Africa.” (NUMSA, 2014a) Consequently, NUMSA’s Special National Congress determined that it would no longer support the ANC financially or politically, that the union would call upon COSATU to organise a Special Congress to resolve “the current crisis in the federation”, and that COSATU must break with the Tripartite Alliance as “the time for looking for an alternative has arrived” (NUMSA, 2014a). Finally, NUMSA resolved to “lead in the establishment of a new United Front that will coordinate struggles in the workplace and in communities” and to “explore the establishment of a Movement for Socialism”, as the working class needs a

political organisation committed in its policies and actions to the establishment of a Socialist South Africa.” (NUMSA, 2014a)

The December 2013 Congress resolutions taken by NUMSA represented a clear statement of intent, with the union not only explicitly rejecting the Tripartite Alliance but signalling clearly that it would fight for COSATU to end the partnership with the ruling party. However, the union’s decisions precipitated a crisis within the federation. Less than a year later NUMSA was expelled from COSATU by the Central Executive Committee (CEC) which effectively confirmed a split in the federation, with eight unions boycotting COSATU structures in protest. By 2017, a new rival federation, the South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU) had been formed, which held no allegiance to the ruling ANC or, at this stage, any other political party.

Significantly, NUMSA’s Congress decisions followed in the wake of a turbulent and perhaps decisive year for COSATU. In the Rustenburg mining region in 2012, COSATU’s largest affiliated union, the National Union of Miners (NUM) saw a huge wave of defections to their increasingly more militant rival the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU). This wave of defections began in the Impala Platinum mine and spread to others, including the Lonmin mine where the infamous Marikana Massacre took place. Mining forms an extremely significant sector within the South African economy, as Twala notes:

“In 2009 mining contributed 8.8 per cent directly and 10 per cent indirectly to the country’s gross domestic product (GDP), sustained approximately one million jobs and created roughly 10.5 billion rand in corporate tax receipts.” (Twala, 2013, p61)

However, it is also a sector characterised by massive exploitation amongst the work force. Mine workers are “consciously divided on ethnic, racial and regional lines” by employers, labour brokers are used to keep wages low, and the ANC government is perceived not to have made a “serious attempt to enforce the industry’s legal obligations”, including providing housing for employees (Twala, 2013, pp62-63). Most mineworkers live in shack settlements often without access to electricity, roads, or proper sanitation (Coleman, 2012). Furthermore, it is a sector that until the arrival of AMCU on the scene had been dominated in terms of worker organisation by NUM, a union widely recognised as playing an important role in the struggle against Apartheid and one of the most vocal champions within COSATU of the Tripartite Alliance.

The 2012 wave of mine strikes began in January at the Impala Platinum mines, initiated by rock drill operators (RDO’s) who demanded an unprecedented 200% wage rise, from R3000 to R9000 per months, and spread throughout the mines. From the very beginning, the workers “rejected representation by the recognised trade union, the NUM and the formal industrial relations institutions” and in place formed “impromptu independent committees to advance their demands” (Chinguno, 2013, p160). The independent committees quickly became members of AMCU, a previously minor union which had broken away from the NUM in the late 1990’s and had officially formed in 2001. By May the same year, AMCU had recruited 12,000 new members working in Impala Platinum in Rustenburg; almost 40% of Impala’s total workforce in the region (de Lange, 2013). Inspired by the partial success of the strike at Impala Platinum, mineworkers at Lonmin in Marikana began organising in June. Again the strike was built initially by the rock drill operators, again the workers rejected the NUM and the official collective bargaining

agreements in favour of electing independent strike committees, and again the dispute led to a huge growth in AMCU membership, but this time the demands were even more radical. The mine workers demanded R12500 per month and refused to budge on this figure, even later on in the dispute after management violated its collective bargaining agreements with the NUM in order to meet with them and offer a compromise deal. (Chinguno, 2013, p162)

Violence had been in evidence during the Impala strikes, but at the Lonmin mine in Marikana it became even more pronounced. After management initially refused to acknowledge the workers' demands, arguing that they were illegitimate as they were not delivered through the proper NUM channels, the workers marched on the NUM offices, which led NUM officials to respond with violence:

“The stakes were too high for the NUM given how events unfolded at Impala and its subsequent loss of appeal to its membership. Thus, in a desperate attempt to extinguish the strike, the NUM branch officials opened fire at the march...two RDO's were killed as a result of the NUM shooting and several injured.” (Chinguno, 2013, p162)

The violence quickly spread, and there were several clashes between workers and police and mine security which left both workers and police officers dead. The escalation of violence came to a head on the 16th of August, when police opened fire on the striking miners, shooting dead 34 miners and leaving a further 78 wounded (Twala, 2013, p65). In the subsequent investigation into the events at Marikana, which is still ongoing, advocates for the miners have produced testimonies which state that some of the miners were shot dead as they attempted to surrender. Dali Mpfu, one of the main legal advocates for the Marikana workers, has described the

actions of the police as the “premeditated murder of defenceless people” (Mpfu, quoted in Hlongwane, 2012). To make matters worse, following the shootings 270 miners were actually charged with the deaths of their fellow strikers, with “the legal basis for the charges was found in the “common purpose” doctrine, ironically much favoured by apartheid prosecutors dealing with political unrest”, a decision which “caused both a national and an international outcry” (Serjeant At The Bar, 2012). The charges were later dropped, but the use of legislation commonly utilised by prosecutors under the old Apartheid system arguably be said to have contributed to creating the impression amongst workers that police and prosecutors were attempting to pin responsibility for the violence and deaths directly on them.

Furthermore, many have argued that the ANC government itself deliberately utilised repressive measures in order to forcibly put down the strike. The striking miners “accused the ruling party of having unleashed the police in dealing with the striking miners rather than forcing the employers to further negotiate with them” (Twala, 2013, p64). This impression was arguably strengthened by the intervention of Cyril Ramaphosa, a member of the Lonmin board of directors, who was previously the general secretary of both NUM and the ANC. In a number of emails circulated between Ramaphosa and senior Lonmin and government officials just before the shooting, he claimed that the ““terrible events that have unfolded cannot be described as a labour dispute. They are plainly dastardly criminal [acts] and call for concomitant action” (Ramaphosa, quoted in Vermaak, 2013). It has been suggested that Ramaphosa’s actions are evidence of a high level of collusion between the ANC and Lonmin, further reinforcing the belief of the workers that their struggle was not just against their employers but against the ANC government itself. Following the

resignation of President Zuma in 2018, Ramaphosa was elected President of South Africa unopposed by the National Assembly (Whittles, 2018).

The effect of the defections on the NUM is potentially devastating. Once the largest affiliate union within COSATU, it has lost between 40,000 to 45,000 members in Rustenburg's platinum mines alone, as well as significant numbers in the gold mining sector. This decline does not just diminish the importance of the NUM as a workplace union; it will also place huge financial strain on the union, which could have lost "as much as R45-million a year" in membership subscriptions (Steyn, 2013). This could also mean "a sharp drop in COSATU's financial sustainability because the NUM is the biggest component of COSATU"; in sharp contrast, AMCU's membership "has jumped from between 40,000 and 50,000 a year ago to a conservative estimate of 130 000" (Steyn, 2013).

The year did not end well for COSATU either. In November, Tony Ehrenreich, the regional secretary of COSATU in the Western Cape region announced that the farm workers strike that had been in progress since August was to be suspended. However, thousands of farm workers defied the announcement and continued the strike. This revealed clearly COSATU's stark lack of authority and legitimacy among farm workers in the Western Cape which in truth has been developing for years. Rival unions such as the women-led Sikhula Sonke farm workers union and the leftist Commercial Stevedoring Agricultural and Allied Workers Union (CSAAWU) are contributing to this declining legitimacy and were beginning to draw serious labour support away from the COSATU-affiliated Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU) (Majavu, 2012).

On August 27th, 2012, the farmworkers strike began “on Keurboschkloof Farm near De Doorns after farm workers claimed that the farm's new owners asked them to sign a new contract that represented a cut in wages”, and quickly spread to other farms (Christie, 2012). The industrial action clearly took both COSATU and the ANC by surprise, and many journalists and commentators have observed that “the strike appeared to be spontaneous and not organized by any union”, unsurprisingly given the low levels of union membership (Majavu, 2012). Indeed, the strikes which began in the Hex River Valley and which involved an initial strike wave of 9,000 farm workers were “entirely organic”, mirroring the worker committees which had appeared in the Rustenburg mines (Christie, 2012).

In the Western Cape region, farm workers were more likely to be members of non-COSATU affiliated unions such as Sikhula Sonke and CSAAWU. Following the collapse of the old South African Agricultural, Plantation and Allied Workers Union (SAAPAWU), FAWU was “designated to organize the farm workers but never did” (Majavu, 2012). This lack of any real membership base has not prevented FAWU and COSATU officials from joining a “negotiating team” formed to represent the striking workers, which was made up of local ANC councillors and labour brokers but not a single farm worker (Christie, 2012). The farm workers’ demands, which initially focused on a monthly wage of R12500, was quickly “downgraded” to a more modest R150 per day, or R3300 per month. (Majavu, 2012)

COSATU’s lack of authority in the region was clearly demonstrated however when Tony Ehrenreich, the Regional Secretary of the federation in the region, attempted to announce the suspension of the strike in November. Workers simply continued the strike with redoubled militancy. Even in January, when Ehrenreich announced, “a

wage raise of R105 per day for farmworkers” (Davis, 2013) had been agreed (although this was not confirmed by employers), as Davis noted:

“In De Doorns, workers made it quite clear that they would not be dictated to by COSATU. At labour hearings held on Wednesday evening in De Doorns, workers reportedly said that they would not settle for less than R150 per day, and would not heed calls to halt the strike.” (Davis, 2013)

Just as in the Rustenburg strikes, the dispute suggested a high level of organisation which had been achieved independently of COSATU, and furthermore that the efforts of COSATU and its affiliates to remain in control of the dispute, such as the ‘negotiating team’ made up to downgrade the strikers’ demands, were clearly not effective. Furthermore, just as in the Rustenburg strikes, state violence against the strikers was very much in evidence. A delegation from the Human Rights Commission visited De Doorns following allegations that police have colluded with farm owners to suppress the strikes and “used excessive force on workers” (Davis, 2013). Private security firms were brought in by farm owners, and there were reports of these firms being responsible for the shootings of farm workers, including at least one fatal shooting (Davis, 2012). The violence was not only perpetrated against the farm workers either; whole communities have been subjected to violence and intimidation. A shop worker is alleged to have been murdered, “shot and beaten by police while in the spaza shop in which he worked”, locals have been shot with both rubber bullets and live ammunition, and even “a 10-year-old girl...was shot with a rubber bullet below her eye outside her home” (Davis, 2013; Fogel, 2013).

The strikes in both Rustenburg and the Western Cape related to working conditions which, in the eyes of many, have remained largely unchanged in the post-

Apartheid era. Furthermore, both struggles developed very clearly outside of COSATU's structures, and outside of COSATU's influence and control. This is significant, because as Alexander Beresford notes, critics of the Tripartite Alliance have long suggested that COSATU's partnership with the ANC has served to contain and to limit the emergence of worker militancy and of working-class politics in South Africa:

"It has been argued that COSATU's leadership have channelled...militancy away from a broader political challenge to the ANC's nationalist project...exemplified by the COSATU leadership's embrace of Jacob Zuma as their political champion in the 2007 ANC succession race." (Beresford, 2012a, p572)

Therefore, NUMSA's decisions to break with the ANC and the Alliance and to pursue the formation of a worker's party could be interpreted as signalling that a limit had been reached in terms of COSATU's ability to maintain both its position as the dominant force in the South African labour movement, and its ability to maintain and promote the existing political settlement in the country.

However, the split within COSATU and the formation of SAFTU could arguably be seen as surprising to many scholars and commentators. As will be shown later in this introductory chapter, a debate has been taking place on the merits of the Tripartite Alliance and the partnership between COSATU and South Africa's ruling party almost since the end of the Apartheid system and the advent of multi-racial democracy. But this debate has always focused on the durability of the Alliance itself, and in general has not been focused on the issue of whether COSATU itself would experience a split. This thesis seeks to understand and explain the processes that led NUMSA to take the decision to break its support for the ANC,

and consequently the root causes of the split within COSATU. The arguments presented within the thesis seek to explain why, despite the expectations of many labour scholars, it was COSATU itself that split, and not the Tripartite Alliance itself. In order to do this, it draws on interviews with NUMSA activists, both at the grassroots and in the national leadership, as well as activists working with NUMSA on their project. This is done in order to contextualise and explain the development of the split in COSATU and the formation of SAFTU, from the perspective of NUMSA members themselves.

1.1 The ANC and Post-Apartheid South Africa:

South Africa in the post-Apartheid era is a hugely important economy within the modern global order, to the extent that it has been described by some as an “African Superpower” (Shaw, Cooper and Antkiewicz, 2007, p1259). Perhaps even more significantly, in 2011 the ‘Rainbow Nation’ formally entered the “BRICS club” (consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China and now South Africa) which is recognised as a hugely important bloc of non-Western economic powers (Hervieu, 2011). It is an extremely wealthy country in terms of natural resources and the size of its economy.

Following the end of apartheid and the establishment of South Africa as a multi-racial democracy, the country has “found a niche in global supply chains of automotive parts” and serves as “the economic and logistics hub for sub-Saharan Africa” (Shaw, Cooper and Antkiewicz, 2007, p1263). In terms of social development, since 1994 “almost 8.4million people have gained access to clean water, 3.8million to electricity, 1.5million to housing and 6.4million to sanitation” (Gumede, 2005, p97). Moreover, since the transition from the Apartheid era began,

the previously disenfranchised and hyper-exploited black majority has made enormous gains in terms of social and political rights.

Despite the enfranchisement of the black working-class majority, the increased access to basic services and the economic success of post-Apartheid South Africa however, the country remains plagued by poverty. In the early 2000's a quarter of the population still lived on less than \$1.25 a day, and some estimates of unemployment levels were as high as 40% (Gumede, 2005, p86). The economy was estimated to have "shed almost one million jobs, chiefly in the mining, agricultural and manufacturing sectors" between the end of Apartheid and 2005 (Gumede, 2005, p86). While inter-racial inequality has decreased sharply, the emergence of a narrow black capitalist class has fundamentally reshaped social relations, meaning intra-racial inequality has risen sharply (Seekings and Nattrass, 2002, p1). For the majority of black South Africans, the ANC, which has been in government throughout the post-Apartheid era, has arguably failed to meet the expectations they had of life after apartheid. While the formal system of racial oppression which Apartheid represented has now ended, the reality of South Africa in the twenty first century does not match the vision of society that black workers organised in COSATU struggled to realise. This is underlined by the fact that South Africa has been dubbed "the protest capital of the world", because of the sheer quantity of protests that regularly take place in the country; most of these protests take place in the poor townships and are motivated by failures of service delivery or an inability to access basic services (Bianco, 2013).

The transition of the ANC from the party of the anti-Apartheid movement to the party of government has placed enormous strain on the relationship between the ANC and COSATU. Prior to 1994, both the ANC and COSATU had held a firm

commitment to the Freedom Charter, which contained a set of economic principles based on nationalisation and collective ownership of industry and resources by the black South African majority. Such a radical plan was deemed necessary, in order to challenge the almost total control of the South African economy by the white Afrikaner minority, and the ANC continued to voice their support for this economic program right up until Mandela's release in 1992. In his first public address following his release, Mandela clearly stated the ANC's intentions:

“Nationalisation of the mines, banks, and monopoly industry is the policy of the ANC, and a change or modification of our views in this regard is inconceivable” (Mandela, quoted in Gumede, 2005, p68)

Mandela and the ANC contended that such a radical proposal was necessary in order to eradicate the economic inequalities of Apartheid. However, this strategy was anathema to capital, both domestically and internationally. At meetings with international bankers, industrialists, and heads of state in the period immediately preceding the end of Apartheid, it was made clear to ANC leaders that foreign direct investment for the new democratic South Africa would depend upon “orthodox, market-friendly policies” (Gumede, 2005, p70). The threat of this radical state intervention into the South African economy brought the “newly unbanned ANC leadership...under a set of local and international pressures to change its economic thinking” (Webster, 2001, p260). Mandela and the ANC quickly began to retreat, and by 1993 any reference to nationalisation was “expunged from all ANC documents” (Gumede, 2005, p71). This marked the beginning of a dramatic policy shift, which culminated in the acceptance of a market-led plan for the South African economy.

Following its election to power in 1994, the ANC government has pursued a predominantly neo-liberal approach to the development of the economy, particularly after the adoption of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR) in 1996 (Beresford, 2009, p393).

“GEAR recommended the complete privatisation of non-essential state-owned corporations and the partial privatisation of others. It called for wage-restraints by organised labour and the introduction of regulated flexibility in the labour market. It promised lower inflation and trade liberalisation, and the removal of most tariffs and other forms of protection by 2000.” (Gumede, 2005, p90)

The radical program of nationalisation and economic transformation, strongly supported by COSATU, gave way to the GEAR strategy. This went totally against the policy preferences and expectations of COSATU and its affiliates and in the eyes of many union members represented a shift away from radical economic transformation and towards an acceptance of the neoliberal economic paradigm that was so dominant within the global economy during the 1990's. Jeremy Cronin, a leading member of the SACP who later became a government minister, provides an explanation of why and how this took place:

“The triumph of neo-liberalism was at its zenith in the early 1990's...for a combination of reasons, including the sheer power, the ideological and hegemonic power of the neo-liberal model and the weakness of the left...laden with the responsibilities of governing, they were persuaded of certain aspects, not necessarily the whole package. The core aspects of the neo-liberal paradigm became very influential in government circles and in leading parts of the ANC.” (Cronin, quoted in Gumede, 2005, p76)

This clear divergence sowed the seeds for deep tensions within the Tripartite Alliance. COSATU's motivations for participating in the Alliance had always been clear; as the former General Secretary of COSATU Jay Naidoo pointed out before the ANC even came to power, the purpose of such a close relationship was "to influence the ANC-and in return, they seek to influence us" (Naidoo, quoted in Gumede, 2005, p75). COSATU as a federation has always sought to fight to influence the policies of the ANC in government, believing that the ANC would be receptive to the needs of the organised working class, and in exchange COSATU campaigned to build support for the ANC among the organised working class and beyond, allowing them to come to power virtually unchallenged. Undeniably, this influence has had some limited success, for example "the adoption of the Labour Relations Act (LRA), labour-friendly clauses in the constitution, and the Basic Conditions of Employment Act", measures which went some way to guaranteeing trade union rights within law (Habib and Taylor, 1999a, p113).

However, COSATU enjoyed far less success when it came to influencing the ANC on the question of broader macroeconomic policy and strategy. Throughout the early 1990's, when the ANC was transitioning from a party committed to radical restructuring of the economy to the party which adopted the "anti-poor" GEAR strategy and the neo-liberal approach that it embodied, COSATU was "pointedly excluded from the process that led to its adoption" (Habib and Taylor, 1999a, p113). While the political aspects of constitutional negotiations were led by COSATU-affiliated union leaders such as Cyril Ramaphosa (now President of South Africa), economic negotiations took place "behind closed doors", with COSATU effectively shut out of the debates (Gumede, 2005, p75).

Despite the promises that the party made during the years of struggle against Apartheid, when in government the ANC has pursued a neoliberal economic strategy that has failed to deliver significant improvements in the lives of the black working-class majority upon which the party's support is largely based. Post-Apartheid South Africa, therefore, has been described as a country in which "the working class and the poor face a state which is out to cut state spending and enforce wage restraint, whilst foreign investors and big business are eagerly embraced so as to fulfil the aspirations of an emerging 'patriotic bourgeoisie'" (Habib and Taylor, 1999a, p115). Indeed, in recent years a prominent South African journalist has described the ANC as "consumed by corruption, arrogance, greed and a growing distance from its core source of power and legitimacy – the poor" (Malala, 2012). Despite this however, COSATU has remained loyal to the ANC and continues to participate in the Tripartite Alliance. This presents a paradoxical situation in which we see "a labour-backed government coming to power and implementing neo-liberal economic and social policies that are at variance with labour's historic goals", which continues to enjoy the support of South Africa's largest trade union federation (Webster, 2001, p255). This is of course far from unusual; however, this relationship between organised labour and the ruling party is clearly one in which significant tensions exist.

Given the lack of input that COSATU has into the economic policy strategy of the ANC, throughout the post-Apartheid years there has been an intense debate around the durability of the Alliance, and how it has survived intact thus far. One of the key reasons for the continued existence of the Tripartite Alliance is because there remains a huge degree of loyalty to the ANC amongst the black South African working class. Beresford, who noted that "support for the ANC remains strong amongst the organised working class", because they see the ANC as "the figurehead

of the liberation struggle”, has argued this most recently (Beresford, 2012b, p883). Undoubtedly, the symbolic role of the ANC has been hugely important in securing its continued and ongoing support from black working-class South Africans. Moreover, the ANC actively seeks to tap into this source of legitimacy as was shown by their slogan in the May 2014 General Election, “Do it for Madiba”, following the death of Nelson Mandela earlier that year. However, there are limits to this strategy of securing legitimacy and support. The legacy of Apartheid remains fresh in the memories of those who lived through it, but a new generation of South Africans, the so called ‘born frees’, are less inclined to forgive the failings of the ANC, and a new generation of ANC politicians find it increasingly difficult to link their popularity and support to the struggle against Apartheid.

Ironically, however, the policy alternative to radical economic transformation adopted by the ANC can perhaps help us to partially understand how and why COSATU’s allegiance to the ruling party has continued. This is the policy of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), described by Southall as being “at the root of the ANC’s dilemmas as an organisation” (Southall, 2008, p282). One of the chief features of Apartheid was a formalised system of economic oppression that was “so extreme that it had stunted the growth of both a black middle class and black capitalism”; furthermore, even after the formal end of Apartheid, it remained impossible for a black capitalist class to emerge, because of “its lack of capital and capitalist expertise” (Southall, 2008, pp283-284). The abandonment of plans to radically collectivise and restructure the economy left a huge hole in the ANC’s strategy to address the economic legacy of Apartheid, one that desperately needed a new, market-friendly solution. This came in the form of BEE, essentially a crude form of affirmative action, which led to “a dramatic growth in the income, wealth and

asset base of a tiny group of black businessmen” (Habib and Taylor, 2001, p218). This was achieved primarily through the sale of shares in State Owned Enterprises (SOE’s) to blacks (essentially a form of privatisation), at a heavily discounted rate facilitated by the creation of the National Empowerment Fund (NEF), and also through legislation that requires large conglomerates and corporations to achieve a minimum level of black ownership (Southall, 2007, p208).

The hugely problematic pitfalls of BEE began with the fact that the skills and experience required to run large organisations or businesses did not exist among the black majority population, because of the economic oppression and deprivation which had characterised Apartheid and prevented the black population from being in such positions and consequently from developing and accumulating the required skills. Therefore, a situation arose in which “the state sector served as the training ground in corporate management, knowledge and the expertise required by aspirant black capitalists for launching themselves into the private sector” (Southall, 2008, p284). In practical terms, this has meant that for the most part only senior civil servants and former government ministers have benefitted from BEE. Furthermore, the effect of BEE has been to create a small black capitalist class, who have profited enormously from the largesse of the ANC in government, at the expense of vast majority of the black working class, as Southall notes:

“BEE has worked overwhelmingly to create a tiny black, and enormously rich, corporate elite at the expense of a distribution of corporate and government largesse to a more ‘broadly based’ set of black recipients. A closely related complaint is that this tiny elite is overwhelmingly the creation of its strong connections with the ANC, that it is highly dependent upon the state, and that it is propelling South Africa towards a path of ‘crony capitalism’.” (Southall, 2007, p69)

BEE has been justified by the belief of many ANC leaders that “a black capitalist class is one of the pillars of democracy in South Africa”, entirely necessary in order to de-racialise the old Apartheid economy (Gumede, 2005, p224). In one sense the resulting BEE program has been successful; it has eroded inter-racial inequality by granting access to the heights of South African capitalism to black South Africans. In another sense however, it has also caused huge inequality among black South Africans through the creation of a narrow black capitalist class, drawn almost exclusively from the upper echelons of the civil service and from the ranks of the ANC and its allies, including the leaders of the COSATU unions. Many of these leaders have become to wealthy businesspersons directly because of BEE. Perhaps the clearest example of this is Cyril Ramaphosa, the former general secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). Ramaphosa later became General Secretary of the ANC and then Deputy President of South Africa, while simultaneously becoming a prominent businessman (Gumede, 2005, p225). Indeed, while serving as Deputy President, Ramaphosa was a member of the Board of Directors at Lonmin, the company who own the Marikana mine at which the massacre took place and was directly implicated in the massacre as result of his pressurising police to take strong action against the strikers. Following the resignation of Jacob Zuma, Ramaphosa subsequently became President of South Africa.

Through what Southall refers to as ‘crony capitalism’, the ANC in government has been able to use state largesse to reward allies for political support, including the COSATU leadership. Indeed, it has become commonplace for labour leaders in COSATU to graduate to “key positions in government and big business” (Twala, 2013, p64). It is the contention of this thesis that this largesse has had a major influence on COSATU’s continuing support for the ANC, despite their neo-liberal

economic policies. In exchange, COSATU has arguably assumed the role of providing a 'safety valve' for militancy among workers and the radical demands that can accompany such militancy. It has become characterised by an "increasingly bureaucratised union leadership bypassing democratic procedures by reaching compromises and accommodations with management without the mandate of their more militant membership" (Beresford, 2012a, p572). This is significant, as it has provided the ANC with a means to encourage and reward loyalty from leaders within COSATU and its affiliate unions. Furthermore, COSATU has acted to stem any potential opposition to the ANC itself, as well as demobilising conflicts between workers and employers; the leadership of COSATU has actively discouraged any turn away from the ANC and towards a more radical political project. However, this thesis will also explain that some unions were more vulnerable to this process than others.

As a consequence of this demobilising effect on COSATU as a federation, combined with the ANC's abandonment of its commitment to radical economic transformation, inevitably debates have taken place on the nature of the relationship and whether or not the Alliance should continue.

1.2 Debates on the Direction of COSATU's Membership of the Alliance

While there has been much debate amongst scholars of labour movements in academic circles regarding the potential prospects for the relationship between COSATU and the ANC, these debates have focused primarily on how COSATU's leadership should approach the question of continuing participation in the Tripartite Alliance, "in the light of the ANC government's embracing of neo-liberal policies" (Buhlungu, 2005, p702). More specifically, this debate has been largely framed

around the question of whether or not COSATU as a federation could or should break the Alliance, and not on the question of what effect the Alliance partnership has had on unity *within* the federation. Consequently, these debates have in large part not anticipated or considered the possibility of contention and conflict developing within COSATU because of the Alliance partnership, such as that represented by NUMSA's 2013 Congress decisions, or indeed of the possibility of a split within COSATU itself.

Instead, discussion has focused on whether it would be desirable or useful for COSATU to continue with the Alliance or to end its relationship with the ruling party. Some have asserted that COSATU was compromising itself through its participation in the Alliance and receiving little in the way of policies sympathetic to labour in return. Others respond that in fact through the partnership with the ANC, COSATU has managed to secure some gains for unionised workers, and that therefore the partnership was something to be both protected and celebrated. A key development within this debate took place in the late 1990's, with an exchange of views between Adam Habib and Rupert Taylor on the one side, who argued that COSATU should break the Alliance, and Roger Southall and Geoffrey Wood on the other, who strongly opposed this idea. In a paper entitled '*Parliamentary Opposition and Democratic Consolidation in South Africa*', Habib and Taylor argue that COSATU has been unsuccessful in influencing the ANC in government, as demonstrated by the adoption of GEAR despite the opposition of organised labour, and that in fact it has been the ANC which has influenced COSATU:

"The Tripartite Alliance has not enabled COSATU and the SACP to imprint a developmentalist political economy on the post-Apartheid ANC government. Instead, continued participation in the Alliance has led to a situation where COSATU and the

SACP are under pressure to abandon their most progressive commitments.” (Habib and Taylor, 1999a, p266)

Habib and Taylor go on to state that “what is required is the development of a non-racial class politics that would counter the neo-liberal economic agenda of the African National Congress”, and that COSATU should play a significant role in such a development, which would require “the fracturing of the Tripartite Alliance” (Habib and Taylor, 1999a, p267).

Southall and Wood responded to this paper, acknowledging that tensions existed within the Alliance and that the ANC in government had not adopted an economic strategy favourable to COSATU or the wider working class and poor. They noted for example the fact that GEAR was “adopted...without adequate consultation with the partners in the Alliance, and that its macro-economic substance is actually regressive and unlikely to stimulate pro-poor friendly growth”. Nonetheless, they argued Habib and Taylor were “offering a prescription for disaster” by advocating that COSATU should break with the Alliance (Southall and Wood, 1999a, p71).

They justified this claim by citing the difficulties faced by the ANC government as a result of the global economic context of the 1990's, as a result of “the pressures associated with globalisation”, which they argued left national governments with “little choice but to follow certain broad macroeconomic strategies”; in broad terms, this meant acceptance of the neoliberal turn in the global economy.

This meant that COSATU could not expect the ANC to deliver the radical economic transformation that the organised working class hoped for, and that moreover the post-Apartheid government had introduced reforms which improved the bargaining power of trade unions, stating that “although the ANC is unable and,

indeed, unwilling to completely protect unions from an adverse global environment, a legislative base does exist for vigorous unions to look after themselves” (Southall and Wood, 1999b, p122). Southall and Wood therefore argued that COSATU’s affiliate unions and member’s interests are in fact best served through the federations continued membership of the Tripartite Alliance, in order to use their partnership with the ANC to promote the interests of its members and the cause of the working class, wherever possible (Southall and Wood, 1999, p122).

It is the contention of this thesis however that the quality and relevance of the debate was dramatically improved by the “‘politics from below’ approach” utilised by Alex Beresford in his recent contributions (Beresford, 2009, p394). The key qualitative difference between Beresford’s work and those of other authors is that it is focused on the attitudes and beliefs held by rank-and-file members and representatives of COSATU affiliates, as opposed to previous contributions which focused prescriptively on how the COSATU leadership should move forward. Beresford’s contribution is based upon data compiled through “over fifty in-depth, qualitative interviews with rank-and-file members of the NUM working at two Eskom power stations in Mpumalanga, as well as participant observation at union meetings, workshops, shop steward councils, and local ANC structures” (Beresford, 2009, p394). By focusing not just on the development of the relationship between COSATU and the ANC and the political context of post-Apartheid South Africa, but on the concerns and perspectives of the COSATU membership itself, Beresford provides a far more detailed analysis of the situation within COSATU, and thus is well positioned to provide a more in-depth analysis of the prospects for the federations relationship with the ANC.

Utilising this 'politics from below' approach based upon qualitative research among rank-and-file members of NUM (COSATU's largest affiliate union at the time) Beresford was able to make an important and timely contribution to the debate on the future relationship between COSATU and the ANC, avoiding a prescriptive analysis of what COSATU 'should' do and focusing on the attitudes of rank-and-file COSATU members to the Alliance. While Beresford recognises completely the challenge to the Alliance that the ANC's embrace of a neoliberal economic strategy represented, his analysis supported the idea that "workers continue to identify strongly with the ANC and that although they are acutely aware of its shortcomings, they believe the ANC *as an organization* is not a lost cause, and has the ability to be regenerated" (Beresford, 2009, p394, emphasis in original). This is significant, as while Beresford's findings suggested that rank-and-file COSATU members were deeply frustrated with individuals within the ANC government, most notably former President Thabo Mbeki, they still felt that the ANC as an organisation could be re-generated and re-invigorated, and saw the ascension of Jacob Zuma to the office of President of South Africa as part of this process:

"Whilst workers expressed disaffection with individuals like Mbeki or Moleketi and with the government as a whole, they continue to hold the ANC as an organization to be sacrosanct: the failures of the ANC government were considered to result from the failure of individual leaders to meet their expectations of representation, mediation, and accountability within the post-apartheid democratic era, rather than any irredeemable ideological shortcoming of the ANC itself. The logical corollary of this understanding was that the ANC itself was not, as yet, a lost cause and could

in fact be regenerated by reasserting control over the party and substituting in representative, 'comradely' leadership... Rightly or wrongly, Zuma was identified as a 'comrade'". (Beresford, 2009, pp410)

Thus, based on this 'politics from below' approach, Beresford was able to make a convincing argument to support the idea that despite frustrations on the part of COSATU members, loyalty towards the ANC among organised workers at the grassroots level had endured, and that the Tripartite Alliance could continue for many years to come. Indeed, the Tripartite Alliance is still in existence today.

However, while COSATU's alliance with the ruling party has continued, it has done so at the expense to the federation of many affiliate unions and hundreds of thousands of union members. While Beresford's work was a significant and important contribution to the debate on the relationship between COSATU and the ANC, like many other contributions, it did not consider the possibility that COSATU itself would experience a split as a result of the partnership. It is this contention of this thesis that in this debate, as all too often in academic debates surrounding organisations of the working class, the organisational and political character of COSATU has been assumed to be largely homogenous, when in fact COSATU like all labour unions and federations is of a highly heterogenous character. Within the federation exist distinct and even competing ideas, organisational norms and practices. It is argued that this is why COSATU has not uniformly broken its alliance with the ANC, but rather that the split reflects conflicting and contradictory approaches to questions of labour organisation. This thesis seeks to understand and explain the processes that led NUMSA to take the decision to break its support for

the ANC, and consequently the origins of the split within COSATU. The arguments presented within the thesis seek to explain why, despite the expectations of many labour scholars, it was COSATU itself that split, and not the Tripartite Alliance. In order to do this, it seeks to replicate the 'politics from below' approach utilised by Beresford and is based on interviews with NUMSA shop stewards and members at the grassroots level, as well as at the level of national leadership, and of activists who worked with NUMSA as they sought to build a United Front, and a party of the working class.

1.3 Research Aims, Arguments and Chapter Guide:

This thesis seeks to understand the processes that led NUMSA to break with the Tripartite Alliance, and in so doing contribute to an understanding of what has led one of the most significant labour federations in the history of the African continent to split in such a way. It furthermore seeks to understand what the implications of this split are for labour relations in South Africa, and what an analysis of this parting of the ways can tell us about the development of the contemporary South African labour movement. The arguments presented in this thesis are based on the results of interviews conducted among NUMSA office bearers, shop stewards and active members in two Johannesburg locals, and a subsequent analysis of the history of the development of labour organisation in South Africa. It will be argued that while disappointment and frustration at the record of the ANC in government has had a significant influence on NUMSA's decisions and the subsequent split, particularly in the wake of the ascension of Jacob Zuma to the Presidency and the Marikana Massacre, in fact the roots of this split have their origins in the Apartheid era and in the development of divergent trends within the labour movement. While COSATU has always been seen, particularly during the height of the struggle against

Apartheid, as a labour federation characterised by a high level of unity, in fact the formation of COSATU itself can be understood as a ‘strategic compromise’ between competing traditions of labour organisation and politics, which developed in two distinct periods in South Africa’s history. This is reflected in a quote taken from fieldwork and explored in detail in Chapter 5 from Steven Nhlapo, NUMSA’s Head of Collective Bargaining – “This Thing is Historical!” (Steven Nhlapo, 2014)

To accommodate this within a suitable theoretical framework, John Kelly’s mobilisation theory will be utilised to theorise the nature of this internal conflict, with a key adaptation proposed: that of *permanent contention*. This is offered as a lens through which the complex and multi-faceted nature of labour union agency can be understood. In this way, it will be argued that NUMSA’s Congress decisions, the subsequent split in COSATU and the formation of SAFTU, and even the re-emergence of debates around the need for a party of the working class in South Africa, can be understood as symptomatic of the re-emergence and the re-assertion of what will in this thesis be termed ‘shopfloor’ unionism, in distinct contrast to the ‘populist’ unionism of the Congress movement.

The thesis will proceed as follows; in the second chapter, the research methodology utilised will be presented and reflected upon. In the third chapter, John Kelly’s mobilisation theory will be outlined and applied to the struggle that NUMSA began within COSATU, with the addition of the proposed adaption of the concept of permanent contention; furthermore, the competing trends of labour unionism which existed within COSATU will be conceptualised as ‘shopfloor’ unionism and ‘populist’ unionism respectively. In the fourth chapter, the history of the labour movement in South Africa will be analysed to trace the history of the development of these competing trends within South Africa and to demonstrate the fact that COSATU itself

was formed from competing tendencies within the South African workers movement as a whole, and that tensions and even contradictions within the federation have existed since its inception. In the fifth chapter, the experiences of NUMSA in the post-Apartheid era will be discussed, to demonstrate how the shopfloor model of unionism has informed and shaped NUMSA's approach to the Alliance and explore the experiences and perspectives of NUMSA worker representatives on how the Alliance functioned (or did not). In the sixth chapter, a comparative analysis will be drawn between NUM and NUMSA, including some discussion of academic literature relating to the Marikana Massacre, to demonstrate the influences that distinct models and understandings of labour unionism have had on the two unions and show why their approach to the Alliance has been so divergent. In the seventh chapter, NUMSA's attempts to build a United Front and a new political party of the working class will be analysed, to understand what the intention of these projects is and how they can develop. This chapter will also consider the contentious processes within COSATU that these projects have brought about and analyse the split that has taken place within COSATU and the birth of SAFTU. The chapter will consider the implications of all of these things for the development of the South African labour movement, and for labour relations more broadly. Finally, in the eighth chapter, some conclusions will be presented considering what the research and analysis contained within this thesis can tell us about the labour movement in South Africa and its trajectory, and what the potential utility of the concept of 'permanent contention' could be when applied to other case studies of labour union organisation and agency in other contexts.

2. Outline of Methodology and Reflections from the Field

This chapter will explain and critically reflect upon the methods utilised to collect data in the field during my time in South Africa, and how this data was interpreted and analysed in order to explain the central research questions of the thesis. It will explore and explain the methods selected for fieldwork and provide some critical reflections on the challenges and successes of the research, and how the data will be utilised in the thesis.

The chapter is split into four sections. The first outlines the aims of the research and the context in which fieldwork was conducted. The second section explains the reasons for the research methods (semi-structured interviews and participant observation) and also deals with some of the challenges encountered in the field, such as securing informed consent and protecting the safety of respondents. The third section represents a reflection on my own positionality as a researcher, operating in a very different cultural context to that which I am studying but with the advantage of sharing the 'identity' of trade unionism with respondents, and a discussion of how identity and insider/outsider status functioned in this context. In the final section, I outline how I interpreted and utilised data, what the implications of that data were for the thesis as a whole, and how the data shaped the theoretical and analytical approach taken in the thesis.

2.1 Research Purposes and Questions

In this section, I will outline the purposes of the field research and the methods utilised in data collection while undertaking fieldwork in NUMSA Locals between June 2014 and October 2014. The purpose of this data collection was to develop an understanding of the factors that led NUMSA towards the decisions they

made at their 2013 Congress, when the union resolved to cease its support for the ANC government and withdraw funding from the ANC as a political party. The union also resolved to create a 'United Front' to unite organised workers with communities in a movement against the government, and to build a new working class political party to challenge the dominance of the ANC. This set into action a chain of events leading to the expulsion of NUMSA from COSATU, the withdrawal from COSATU of other affiliate unions, and most significantly the creation of SAFTU, a new independent labour federation which NUMSA played a leading role in forming.

One of the most significant implications of the split that has taken place within COSATU is that it defied the expectations of many analysts studying the politics of the Tripartite Alliance. As discussed in the introductory chapter of this thesis, ever since the ANC came to power in 1994 an ongoing debate has taken place around the sustainability and desirability of the partnership between COSATU and the ruling party. This debate however has focused almost exclusively on the likelihood and desirability of COSATU and the ANC, centring on the question of whether or not organised labour would split with the party of national liberation. However, very little serious scholarship has focused on the effects of the relationship between COSATU and the Alliance have had on COSATU and its affiliate unions, and the extent to which this relationship has generated contention within the labour federation itself. It is the contention of this thesis that the formation of the Tripartite Alliance generated a contentious process within COSATU that, far from leading COSATU to split from the Alliance has in fact led to COSATU splitting over the question of the Alliance itself.

In order to do develop some insight and understanding into what led NUMSA as a union to take this step, this thesis attempts to replicate the 'politics from below' approach adopted by Beresford. This research utilised semi-structured interviews

carried out with respondents who were members of NUM, a union that has historically been one of the staunchest supporters of the Alliance within COSATU. Utilising the research data produced by this method Beresford argued at the time that rank and file members within COSATU were “as yet, unreceptive to the idea of an independent working-class project headed by a workers’ party or an independent SACP” (Beresford, 2009, p411). However, the focus of this research is instead NUMSA, a union which has historically adopted a far more critical position on the Alliance, and which set into motion the processes that have led to South Africa’s largest labour federation splitting into two separate federations. Through attempting to understand the views and experiences of office bearers, shop stewards and active members of NUMSA, the research seeks to provide an alternative perspective on the attitude of COSATU members towards the Alliance. Furthermore, it will attempt to build knowledge of why NUMSA came to end its support for the Alliance, and in doing so initiate a series of processes which led to a split in the ranks of COSATU and the formation of SAFTU. Moreover, the thesis attempts to provide an explanation for why the idea of a ‘workers party’, which Beresford’s research suggests had no currency within NUM, had become such a powerful demand within NUMSA. In doing so, the research provides a counterpoint to Beresford’s work through an examination of the two divergent trends which has existed throughout the history of COSATU, that of the shopfloor model of unionism that grew out of the 1973 Durban strike wave and the new unions of that decade. This demonstrates a key division within COSATU – between populist unionism and shop floor unionism – which I argue is a key explanatory factor in the development of the split.

The data produced by the fieldwork consists of 37 semi-structured interviews and 11 participant observations of NUMSA meetings and events, in addition to 4

semi-structured interviews with activists from other organisations who worked with NUMSA on their plans for the creation of a 'United Front' and of an explicitly Socialist political party of the working class in South Africa. The majority of respondents are members of two NUMSA locals; Germiston and North Johannesburg, and the majority of participant observations were of shop steward councils in these Locals. Finally, I also carried out 4 elite level semi structured interviews, one with the spokesperson of COSATU at the time, Patrick Craven, and three with current and former NUMSA national officials/office bearers. I did this because while I was primarily interested in how NUMSA's break with the Alliance was understood by NUMSA representatives at the grassroots level, I also wanted to secure a nuanced understanding of the view of NUMSA's leadership on the processes and developments which NUMSA as a union is engaged in. All interviews and participant observations were conducted between June 2014 and October 2014.

My reasoning for the selection of these methods and the challenges associated with these will be examined in more detail in the next section of this chapter. In this section however, the nature of the union structures in which the fieldwork was conducted, the reasons for the selection and the purpose of the research are explained. The 'Local' organisational structure utilised by NUMSA brings together NUMSA members and shop stewards on a geographical basis, with all NUMSA members and shop stewards attached to the Local in the geographic area that their workplace falls in to. The key organising body in each local is the weekly shop steward's council, which takes place every Saturday and which all NUMSA shop stewards are required to attend. These 'Locals' are not simply organisational bodies but explicitly political bodies, and the discussions that take place there range from the day-to-day organisational activities of the union through

to political education and discussion and up to and including issues at a national level within the union. The expectations of shop stewards, elected by fellow workers on a factory or workplace basis, are extremely high. Any shop steward who is unable to attend must supply a written reason for their absence, which will be subject to approval by the council. At one Council I attended, there was some discussion of whether it was acceptable that a shop steward had missed two consecutive meetings, particularly given that they had not supplied their written explanation for absence on the regulation A4 paper. This gives an indication of how seriously the union takes its 'Locals' – as one shop steward put it to me, “Our Locals are the building blocks of NUMSA. They connect workers on the factory floor together with other workplaces and with the structures of the union” (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014). Consequently, to develop an understanding of what led NUMSA to break with the Tripartite Alliance fieldwork within Locals was extremely useful.

This thesis is concerned with what led NUMSA to take the decisions that it did at the December 2013 Congress and what the implications are of this development for labour relations in South Africa. Therefore, the primary research questions set out in the first chapter, which this thesis seeks to answer, are as follows:

1. What processes led to NUMSA's decision to break with the Tripartite Alliance and to announce its intention to form a United Front and a new political party of the working class?
2. What do the decisions taken at this Congress and the resulting split within COSATU mean for the future of labour relations within South Africa?

However, while the research project attempts to contribute towards of knowledge of why NUMSA took these decisions and therefore better understand what the significance of the resulting cleavage in the Tripartite Alliance is, these are very much macro-level research questions. The purpose of my research in the field therefore was not to secure definitive answers to these questions but to gain knowledge and understanding of how NUMSA members and representatives at grassroots level view the decisions that their union has taken and the narrative and explanation they themselves attach to these processes.

It is for this reason that I have utilised qualitative methods in the field, in order to develop an understanding of how NUMSA members themselves understand the development of the Alliance in post-Apartheid South Africa and why their union has decided to break with the Alliance. One of the key strengths of qualitative research methods is that it provides researchers with tools that make “understanding people from their own frames of reference and experiencing reality as they experience it” a possibility (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2016, pp7-8). Consequently, this type of research allowed me to explore how members of the union understood these decisions in a completely open-ended way that allowed respondents to communicate their own account of what had taken place. Even in the first few interviews I conducted, the benefits of this became immediately apparent. I had travelled to South Africa with a clear expectation that my fieldwork would reveal the driving force in NUMSA’s decision to cease its support for the ANC to be the Marikana Massacre, an episode of state violence against striking workers that had taken place in August 2012. That episode was of course important, but in many interviews it was made clear to me in no uncertain terms that for NUMSA members, Marikana was not in itself a turning point that fundamentally altered labour relations in South Africa but

the result of a historically embedded and constantly evolving process, or processes. Marikana represented the culmination of decades of contention within the South African labour movement and within COSATU, as NUMSA members are keen to point out:

“What happened at Marikana has shocked people everywhere. But Marikana confirms to us what we in NUMSA have been saying for quite some time...the ANC government is not a friend of workers.” (NUMSA Local Office Bearer, 2014)

This a question which we will return to later in the chapter, but for now it is sufficient to say that quantitative methods could not have revealed this alternative understanding of what such an important event represented, because quantitative methods do not allow research subjects to explain or put forward their understanding of what such events represent.

There are of course limitations and challenges with a qualitative approach; unlike quantitative data, which produces quantifiable numerical data in response to specific questions, the ‘data’ produced by qualitative methods is of an open-ended and interpretive nature. Consequently, while the research project focuses on the factors which have led to NUMSA’s rejection of the Alliance and the consequences of this, the work conducted in the field was designed to generate accounts from participants in NUMSA’s structures of their attitudes towards the Alliance and their own explanations for what has taken place. Therefore, the data that I gathered in the field consists of set of individual explanations and accounts of the process the union is going through, largely from shop stewards and local office bearers but also some from national office bearers and activists working with the union. This data cannot be assumed to necessarily reflect the narratives of NUMSA members across

the country; it is quite possible that in other regions and Locals' alternative explanations for the break with the Alliance NUMSA members and shop stewards would attach more weight to other explanatory factors. However, it would not have been possible to collect in-depth accounts of this nature on a national scale, and I had made a conscious decision that the data I was interested in was specifically in-depth accounts of what NUMSA is doing, from the grassroots level of the union. What the data can demonstrate though is the explanatory narratives that NUMSA members and representatives from two Local's explain is important in terms of why their union has taken these steps and why they believe them to be correct.

In Germiston, one of the two Locals in which I conducted my research, a Local Office Bearer told me specifically that:

“Our Local was one of the Local’s key to the decision to break with the neoliberal ANC. We took a resolution to the December 2013 Congress calling for this break. That is how we make decisions in NUMSA – discussions start at the factory floor, workers make decisions in their Local and we take this mandate into our national structures.” (NUMSA Local Office Bearer, 2014)

In this local, discontent with the Alliance had clearly been building for some time and therefore the interviews produced some very rich detail about how NUMSA members view the Alliance and the reasons that NUMSA needed to break with it. This method of data collection allows insight into how members understand NUMSA's position, which quantitative methods could not possibly reveal. For example, a survey which allowed respondents to indicate preferences or opinions in response to binary or multiple questions could have been utilised to collect data across a far greater range of Locals and provided quantitative data; perhaps for example on the number of

members who agree with the decisions taken at the 2013 Congress. However, this would not allow respondents to tell their own stories and explain their world as they understand it and from their viewpoint.

During the time I spent in the field, it became clear that there was a genuine need to protect the identities of respondents. While the Marikana Massacre of 2012 had made headlines around the world as the worst example of state violence against organised workers since the Sharpeville massacre in the worst days of Apartheid violence, it did not occur in a vacuum. Respondents repeatedly told me that violence and harassment of union members by police and private security firms was an endemic problem, as illustrated by the quote below:

“You must come to our picket lines. Please. You must see how police use violence against workers. You must tell people.” (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

I visited several strikes and picket lines during the fieldwork, and witnessed no actual violence, although there was always a heavily armed contingent of police, private security or both. One respondent believed that my presence at picket lines actually discouraged violence from taking place because of my whiteness:

“Now you are here, they are staying over there...they (meaning in this case G4S security guards armed with machine guns) are all black, we are black, they harass us and threaten us. But you are white, so now they do not bother us. Crazy! We are workers. We do not want to kill anyone.” (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

The fact that so many respondents complained of harassment and violence by police and private security would have been reason enough to protect their identities and

anonymise responses. During my time in South Africa however, on 6th August 2014, three NUMSA Local Office Bearers from the Isithebe Local in Kwazulu-Natal assassinated in a brutal shooting. According to news reports, “Njabulo Ndebele, secretary of Numsa’s Isithebe branch, his deputy, Sibonelo Ntuli, and Ntobeko Maphumulo” were “shot in the back and then in the head to make sure they were dead” (Dzanibe and Rondganger, 2014).

NUMSA released a statement following the incident making clear that the union viewed the incident as “a well-calculated and dastardly killing” and asserting that:

“We know that working class people and NUMSA activists will face similar incidents as we implement our December 2013 Special National Congress resolution to explore the establishment of an alternative Movement for Socialism... The assassination of the three comrades takes place on the eve of the International Symposium of Left Parties and Movements that starts on 07 August and concludes on 10 August 2014. Both Ndebele and Ntuli, as members of the union’s Mbuyiselo Ngwenda Brigade were coming to the symposium. Their contributions at the symposium will be sorely missed.” (NUMSA, 2014b)

This statement drew a link between the killings and the plans to develop an alternative political party, including a symposium to which representatives of trade unions and left parties from around the world were invited. Leaders of NUMSA were clearly convinced of the possibility that the assassinations, along with other acts of intimidation, represented a response to the union’s decision to challenge the political dominance of the ANC and the Tripartite Alliance. While no one I spoke to during my time in the field explicitly stated who could be responsible for such acts, several

respondents did state that they felt the killings took place in response to NUMSA's decision to form a new party.

“When we have well known NUMSA leaders, who are shot the day before they will speak at our Symposium on Left Parties, who is responsible for this violence, if it is not those who wish to prevent us from forming a worker's party?” (NUMSA Regional Office Bearer, 2014)

In light of this development, while I was in the field, I took the decision to anonymise all respondents who held only local or regional positions within NUMSA, in order not to risk any potential exposure of the members I interviewed to any form of political violence or intimidation. I decided only to name respondents who held national positions within the union, since these individuals would already have a significant profile and therefore there was no increased risk for them resulting from the fieldwork.

2.2 Research Methods and Selection of Respondents

In the field, I wanted to collect data in as open-ended a manner as possible and allow respondents to expand as much as possible on their understanding of what their union is doing and why. There are many types of qualitative research method that I could have utilised to achieve this since the purpose of qualitative methods is to produce open-ended and in-depth responses, which reveal the meaning that respondents attach to processes and events. However, I was also aware of the need to provide some structure and focus to interviews, in order to ensure that the interviews remained on the key topic in which I was interested in collecting data on; the tensions and experiences that led NUMSA chose to break

with the Alliance. For this reason, in-depth semi structured interviews were selected as the primary research method utilised in this project. This allowed me to focus the discussion through specific questions relating to the decision to break with the Alliance and explore some of the factors that may have influenced this decision. However, the semi-structured nature of the discussions also allowed “individuals to expand on their responses to questions” and gave me an opportunity to adapt my approach and seek further responses on particular issues and questions (Jones, 2002, p203). This was crucial, as many of the issues that respondents raised were not ones I had considered myself as a white European researcher from a very different country and society, with little direct experience of the South African labour movement and its history. In particular, the importance placed by respondents on the historical experiences of NUMSA and its forebears, both during the anti-Apartheid struggle and within the Alliance, highlighted the need to understand the decisions of NUMSA in historical context. In addition to these semi-structured interviews at the grassroots level, I also carried out a series of non-participant observations of NUMSA shop stewards’ councils and events, which allowed me to develop a picture of how NUMSA organises from day to day as well as providing an opportunity to witness and record how NUMSA members discussed and debated their plans.

Throughout the project, I consciously tried to keep all interviews as conversational as possible, and even decided against recording interviews in order to create a relaxed environment, as I was concerned that the presence of a recording device would result in respondents being less candid and forthcoming during the interview process. Instead, I made limited notes during interviews, tried to use a notebook only when I wanted to record a statement or response that I found particularly surprising or insightful, and wrote up reflections of interviews as quickly

as possible afterwards. This of course means that I do not have recordings or transcripts of the interviews but the research data was immeasurably richer because of this; because interviews became extensive discussions I was generally able to establish a strong rapport with interviewees and develop a detailed understanding of the respondents background. Even the shortest interviews last 40-45 minute and most lasted anywhere between an hour and two and a half hours. This meant that I was able to develop extensive insight into the way that NUMSA operated as a union, and the internal culture it embodied, as well as secure open-ended and detailed responses to the issues I was raising.

Particularly when interviews took place in union offices, while the interview would begin between myself and a single participant, other shop stewards and members who happened to be in the building would become interested and sometimes an audience would begin to assemble who were often keen to add their thoughts or responses to questions and to join in with discussions. In one sense, this presented a difficult challenge, as it would have been completely unethical to include in the thesis the responses of trade unionists who had not given their informed consent to participate in the research. When this happened, I attempted to explain as they joined why I was there and what the purpose of my research was; on one or two occasions, I tried to suggest keeping interviews to a one on one basis in privacy, but this was not well received by respondents. In general, there was a sense that there should be no need for anything to be private or hidden from other members of the Local, as illustrated by the quote below:

“In NUMSA, we do not have secrets, my leader (in reference to Local Office Bearer) does not need to hide what he is saying to you from us. We are comrades and

workers. Bosses have secrets and hide away, not workers." (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

This quotation gives some indication of the culture that exists in NUMSA locals and reflects a widespread feeling that whatever happened in the offices of the union was in a sense open to all members to participate in. This internal culture is linked to the 'shop floor' tradition on which the union has been built. Furthermore, leaders within the Local also seemed to hold this view. In general, respondents were very relaxed and even happy about the chance to answer questions and tell the story of their union but seemed uncomfortable about actively preventing their members (who after all elect them to their position) from being present for every discussion. Even a Regional Office Bearer expressed reluctance to do so when I asked if it would be better to conduct the interview in private, explaining:

"It is good that you are here and that you want to learn about NUMSA. But why must I hide from these members? I have nothing to say that they cannot hear, must I make them think I am saying things they cannot hear?" (NUMSA Regional Office Bearer, 2014)

This meant that interviews occasionally strayed into the territory of becoming focus groups, with several NUMSA members in attendance and even interjecting in the discussion. This brought challenges, particularly in terms of explaining the purpose of the project to respondents and securing informed consent, but also meant that the interviews were incredibly rich in terms of the volume of responses and in-depth discussion that the interviews provoked. However, this affects the responses that the interviews produced; while on the one hand, I was very successful in gaining access

to respondents, I struggled at times to restrict interviews to a one-on-one dynamic. I also often got the impression from respondents that they were only willing to provide the collective viewpoint of the union during interviews; if they held individual viewpoints that did not correspond with this collective viewpoint, in some cases it seemed clear that they would not wish to express these. Responses would often take the form of the collective, with shop stewards saying 'we' rather than 'I'.

I approached each interview with a set of very basic questions, designed to be open ended in nature and to stimulate as much conversation and discussion with respondents as possible. While I adapted these slightly during some interviews, I used the seven questions below as a framework with which to structure the interviews:

1. Can you tell me about being a member of NUMSA, and what kind of union NUMSA is?
2. Can you tell me about your role in the union, if you have one?
3. Can you tell me why it is that NUMSA has resolved to break with the Alliance?
4. What do you think of the ANC's record in government since the end of Apartheid?
5. Why has NUMSA decided to end its support for the ANC government?
6. Was this decision connected to the events at Marikana in 2012?

7. What do you think of NUMSA's decision to build a Socialist political party in South Africa?

I also utilised a consent form as part of the process of explaining my reasons for carrying out the interviews and ensuring I had the demonstrable consent of respondents for the research. This was useful to an extent; in effect, it acted as a prop, which allowed me to explain my position as a researcher, the purpose of my research, and that I was asking for their consent to take part in an interview. It also helped to explain that I wanted to use their responses in the thesis, including direct quotations; I also gave respondents the option of refusing consent for direct quotations both on the forms and verbally in our discussions, although none selected this option.

Securing written consent from respondents was however quite challenging; by the time I had fully explained the purposes of my research and why I had come to South Africa, respondents were often quite excited to begin discussing their union and the political situation as they saw it. They often viewed the forms as an unnecessary irritation and would ask why it was necessary to fill them in; when I explained that they would serve as evidence that I had outlined the purpose of the research project to them and that they had given informed consent to the interview process. This was often met with derision, incredulity or amusement. One response, from a shop steward who listened carefully to everything I said, read the form thoroughly and then promptly refused to sign it, summed up the general reaction to the forms:

“We do not need to sign these forms. We are not lawyers, we are workers. We trust you. Do you not trust us?” (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

In general, while respondents understood the purpose of the form, the request to sign was often met with some discussion as to why it was necessary. This would usually focus on the fact that respondents were happy to tell their story and indeed actively wanted what they said to be reproduced but did not see why I would need proof of their willingness to take part. Additionally, since consent forms were not used by researchers at the centre to which I was attached, the form surprised even some NUMSA members who had experience of being interviewed by academics.

While this created challenges in securing informed consent from participants, I did use the form to engage all respondents in discussion about the purpose of the research and secure verbal consent in all cases that they were happy for me to use the interviews for the purpose of the thesis, including direct quotations. Additionally, because respondents often raised questions in relation to the consent forms, this allowed me to explain how responses would be utilised, what the purpose of the research was and why as a researcher it was important for me to gain their informed consent to participate in the research. I placed particular emphasis on the fact that I was conducting research as often respondents would view me as having a ‘dual identity’ as both a trade unionist and a researcher, a theme I will return to later in this chapter, and I felt it was necessary to repeatedly emphasise my role as a researcher.

I did not engage in any form of selective or stratified sampling of respondents, partially because I did not want to dissuade or put off respondents from agreeing to interviews. However, it would not be correct to describe the process I engaged in as

'random' sampling, particularly as many of my interviews came about because of requests for volunteers at various NUMSA meetings. There was a strong element of self-selection to the sample of respondents I was able to access. Additionally, all the interviews I conducted within NUMSA were either with elected representatives of the union at the grassroots level, or with 'active members' who desired to become elected representatives. Consequently, while this does not reduce the validity of the data these interviews produced, which took the form of explanatory narratives, it is important to note that the 'self-selecting' nature of many of these interviews could potentially reflect a bias in sample. It is possible that the respondents I interviewed reflected a greater level of enthusiasm and strong conviction in the decisions NUMSA has taken to break with the Alliance than is typical of the average NUMSA member or representative. However, since most of the interviews were conducted with elected representatives of the union whose role it is to speak on behalf of rank-and-file members, respondents held a specific relational function, to speak on behalf of members, and as a consequence can be viewed as 'spokespersons' of the union at the grassroots level.

2.3 Positionality, Context and Insider/Outsider Status

When reflecting on the methodological approach of any research project, it is of course essential to reflect on one's own positionality as a researcher. As a white European who had never previously visited South Africa, and with no familial or ethnic links to the country, I was very much an outsider to the country and therefore an outsider as a researcher. The extent to which the impact of colonialism, Apartheid and racialism have had upon the social fabric of South African society cannot be understated, as noted below:

“Arguably the single most intractable, most toxic presence of the past is how profoundly racialised South African society remains. The discriminatory divisions and hierarchies of Apartheid translated into everyday experience and impacted on the psyche of all South Africans.” (Bundy, 2014, p50)

Within the context of South Africa, even more so than many other countries, whiteness is an indication of wealth. Since the subject of my research was organised workers, this obviously marked me out as an outsider; not a worker, and not one of ‘them’. Consequently, it was impossible for my own whiteness not to have a profound effect on all of the work I carried out.

However, my own position as an active trade unionist and political activist also provided a counterpoint to this. I discovered this very quickly in South Africa; just three days after my arrival I went to join a march organised by NUMSA to mark the beginning of a significant national strike in the engineering sector. The march, which ran through the Central Business District in Johannesburg, was huge, numbering over 100,000. I had intended to meet with contacts who were attending the demonstration, but the size of the march made it difficult to find them. As I proceeded along the route, surrounded by black and coloured NUMSA members wearing red NUMSA t-shirts, I became distinctly conscious that I stuck out in the crowd probably more than I ever have in my entire life. Very quickly, marchers began pointing me out to each other and staring. Several approached me to ask what I was doing there. There was clear consensus among everyone around me that I must be either a journalist, or worse, a ‘spy’, and they asked repeatedly and sometimes aggressively if this was the case. When I replied however that I was from Britain, that I was a trade unionist visiting South Africa, and that I had heard about their strike and had come to show solidarity, the transformation in the atmosphere could not have been

more rapid. Even the fact that I spoke with a British accent made a difference, as British people are often more favourably perceived than white Afrikaans speakers in South Africa are. When I explained that I was a trade unionist, however, this instantly dispelled any hostility or suspicion towards me. After having initially been questioned and challenged, I was hugged warmly and asked to pose for 'selfies' with many of the marchers, which I readily agreed to do, not without considerable relief.

It is important to clarify that I would not have experienced such suspicion in any other context in South Africa, even in locations where white people rarely visit. In townships for example or in industrial areas, my presence was regarded as an oddity, but not a threat or cause for concern. When NUMSA members march or strike however, they are extremely wary of journalists, who they do not regard as sympathetic to their cause, but also of individuals who may be conducting surveillance on them or present for the purposes of instigating disruption or violence. During the time I was there, I was informed by a Local Office Bearer that the union had recently issued an instruction to Local's and other NUMSA structures that the unions distinctive red t-shirts must not be issued to anyone who was not a NUMSA member. He explained:

“What they are saying in the media, in the papers, is that NUMSA are violent, NUMSA are creating trouble. They show footage of people wearing NUMSA t-shirts breaking windows, committing acts of vandalism. We see these are not NUMSA members! But if they have our t-shirts, then they are saying they are NUMSA. So we cannot allow those who are not NUMSA to wear our shirt.” (NUMSA Local Office Bearer, 2014)

In general, on all NUMSA picket lines and marches I participated in, union members always stressed to each other the importance of discipline and the need to avoid causing any kind of disruption that could be used to justify criticism of the union.

My status as an active trade unionist was integral to my attempts to secure access to NUMSA as a union; a key part of making introductions was making clear that I was not a journalist but a researcher from the UK who was also an active trade unionist. I found that when I was perceived as a journalist – particularly in the context of asking for interviews – then I was met with suspicion and even hostility. As an active trade union organiser however, my outsider status was mitigated somewhat, although still significant. Consequently, while on the one hand my own positionality could sometimes act as a barrier to access to respondents, it also served as a benefit and allowed me to build an element of trust and acceptance within the Locals which I conducted research.

This was particularly the case in NUMSA, a union with a strong and proud history of internationalism, which emphasises its past and current links with unions around the world. In general, members of the union expressed reservations about journalists or outsiders wanting to interview them or ask questions about what the union was doing. Explaining that my own motivations for conducting the research were linked to my own involvement in the labour movement removed those suspicions; this was particularly so because I took pains to make clear that I was interested in learning about how NUMSA organised and discovering what lessons NUMSA's experiences held for the labour movement more generally. Instead of being viewed as an outsider who might pose some form of threat for the union, I was viewed as an outsider who nonetheless shared a bond through a mutual identity; many of the Office Bearers in particular would refer to me as a 'comrade'.

Furthermore, perhaps again because of NUMSA's strong emphasis on internationalism, and the union's commitment to worker education, respondents had a strong interest in discussing the trade union movement in Britain and asked almost as many questions of me as I did of them. NUMSA shop stewards and office bearers are expected to take political education seriously and to learn about the history and theory of trade unionism, Socialism and Marxism; consequently, those who hold positions in the union have a strong tendency to be very interested in international politics and in trade unions around the world. This created some sense of a reciprocal dynamic in my interactions with respondents which would otherwise have been impossible. I had little to offer them in exchange for speaking with me, allowing me to attend meetings and answering my questions, but I could hold discussions with them about the trade union movement and the position of the organised working class in Britain. Because I was happy to do this, and to answer the many questions they had as best I could, the union members were happy for me to sit in on their meetings and listen to their discussions as long as I wished. I was often expected to participate in these meetings however, particularly in meetings with an educational focus. Usually at the start of any formal NUMSA meeting, the Local Office Bearers would explain to the members and shop stewards that I was a trade unionist and researcher who had come to learn about NUMSA, and ask me to say a few words to introduce myself. This done, I would generally be able to sit and observe meetings for hours, making notes without anyone disturbing me. However, I was expected to contribute to the discussion occasionally, particularly if an office bearer felt that my knowledge of Britain would be useful. In Germiston for example, in the middle of a 'Political Discussion Forum' about campaigning against 'e-tolls', an unpopular mechanism used to charge drivers for using motorways, I was suddenly asked to

give some historical context of the campaign of non-payment of the Poll Tax in Britain. This was because some members of the Local were interested in the idea of a non-payment campaign and were aware of the campaign against the poll tax. In North Johannesburg, in the middle of a discussion of NUMSA's strategy to build a 'United Front' of workers and communities against the neoliberal policies of the ANC government, an Office Bearer leading the discussion asked me to explain how trade unions and community campaigns in Britain utilised the tactic of United Fronts. While this meant I sometimes felt put on the spot, and often that my responses were not as detailed or informed as the NUMSA members might have hoped, it allowed for a more reciprocal dynamic than the more orthodox researcher/respondent dynamic. The union members I was interviewing and observing were able to ask me questions about my own experiences as a trade unionist, thus building to an extent a feeling of some shared experience. It is also an indication of the high levels of internationalist sentiment and knowledge of/interest in global labour struggles which NUMSA members generally hold that they were so interested in these issues.

The fact that I am myself an active trade unionist also has a bearing on how I approach the processes taking place within the South African labour movement. I have strong personal sympathy with the cause of NUMSA, and a significant motivation for choosing to study what is taking place in South Africa is my own interest in the political independence of organised labour and the relationships that trade unions have with political parties. Inevitably, this has an effect on how I see and understand the situation, and it is important to be careful not to allow this to distort the research or the findings that I present. However, it is also important to recognise that no researcher operates from a position of complete objectivity outside of society, and the worse kind of subjectivism would be to believe that such a thing

were possible. Furthermore, the purpose and intention of the research is not to assess whether what is taking place is positive or negative, but rather to understand *why* it is taking place; a key aspect of qualitative research is to empathise and engage with respondents and understand the world as they see it. The focus of my research is to explore how NUMSA members view the situation in their union and wider labour movement, and therefore understand why these developments are taking place. As the quote below indicates, in this type of research it is important to be able to identify with respondents:

“Qualitative researchers empathise and identify with the people they study in order to understand how those people see things.” (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2016, p8)

Given this, and given that my status as an active trade unionist served as a means of gaining access, while my own positionality must be recognised, overall it has proved to be hugely positive for my research.

2.4 Making Sense of Data

An important aspect of data collection is determining what is useful and germane to the research project, how the data should be utilised, what data tells us about a research question and what the implications are for the theoretical siting of data with which to situate research. The purpose of fieldwork in this thesis was to attempt to explore the narratives put forward by NUMSA representatives at the grassroots level. The data produced, in the form of these narratives, inform an analysis of why the union has chosen to break with the Alliance in the manner that it has and consequently how best to understand what this means, both for COSATU and the Tripartite Alliance and for SAFTU. This however raises the question of how this data should be utilised within the research project.

The data produced in the field takes the form of a collection of explanatory narratives put forward by representatives of NUMSA for the steps that their union is taking and the consequent reconfiguration of the South African labour movement. Having carried out research in the field and secured this data, the next task was to analyse the responses and identify key themes within those responses. While I did not seek to include responses which individually were completely out of step with other interviews, I wanted to include as much of the detail of these thematic responses as possible in the analysis. Therefore the key organising principles of the data which are utilised are the themes that come through strongly the interviews when viewed as a whole.

When preparing for fieldwork and designing exploratory questions to use, I had concerns that the responses I received would display a wide range of attitudes and perspectives, which could not easily be codified into data that could be used to provide answers to my research questions. However, the interviews in fact revealed a distinct unity of understanding and purpose among respondents. This is in part because NUMSA is a proudly 'Democratic Centralist' union, as noted in the Secretariat Report submitted to the hugely significant December 2013 Congress:

“We are democratic centralist – we believe in robust, vigorous and democratic debate leading to a united decision and action.” (NUMSA, 2013, p37)

This means that having taken part in democratic discussion on an issue and agreed on a particular action, union members are expected to support and carry out that action.

Perhaps because of this, and because for the most part I interviewed representatives of the union at workplace, local and regional level who sought to position and communicate the collective position of the union, in general there was a surprising degree of homogeneity, or perhaps unity, of analysis among respondents. That is not to say that all interviews were identical; there were often different levels of enthusiasm or emphasis on issues that came up during the interviews. However, in the main there was a strong trend towards a particular set of explanations for NUMSA's decision to break with the Alliance and to move towards setting up a 'United Front' of opposition to the government between workers and communities, and to set up an explicitly working-class political party.

The strongest trend within the interviews was towards an explanation for the break that went back beyond Marikana or even the recent history of Alliance politics, to the formation of the Alliance itself. In most interviews respondents indicated that there had always been tensions within COSATU over the Alliance, and several respondents specifically reminded me that NUMSA held severe reservations about the continuation of the Tripartite Alliance following the advent of multi-racial democracy in 1994. Particularly in interviews with older respondents, it was asserted that the union had only maintained the Alliance because of a desire to maintain the unity of the organised working class within COSATU. Indeed, how the end of Apartheid was understood was a central point of contention within COSATU from the perspective of NUMSA. Without exception, every NUMSA member I spoke to referred to the 'negotiated settlement' of 1994 and rejected the terminology of the 'National Democratic Revolution', which is commonly used amongst supporters of the Tripartite Alliance and the ANC government, including within COSATU. This indicates the extent to which NUMSA articulates an alternative analysis of the anti-

Apartheid struggle and of post-Apartheid South Africa; in many ways this struggle is viewed as unfinished.

With regard to the creation of the United Front, another strong trend that emerged from the interview data was that NUMSA members had come to see membership not just of the Alliance but also of COSATU itself as an active obstacle to unity between organised workers and communities. This came up repeatedly in relation to the United Front, which was seen as necessary to overcome this lack of unity. COSATU's structures were seen as acting as a block on organising with communities, because of a lack of general interest in the federation to deal with these issues, and because even when decisions were taken within COSATU in relation to community issues and service delivery protests, these decisions were never acted upon. This issue is taken up in Chapter Five of the thesis, which focuses on NUMSA's experience of the Alliance in the post-Apartheid era.

One issue on which the interviews revealed divergent opinions related to the possibility of NUMSA forming a political party. Almost everyone interviewed, even the minority who expressed some degree of sympathy with the ANC, accepted that a party should be formed. But what kind of party, and when it should contest elections, was an issue on which there was very little agreement among respondents, which presented a contrast to respondents' views on the experience of the Alliance and the reasons for breaking with it. Perhaps the most significant cleavage in terms of attitudes displayed by respondents centred on the question of *when* a new party would be formed and would contest elections. The attitude between 'rank and file' members and representatives of the union and those in leadership positions demonstrated some differences on the question of what kind of party would be formed and when it would begin to contest elections, with respondents from the

grassroots level expressing a greater sense of urgency than the national office bearers I interviewed who were more cautious. Consequently, I deal with this in detail in the penultimate chapter of the thesis.

I also made the decision following the conclusion of my fieldwork to re-evaluate my approach to the project. A key recurring theme throughout all of the interviews conducted was the historically contingent nature of everything that is taking place within COSATU; frequently respondents referred to COSATU's formation, the scepticism held by NUMSA towards the Tripartite Alliance, and NUMSA's attempts to push COSATU to assert its political independence from the ANC government. I had not previously considered that to understand contemporary developments within COSATU and the wider labour movement, it would be necessary to engage in detail with the history of the trade union movement in South Africa. Having completed my research 'in the field', I realised it was necessary to engage in an exercise of historical process tracing; to study the development and origins of COSATU and the Tripartite Alliance in order to understand how contention within these formations has developed over time. It was repeatedly stressed to me that NUMSA had always held a critical attitude towards the Alliance, as illustrated by the quote below:

“NUMSA has always been sceptical of the Alliance. We have simply reached a stage where now, what we are saying is that we cannot continue with the Alliance.”

(NUMSA Local Office Bearer, 2014)

Following my work in the field, I therefore began an analysis and review of available literature, including academic texts and journal articles focused upon the history of COSATU, as well as material and speeches produced and made throughout past

decades by trade unions themselves. This revealed the existence of (broadly speaking) two historical trends within COSATU and its forebears – ‘populist’ unionism and ‘shopfloor’ unionism - conceptualisations which I will discuss in subsequent chapters.

2.5 Chapter Conclusions:

In this chapter I have outlined the research methodology and provided some reflections on my experiences in the field. Understanding the historical context in which contemporary developments within the South African trade union movement are situated changed the focus of the research project completely in terms of both the theoretical framework in which the analysis is situated and understanding the contentious processes which lie right at the heart of the split within COSATU and NUMSA’s role within the process.

The experience of fieldwork and the realisation of the central importance of historically contingent processes of contention also influenced the theoretical framework in which I situate the analysis of the data. While this is dealt with more extensively in the theoretical chapter of the thesis, it is necessary to say here that I had designed and planned the research within the theoretical framework based on John Kelly’s work on Mobilisation Theory. The ‘cyclical’ nature of contention within this theoretical framework, combined with the emphasis on situating labour struggles within the relevant historical context in which they develop, had an obvious appeal with regard to theorising the struggle NUMSA is engaged in at the present time. This can arguably be seen as a resurgence of open contention between labour and the state last seen on such a scale during the Apartheid era. However, upon completion of the research, I realised that what appear to be ‘cycles of contention’ from an

external perspective were in fact, when viewed from the position of NUMSA members, a continuation of the same contentious processes, which they have always been engaged in. While this process of contention has been obscured by the transition from a coercive labour regime, and the development of internal contentious processes in place of the previous external contentious processes, for NUMSA members contention has been *permanent*, rather than cyclical.

As Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault note, the “inductive theorising process involved in qualitative research...has the goal of building theory” (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2016, p8). While mobilisation theory offers a very useful framework for understanding labour mobilisation, the ‘cyclical’ conception of contention did not in fact match well with the perspectives of NUMSA activists interviewed in the field. Through a recognition of the interaction between internal and external contentious processes, conceptualised as a state of *permanent contention*, in the theoretical framework chapter of the thesis, mobilisation theory is adapted to reflect the perspective and understanding of workers themselves in explaining the development of contentious processes within labour movements and between labour movements and the state.

3. Bringing In Internal Contention: Adapting Mobilisation Theory Through the Concept of ‘Permanent Contention’ and Conceptualising Oppositional Models of Labour Unionism

In this chapter, the theoretical framework upon which this thesis builds, mobilisation theory, will be introduced. This theory, developed by John Kelly (1998), provides an invaluable framework to understand how cycles of contention between capital and labour develop. This is firstly because of its emphasis on the dynamic interaction between labour mobilisations, and secondly its recognition that contemporary mobilisations are shaped by the mobilisations of the past. But it is also incredibly useful as a theoretical framework with which to understand how labour mobilisations and strikes develop, because it starts from the perspective of workers themselves. This allows a restrictive and economic understanding of why labour organisations develop and struggle to be rejected in favour of one in which labour mobilisation begins from the perspective of worker perception of injustice and worker grievances – a broad concept which can encapsulate the diverse reasons which can drive labour to organise.

Furthermore, it will be demonstrated that mobilisation theory provides a useful analytical framework with which to understand the history and development of the South African labour movement. Drawing upon analysis done by Upchurch and Mather (2011) it will be shown that the emphasis upon both injustice and upon the dynamic interaction of worker mobilisation and state responses to mobilisation, it will be explained that mobilisation theory is a useful tool with which to highlight how the first trade unions developed in South Africa and how they grew into labour federations, but also how the strategic response of the Apartheid state to mobilisation served to re-shape the South African labour movement and conditioned

the development of a new cycle of contention. This is represented by the development of the new unions of the 1970's, which in turn paved the way for the formation of COSATU itself and for the mass mobilisation of organised labour against the Apartheid state in the 1980's. Mobilisation theory also helps us to understand how this mobilisation was resolved through the end of the Apartheid in 1994 and the facilitation of COSATU to become a partner of the newly elected ANC.

However, while mobilisation theory offers a lens with which to understand the dialectical relationship between labour mobilisation and the counter-mobilisation of capital, there exists a theoretical blind spot in mobilisation theory, whereby the role of contention and contentious processes within labour organisations is ignored. This limits the analytical detail which can be revealed, because it ignores the ways in which contested processes develop which determine how the expression of labour's collective agency takes form; in effect how contestation between workers within organisations shapes their collective organisation and mobilisation. As has been explained in the previous chapter, and will be further outlined later in the thesis, from the perspective of NUMSA, competing organisational and political trends within COSATU itself have been central to the way in which the split that has taken place within the federation has developed. Therefore, to bring in an account of internal contentious processes to the analysis of the thesis, the concept of 'permanent' contention will be outlined as a proposed adaptation to mobilisation theory.

Finally, having adapted mobilisation theory to account for internal contentious processes within labour organisations and their role in shaping labour mobilisation, the key points of contention within COSATU that have led to the split will be outlined. It will be explained that the common characterisation of COSATU, as a federation which was based upon the model of 'Social Movement Unionism' (SMU), is in fact a

mischaracterisation of COSATU during the struggle against Apartheid. It is more accurate to see COSATU as uniting two divergent and sometimes conflicting approaches towards labour organising and mobilising. This is done by briefly outlining the debate between the 'populist' and 'workerist' tendencies within COSATU at the time of its formation – a debate which will be explained in greater detail in the next chapter. Drawing upon historical accounts of this debate it will be explained that this thesis will categorise the contemporary divide within the South African labour movement as a divide between populist unionism on the one hand and shopfloor unionism on the other.

3.1 Mobilisation Theory: Understanding Mobilisation and Counter-Mobilisation from a Worker Perspective

In his outline of mobilisation theory, John Kelly provides a theoretical framework with which to understand the development of labour organisation and mobilisation that places the labour-capital relationship at the centre of its analysis. This framework is actually based on the resource mobilisation framework developed by Charles Tilly in 1978 during studies of new social movements, but while Kelly is critical of many aspects of new social movement theory, particularly the extent to which the approach assumes that the development of new social movements has reduced the importance of labour movements, he argues that this can provide “a framework of well-developed concepts that has significantly increased our understanding of a wide range of social movements and whose application to industrial relations could prove invaluable” (Kelly, 1998, p132). However, he also developed mobilisation theory in response to the growing influence of new social movement theory, and in particular the idea that the development and proliferation of

'new' social movements have reduced the struggle of workers against capital to simply one site of struggle among many. Countering this position, his theory was intended to restore to an analysis of labour struggles the primacy of the capital-labour contradiction and the manner in which workers experience this contradiction, as Kelly explains:

“Instead of starting from the employers need for co-operation and performance or from the general issue of getting work done, it (mobilisation theory) begins with the category of injustice. Workers in capitalist societies find themselves in relations of exploitation and domination in which many of their most significant interests conflict with those of the employer. The individuals need to be in paid employment and hence for economies to operate at full employment conflicts with the capitalist requirements for periodic job-destructive reorganisation and for a labour surplus...From the vantage point of mobilisation theory it is the perception of, and response to, injustice that should form the core argument of industrial relations.”

(Kelly, 1998, p126)

The fact that mobilisation theory takes as its starting point workers perception of injustice lends itself well to the case of NUMSA and its mobilisation against the Tripartite Alliance. This focus means that the framework can begin from the perspective of workers themselves and fits well with the 'politics from below' perspective applied to gathering data in the field as it allows workers themselves to define what it is that they are mobilising against. As Kelly notes, injustice can cover a broad range of phenomena, including “violations of laws, conventions, or consensual social values.” (Kelly, 1998, pp126-127) It is the contention of this thesis that the

continued partnership between COSATU and the ANC, in the context of the ANC's failure to deliver on its promise to transform South Africa's economy, and in the context of increasing levels of state violence against workers, but also in the ANC's violation of the principles which underpin NUMSA's conception of labour organising, can be understood as incompatible with NUMSA's shared organisational and political values.

Mobilisation theory attempts to understand the relationship between labour movements and the state/employers as "cycles of contention", consisting of "alternating periods of worker mobilisation", typically but not exclusively demonstrated by protest or strike action, generated by workers collectively organising and mobilising against collectively experienced injustice, and "state and employer counter-mobilisation" (Kelly, 1998, p86). It is built upon the Marxist premise that the interests of labour and capital are fundamentally irreconcilable, and that the role of the state is to maintain and preserve the dominance of capital. Therefore, within mobilisation theory, the basis for authority within capitalism is provided by "the dialectical interplay of coercion and consent" on the part of the state, and therefore state counter mobilisation can consist either of channelling or facilitation of this mobilisation, or repression (Kelly, 1998, p59). Thus labour mobilisations and the counter-mobilisations of the state and employers create a "cycle of contention", best understood as "a phase of heightened social conflict" which "can only be ended by either reform, repression, or, in extreme cases, by revolution" (Upchurch and Mather, 2011, p270). In this way, labour mobilisation is understood as cyclical; labour movements on any scale engage in cyclical mobilisation, and in turn employers and states are obliged to find ways to respond to these mobilisations, either by granting concessions or by engaging in repression. Worker mobilisation, premised upon

workers experience of injustice, is therefore either mollified because their grievance has been resolved (at least partially), or workers collectively decide to shelve their grievances either because their attempts to mobilise against perceived injustices are unsuccessful or because employers or states respond to their grievances with recriminations or repression.

3.2 Applying Mobilisation Theory to the South African Labour Movement

Applying the theoretical framework of mobilisation theory to the historical experience of the South African labour movement provides a useful analytical tool with which to understand the various worker mobilisations that have occurred in the country. It is the contention of this thesis that the history of labour struggle under the Apartheid regime for example shows two distinct periods of mobilisation against injustice. The first stretches back to the development of the first trade unions and federations in South Africa, culminating in the formation of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), a federation of black workers unions explicitly allied to the ANC. This federation and the organised workers in its periphery were ultimately largely quashed by state repression; the Apartheid state sought to ban and crush the Congress movement, meaning not just simply the ANC but all organisations who were formally aligned to the ANC, and SACTU was no exception. The second period of mobilisation began with the Durban strike wave of 1973, which led to the emergence of a wave of new independent unions, and eventually the formation of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) in 1979. Furthermore, this thesis contends that two distinct phases of state response to these waves or cycles of mobilisation can be observed: one of repression, and one of

facilitation. When considering the history of the development of the labour movement under Apartheid for example, it is possible to observe firstly how labour organisations and mobilisations against the injustices suffered by black workers under the horrors of Apartheid developed, and also secondly how state repression and retaliation, while initially successful in curbing the development of labour mobilisations such as strikes, also subsequently served to shape the tactics and strategy of labour organisations and intensify their development, leading to the Durban strike wave and the subsequent development of a labour movement that operated independently of the ANC and the wider Congress movement. The development of these phases of mobilisation and of state responses to mobilisation will be explored in detail in Chapter Four of this thesis, which looks at the historical development of labour unionism in South Africa leading up to the formation of COSATU in 1985.

Attempting to understand the history and development of South Africa's workers movement through the framework of mobilisation theory is not however an original contribution of this thesis. Rather, this approach is borrowed from an analysis conducted by Upchurch and Mather in a paper from 2011, entitled 'Neoliberal Globalization and Trade Unionism: Toward Radical Political Unionism?'. Upchurch and Mather applied Kelly's mobilisation theory framework to the case of South Africa in order to explain how the Apartheid state found it necessary to selectively alternate between strategies of repression and facilitation, in order to respond to episodes of worker mobilisation:

“State strategies of selective state repression and facilitation have had a highly significant effect... Kelly (1998), for example, argues that state repression can serve to radicalize and generalize labour mobilization. This was clearly the case in South

Africa under apartheid. The risks of repression are high, but a strategy of facilitation is not guaranteed success either as prevailing economic conditions dictate the terms of negotiation.” (Upchurch and Mather, 2011, p270)

The utility of this theoretical framework is that it acknowledges that there are risks and costs for employers/states when they respond to labour mobilisation, whether they pursue a strategy of repression or of facilitation. A strategy of repression, such as was utilised to suppress the development of labour organisations in South Africa in the 1960's, carries risks because workers sense of injustice may be fuelled by this repression, or can be driven to experiment with new tactics to respond to this repression. Furthermore, it acknowledges that whatever strategy is pursued will likely shape labour mobilisation in the future.

This is evident in the development of the model of labour organisation developed through the new unions in the 1970's, which was premised upon tightly organised networks of shop stewards and workers to guard against victimisation and repression from employers and the state. This model of labour organisation developed as a direct response to the repression that the labour movement had previously been subjected to and was based upon the principle of the independence of worker organisations. High levels of organisation meant that workplace organisation could continue even when leaders were retrenched or arrested, and furthermore these new unions had links to political parties such as the ANC that could be used as justification for repression. This will be demonstrated in detail in the next chapter of this thesis, but for now it is important to say that through the focus on mobilisation and counter-mobilisation, mobilisation theory provides us with an analytical framework which focuses on how the interaction, or dialectical interplay, of worker agency and state/employer agency shape the development of cycles of

contention. While the initial wave of labour mobilisation represented by organisations like SACTU was at first suppressed through the repressive counter-mobilisation of the Apartheid state, this period of repression subsequently shaped the way in which workers began to organise, causing them to think more about the importance of strong grassroots structures and organisation.

This need for organised workers to respond to the Apartheid state repression of trade unions shaped the development of a second wave of labour mobilisation, beginning with the Durban strike wave of 1973. As Wood has noted, out of this strike wave came the “re-emergence of black trade unions” as new independent unions were formed, including the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU), the key forerunner of NUMSA (Wood, 1992, p23). Whereas it had been relatively easy to disrupt the activities of the SACTU unions, these new unions operated independently of the ANC and Congress movement, and furthermore had developed a more collective form of leadership. This made it harder to identify leaders; moreover, unions were less reliant upon individual leaders, since leadership became a collective task rather than simply the job of individuals. Consequently, to quell industrial action and unrest, employers and the state were increasingly pushed towards considering strategies of facilitation, rather than repression. For example, the Apartheid state began during this period to legalise trade unions, and to allow the development of some limited forms of collective bargaining.

It is argued in this thesis that this marked the beginning of a shift in state responses to labour mobilisation away from repression and towards a strategy of facilitation, which would culminate in the fall of Apartheid and the coming to power of the ANC, as Upchurch and Mather note:

“Repressive legislative and political practice under apartheid preserved white privilege and excluded non-whites from anything but the lower echelons of the labour market. But such economic exploitation and political suppression could not permanently contain the movement from below to which organized labour was central. The end of apartheid heralded new institutional practices designed to incorporate black organized labour into decision making structures led by the African National Congress (ANC) and the trade union federation COSATU. Radical politics appeared to be marginalized as the new black-led state sought to facilitate rather than repress the black labour movement.” (Upchurch and Mather, 2011, p272)

Thus, the end of Apartheid is understood as a recognition on behalf of the South African state that this explicitly and overly racialised hierarchy could no longer be maintained in the face of resistance from below. This fits neatly with NUMSA’s own analysis as discussed in the previous chapter; that the transition to a multi-racial democracy of 1994 was not a revolutionary transformation but a ‘negotiated settlement.’ Furthermore, it allows us to recognise that COSATU was incorporated into the decision making structures of the new South Africa in a corporatist fashion in an attempt to neutralise its potential opposition to the ANC, as Habib explains:

“The extension and consolidation of corporatism in the- post-1994 period was prompted by the ANC’s sense of political and economic vulnerability...Once the ANC undertook responsibility for governing and managing South Africa on these terms, it began to investigate mechanisms that would neutralise opposition to this new political and economic order. This became an urgent priority particularly because of the fragility of the transition, and the fact that the political and economic settlement represented a significant compromise that did not permit the ANC to address the

material grievances of, and deliver on the electoral promises it made to, its constituency.” (Habib, 1997, p70)

The history of the South African labour movement and the development of COSATU will be covered in more depth in the next chapter of this thesis, but it is sufficient to say here that mobilisation theory provides us with a compelling account of how the South African labour movement developed, starting with the category of injustice as it is perceived by workers. The Apartheid state and the formalised racially structured nature of the workplace provided this injustice, as it was experienced by workers, and correspondingly workers began to organise to challenge their conditions of work. Furthermore, the emphasis of mobilisation theory on the dialectical interplay of worker mobilisation and employer/state counter-mobilisation provides us with a framework which not only explains the way in which the Durban strike wave and subsequent organising developed in the 1970's in response to the heavy-handed repression of SACTU by the state, but also how the state shifted its counter-mobilisation strategy. While a strategy of extreme repression of labour organisations was pursued during the 1950's and '60's, this gradually shifted towards a strategy of facilitation of labour mobilisation, culminating in the end of Apartheid and the transition to multi-racial democracy in 1994. In the contemporary era, given the experience of the ANC's refusal to radically transform the Apartheid economy and the increasing use of repression against labour mobilisation, it also provides a framework with which to understand labour mobilisation against the existing corporatist order of labour relations in South Africa.

However, while this framework helps us to understand the interactions taking place between labour and the state, providing a framework which can explain why a new 'cycle of contention' is developing between labour and the state, it does not

explain why it is COSATU itself that has experienced a split, and not the Tripartite Alliance. This is because this theoretical model does not account for the competing and conflicting tendencies within the labour movement itself. As with the debates around the sustainability of the Alliance discussed in the introductory chapter, labour in this framework is regarded as politically homogenous, and competing agencies, politics and traditions within the labour movement are not accounted for.

This creates an issue in terms of the utility of the framework for understanding the events that have followed NUMSA's 2013 Congress. During fieldwork it was established that these processes represent the culmination of NUMSA's longstanding suspicion towards the Alliance, but also that political divisions within COSATU on this question have existed for some time. Patrick Craven, COSATU's national spokesperson at the time, explained:

“There is a great deal of tension within the federation, it’s difficult to exaggerate. It goes back further than this. The rise of AMCU and the NUMSA resolutions are a symptom of an underlying problem, a political problem. There are two different viewpoints on the correct attitude of the trade union movement towards the government...There has always been a strong view that COSATU should maintain independence.” (Patrick Craven, 2014)

The processes that have led to the 2013 Congress and the subsequent split within COSATU have therefore been shaped by internal contentious processes within the federation, as well as by state responses to organised labour in the post-Apartheid period. The role that competing ideas, politics and agencies within the federation has been significant. In order to account for this within the theoretical framework in which

the analysis is situated, this thesis therefore proposes an adaptation to mobilisation theory in the form of the concept of permanent contention.

3.3 Adapting Mobilisation Theory to Account for Internal Contention: The Concept of Permanent Contention

Throughout the thesis it will be argued that not only can mobilisation theory help us to understand how the post-Apartheid model of labour relations developed historically, it can also be adapted to help us to understand from the perspective of workers how the processes of contention within COSATU have emerged, between the pro-Alliance faction on the one hand and the anti-Alliance faction on the other, leading eventually to a de facto split within COSATU and the creation of SAFTU, a completely new labour federation. The strategic facilitation of labour which was established in post-Apartheid South Africa following 1994, premised upon an acceptance of the populist faction of COSATU's preference for a corporatist and cross-class alliance with the ANC, and the subsequent development of oppositional tendencies unhappy at the results of this facilitation, has meant that injustice in this context can be perceived by workers as perpetrated not simply by employers or the state but by the defenders of the dominant model of labour relations; consequently mobilisation in this context mobilisation against the dominant model of labour relations and against the Tripartite Alliance itself, even if this means workers mobilising against the leadership of their own labour federation or affiliate unions; what we might term *internal* contention and mobilisation.

As will be demonstrated later in the thesis, NUMSA is a union which has been built upon specific principles and a particular model of labour organising. Consequently, NUMSA has collectively always been suspicious of the Alliance and

has sought to challenge the status quo within the Alliance throughout the time in which the union has been involved in the Alliance. Furthermore, historically the union has been committed not only to improving the lives of their members but to transforming the economic structure of South African society. As such they have collectively reached a point where they now understand the Tripartite Alliance and the ANC as an obstacle to this transformation. It is for this reason that NUMSA members took a democratic decision to mobilise politically against the existing model of labour relations in South Africa and for a new, independent labour federation and a new, explicitly Socialist political party. Furthermore, it is this position and strategy which has resulted in both political and organisational counter mobilisations from the pro-Alliance faction of COSATU, including the expulsion of NUMSA and subsequent split, and consequently is the most important manifestation of internal contention and mobilisation within COSATU in recent years.

However, in order for us to adapt mobilisation theory in a way which is sufficient for it to provide a lens with which to understand these internal dynamics of contention and mobilisation, contained within worker's organisations, as well as external mobilisations such as strikes or campaigns against employers or the state, it is necessary to do away with the 'cyclical' conception of contention which exists within mobilisation theory, and instead replace it with the concept of *permanent contention*. In this way, in much the same way as mobilisation theory utilises the dialectical interplay of worker agency and employer/state agency to explain the development of mobilisation and counter-mobilisation, through the concept of permanent contention, it becomes possible to see how the dialectical interplay of contention, mobilisation and counter-mobilisation *within* labour unions and organisations shapes the way in which external mobilisations develop. Furthermore,

the resolution of what in Kelly's formulation of mobilisation would be understood as a particular episode or cycle of *external* contention invariably serves to shape the development of further *internal* contention. For example, a group of workers may discuss a strike over pay. This process of internal contention will determine whether they act and what form this action will take. The state or employers will then respond to this action either with repression, to disrupt and end the action, or with facilitation, which could mean offering concessions or simply waiting out whatever tactic the workers employ. Whatever action the employers take will then shape the experiences and the preferences of workers, and thus determine how they will collectively express their agency in future. Thus, this contention is not simply episodic or cyclical; contention in the present is shaped and historically conditioned by the dynamics of both internal and external contentious processes in the past, and in turn contention and struggle in the present will determine contention and struggle in the future. Organised labour in capitalist society therefore exists within a state of *permanent contention*. This concept is designed to highlight that while it is true that the development of the oppositional currents within COSATU has been conditioned by state responses to labour, it has also been simultaneously conditioned by political and organisation contention within the labour movement itself.

An example of this was observed during fieldwork, in a meeting of the Germiston NUMSA Local. During the period in which fieldwork was undertaken, NUMSA began a period of national strike action in the engineering sector. The dispute involved around 220,000 NUMSA members, a huge proportion of the union's membership, and was therefore a very significant mobilisation, which began on 1st July 2014. The strike was in response to an offer on pay made by the employers bargaining council of an 8% pay rise. NUMSA had rejected this offer and was

demanding 15%, although the union lowered this demand to 12% (BBC, 2014; IndustriALL Global Union, 2014a). The strike was resolved after a month of industrial action when NUMSA agreed to the following improvements:

“The settlement provide a 10 per cent wage increase every year for lowest paid members in the sector and 8 per cent increase for the highest paid for the next three years. Other gains were time-off for shop stewards to attend to union and industry matters; the establishment of an industry short-time fund which will be used to compensate workers when they are on short time and training opportunities for workers.” (IndustriALL Global UNION, 2014b)

The settlement, which was described by NUMSA as “a massive victory... overwhelmingly and unanimously accepted by our members” (NUMSA, 2014) was reported and discussed in the Germiston Local and generally met with enthusiastic approval. The union was regarded as having significantly improved the offer from employers because of the strike. However, one shop steward bitterly objected to the settlement, complaining that the mandate from the workers had been to demand 15%, and that the union had accepted a deal which fell short of what they expected:

“Our members sent us to demand 15%. That was the mandate given by workers to NUMSA at the beginning of this struggle. Why now are we accepting 10%?”
(NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

A small number of shop stewards present, notably some of the youngest in the meeting, agreed and supported these comments. However, the overwhelming majority explained that they were happy with the settlement.

This situation provides an example on a small scale of what is meant by the concept of permanent contention. During the engineering strike, NUMSA mobilised around the grievances of its members, generating a cycle of contention which was resolved through the employer's council (partially) facilitating the demands of the union. As a result, this episode of contention is resolved, to the satisfaction of (a significant majority) NUMSA's members. But as labour organisations are collective organisations which operate as collective political agents, there will always be groups within these collective agents that are dissatisfied by the resolution of episodes of contention, and these groups will continue to play a role in shaping the development of subsequent worker mobilisations. In this case, the existence of members within NUMSA who were dissatisfied with the resolution of the pay settlement and the attitudes of the wider membership towards this will continue to play a role in shaping debate within both the sector and the union in future negotiations and potential mobilisations.

This thesis contends that the same is true of the political settlement of 1994 and the end of Apartheid. While the majority within COSATU (potentially a significant majority) was satisfied by the Tripartite Alliance becoming a partnership between organised labour and the new governing party, and by the resolution to the cycle of contention between labour and the state, there remained currents within COSATU that were not. These currents, to which NUMSA indisputably belongs, have continued to attempt to shape both the Alliance and COSATU in the post-Apartheid period, and the internal contention between these different political currents within the federation need to be understood if we are to fully understand the processes that have led to the split that has taken place.

3.4: Rejecting the Characterisation of COSATU as a Federation Based Upon 'Social Movement Unionism'

It is important to state at this point that many accounts of the development of COSATU have characterised the union as representing one of the primary examples of SMU. The SMU conceptualisation of a distinct approach to labour organisation was in fact developed as a concept in order to explain the development of “militant, mobilised industrial unions in the newly industrialising countries, such as Brazil, South Africa, South Korea and the Philippines, in the 1980's” (von Holdt, 2002, p284). In fact, the term SMU was first coined by Peter Waterman in 1984 and originally applied to South Africa to characterise the formation of COSATU by Lambert and Webster in 1988 before being applied to other newly industrialising economies (Pillay, 2013, p11).

COSATU was seen as the first expression of a ‘new’ model of unionism, which was labelled SMU. There are many variations and interpretations of SMU; indeed, Waterman listed ten conditions or characteristics of SMU, while simultaneously acknowledging that not all manifestations of SMU would meet these criteria and that these characteristics were “thought-provoking but inadequate” (Waterman, 1993, pp266-268). However, Pillay describes SMU as embodying three distinct characteristics:

“Firstly, unions developed deep, shop-floor participatory-democratic internal processes; secondly, while focused on collective bargaining, they also addressed issues beyond the workplace; and thirdly, they forged alliances with community and

political organizations, both to support workplace struggles, as well as to support local and national community-political struggles.” (Pillay, 2013, p10)

In terms of what distinguishes SMU from other manifestations of labour unionism, the key feature is clearly the emphasis on alliances with other organisations and engaging with struggles outside of the workplace at a local and national level.

Masiya also emphasises this point while arguing that COSATU represented a clear example of SMU, stating that “social movement unionism theory contends that trade unions are not separate from social movements such as faith groups, civic, advocacy, campaign, welfare and residents’ organisations and student groups... COSATU sensed the limitations of workplace-based workers’ struggles and went beyond this level, to participation in the broader socio-political arena” (Masiya, 2016, pp443-444). Again, the emphasis here is on going beyond the workplace and building alliances with other forces; it is noteworthy however that here it is made explicit that this includes cross-class alliances, a tension that will be discussed later on.

While COSATU has frequently been characterised as representing the emergence of SMU however, this thesis contends that this is a simplistic characterisation. In order to demonstrate this, it will examine the central theoretical premise on which SMU is based; that structural transformation in the global economy has seriously undermined and diminished the transformative capacity of workplace centred labour organisation. Furthermore, emerging new sites and forms of social struggle and movement, structured not by the material realities of class relations and labour exploitation but by ‘new’ fluid and sometimes overlapping identities, are identified as displacing the workplace as the primary form of progressive societal

struggle. This perspective holds that transformations in the global order have diminished the prominence, significance and transformative capacity of traditional workplace organisations and opened new sites of progressive social struggle, the dynamics of which are driven not by the contradictions and tensions arising from class society but by a wide range of fluid and intersecting identities. Thus, theories of social movement and struggle influenced by this perspective are situated within a conception of a transformed global economy in which identity rather than the material contradictions of the capital-labour relationship serves as the key driver of contentious political processes. As Waterman explains:

“The concept of social-movement unionism (SMU) is intended to relate to and be appropriate for our contemporary world. This is a world increasingly marked by the dramatic expansion and equally dramatic transformations of capitalist, military, state, imperial, technical, and patriarchal forms and powers. It is also (and consequently) marked by the appearance of the so-called new social movements (NSM’s-feminist, antimilitarist, human-rights, ecological, etc.) alongside such old ones as those of religion, nation, or labour.” (Waterman, 1993, p246).

It is suggested that for labour organisations to remain both relevant and significant in this transformed global economy, it is necessary for them to orientate less towards traditional centres of strength for labour, such as networks of workplace activists and ‘economistic’ material demands and more towards these ‘new’ and ‘vibrant’ emergent social movements, in order to play their role in creating broad and diverse progressive movements focused on social justice. While there are some variations of emphasis and interpretation within SMU as a theoretical approach, nonetheless all such variations are premised upon “a commitment to the reinvention of the labour movement by taking up progressive social ideas and attaching themselves to a

transformatory project that has developed alongside the labour movement.” (Neary, 2002, p159). Therefore, having diagnosed labour organisation as suffering from decreased structural power because of transformation in the global economy, the prescription which SMU offers as a remedy is for the labour movement to re-align itself alongside the diverse and amorphous ranks of the ‘new’ social movements.

Proponents of SMU point to structural transformations in the global economy which have significantly undermined the structural power of labour, such as outsourcing, wage discipline, trade liberalisation, employment deregulation and privatisation. This in combination with the modernisation of social democratic/labour friendly political parties results in a situation whereby “past patterns of national institutional support can... no longer be guaranteed under the pressure of labour market de-regulation.” (Upchurch and Mather, 2009, pp265-266). The cumulative effect of these processes has resulted in several factors, most importantly:

- A general decline in the level of membership and density of trade unions in most countries
- An increase in informal labour sectors throughout the global economy

These leads proponents of SMU such as Waterman to conclude that “the overwhelming majority of the world's workers (including the traditionally defined proletariat) are not unionized. And, even if defined as workers, the overwhelming majority of the poor, powerless, marginalized, and alienated are not unionisable.” (Waterman, 1993, p247). Therefore, since labour organisations alone cannot fully encompass this diverse range of identities and positions which constitute the poor, marginalised and oppressed in society, the struggle of organised workers is there conceived of as “representing one front or site of political struggle that must be

articulated intimately with others if the "present state of things" is to be abolished." (Waterman, 1993, p252). Consequently, labour organisations are presented as relegated from a position of primacy within transformative movements to a position of representing one form of social struggle amongst a myriad of identities and positionalities. The concept of Social Movement Unionism (SMU) is one based on the promotion and celebration of partnership and collaboration between labour unions and other social justice organisations – often referred to as the ‘new’ social movements - to create broad coalitions which seek to secure social and economic justice. Conceptions of what exactly SMU represents vary, but all share a common defining feature; as Neary puts it they are generally premised on “a commitment to the reinvention of the labour movement by taking up progressive social ideas and attaching themselves to a transformatory project that has developed alongside the labour movement.” (Neary, 2002, p159).

The emphasis of SMU upon the creation of broad and diverse alliances with social movements seems at first glance highly relevant to the South African labour movement and its role in the broader National Liberation struggle during the Apartheid years. Indeed, the development of SMU as a concept was heavily influenced by this historical struggle. SMU could also be seen as providing a useful characterisation of NUMSA’s attempt to construct new alliances outside of the Tripartite Alliance through the development of the United Front and the Movement for Socialism. However, this thesis argues that the characterisation of COSATU as embodying SMU lacks a nuanced appreciation of the tendencies within the South African labour movement, and furthermore serves to obscure the specific and unique form of agency and collective power which labour unions represent. This critique is not intended as a denunciation of the creation of alliances between labour and

broader progressive forces; indeed, NUMSA is looking outside the ranks of COSATU and the Tripartite Alliance towards new types of alliances with other 'anti-neoliberal' organisations in its attempts to reassert the principles of shopfloor unionism on which the union was founded. But to understand contemporary developments, it is necessary to recognise the flaws in this account of COSATU and the South African labour movement.

It is valid and correct to point out that the majority of the global working class is not unionised. However, Waterman seems to suggest that this is a new phenomenon resulting from transformation in the global economy. This is a somewhat ahistorical perspective; at no point in history is it possible to claim that the majority of the world's workers have been organised in formal unions. Indeed, Waterman's argument that much of the global working class are not unionised is a point that had been made many years previously by Leon Trotsky, writing in 1938:

"Trade unions, even the most powerful, embrace no more than 20 to 25 percent of the working class, and at that, predominantly the more skilled and better paid layers. The more oppressed majority of the working class is drawn only episodically into the struggle, during a period of exceptional upsurges in the labour movement." (Trotsky, 1938).

Trotsky, like Waterman, acknowledged that unions do not constitute a majority of workers. But this is not a new phenomenon; indeed it has always been the case.

Given the decline of union membership in the global North, particularly in areas of traditional strength such as manufacturing, energy, mining and heavy industry, it is easy to see where Waterman's pessimism with regard to the power of workplace organisation comes from. In many countries labour organisations in these

sectors have not just been forced into decline but soundly beaten by the combined forces of the state and global capital. Outsourcing in particular has been a useful stick with which to punish workers organised enough to struggle for better wages and conditions. Often communities which have grown up around particular forms of industry have been left totally bereft, with high levels of unemployment, a stark warning to workers who might dare to demand uncompetitive wages, and a heavy blow to established unions in terms of traditional areas of strength.

But to see the global economy as having been irreversibly transformed by such processes is arguably Eurocentric; though these forms of heavy industry may have been significantly displaced in the Global North, they have not been done away with by technological advances, but simply shifted geographically to low wage economies in Asia, Africa and Latin America. For example, if we take the mining sector in South Africa, which produces more gold, platinum and chromium than any other in the world, we can see that hundreds of thousands of workers are employed in the exact type of sector that was traditionally a stronghold of labour organisation in the Global North. Furthermore, these workers almost always live in township communities which have sprung up around mining, meaning that labour organisation and community organisation can often represent much the same thing. The high levels of union membership in the mining sector are a testament to enduring power of workplace organisation – as are the substantial pay rises that AMCU members in the platinum mines won following their five-month long strike in 2014. The idea that workplace organisation has become less effective, in the face of such high levels of unionisation and evidently successful industrial action, does not sit at all easily with the reality.

Furthermore, this analysis of decline does not match the experience of the South African labour movement in the years preceding COSATU's formation. As is alluded to throughout this thesis, and explored in detail in Chapter 4, during the 1970's a revival of trade union organisation took place following the Durban strike wave, resulting in an exponential growth in union membership. It is therefore questionable whether a conceptualisation of COSATU's development based upon a perception of declining trade union membership

The conclusions that Waterman and other proponents of SMU draw from the low levels of traditional worker mobilisation, particularly against the emergence of 'new' social movements, is therefore to see workers' organisations and indeed workers' struggles as "representing one front or site of political struggle that must be articulated intimately with others if the "present state of things" is to be abolished." (Waterman, 1993, p252). In presenting workplace struggle as merely one site of struggle against what Waterman vaguely defines 'the present state of things', he is in effect denying the central position of workers within the mode of production, the centrality of exploitation of workers to the extraction of surplus value, or profit, and therefore the specific and unique power which organised workers can hold, albeit perhaps only potentially. As Neary points out, "in Waterman's account the capital/labour relation is no longer of central importance" (Neary, 2002, p171).

When we consider the development of the South African labour movement and the formation of COSATU during the anti-Apartheid struggle (which again will be discussed extensively in Chapter 4) this again seems incongruous. Far from representing a model of labour unionism developed as a result of the diminishing power of workplace organisation, during the anti-Apartheid period COSATU and its predecessors were capable of organising incredibly powerful strikes. These strikes

were a tool which was used to successfully force concessions from both employers and the state during the Apartheid era, but which also made the continuation of Apartheid fundamentally untenable. The power of workplace organisation forced the state to shift from a strategy of repression of labour to one of facilitation that would ultimately culminate in the end of Apartheid.

However, some of the features of COSATU that SMU points to, such as its alliances with other organisations, including cross-class organisations which it is argued are not a feature of the shopfloor tradition, are important to discuss. Furthermore, the presentation of COSATU as representing SMU glosses over the fact that there were deep and protracted differences on key political questions – including on the desirability of coalitions with other organisations, particularly cross-class organisations. In this next section, this chapter will identify and discuss two competing models of labour organising which were united in a state of permanent contention within COSATU itself.

3.5 Populist and Shopfloor: Conceptualising the Competing Traditions within COSATU

Having outlined the theoretical framework in which the analysis contained within this thesis is situated, and rejected the characterisation of COSATU as embodying SMU, this section of the chapter will now deal with the question of how the competing tendencies within COSATU can be conceptualised. This conceptualisation will be rooted in research conducted in the field, which revealed that from the perspective of NUMSA, the decisions the union took at the 2013 Congress and the processes this has unleashed are the culmination of a political struggle which has been present within COSATU since its formation. The

conceptualisation of the competing political currents in the contemporary South African labour movement will therefore be based upon the main historical political trends within COSATU. The starting point for this conceptualisation is based upon Baskin's identification of 'workerism' and 'populism' of two distinct political trends which were present in COSATU at the time of its formation in his book 'Striking Back: A History of COSATU'. In the chapter entitled 'Workerists and Populists?' he writes:

“Populists’ tend to agree that racial oppression is the central contradiction within society. Class differences, while often acknowledged, are devalued and held to be of lesser importance, and ‘the struggle’ is often seen as being against Apartheid oppression in all its forms. This requires the unification of all classes and sectors oppressed by the regime. Class differences and class issues are downplayed in the interests of the broadest anti-Apartheid unity... ‘Workerists’, by contrast, tend to see racism and Apartheid as a mask concealing capitalist exploitation. Racism is simply a tool of the ruling class used to enhance the division and exploitation of the ruling class. Politically, workers tend to counterpose the national-democratic struggle and the class struggle. The working class alone, on an anti-racist and socialist program, can effect real change. Co-operation with other classes is likely to compromise working-class objectives. While class alliances are not ruled out in principle, workerists tend to underestimate them or view them with suspicion.” (Baskin, 1991, p96)

The main competing political trends within COSATU historically then were on the one hand the populists, who saw racial oppression as the most fundamental contradiction in society and who argued that cross-class alliances (such as the Tripartite Alliance itself) were essential in the struggle against oppression, and on the

other hand the workerists, who saw the capitalist system as the most fundamental contradiction and who were generally suspicious of cross-class alliances.

It is important to note that alternatives to the term 'populist' and 'workerist' are often used within academic literature. Indeed, as Friedman notes, "neither label was chosen by the factions — they were usually hung on by their opponents" (Friedman, 2013a). There is a long history of these terms being used pejoratively by political opponents. It is also important to note that while populist and workerist perspectives represented the main dividing line in political perspectives, this did not necessarily mean that every member or affiliate union was firmly wedded to one perspective or the other:

"Within COSATU, neither workerist nor populist views were usually held in the pure forms...Positions adopted were not static, and developed and changed over time."

(Baskin, 1991, p97)

However, the populist and workerist debate, and the internal contentious processes that flowed from these two contrasting positions, were key to influencing and shaping COSATU from its formation.

It is also important to point out that these two divergent political perspectives have sometimes been referred to by other labels, particularly as both could be understood as having negative connotations. Other terms have therefore often been substituted; for example, populist is sometimes replaced with terms such as 'nationalist' or 'national democratic'. Southall and Webster outline a definition of 'national democratic' unionism:

“This...involved a view that South Africa could not be understood simply in class terms. Social reality was based on a ‘colonialism of a special type’ necessitating national democratic rather than class struggle as the appropriate strategic response. This therefore argued for a multi-class alliance under the leadership of the ANC, drawing together all sections of the oppressed black masses and sympathetic whites and aiming at establishing a ‘national democracy’.” (Southall and Webster, 2010, p137)

While a different term is utilised here, the principle remains the same; that in the context of the Apartheid struggle, organised labour should prioritise building the broadest possible coalition on a cross-class basis. However, in the context of post-Apartheid South Africa, where a multi-racial ‘national democracy’ has been in place since 1994, this term has the potential to be conceptually disorientating. For this reason, the term populist will be utilised in this thesis, denoting a model of labour unionism which is based on a perspective that the interests of organised labour are best served through a broad multi-class alliance against racism, colonialism and other forms of oppression, and which is therefore in support of the Tripartite Alliance.

The usage of the term workerist in debates on organised labour in South Africa however is more complicated. This is because the term workerist has often been understood as signifying a narrow economism, concerned only with the workplace and with nothing else. This is illustrated by an article entitled ‘The Errors of Workerism’ which was published in *Isizwe*, the journal of the United Democratic Front, in 1986, around the time of COSATU’s formation:

“Workerists who advance this brand of economism tend to dismiss the political struggle as not so important. They see apartheid oppression as simply a mask

behind which capitalist exploitation is hidden. For these workerists, struggles around who shall govern, and against apartheid oppression generally are not really important. They say such struggles have the danger of misleading workers away from the “real” struggle, the pure class struggle in the factory...it tends to ignore the great importance of political questions.” (Isizwe, 1986, pp20-21)

This creates a more difficult issue, as it was simply not the case that the unions who were labelled ‘workerist’ were indifferent to the horrors of Apartheid or to broader political questions outside of the workplace. This will be demonstrated in the next chapter of this thesis in more detail, but for now it is sufficient to note that what has been labelled the ‘workerist’ trend within COSATU was diverse and eclectic. It included syndicalists who emphasised “workplace struggle as the most important aspect of working-class political activity”, but there were also revolutionary socialists who agitated for “the establishment of a revolutionary Marxist party” (Baskin, 1991, p96). Furthermore, as Byrne explains:

“(despite) the frequent assertion that workerists ignored or avoided race and were unconcerned with the national-democratic struggle...the workerist strategy revolved around combining anti-nationalism and anti-capitalism into a national liberation struggle – fought by a united, non-racial working class (as opposed to a multiclass nationalist or populist front) infused with socialist aspirations.” (Byrne, 2013, pp15-16)

What has generally been referred to as workerism is in fact a broad and eclectic tendency within the South African labour movement, which is united by some commonalities, but also demonstrates some divergent features. For this reason, to avoid conceptual confusion, the term workerist will not be used within this thesis.

Instead, this thesis will adopt the term utilised by Webster, who describes the unions that emerged during the 1970's as representing a 'shopfloor' model of labour unionism. These unions rejected what they viewed as the populist unions of the 1960's and instead emphasised "the building of democratic shopfloor structures around the principle of worker control, accountability, and the mandating of worker representatives. This they saw as the basis for developing a working-class leadership within the factories" (Webster, 2001, p257). The advantage of this terminology is that it avoids an overly restrictive or potentially confusing definition and locates this model of unionism as emerging from a particular wave of labour mobilisation, the 1973 Durban strike wave and the new unions that developed from this. It is emphasised that this 'shopfloor' model was diverse and eclectic, but that within this diverse and eclectic model existed core principles of worker leadership, democratic accountability, and the central importance of the political and organisational independence of the working class. It is this emphasis on organisational and political independence, and not indifference to the struggle against Apartheid, which united the shopfloor or so-called 'workerists' into a coherent political tendency within COSATU.

3.6 Chapter Conclusions

In summary, this chapter has set out the theoretical framework in which the analysis contained within this thesis is located, drawing upon Kelly's mobilisation theory to utilise a conception of how worker mobilisation and state responses to labour mobilisation shape each other. It was explained how this theoretical framework meshes neatly with the historical experience of the South African labour movement, but also highlighted that this framework failed to account for the question of internal contentious processes within labour movements themselves – in effect the

role that competing political agencies within labour unions shape the character of labour mobilisations.

Furthermore, this chapter outlined some criticisms of the characterisation of COSATU as embodying SMU, a theoretical approach to labour organising which in essence reduces and relegates the importance of workplace organisation and struggle. Finally, the chapter has provided a conceptualisation of the key political conflict which NUMSA's opposition to the Alliance and the resulting split within COSATU embodies, a political and organisational divide between a populist model and a shopfloor model of labour unionism. In the next chapter, the thesis will outline the origins of both the populist and the shopfloor models of unionism in detail and provide an account of how these two competing tendencies within the labour movement came together in the 1980's in the form of a strategic compromise – COSATU.

4. COSATU's Split in Historical Context: The Roots of Unity and the Roots of Contention

“NUMSA’s search for an alternative labour politics builds on a long tradition of worker’s control, shopfloor democracy, and struggle unionism that independent unions like its’ predecessor – MAWU – built during the 1970’s. Denigrated then by SACP and its allies in the ANC as “workerism” (meaning economism), this tradition never really went away, even while its most powerful vehicle, FOSATU, was absorbed into COSATU in the 1980’s and then the Alliance after liberation.”

(Lichtenstein, 2019, p622)

In previous chapters, it was explained that to develop a full analysis of the processes which have led to the NUMSA 2013 Congress resolutions and the resulting split that these resolutions triggered, it is necessary to consider the dynamics of permanent contention which characterise labour organisations. Furthermore, the origins of both the populist and shopfloor models of unionism, a key debate taking place at the time of COSATU’s formation, were briefly outlined and presented as characterising the contemporary political struggle which is currently ongoing. In this chapter, the origins of these two competing models of unionism will be discussed in detail, in order to situate the analysis of within the thesis within the history of contentious politics within the South African labour movement.

This chapter will first outline the origins of populist unionism, through a discussion of the origins of the first labour unions in South Africa, which were initiated in large part by the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), later refounded as the SACP in 1953. Consequently, the political ideas of the CPSA/SACP had a huge influence on the early trade unions in South Africa, in

particular the party's position on the National Liberation struggle. This is a key explanatory factor in what developed into the populist model of unionism within the South African labour movement. The chapter will show how this model of unionism became influential in the South African Council of Trade Unions (SACTU), the first sizeable federation of labour unions to be formed in South Africa, but also how SACTU's organisational structures and links with the ANC made it vulnerable to state repression and ultimately resulted in its demise.

Secondly, it will outline the origins of the shopfloor model of unionism, which grew from the 1973 Durban Strike wave, and importantly developed in many ways as a conscious response to the repression experienced by SACTU. It will be shown that this model of labour organising heavily influenced the formation of both the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU), and the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), a federation based on the shopfloor model. Thirdly, the character of the shopfloor model will be discussed, and the characterisation of this model as economists, unconcerned with the struggle against Apartheid, or narrowly syndicalist will be evaluated and refuted. It will be demonstrated that the shopfloor model was a broad, eclectic political tradition which contained within it a variety of attitudes and perspectives towards political questions.

Finally, the processes leading to COSATU's formation will be discussed. It will be demonstrated that as Southall and Webster point out, COSATU was "formed as a 'strategic compromise' between the two dominant political traditions within the democratic labour movement; that is, between the national democratic (populist) and shopfloor traditions" (Southall and Webster, 2010, p138). It is in this divide between national democratic and shopfloor traditions that we can observe a historically contingent link between the contentious processes of the past and the contemporary

issues and debates which surround the NUMSA 2013 Congress resolutions and the split that this has precipitated within COSATU.

4.1 The Origins of Black Trade Unionism in South Africa

The history of black trade unions in South Africa stretches back to 1919, when the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) was formed in Cape Town. In effect it was a general workers union, and it had some early successes, particularly in organising dockworkers in Cape Town, where they organised a successful strike of 2,000 workers. Jeremy Baskin notes that the ICU “drew in members from a range of classes, including teachers, small traders and rural farmworkers and labour tenants...It resembled, at times, a mass movement of the dispossessed more than a union” (Baskin, 1991, p7). It is significant that the union was conceived on this basis, consisting of members from a variety of class backgrounds, since many later unions in the populist tradition followed a ‘community’ union model, which did not emphasise building in specific workplaces but rather communities. The ICU was also the first union in South Africa to express support for the African National Congress, which it “officially recognised as the only political body fighting for the rights of African people” (Kelley, 2014, p255) in 1925. The union grew to a significant size and boasted a membership of 100,000 at its peak in 1927. However, the union had pretty much disappeared by 1930 following the expulsion of key Communist Party members, who had been the driving force behind the union (Baskin, 1991, p7).

Attempts to build black trade unions continued for some years with varying degrees of success, led largely by the CPSA, which was crucial to the early development of black trade unions in South Africa and later to the formation of SACTU. This meant that strategies for labour organising were heavily influenced by

the concept of the National Liberation struggle. This idea held that in the colonial world, it was necessary to bring about a democratic revolution first, through a broad alliance of multi-class forces, before the question of socialism could be addressed. The CPSA had initially been suspicious of what it saw as 'African Nationalism', and advocated an immediate struggle for socialism, but was over-ruled by the Third International to which it was affiliated:

“The COMINTERN resolution rejected the CPSA’s longstanding political position that the struggle in South Africa was first and foremost a struggle for socialism. The new position maintained that a “national agrarian movement,” or a struggle for national liberation had to precede socialist transformation.” (Kelley, 2014, p261)

This became the policy of the CPSA from this point onwards, as was confirmed by Joe Slovo, General Secretary of the SACP in 1988:

“Our National Democratic Revolution expresses the broad objective interests not only of the working class but also of most of the other classes within the nationally-dominated majority, including the black petit-bourgeoisie and significant strata of the emergent black bourgeoisie. This reality provides the foundation for a struggle which aims to mobilise to its side all the oppressed classes and strata as participants in the national liberation alliance.” (Slovo, 1988)

The roots of the populist model of unionism, in which organised labour should participate in cross-class alliances in order to achieve liberation, developed directly from the influence of the Communist Party on the early labour unions.

It is important to stress that this vision of transition, firstly from Apartheid to democracy and then secondly from democracy to socialism, is an idea which was dominant in the leadership of the anti-Apartheid movement and consequently in the

Alliance. It continues to have resonance in South African political discourse today. This is demonstrated for example by President Zuma's references to the "Second Phase of the Transition to a National Democratic Society" which he told the ANC's fourth National Policy Conference was just beginning in 2012 (ANC, 2012). While official ANC policy documents no longer make reference to a future socialist transformation of society, the ANC retains the language and ideas surrounding the National Democratic struggle, just as it is necessary to sing the struggle songs at official ceremonies; it is an integral part of the image of the ANC as the party of liberation from Apartheid.

4.2 SACTU: Mobilisation and Repression

South Africa's first non-racial trade union federation, SACTU, was formed in 1955. This represented the culmination of a process that took decades, chiefly driven by the Communist Party of South Africa, to create a non-racial trade union federation that could organise and unite workers in South Africa under one umbrella organisation. Initially SACTU brought together 19 affiliate unions, with a total membership of 20,000. By 1959 this had grown to 35 affiliate unions with a total membership of 46,000 workers. This was no mean feat, particularly given the existence of white-only unions which often refused to recognise the existence of black unions and even (in the case of ultra-nationalist Afrikaner unions) demanded racial segregation in factories. In practice the vast majority of workers organised under SACTU were black but given the "enforced breaking up of unions into separate racial branches, the intensification of legalised job reservation whereby certain jobs were reserved for whites, and a government declaration that it would

never recognise black trade unions” which took place in the early 1950’s it was nonetheless a major achievement (Baskin, 1991, p12).

While the creation of SACTU represented a major breakthrough, it is important to note that SACTU was a very particular kind of labour federation, developed to unite workers around a particular strategy of labour organisation. Given the huge influence which the CPSA had had over not just the formation of SACTU but almost all efforts to build black trade unions up to this point, within SACTU and its predecessors there was a general acceptance that the labour movement should align itself with the broad anti-Apartheid movement, including the ANC, which was not in any sense a working class organisation. Consequently, the SACTU federation embodied a particular approach to labour organisation, seeing the ANC as its political leadership. As Beresford notes:

“SACTU was formally aligned with the ANC and in this sense it continued the ‘political tradition’ developed by the black trade unions organised by the Communist Party in earlier decades.” (Beresford, 2016, p9)

SACTU adopted the Freedom Charter, the political program of the ANC. From its inception, it was critical of the idea that the focus of labour organisations should be the workplace, declaring that “a mere struggle for the economic rights of workers without participation in the general struggle for political emancipation would condemn the trade union movement to uselessness and to a betrayal of the interests of the workers” (Luckhardt and Wall, 1980, p97). Since SACTU took its political lead from the ANC, it followed a strategy of complete non-engagement with the Apartheid state:

“SACTU advocated what it called ‘political trade unionism’, by which it meant that ‘the apartheid state is all-powerful and that the only form of struggle appropriate to the strength of the state apparatus is armed struggle’. Hence, ‘Class-conscious workers ... should abandon the struggle to establish trade unions and acknowledge the primacy of political struggle by leaving the country to get professional military training. The issue of working-class rights thus can only be solved through military struggle; in a national democratic state trade union rights will be granted to workers.’”
(Legassick, 2008, p250)

Because of this viewpoint, support for and allegiance to the ANC and the liberation movement was a key priority within SACTU and engagement with the Apartheid state was seen as a betrayal of the liberation struggle. Instead, the federation followed a policy of deliberate refusal to engage, eschewing any attempts to secure recognition and rights for trade unions. SACTU developed to a point where it was able to organise mass community style strikes in support of the liberation movement, but its association with the ANC resulted in state repression:

“The mass strikes of the 1950s that were associated with the liberation struggle served as an effective recruitment tool, until the apartheid state banned the ANC and forced the movement underground, while SACTU became defunct.” (Emery, 2006, p7)

When the Apartheid state began to clamp down on the liberation movements, and banned the ANC and the CPSA, while SACTU was not officially banned, it was “suppressed and driven into exile...from 1960, to the formation of COSATU in 1985.” (Southall and Webster, 2010, p132) The effect of the repression of SACTU was to

throw black worker organisation in South Africa into total chaos. As Hemson, Legassick and Ulrich explain:

“In 1970 the two main federations were the South African Confederation of Labour (SACLA) and the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA). The wages, hours of work, benefits, place in the labour process and working conditions of most African workers were determined by employers and SACLA and TUCSA unions in the industrial council system, from which African workers were excluded. SACLA, with a solely white membership of some 190 000, looked to the government to promote job colour bars. TUCSA, with a membership of some 186 000, was dominated by unions who preserved their position against deskilling through the industrial councils and was conservative and bureaucratic, despite the fact that a majority of its members (107 000) were coloured and Indian. TUCSA’s attitude to African workers was to ignore them or to try to control their organisation to control its members privileges.”
(Hemson, Legassick and Ulrich, 2006, p247)

While SACTU’s efforts to create a non-racial trade union federation resulted in a significant success, and at the federations high point in 1962 organised around 55,000 workers, ultimately SACTU itself had a very short lifespan, and was no longer a significant force by the mid-1960’s.

The rapid rise and fall of SACTU had demonstrated that it was not possible to build sustainable and lasting labour organisations that were overly reliant on local and national leaders; this was shown by the way SACTU was “reduced to inactivity by police harassment, and by the silencing of most officials and secretaries by administrative fiat” (Hirson, 1984, p360). A “reconstituted committee” did continue to organise in exile for many years, but of course these organisational efforts were

purely limited to propagandising from the outside (Hirson, 1984, p360). SACTU's weaknesses lay in its failure to build strong workplace networks and to educate and develop members into industrial cadres capable of carrying out organisational and political tasks independently of the leadership. Instead, it favoured general or community unions, whose members were too thinly spread to develop organisational strength in particular factories and sectors. Consequently, these unions often lacked the organisational power necessary to force employers to negotiate, and failed to develop leadership cadres at the grassroots level, a problem seriously exacerbated by the federation encouraging cadres to leave the country and receive training in armed struggle. After the wave of repression against the liberation movement, much of the leadership of SACTU was rendered unable to directly organise or provide leadership to workers. Given the low level of worker organisation and dispersal of workers across different workplaces and geographical areas, the federation was ultimately unable to continue to organise effectively.

4.3 The Durban Strike Wave and the Emergence of Shopfloor Unionism

The lessons of SACTU left a deep impression upon workers, and shaped the way that a new wave of labour unions developed in the 1970's'. Furthermore, given the experience of state repression, organisations were established which were not explicitly referred as labour unions, but rather worker advice centres or worker benefit funds. These were set up with the support of Marxist academics from several universities, and while they did not explicitly label themselves as unions "these bodies aimed both to educate and organise workers" (Friedman, 2011, p23). One such example was the General Factory Workers Benefit Fund (GFWBF) in Durban, established in 1972 with the support of students and academics from the University of Natal:

“As the name suggests, one of the primary functions of the Fund was to provide benefits for its members, in this case, funeral benefits. It was decided to avoid a more overtly trade union type role for fear of attracting an unfavourable reaction from the authorities. At this stage, it was still unclear what the state's response to independent trade unions for blacks would be, but the experience of SACTU in the 1960's had shown that it was unlikely to be favourable.” (Wood, 1992, p19)

The level of worker mobilisations at this time was extremely low however, and these advice centres and benefit funds deliberately kept a low profile. This changed dramatically in 1973 however:

“In 1973, a series of spontaneous strikes broke out in Durban. These strikes took everyone by surprise – management, workers and an immature and disorganised labour movement.” (Friedman, 2011, p23)

This strike wave involved huge numbers; in total, 61,000 workers took strike action in workplaces across Durban. Such was the surprise at black workers organising themselves on such a scale that “many managers were quick to grant wage increases, resulting in the strikes being of comparatively short duration” (Woods, 1992, p20). The GFWBF was not officially linked to the strike wave, however Woods states that “it seems that behind the scenes the Fund gave considerable support to the strikers” as during the course of the strike wave the Fund’s membership grew from 2000 to 60,000 (Wood, 1992, p19).

The unprecedented and spontaneous wave of strikes quickly achieved improvements for workers without the need for protracted struggle, caught many employers totally unprepared, and surprisingly triggered very little in the way of repression or reaction from the Apartheid state. This clearly incentivised and

encouraged other workers to adopt the same organisational tactics, and the impact of the Durban strike wave held a significance which went way beyond mere wage improvements. Seeing how quickly workers taking strike action had been able to win improvements galvanised others, and acted as the catalyst for a huge surge in the numbers of workers involved in unions, as Maree notes:

“The impact of the 1973 Durban strikes reverberated beyond wage increases and sparked off fundamental changes in labour relations in South Africa. The most significant immediate consequence was that masses of militant African workers poured into newly founded working class organizations in Durban and Pietermaritzbu.” (Maree, 1985, p289)

As well as leading to a revival of workers organisations, the Durban strike wave “re-ignited mass struggle” against the Apartheid state, which had been absent following the banning and exile of the Liberation movement, and in 1973 and 1974 there “were five times as many strikes as the average year between 1960 and 1972, involving more than ten times as many workers” (Hemson, Legassick and Ulrich, 2006, p244).

After the initial strike wave however, repression and reprisals against the new unions increased and “many workers who found themselves vulnerable to dismissal or worse in this new climate left the fledgling unions.” (Friedman, 2011, p24) Just as the successes of the initial strike wave had acted as a catalyst for workers to imitate those successes and organise together, so did this repression cause workers to retreat from organising for fear of losing their jobs. This necessitated a response from the nascent worker organisations; it was necessary both for workers within workplaces to be able to organise against retrenchments and for the new unions to

co-ordinate a response to the counterattack of both employers and the state. The new movement was able to respond, however.

“Firstly, they retreated into a smaller number of factories in which department-based shop stewards played the leading role. Secondly, in October 1973, the Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Council (TUACC) was formed to create a tight, unified, defensive structure.” (Friedman, 2011, p24)

This response was important because it allowed unions to share ideas and compare tactics through TUACC, while keeping the organisational and decision-making focus and responsibility on the shop floor with shop stewards and members. This ‘shopfloor’ model of labour organisation which characterised the Durban strike wave and subsequent developments, based upon tight and cohesive grassroots structures in which workers themselves were the key drivers of organisation and democratic decision making, began to spread throughout South Africa, and organisations such as TUACC played a huge role in helping the new unions to co-ordinate, exchange ideas and develop tactics without assuming control of the organisational structures in the workplaces themselves. It was in this context that MAWU was formed in Pietermaritzburg in April 1973 (Forrest, 2011, pp10-11) MAWU was the first of several unions to develop out of the GWBF, which served as one of “the forerunners of the independent unions” (Maree, 1985, p287). MAWU is also generally recognised as the main forerunner of NUMSA, although of course there were other unions which merged to form the union that exists today.

As a result of the repression suffered by SACTU and the harsh conditions of Apartheid, the new industrial unions that emerged in this period were very much “rooted inside the factories, cautious about wider political connections and sceptical

if not critical of the exiled nationalist movements” (Southall and Webster, 2010, p133). The unions that developed in this period placed enormous emphasis on grassroots organisation, worker-leader structures, and democratic accountability. Shop stewards were directly elected by workers, operated based on strict mandates from their members and were subject to recall. (Adler and Webster, 1995, p79)

Unlike the general or community unions which drew upon workers from a variety of sectors and workplaces, and which typified many previous efforts to organise black workers in South Africa, the new unions placed emphasis on building strong organisational networks in individual workplaces, recognising that many members spread across different workplaces could not hope to pressure employers in the way that a well organised group of workers in a specific factory could. Union structures were dominated regionally and nationally by elected worker representatives, “including the President and national officers”, who were usually required to be full time shop-floor workers (Adler and Webster, 1995, p79). All these aspects helped to create and develop “decentralised structures that could survive when state repression threw the head office into disarray” (Adler and Webster, 1995, p79). In this way, the shopfloor model of unionism that developed in the 1970’s demarcated itself significantly from the populist model of organising, with its emphasis on general and community unions.

This emphasis on shopfloor democracy and worker control was reinforced by contact between black workers and Marxist academics from the universities, which exposed large numbers of workers to alternative ideas to those of the Communist Party. As Johan Maree wrote, a key factor in the development of such a strong commitment to worker democracy was “the commitment of intellectuals and other leaders to democratic practices in the unions” (Maree, quoted in Friedman, 2011,

p37). This came about because of the worker advice centres and benefit funds set up at the beginning of the 1970's'. While the populist strategy of organising against Apartheid at that time effectively precluded the involvement of white activists; these funds and advice centres created contact with intellectuals who were influenced by the re-emergence of Marxism in the US and Western Europe. This 'New Marxism' was less influenced by the Soviet Union and refocused attention on understanding power relations within class struggle encouraged a focus on labour struggles. As Friedman explains, this new form of engagement, combined with the experience and focus on organisation of the black workers, cemented the emphasis on democratic organisation:

“Academics organised educational workshops, seminars and training for black workers in factories. This contributed to shaping the democratic structures that emerged on the shop floor. Ultimately, it was the dynamic relationship between union intellectuals, and the lived experiences of black workers that fuelled a powerful democratic ideology.” (Friedman, 2011, p40)

Although white intellectuals were involved in the development of the new unions however, unlike the Communist Party in the past, they saw themselves as supporting rather than leading the workers efforts to organise. Furthermore, they believed that worker-led democracy in worker organisation was integral to developing both strong sustainable workplace organisation and strong black worker leadership.

Consequently, the thrust of their intervention was to encourage the development of capable leaders and strong rank and file networks rather than to channel labour organisation into a broader political project. While the new union movement of the

1970's received support from sympathetic academics and intellectuals however, the key driver of the emergence of new unions was workers themselves.

The shopfloor model of unionism also differentiated itself strategically from the populist model of unionism through its attitude to the Apartheid state. As has been explained earlier in this chapter, the populist model of unionism emphasised the need for a National Democratic revolution, and consequently rejected the idea of any form of engagement with the Apartheid state, essentially calling for:

“A sudden shift in the balance of power in which the old ruling class was destroyed altogether. This strategy of revolutionary rupture stressed abstention from involvement in the Apartheid state and all its institutions on the assumption that the leadership of any subject group would be co-opted, and the status quo would remain.” (Adler and Webster, 1995, p81)

In essence this meant a maximalist strategy which yielded few results. In contrast, the unions based on the shopfloor model developed a strategy of selective engagement with the state, backed up by powerful, disciplined and independent trade unions based on strong factory level organisation held together by democratic accountability:

“In pursuit of the long-term goals of ending Apartheid and creating a Socialist economy, the unions emphasised legal means of struggle. They sought inclusion of all workers within the industrial relations system and decided to register their unions...Reforms were regarded not as ends in themselves but rather as dynamic phases in a progressive struggle to achieve the longer-term goals.” (Adler and Webster, 1995, p80)

This strategy was hugely successful; the Apartheid state was eventually forced to grant these new independent unions recognition under the 1979 Labour Relations Act (LRA) because of “growing labour militancy and township unrest”, which served to demonstrate that the shopfloor model was capable of winning results through engagement with the state, in contradistinction to the abstentionist strategy of SACTU (Adler and Webster, 1995, p80).

The new unions also formed the first non-racial labour federation in South Africa since the demise of SACTU in 1979, FOSATU, with 20,000 workers organised across ten industrial trade unions. Moreover, recognition under the Labour Relations Act enabled FOSATU’s membership to grow even further, and the federation reached 95,000 members in total by 1981 (Adler and Webster, 1995, pp78-80).

MAWU too was growing rapidly, and this growth was directly linked to the organising model it had adopted.

“By 1984, MAWU was bringing in R58 000 in subscriptions and its staff grew to 23 full-time officials...There is a relationship between union growth and union structure. The FOSATU unions’ decision to organise as industrial unions, rather than as closed unions...which ‘are generally orientated to controlling the supply of labour and do so by focussing on entry barriers to jobs and union membership’, allowed for inclusion and maximum participation – which attracted African’s who were voiceless. Therefore, it was the open industrial unions which grew most rapidly in the 1980’s.”
(Forrest, 2011, p47)

The National Automobile and Allied Workers' Union (NAAWU), another union which went on to too grew rapidly – by 1983 it had “organised 18,000 members and had

won recognition in five of nine auto companies with two further agreements imminent” (Forrest, 2011, p45). It was also influential within FOSATU, giving direction to the federation by demonstrating how best to deal with retrenchment policies; FOSATU drew up guidelines for all its affiliates based on the approach NAAWU pioneered. Retrenchment was a major issue for workers under Apartheid due to their lack of any employment rights, particularly in the case of black migrant workers; consequently, retrenchments could be used to intimidate and punish workers. Furthermore, retrenchments made it possible for companies to target large groups of shop stewards and union cadres for victimisation. NAAWU showed how to combat this by fighting for job security, for example by negotiating:

“...freezes on recruitment, training in new techniques or work, a shorter working week, an end to overtime and staggered unpaid leave. Companies were asked to engage shop stewards on forms of cost cutting. When retrenchments were inevitable, the union demanded adequate notice, usually a minimum of one month, and the ‘last in, first out’ system to prevent the victimisation of unionists.” (Forrest, 2011, p41)

By developing strategies to respond to employer recriminations against workers, the FOSATU unions were able to respond to some extent to employer strategies against them. They were also able to avoid alienating or angering unemployed or retrenched workers. They won redundancy payment agreements at several companies and demanded that companies “maintain lists of the retrenched, who had first option on future job opportunities” (Forrest, 2011, p41). This demonstrated an awareness of unemployed workers and the wider working class, amongst which FOSATU hoped to build.

The negotiating power of the unions however was built upon their indisputable disruptive power; MAWU utilised strike action at least eleven times during 1981 in the battle against retrenchments (Forrest, 2011, p41). The ability to deliver well organised industrial action stemmed directly from the shop floor model of labour organising which was developed in the aftermath of the Durban strike wave, with a strong emphasis on tightly organised shop steward networks on the factory floor, and united and disciplined action amongst groups of workers to prevent employers or the state from carrying out reprisals or recriminations against strike leaders. Furthermore, in stark contrast to the abstentionist tactics of the populist unions, MAWU and NAAWU utilised courts and existing labour bargaining structures and legislation, as this example from Forrest shows:

“After a MAWU court challenge Deutz Diesel in Pietermaritzburg agreed to pay R6 500 each to retrenchedes and to re-employ them if vacancies arose.” (Forrest, 2011, p41)

This pragmatic approach, combined with the emphasis on worker leadership on the shopfloor and the new unions efforts to build amongst the most hyper-exploited black workers made the FOSATU unions attractive to workers, and as a result growth while localised could be very rapid.

Growth presented challenges, however. In this “period of rapid expansion, MAWU and NAAWU faced the problem of maintaining internal cohesion and ensuring that members were properly serviced” (Forrest, 2011, p47). In the past, previous labour formations had struggled to retain members once they were recruited and to defend any minor gains they might have made, but workers in these

unions saw the importance of not simply winning new recruits but also developing them and ensuring they felt a sense of ownership of their union. The principles of the shopfloor model, including strong democratic decision making structures and a huge emphasis on shop stewards on the factory floor, provided a solid organisational platform to do this. A MAWU pamphlet from around this time made these principles clear:

“Each factory must be a school for democracy. The leaders are a voice in the factory: the workers are the union. The shop stewards are our leaders. And workers through their shop stewards must control the union. Leadership does not stop at the factory floor. It extends to the entire organisation. Trade union branches are controlled by a branch executive committee of shop stewards; our union as a whole by a national committee of shop stewards” (MAWU, no date but thought to be from 1985 or 1986, cited in Forrest, 2011, p47).

The tightly organised, grassroots orientated approach of the shopfloor unions was adopted wholesale within FOSATU. The “basic policy” adopted by FOSATU at their founding conference was as follows:

- *A strong, democratic factory floor organization*
- *A united labour movement, independent of race, color, creed, or sex*
- *National industrial unions*
- *An ongoing worker education program*
- *Social justice, decent standards of living, and fair conditions of work for affiliates and for the working class as a whole* (Emery, 2006, p8)

FOSATU also opted to continue its policy of “political independence from national liberation organizations” (Emery, 2006, p8). The reasoning behind this was partially rooted in a desire to avoid the state repression suffered by SACTU because of its alliance with the ANC and the National Liberation Movement, but also a reflection of the cross-class, populist nature of the ANC and liberation movement itself. This can be seen clearly in a hugely important speech given by General Secretary Joe Foster at the 3rd Congress of FOSATU. At this time despite existing for only three years FOSATU had grown from 20,000 members to over 100,000, and the speech was written collectively by FOSATU’s leadership, although the exact authors were never revealed (Plaut, 2003, p305).

Foster noted that “various political and economic interests gather together in the popular front in the tradition of the ANC and the Congress Alliance” (Foster, 1982, p106). This was a recognition of the fact that the National Liberation movement, engaged as it was in a struggle for democratic rights for all black and coloured South Africans, represented a cross-class political struggle which did not explicitly challenge capitalism, and which was not primarily concerned with the conflict between labour and capital. Indeed, as Foster explained:

“What has developed in South Africa is a very powerful tradition of popular or populist politics. The role of the great political movements such as the ANC and the Congress Alliance has been to mobilise the masses against the repressive minority regime... Where virtually all the population is voteless and oppressed by a racial minority then a great alliance of all classes is both necessary and a clear political strategy.” (Foster, 1982, p102)

However, Foster directly raised the possibility that contention and conflict could develop between workers and bourgeois elements of the movement in the future, warning that:

“These movements cannot and have not in themselves been able to deal with the particular and fundamental problems of workers. Their task is to remove regimes that are regarded as illegitimate and unacceptable by the majority. It is, therefore, essential that workers must strive to build their own powerful and effective organisation even whilst they are part of the wider popular struggle. This organisation is necessary to protect and further worker interests and to ensure that the popular movement is not hijacked by elements who will in the end have no option but to turn against their worker supporters.” (Foster, 1982, p107)

Through this explicit characterisation of the National Liberation Movement as ‘populist’, Foster was making clear that what workers within FOSATU were struggling for was a working-class movement, one that was not simply seeking to engage in struggle against the Apartheid state but to engage in struggle against capital itself. Furthermore, Foster was cautioning that in the future, the leaders of the popular movement (the ANC) might one day turn upon the workers – a prescient statement given the events of Marikana many years later.

4.4 Refuting the ‘Narrow’ Focus of the Shopfloor Model

As was alluded to in the previous chapter, a criticism aimed at the shopfloor model which developed from the Durban strike wave was that this approach was apolitical, economistic, and narrowly focused, due to its emphasis on workplace organising and selective engagement with the Apartheid state. This criticism exists to

this day, sometimes in veiled form, as evidenced by the comments of then Deputy President Jacob Zuma addressing COSATU's 9th Congress in 2006:

“We can...never forget the role of trade unions in reviving our struggle during the 1972-73 Durban strikes. The strikes had a major impact in the revival of internal mass resistance to apartheid in the 1970's. These strikes were led by amongst others, cadres who carried the political influence, of the revolutionary trade union federation, SACTU. This indicates the correctness of the approach of political revolutionary trade union movements, as distinguished from those union movements that concern themselves only with factory floor issues.” (COSATU,

While Zuma recognised the significance of the Durban strike wave in revitalising mass struggle against Apartheid, he sought to credit SACTU for this mobilisation. While former members of SACTU were certainly involved in the organising efforts of the 1970's, the federation itself had ceased to operate. Furthermore, the swipe at unions concerned only with 'factory floor issues', is an example of the narrative that the populist wing of the labour movement seeks to maintain; that it was SACTU and other Alliance supporting unions that were the driving force behind the mass strikes and civil disobedience that made the Apartheid system impossible to administer, rather than the so-called 'workerist' unions. It is significant too that this comment was made in 2006, twelve years after the end of Apartheid and seven years before NUMSA resolved to break with the Alliance. Clearly, during this period the political divisions between the competing models within COSATU was still a sensitive subject.

The criticism that the shopfloor unions were concerned only with the workplace however fails to acknowledge their significant achievements. Being able

to win improvements for workers meant the creation of “space for further advances but also...concrete improvements in workers’ conditions, thereby reassuring them of the efficacy of direct action.” (Adler and Webster, 1995, p80) This was hugely important; while SACTU mobilised workers with talk of liberation and a revolutionary rupture with Apartheid, the unions organised in FOSATU recruited based on their achievements. Their very existence and mobilisation represented “a *political* challenge to the state’s dual system of ‘industrial relations’ – and participation in them increased the self-confidence of workers” (Legassick, 2008, p249, emphasis in original).

The idea that the shopfloor unions were focused only on workplace issues was also simply untrue:

“Most of the key founders (of the shopfloor unions) were politically conscious individuals. Many were members of the banned ANC and SACP. Others were committed Marxists. But almost all the emerging unions accepted the argument, at that stage, that the major political task was to build union organisation. Open, explicit politics would come later. Developing a political profile too soon, most unionists argued, would be suicidal.” (Baskin, 1991, p22)

The decision to remain politically unaligned was a not an indication of indifference to the struggle against Apartheid, but a political and strategic question. Suspicion of formal alliances with the ANC and the liberation movement was based on concerns of repression from the Apartheid state. There was also a very genuine concern that the interests of the black working class would be subordinated. Consequently, shopfloor unionism consciously embodied “a critique of a 'popular front' politics in which trade unions are seen as the workers' voice in a broader alliance against

apartheid” (Fine, 1982, p96). This populist approach, in which the question of economic and social transformation is taken as secondary to the question of building political liberation through a National Democratic Revolution, held:

“The danger that adherence of trade unions to a popular front against apartheid is secured at the expense of their representation of the interests of black workers as workers...Under the guise of a classless alliance for democracy, the democratic movement is in fact led by democratic elements of the bourgeoisie or the petty bourgeoisie. The working class is merely wheeled in and wheeled out like the crowd in a Shakespearean drama.” (Fine, 1982, p96)

The new unions of the 1970’s’ did not reject the ‘political’ model because their members were indifferent to the horrors of Apartheid, quite the opposite. In fact, they recognised that for workers to organise and struggle for transformation in the context of the brutal Apartheid state, disciplined and effective labour unions were essential, and the building of such organisations required a determined effort to build highly organised and democratic structures at the grassroots level. As Joe Foster explained, FOSATU’s intention was to “take the great militancy of (their) members and use this to create a just and fair society controlled by workers” and had “no intention of becoming self-satisfied trade unionist’s incapable of giving political direction to the workers struggle” (Foster, 1982, p100).

Furthermore, there were significant debates inside FOSATU as to how best to achieve this transformation, and some within the federation held the view that FOSATU should develop or support working-class political formations. Sadly, as Byrne notes these debates are not well documented since “no in-depth general history of the federation exists” (Byrne, 2013, p6) and furthermore the politics of

FOSATU has been routinely caricatured and obscured. We do however know that some within the shopfloor tradition “supported the creation of a mass-based working-class party as an alternative to the SACP” (Southall and Webster, 2010, p137). Certainly, Trotskyist organisations such as the Marxist Workers Tendency (MWT) and Workers Organisation for Socialist Action (WOSA) were involved in the shopfloor unions and favoured the creation of mass working-class parties. (Baskin, 1991, p96) FOSATU was not opposed to engaging with community campaigns either; from 1982 the union had resolved that it would engage in community campaigns, provided that they were worker controlled and that FOSATU had a mandate from its members to do so. In 1984, for example, FOSATU participated in a two-day stay-away organised by the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) (Friedman, 2011, pp117-119).

The idea that the shopfloor unions were somehow apolitical, indifferent to the injustice of Apartheid, or concerned only with the workplace is manifestly untrue – although certainly they did include syndicalists who rejected party affiliations. Furthermore, support for the idea of unions forming or supporting political parties was not at all incompatible with the shopfloor tradition, and neither is NUMSA’s resolution to build a worker’s party. The allegation that the unions of the 1970’s were apolitical should therefore be understood chiefly as an attempt to elevate the role of the populist unions and the Tripartite Alliance in the struggle against Apartheid by minimising the role of FOSATU.

4.5 COSATU: Formation and Character

While the Durban strike wave and the subsequent development of the shopfloor tradition revitalised the South African labour movement during the 1970’s,

FOSATU had affiliate unions in only four of South Africa's nine regions: Natal, Transvaal, Western Cape and Eastern Cape. The country still lacked a genuinely national labour federation capable of uniting workers from across the country. In August 1981 at the Langa summit, a series of talks began between various labour unions and federations began. These talks were characterised by conflict, disagreement and even mistrust. During this time "Differences of interest, of political outlook, of organisational methods and of personality had to be overcome before COSATU could be born" (Baskin, 1991, p34).

COSATU was officially launched in at its inaugural Congress in December 1985, following four years of unity talks between a range of unions and federations. All were agreed that it was necessary to unite the labour movement in the struggle against Apartheid:

"There was a sense of urgency and a widespread belief that the time was right to launch a new federation, due to the problems being experienced by workers around the country." (Twala and Kompi, 2012, p175)

The launch Congress of COSATU did not however attempt to discuss or adopt any political policy for the new federation; this was left to the CEC of the nascent federation. This decision reflected the competing conceptions of labour unionism and of the wider fight against Apartheid. While agreement existed across the main labour unions in relation to the need to build a united labour federation, there were significant areas of disagreement. Furthermore, the CEC received four political proposals from affiliate unions, which they attempted to composite into one coherent resolution:

“The political resolution was essentially a compromise, satisfying everybody and no-one at the same time. It consisted largely of generalities, gave the federation very little practical direction for political action and was open to differing interpretations...The resolution expressed overwhelming agreement (that) COSATU would be politically active and COSATU would work in alliance with other organisations. But it revealed disagreement over who COSATU should ally with and how such alliances should work.” (Baskin, 1991, p92)

Fundamentally, the four proposals that COSATU’s CEC had received represented the two competing and contrasting models of labour organisation present within COSATU at the time of its formation. MAWU, the forerunner of NUMSA and a FOSATU affiliate, proposed that all of COSATU’s structures should discuss “the demands and aims of workers in the struggle” and that these discussions should be opened up to “include other organisations of the working class, especially the students and unemployed workers” (Baskin, 1991, p91-92). The union was clear that the political direction of COSATU must be developed from the ground up, just as their own organisation was built and mobilised, in accordance with the shopfloor model. At the other end of the spectrum, the South African Railways and Harbour Workers Union (SARHWU), a much older union formed by Communist Party activists, called instead for COSATU to work jointly with “other democratic forces”, meaning of course in the main the ANC and the UDF, the key national political organisations of the struggle against Apartheid (Baskin, 1991, p91-92).

The result of this contest, and subsequent compromise, was that while a union federation capable of organising workers on a genuinely national scale was formed, its early existence was characterised by deep tensions and disagreements between competing factions, particularly over the question of the federations

relationship with the ANC. The actions of COSATU's CEC demonstrated this most starkly, when in March of 1986 they agreed to hold a meeting with delegations from the ANC, and subsequently issued a joint communique, which stated that "lasting solutions to South Africa's economic and political crisis...can only emerge from the national liberation movement, headed by the ANC and the entire democratic forces of our country of which COSATU is an important and integral part" (Baskin, 1991, p94). This effectively committed COSATU to accepting the ANC's claim to be the natural leadership of the national liberation struggle and moved the new federation closer to accepting the ANC as its political leadership. Clearly it went somewhat beyond the compromise composite resolution on COSATU's political position.

This caused consternation within some affiliates, while others supported the move and responded by pushing for further engagement and alliance building with other 'progressive' organisations at the grassroots level. MAWU, one of the strongest critics of the CEC's actions, produced a paper entitled 'Trade Unions and Political Direction' setting out the unions position. This accepted unreservedly that the organised working class should be part of the national struggle, but also stressed that COSATU "should be clear that the groups we are campaigning with accept that socialism is the goal which must be achieved under the leadership of the working class" and proposed that "building for socialism" through the creation of democratic workplace unions and community organisations, based on "proper socialist principles like democracy, working-class leadership, mass participation and worker control", arguing that these could serve as "our vehicles for Socialism" (Baskin, 1991, pp100-101). The paper was scathing of the decision to meet with the ANC and issue a joint communique, arguing that the CEC had no mandate from workers for such actions and that the CEC "should not have agreed to COSATU struggling under the

leadership of the ANC” but rather “made it clear that COSATU would struggle together with other progressive organisations, but independently, under its own leadership” (Baskin, 1991, pp100-101). MAWU argued that the CEC was creating the impression that “there was no room (in COSATU) for the other workers who did not fully support the ANC” (Baskin, 1991, pp100-101).

The criticisms that MAWU put forward however “did not enjoy majority support within COSATU” (Baskin, 1991, p101). But nonetheless MAWU’s recorded objections and criticisms point to a significant minority tendency within the nascent labour federation which was deeply concerned about the possibility of being subordinated by the ANC and the national liberation movement. Moreover, the debates within COSATU at this time highlighted the differences in political perspectives and aims within the federation, with the more populist unions primarily focused on doing away with Apartheid and securing democratic rights, while the shopfloor unions saw the struggle against Apartheid as part of the struggle against capitalism, and furthermore were concerned that workers interests would be subordinated to those of the liberation movement.

FOSATU was instrumental in initiating the unity talks which led to the formation of COSATU in 1981. In the intervening years, however, Plaut suggests that the ANC and the populist tendency had been working hard to attempt to re-establish its political leadership of South African trade unionism in response to the rapid development of the shopfloor tendency during the 1970’s and early 80’s, particularly following FOSATU General Secretary Joe Foster’s warnings about leaders of the populist movement. It is even suggested that the name of the new federation, Congress, was an attempt to imply support for the ANC:

“Within four years (the ANC) had managed to exert enough political muscle to persuade the South African union movement to reform itself as the Congress of South African Trade Unions, COSATU, adopting the Congress label as an indication that its loyalties lay with the Congress Alliance.” (Plaut, 2003, p306)

Despite MAWU's protests, the relationship between COSATU and the ANC that would later be formalised as the Tripartite Alliance in 1990 had essentially begun. It is significant though that this was not a position that was agreed democratically at the founding congress of COSATU, but a relationship that was initiated by the CEC, which some unions, particularly MAWU, believed it did not have a mandate to do.

COSATU was formally an equal partner in the Alliance, and not a subordinate partner operating under the leadership of the ANC, as SACTU had been. At the time of its formation it was strongly influenced by the shopfloor model of unionism which had developed in the 1970's and which was embodied within FOSATU:

“While COSATU committed itself to participation in the national democratic struggle under the leadership of the ANC, it joined the Tripartite Alliance not as a subordinate partner (as had SACTU) but, formally, as an equal player with an independent power base, strategy and leadership. However, the lifting of the political ban from the ANC in 1990, its return from exile, its entering into negotiations with the ruling party, COSATU's exclusion from the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (the forum which negotiated the making of a new Constitution), and the increasing centrality of political parties to the transition process meant that the ANC came to assert its hegemony over the Alliance.” (Southall and Webster, 2010, pp139-140)

Over time however, and particularly during the transition towards a multi-racial democracy, COSATU was increasingly marginalised from key debates, as was discussed briefly in the introductory chapter of this thesis.

The formation of COSATU and the conflict between populist and shopfloor models of union which characterised the new federation demonstrates the way in which labour movements are shaped not simply by external contentious processes but by internal contention as well. The hyper-exploitation, insecurity, poverty and violence suffered by black workers under Apartheid (a product of contention between the black working class majority on the one hand and employers backed up by the Apartheid state on the other) necessitated a united response from the organised working class, not simply in regions of South Africa but across the country as a whole, and consequently this necessity gave rise to COSATU, the first organisation in South Africa's history genuinely capable of uniting, organising and mobilising workers across the country as a whole. But at the same time, internal contentious processes shaped the particular form that this new federation took, adopting a stance which was arguably a compromise between the two main perspectives for labour organising represented within COSATU. When the new labour federation had been formed, the emphasis within its affiliates upon disciplined grassroots organisation and democratic worker leadership and decision making which were central to the shopfloor tradition were plain to see – but so too was the emphasis on building alliances with the ANC and the national liberation movement as a whole and an implicit recognition of the ANC as the political leadership of the black working class, which was associated with the populist model of labour organising.

4.6 Chapter Conclusions

In this chapter the origins of two divergent models of unionism have been presented, for the purpose of situating the analysis of the 2013 NUMSA Congress and the split within COSATU within historical context. The origins of the populist model of labour unionism are outlined and it is explained that this tradition was strongly influenced by the concept of the National Liberation struggle and by the Communist Party. Furthermore, it is shown that this model of labour organising favoured general or community unions, rather than a workplace focused model, and that it has always demonstrated an acceptance that the ANC should function as the political leadership of the organised working class. It has been explained that these factors had an impact on the way in which the labour movement, particular SACTU, was destroyed by Apartheid state repression in the 1960's.

The chapter has also outlined the development of the shopfloor model. It has been explained that the development of this model of labour unions was shaped directly by the experiences of state repression of the labour movement, and its development was conditioned by the strategic response of the Apartheid state. It has been outlined that the shopfloor model of organising served to simultaneously revitalise both the labour movement in South Africa, and the broader struggle against Apartheid, and that furthermore because workers organised on the basis of this model were more resistant to state repression, it resulted in the beginning of a shift within the Apartheid state away from a purely repressive strategy and towards the beginnings of an approach characterised by increasing levels of facilitation of the labour movement.

The chapter has also dealt with the question of the shopfloor model of unionisms attitude to political questions and explained that the tradition was from the start an eclectic tradition. Its suspicion of a cross-class alliance with the ANC was rooted firstly in a desire to avoid recrimination and repression from the state, but also secondly a strong principle of working-class organisational and political independence. Within the shopfloor tradition, there existed elements who favoured the idea of a worker's political party in various different forms, as well as syndicalists who rejected any notion of a formal relationship with a political party but who nonetheless were not indifferent to the broader political context of the Apartheid state, and who saw the creation of strong independent unions and working-class power as central to the struggle against Apartheid.

Finally, it was explained that COSATU was shaped by these two competing models of labour unionism, and that the tensions that have led to NUMSA's 2013 Congress decisions and the subsequent split within COSATU have existed since its formation. COSATU was in effect a strategic compromise between two competing political traditions, and this is still observable today. The roots of contemporary contentious processes within the South African labour movement then are to some extent historically contingent; the continuation of internal contentious processes that have always been present in the federation.

In subsequent chapters, the thesis will move to focus more directly on the research undertaken within the field, drawing upon interviews and participant observations with NUMSA activists and NUMSA structures to further develop the analysis of the processes that have led to the split in COSATU, in order to understand their significance. This will begin in the next chapter, where it will be demonstrated that NUMSA grew directly from the shopfloor model of labour

organising. The thesis will examine NUMSA's experiences of the Tripartite Alliance and the ways in which it has sought to mobilise to achieve its political goals.

5 Unwilling Partners: NUMSA's Experiences of the Alliance in Post Apartheid South Africa

"This thing is historical! From the very beginning, we in NUMSA did not want to relinquish our independence as workers. We argued that the Alliance must be temporary, and that we needed a Workers Charter – the Freedom Charter was not enough!" (Steven Nhlapo, 2014)

In the previous chapter, the development of two distinct tendencies within the South African labour movement was outlined, to explain that the formation of COSATU itself represented a strategic compromise between these tendencies. Furthermore, it was shown that it was the shopfloor model of trade unionism which was primarily responsible for the revival of black worker organisation in the 1970's and which laid the foundations upon which a multi-racial labour federation capable of mobilising millions of black and coloured workers against the Apartheid state itself was built. In this chapter, the history of NUMSA as a union and its participation in the Tripartite Alliance will be examined, and it will be explained how the shopfloor model on which the union is based has informed this participation. At over 330,000 members, NUMSA is the largest trade union in the history of South Africa. NUMSA was therefore a huge player in both COSATU and the Tripartite Alliance. Consequently, the decision taken by NUMSA at their December 2013 conference and the unions attempts to build an alternative labour federation and a working-class political challenge to the ANC represents the most significant alternative to the populist model of labour organising which has been dominant within COSATU in the post-Apartheid era.

The challenge that NUMSA's decision to break with the Tripartite Alliance represents through its re-assertion of the shopfloor model of labour unionism and a challenge to the existing state of labour relations in South Africa, has not been shaped purely by the shift in the South African state away from a strategy of facilitation of the labour movement towards a more repressive and coercive stance. The processes that have led to the split in COSATU lie in the conflict between the shopfloor model of unionism upon which NUMSA is based, and the populist model of unionism. This chapter will demonstrate that the split came as a result not just of the failures of the ANC government to deliver the new South Africa that the organised working class had hoped for but also because of NUMSA's efforts to reshape the Alliance in accordance with its own principles, which the union regards as ultimately unsuccessful. It must therefore be seen as key to understanding the split within COSATU and the development of SAFTU. To do this, the chapter will examine the experience of NUMSA within the Alliance.

The chapter will be structured as follows: Firstly, the formation of NUMSA as a union and the key legacy of its history will be examined, to demonstrate that NUMSA developed directly from the tradition of shopfloor unionism. Secondly, NUMSA's attitude to the Alliance in the early years will be considered, including the unions opposition to the Alliance. Thirdly, the chapter will consider how NUMSA's shopfloor tradition has shaped its attempts to influence and direct the Alliance, in terms of both the political program of the ANC but also the ousting of President Thabo Mbeki and the elevation to power of his replacement, President Jacob Zuma, in which COSATU played a hugely significant role. Finally, it will be shown that the NUMSA's 2013 Congress resolutions cannot be explained simply explained by a shift in state responses to labour, symbolised by the Marikana Massacre, but rather represents

the culmination of a process of contention which has been shaped by the strategic compromise which was the basis of the founding of COSATU and the development of the Tripartite Alliance. Consequently, the split within COSATU must be understood as a resurgence of shopfloor unionism.

5.1 NUMSA: Rooted in the Shopfloor Model

NUMSA owes its origins to the Durban strike wave and the new trade unions of the 1970's which was discussed in the previous chapter, in which a new model of labour unionism was born. Furthermore, NUMSA and its forerunner, the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) was always a stronghold for shopfloor unionism within COSATU, had always taken a critical view of the Tripartite Alliance, and had kept alive the principles of worker democracy and worker leadership throughout the history of post-Apartheid South Africa. Because of this history and tradition, it comes as no surprise that it is NUMSA that has led the way in the South African labour movement in breaking with the ANC and attempting to build a new labour federation, and a political party, of the working class in South Africa.

NUMSA was formed in 1987 as the result of a merger between seven different unions: MAWU, NAAWU, the Motor Industry Combined Union (MICWU) the Motor Assembly and Component Workers Union of South Africa (MACWUSA), the General and Allied Workers Union (GAWU), the United Metal, Mining and Allied Workers of South Africa (UMMAWOSA) and the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) (Baskin, 1991, p199). With the exception of MICWU, all the unions were already affiliate unions of COSATU. MACWUSA and UMMAWOSA had actually formed as breakaway unions from NAAWU and MAWU respectively, with roots in the shopfloor tradition that had developed in the 1970's (Forrest, 2011, p71).

GAWU and TGWU were also FOSATU affiliates, who contributed a small number of metal workers to the new union, in line with the 'one industry, one union' principle adopted by COSATU (Friedman, 2011, p27; Forrest, 2011, p71).

MICWU, the only non-COSATU union, was the oldest of these unions, having been registered in 1970 as an affiliate of TUCSA. Unlike the unions organised in the populist and shopfloor traditions, it had historically been organised along racial lines. As a result of Apartheid laws which forced labour unions to organise workers in accordance with the principle of racial segregation, it was formed as a 'coloured' workers union; in fact, its members had been part of the Motor Industry Employee's Union of South Africa (MIEU) until the white leadership ordered them to form their own union, effectively expelling them. However, by the end of the 1970's, black workers had begun to join the union in some areas, although its leadership remained "mainly coloured and conservative, in the TUCSA tradition" (Forrest, 2011, p29).

MICWU experienced significant changes during the early 1980's, as it developed new democratic structures, hired new organisers and recruited more black members, which meant it more than doubled its membership between 1982 and 1984. The union eventually left TUCSA in 1984 because it was frustrated by the attitude of some of the TUCSA leadership's support for the new Tricameral Parliament (which allowed limited political representation to South Africa's 'coloured' population but maintained the total disenfranchisement of black Africans) which MICWU strongly opposed (Forrest, 2011, pp67-68).

MICWU had had difficult relationships with both MAWU and NAAWU, who it had seen as competitor unions. However, as was explained in the previous chapter, these unions had experienced rapid growth because of their principle of non-

racialism and open industrial unionism, in contrast to the TUCSA unions, and as a result of MICWU opening membership to black members it had also grown significantly. Furthermore, the formation of COSATU was warmly received by MICWU's membership, and there was enthusiasm about the idea of becoming part of COSATU, but that meant accepting the principle of 'one industry, one union' (Forrest, 2011, p65-70). The rapid growth of the shopfloor unions, combined with the formation of COSATU, meant that MICWU accepted the principle of a merger. The fact that MICWU had developed a working relationship with some of the other unions, particularly MAWU, through its participation in the metal industry bargaining council (Baskin, 1991, p199).

Unions associated with the populist model of labour organisation were not represented in the merger that produced NUMSA. This was not a deliberate exclusion; such an approach would have contradicted the 'one industry, one union' principle adopted by COSATU. The South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU) had formed in 1978 and did organise metalworkers, who fell under the remit of the new NUMSA union. It was a general union, which identified strongly with the liberation struggle and the ANC and which:

“Organised through rallies...lacking depth of organisation in factories...SAAWU, like SACTU before it, was badly weakened by a state crackdown on its leaders.”

(Forrest, 2011, p11-12)

SAAWU also followed the populist policy of refusal to engage with the Apartheid state and had refused to register itself as a union (Forrest, 2011, p44). It can therefore be understood as strongly rooted in the populist model, rather than the tradition of the shopfloor.

However, while SAAWU was invited to participate in the unity process which led to NUMSA's formation, unlike the other unions it did not submit details and figures of its members in the metal sector, despite being given three opportunities to do so (Baskin, 1991, p199). It is possible that SAAWU was simply not able to present accurate membership figures; unlike the shopfloor unions, the populist unions emphasis on general and community unions meant that they were generally much less organised. Daniel Dube, the first President of the newly formed NUMSA, expressed frustration at the situation:

"I couldn't tell whether SAAWU had members within the metal and engineering industries, or whether they had members in the textile industry, or whether they had members in another industry, or no members at all because gatherings in the township would fill a hall, and yet there were only seven paid-up members...that is when we realised that after all they didn't have members, because they couldn't submit membership numbers." (Dube, quoted in Forrest, 2011, p71)

Consequently, SAAWU was excluded from the process, and the remaining seven unions forged ahead with the merger, although they made it clear that SAAWU's members in relevant sectors were welcome to join (Baskin, 1991, p199).

NUMSA brought together over 130,000 workers following its formation, making it the second largest COSATU affiliate after NUM. The majority of these members came from MAWU, which had grown its membership to 70,000. (Baskin, 1991, p199). From the beginning, it emphasised the principles of shopfloor unionism, as Forrest explains:

"The new union, in a tradition dating back to the TUACC days, was guided by

principles of nonracialism, internal democracy and workers control and, critically, worker unity. 'We, the members of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, firmly commit ourselves to a united South Africa, free of oppression and economic exploitation. We believe that this can only be achieved under the leadership of an organised and united working class...' ringingly affirmed the first sentences of the preamble to the unions constitution." (Forrest, 2011, p74)

From its inception, NUMSA was rooted in a political and organisational model which developed directly from the shopfloor unionism that was born in the 1970's.

NUMSA has continued to recognise the importance of FOSATU and the principles of the shopfloor model of organising, and to highlight its roots in this tradition, even in more recent years. In 2009, to mark the 30th anniversary of the formation of FOSATU, it released the following statement.

"Both the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) and the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union (NAAWU), two of the unions that were in the merger that led to NUMSA, were affiliates of FOSATU. The two first general secretaries of FOSATU came from the unions that were the forebears of NUMSA. It is FOSATU that started the unity talks that led to the formation of COSATU. Many of the principles of Cosatu such as worker control, non-racialism, strong shopfloor organisation and trade union independence come from FOSATU." (NUMSA, 2009)

While not alone within COSATU in the post-Apartheid era in consciously maintaining an adherence to the shopfloor tradition, NUMSA has arguably been the union that has done most to keeping this model of labour organisation alive and has been able to do so on a large scale due to its size, industrial strength and the unity made

possible by its emphasis on shopfloor worker democracy, emphasising the importance of the ‘worker leader’ model upon which NUMSA is based.

“In NUMSA, decision making begins on the factory floor. Discussions begin in the factory with the workers, then in the Local, then in the regional and national structures. The union must have its mandate from the factory floor.” (NUMSA Local Office Bearer, 2014)

Furthermore, in NUMSA a record and acknowledgement of the role that FOSATU played in the formation of COSATU has been kept alive, which counters the widespread narrative of the populist model of unionism being integral to the formation of COSATU.

The most significant aspect of NUMSA’s shopfloor model of organising is the way in which the union understood itself in relation to the Tripartite Alliance. NUMSA’s model places firm emphasis on decision making from the bottom up – so for example the decision to organise a national strike in a particular sector must come from the shopfloor itself to Locals (the shop stewards councils which bring together representatives from different workplaces), and Locals and regional structures must debate and discuss the issue in order to provide the national union with a mandate for action. This stands in contrast to the populist model of organising, in which because of the conceptualisation of the national liberation movement and latterly the ANC government as the leadership of workers, decisions often come from the national leadership of a union, perhaps even at the direction of forces outside of the labour movement. As a union, NUMSA has always operated on the principle that not only should it take its mandate from the factory floor, but that in matters relating

to the wider labour movement this mandate should be taken into the structures of COSATU itself, in order to win the federation to the viewpoint of its members.

NUMSA was a reluctant partner in the Tripartite Alliance, but out of a desire to maintain unity with the majority of COSATU affiliates the union agreed to abide by the policy of COSATU and to enter into and maintain the Alliance. However, the shopfloor model upon which NUMSA was built meant that the union and its members took an approach towards the way in which the Alliance functioned premised upon the notion of decision making from the grassroots up. Therefore, in seeking to influence the ANC government through the mechanisms of the Alliance, NUMSA held an expectation that, if a particular viewpoint was progressed throughout the ranks of COSATU until it became the policy of the federation, that COSATU should then seek to use this mandate to challenge the ANC and SACP, partners in the Alliance, and that the ANC and SACP should in turn respect the will of the workers as communicated up through the structures of affiliates and the federation, and duly change course. This led NUMSA not only into conflict with the ANC, who in general held a very different vision of how the Tripartite Alliance should function, but also with populist elements within COSATU itself which had historically accepted the 'party of liberation' as its political leadership.

5.2 NUMSA and the Tripartite Alliance: Responding to the ANC as Governing Party

The Tripartite Alliance – consisting of the ANC, the SACP and COSATU – was formally constituted in June of 1990, although COSATU did not join until the following month. It appeared at the time to be a relatively smooth process, and arguably cemented an existing working relationship between the three, particularly

following COSATU's adoption of the Freedom Charter in 1987. However, while from an external perspective this appeared to be a relatively smooth process, it was rather more complex and there were many underlying tensions. On the one hand COSATU had increasingly functioned as an ally of the ANC, because of the growing influence of the populist tradition during this period. On the other hand, activists within COSATU who more strongly identified with the shop floor tradition were concerned by this development and voiced criticisms and concerns.

As the quote below shows, NUMSA argued at COSATU's Congress that once the first democratic elections had taken place the Alliance should be broken and raised the need for a workers' charter and even for an independent worker's party built by the trade unions:

"In the course of the political negotiations from 1990-1993, one of COSATU's more militant affiliates, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), called for the discontinuation of the alliance after the 1994 elections. NUMSA stated that there was a need for an independent workers' party to represent the interests of the South African working class within a post-Apartheid era. This proposal by NUMSA was, however, rejected by COSATU." (Twala and Kompi, 2012, 178)

This is highly significant given the renewed call for a workers' party that has featured in NUMSA's expulsion from COSATU and the creation of SAFTU, and shows that far from being a new idea, the concept of a worker's party had relevance within NUMSA in the 1980's and 1990's just as it had had within FOSATU during the 1970's. But it is significant too because it flows from the shopfloor labour politics of NUMSA, based on the need to preserve and protect the political independence of the working class. This also demonstrates the inaccuracy of the 'workerist' characterisation of the

unions which developed out of the Durban strike wave to form FOSATU; the allegation was often made that these unions took a syndicalist position of abstentionism in relation to politics and political parties, but in fact NUMSA's proposal for an explicitly working-class political party represents the re-emergence of an idea which had some currency among the unions which came from the tradition this theses has conceptualised as shopfloor.

For NUMSA, only an explicitly working-class political party could act as the political voice of the working class, and the idea of an alliance with a cross class political party was considered incompatible with the shopfloor model on which NUMSA was built. An alliance with the ANC was therefore viewed with deep suspicion. However, COSATU's Congress voted against NUMSA's proposals and, in accordance with the principals of shop floor unionism which places strong emphasis on democratic decision making, the decision to continue with the Alliance was respected. This created a conundrum for the union in relation to its principles; on the one hand, a permanent alliance with the cross-class ANC was understood as tantamount to surrendering the political independence of the workers, but on the other the respect for grassroots democratic decision making and the culture of democratic centralism within NUMSA meant that once the debate had taken place within COSATU, the outcome of the debate and the vote had to be respected. This illustrates further the way in which labour unions exist in a state of 'permanent contention' and the complexity of competing agencies within labour movements; on the factory floor, in the NUMSA Locals and in the union's regional and national structures the issue of the alliance with the ANC was debated and contested, until the union developed a position. But when this position was taken into the structures of the federation of which NUMSA was an affiliate member, in which the shopfloor

model of labour unionism was significantly weaker and the populist model held considerably more influence, NUMSA emerged in the minority on the debate and was bound to accept the decision to maintain the Alliance permanently by the concept of democratic centralism and respect for the mandate of democratic decisions on which COSATU itself, due to the influence of FOSATU in the creation of the federation, was founded.

Discussion of this crucial turning point featured heavily in interviews conducted with NUMSA activists at both local and national level. At the beginning of this chapter, a quote from Steven Nhlapo, NUMSA's head of Collective Bargaining, was given to illustrate the historical suspicion NUMSA had held towards the Alliance and the union's desire that COSATU should be independent. Nhlapo stated explicitly during our interview that the roots of NUMSA's split with the Alliance and with COSATU lay in the formation of COSATU itself, and the fact that NUMSA had to accept the collective decision of COSATU to support the ANC. This interview mirrored a trend among many respondents who referred to a historical scepticism of the Alliance, tempered by a desire to maintain unity within COSATU itself. Many referred to how NUMSA had never wanted to be part of the Alliance permanently and only agreed to do so for the sake of unity within COSATU, and for the sake of adhering to the union's democratic centralist traditions, whereby collective decisions must be respected by all. This is illustrated by the following quotes:

“NUMSA's rejection of the Alliance is not new. We never wanted to be part of the Alliance, but we were bound to accept the democratic decisions taken by COSATU. We could not jeopardise unity simply because we disagreed.” (NUMSA Regional Office Bearer, 2014)

“You have to understand we were fighting against Apartheid, and we had to be united in that struggle. We could not simply walk away from COSATU over the question of the Alliance.” (NUMSA Local Office Bearer, 2014)

Reluctantly then, having failed to convince the leadership of other unions within COSATU, NUMSA accepted the reality of the Tripartite Alliance, until the historic December 2013 Congress.

The concept of a Worker’s Charter was also raised several times in discussions with interview respondents in NUMSA. For them, the Freedom Charter which went on to form the program of the ANC and therefore of the Tripartite Alliance was too vague – the ‘populist’ language of the charter did not call explicitly for socialist transformation based upon workers ownership of the wealth in society. From the perspective of NUMSA this was deemed unacceptable; they wanted to see COSATU commit to what they saw as a more explicitly working-class and socialist political program. During our interview, Moses Mayekiso, who was elected the first General Secretary of NUMSA in 1987 despite being imprisoned by the Apartheid state at the time, explained the political perspective of the union during this transitional period:

“We believed only a Socialist organisation could liberate South Africa. Our expectation at that time was that we were fighting for the vote, but we were fighting for the vote to push towards Socialism. The negotiated settlement of 1994 was not our goal...Right throughout the history of NUMSA workers have been calling for a socialist dispensation.” (Moses Mayekiso, 2014)

This antipathy and frustration around the question of the Freedom Charter has grown over the years, as not only is it perceived by many NUMSA members as a very

minimal program, insufficient to transform South Africa's society and erase the embedded legacy of Apartheid, but also the ANC is widely perceived within NUMSA as having failed to implement the Charter at all.

"We have to say honestly when we speak of the Freedom Charter, even these minimal demands, after 20 years the ANC has still not implemented the Freedom Charter." (Irvin Jim, 2014)

Most NUMSA members interviewed spoke of the need for a "socialist party of workers" to "meet the needs of the working class, jobs, schools, homes, which the ANC has failed to deliver." (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014; NUMSA Local Office Bearer, 2014)

The defeat of NUMSA's call for the breaking of the Alliance and the formation of a worker's party is significant because it meant that as a result of an *external contentious process* – namely NUMSA's struggle against the Apartheid state, for a Socialist South Africa and for the independence of labour from cross-class political projects - an *internal contentious process* was stimulated in which NUMSA was drawn into the beginnings of a conflict with affiliate unions within COSATU itself who subscribed to a more populist perspective on COSATU's relationship to the ANC. This process was in fact a continuation of the debates that took place around the formation of COSATU and represents part of a struggle of competing models of labour organisation, which has been present in South Africa for many decades. Thus, it demonstrates the dialectical relationship between internal contentious processes within labour movements and the direction of externally contentious

processes between labour and the state, employers, or other non-labour organisations.

As the 1994 elections approached and it became clear that a transition to a multi-racial democracy was taking place, NUMSA had serious reservations as a union about maintaining the Alliance with the ANC, particularly as they were preparing to become a party of government. However, the unions' strong tradition of 'shopfloor' unionism, whereby members of the union must abide by collective democratic decisions, meant that NUMSA remained part of the Alliance to preserve unity within COSATU itself.

The effect of the strong shopfloor tradition however was twofold; on the one hand, the internal culture of NUMSA demanded that once a collective position had been arrived at through democratic debate, whether in NUMSA or COSATU, this must be adhered to. On the other hand, however, the 'shopfloor' culture of the union also demanded that leaders be accountable to workers on the factory floor in all things. Being part of the Alliance therefore meant that the ANC would become the political representatives of the worker's movement in South Africa, so it needed to be accountable to the workers movement, and the workers movement needed to give the ANC a mandate. NUMSA therefore began to discuss attempting to shape the policies of the ANC. As Steven Nhlapo explained:

"We lost the debate and we had to respect that, for the sake of unity among workers. So, we had to adapt and work with the Alliance and with the Freedom Charter. We had to try to make the Alliance work for workers." (Nhlapo, 2014)

This signified an approach whereby NUMSA essentially attempted to make the best of the opportunities afforded by the Alliance, despite being unhappy about the relationship with the ANC and leading the opposition to this. A comparison can be drawn here between NUMSA's approach in the early stages of the Alliance and the strategy of selective engagement with the Apartheid state utilised by FOSATU unions in the 1970's', whereby they made use of the opportunities afforded by winning recognition and registering as legal unions while still opposing the Apartheid system itself. This strategy was not uncontroversial within NUMSA, with some in the union leadership wanting to push for the ANC to commit to social democratic reforms and others believing that NUMSA should not compromise on its socialist principles and program. In the end, however, pragmatism won out and NUMSA decided to push for a set of ideas that later became the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP). This was based on NUMSA's own bargaining demands and included "state public works programs" intended to improve public services in the townships and provide jobs and training for the black working class. (Forrest, 2011, pp471-472).

NUMSA took the Reconstruction Accord to the leadership of COSATU. Initially, it was not well received, but eventually COSATU's executive began to see the value in placing demands on the ANC. Phil Bokaba, NUMSA's second Vice President, explained:

"At the first COSATU Exco (Executive Committee) when this was introduced it was not well received by most affiliates and the national OB's (Office Bearers) were not convinced in the beginning. People said 'Ah, these workerists, what do they want now? We already have the Freedom Charter'...I remember Jay (Naidoo) saying at one meeting: 'Originally I was not convinced by this RDP (Reconstruction and

Development Program, as it was later called), *but now as we begin to talk I see there is something in what you say.*’ He read it and supported it, and when the GS (General Secretary) *speaks, people listen...finally they agreed, it was a hell of a battle.*” (Bokaba, quoted in Forrest, 2011, p473)

Even though it was the more populist wing of COSATU that had pushed for the Alliance, it was in fact NUMSA who “turned to the task of harnessing the new governments program to the needs of the working class” (Forrest, 2011, p470). Moses Mayekiso echoed this point, stating that “NUMSA has always had to be the union that is pushing for transformation.” (Mayekiso, 2014)

Initially, this met with some limited success – the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), the ANC’s economic policy in the first two years of post-Apartheid South Africa is widely regarded as having been strongly influenced by COSATU and the demands of organised labour.

“The initial impetus for a ‘reconstruction and development’ programme came from the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), which fought the April 1994 election in alliance with the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP). COSATU demanded a pact binding an ANC-led government to policies that would ‘fundamentally transform’ the economy, polity and society of South Africa.” (Blumenfeld, 1997, pp66-67)

So closely involved was the federation with RDP that when an office was set up within the Office of the State President specifically to oversee the programme, Jay Naidoo, the first General Secretary of COSATU, was made a Minister without Portfolio and placed in charge.

Several NUMSA interview respondents raised the issue of the RDP and cited the importance of NUMSA's influence in the development of the program. While the RDP was not regarded as ideal, there was recognition that it represented both an economic program that contained important things for workers, and that the ANC was listening to COSATU:

“The RDP, that was not so bad, at least then they were talking about jobs and the things that people need in the Township. And it showed that leadership (the ANC) was listening to COSATU.” (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

“In the early days, the ANC would listen, they listened with the RDP. That was achieved because we placed demands on leadership.”

However, the RDP was short-lived; as noted in the introductory chapter of this thesis, the ANC replaced its economic program in 1996 with GEAR, which promoted privatisation, wage restraint, trade liberalisation and flexibility in the labour market. In short, it was an avowedly neoliberal program. GEAR “changed the relations within the Alliance, taking power away from COSATU and blocking its promises of redistributive social change.” (Lockett and Munshi, 2017)

The shift in the policy of the ANC, who had only a few short years ago dropped any possibility of nationalisation of key sectors in the economy, such as the banks and mines, was a key event in Alliance politics, and signalled to NUMSA members that even when the union was able to influence policy, this would mean very little:

“What is it telling you, if they talk about nationalisation of the wealth when they are in exile, but then they do not do it when they are in power? What is it telling you, if they

listen to workers with the RDP, but then they say no, we will have GEAR? It is telling me that the ANC cannot be believed.” (NUMSA Local Office Bearer, 2014)

Nonetheless, NUMSA’s attempts to make sense of its relationship within the Alliance by putting demands on the ANC, “giving the ANC a mandate”, as one shop steward put it (NUMSA shop steward, 2014), is instructive of how the shopfloor model on which the union is based has guided the union in the post-Apartheid years.

The strategy of attempting to use the Alliance to further the cause of workers extended even to participation within the ANC itself; as noted in the introductory chapter of this thesis there has always been a strong tendency in post-Apartheid South Africa for trade union leaders to become political leaders, indeed some of the most staunchly pro-Alliance unions such as NUM are very proud of this tradition. Some leaders of NUMSA also made the transition from unionist to politician, after all the union believed in worker leadership. Moses Mayekiso, the first General Secretary of NUMSA, was elected to Parliament in 1994 as an ANC MP. As a result of his leadership of NUMSA during the struggle against Apartheid, he was a popular candidate. However, he resigned after just two years, and talked in our interview of his frustrations:

“My time in Parliament was boring. What I found, we were too far removed from constituents, from the grassroots. It was a recipe for disaster, we were just not connected to the workers. I was much less interested in the ANC after that! I resigned and went back to the civic movement. You have to be accountable in policy formation. Nothing the ANC does is from the grassroots.” (Mayekiso, 2014)

Mayekiso summarised a frustration that is keenly felt within NUMSA regarding the ANC and the Alliance; namely that the ANC is not responsive to the views of its

trade unionist Alliance partners, transmitted up from the factory floor, through COSATU's affiliate unions and expressed through COSATU and the Alliance structures.

"The ANC does not listen to COSATU. They do not respect their mandate. When we are sending our worker leaders to the ANC, they stop listening to us." (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

"We lost the debate within COSATU, so we accepted the Alliance and the Freedom Charter. But the ANC has not even implemented the charter. GEAR is maintaining the Apartheid economy." (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

There is even a feeling that allowing union leaders to become leaders in the ANC not only fails to provide a stronger voice for labour in government, but in fact damages the cause of the unions. This is due to what NUMSA members perceive as the syphoning off of leaders away from the union and towards a government which has consistently followed a neo-liberal economic strategy:

"We must not send our leaders to the ANC anymore. When we are sending NUMSA cadres to Parliament, we are not just losing our cadres. We are gaining enemies!" (NUMSA Local Office Bearer, 2014)

One such example of this was Alec Erwin, who became Deputy Finance minister in Mandela's first government (Forrest, 2011, p477). Erwin would eventually become He would eventually become Trade and Industry Minister in the Mbeki government and a key architect of GEAR. Another was Enoch Godongwana, a former General Secretary of NUMSA who was appointed Finance Minister in the Eastern Cape by

Thabo Mbeki. Godongwana had been a fierce critic of GEAR but abandoned these criticisms once he entered political office (Gumede, 2005, p262). As Forrest observed, when trade union leaders became politicians, “little thought was given to how this relationship would operate beyond a loose accountability through the Tripartite Alliance” (Forrest, 2011, p477). Like NUMSA’s attempts to push COSATU to shape the political program of the Alliance, the unions experiences of sending its members to become ANC leaders has suggested that this strategy for achieving transformation is a dead end. Several respondents cited the lack of accountability once a NUMSA representative went to become a politician:

“They are not in the factory anymore, and they are not in the Local anymore, so how are you going to tell them you are not happy?” (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

It seems this particular issue is now beyond the unions control in any case; in the course of fieldwork, it was explained that “The ANC used to ask us who they wanted us to send to Parliament. Now you just hear that they are gone.” (NUMSA Regional Office Bearer)

The frustration of COSATU affiliates with the ANC became particularly apparent under the Presidency of Thabo Mbeki, who succeeded Mandela and was widely perceived as uninterested and unreceptive to the demands that COSATU placed upon the ANC. In this next section of the chapter, we will discuss how Mbeki was removed from power by COSATU and the SACP, and by the mobilisation of worker protests. This represented a new phase of contention within the Tripartite Alliance, but also within COSATU itself.

5.3 Mbeki Out, Zuma In: Insider Mobilisation as a Learning Process?

“We will not speak of the political investment we have made since we stood up against the encroaching dictatorship and Zanufication of the ANC in the late 1990’s and until the triumph of 2007 in Polokwane, where our ideological foes met their Waterloo. When the historians write honestly about the contributions the workers movement made in this period, we are certain they will speak in glowing terms about COSATU.” (COSATU Political Report, quoted in Buhlungu and Ellis, 2012, p65)

The above quotation, taken from the political report to COSATU’s 10th Congress in 2009, gives some indication of the extent to which the COSATU leadership wished to present the outcome of the Polokwane conference as a political triumph. At this conference, then President of South Africa Thabo Mbeki, painted in this speech as dictatorial and likened to Robert Mugabe, was removed as President of the ANC and Jacob Zuma elected in his place. Including Mbeki, “six of the most important personalities in the ANC and government stood for election to leading positions and were all voted down...a democratic process allowed a major shift of personnel and perspective by the simple mechanism of choosing a different set of leaders” (Turok, 2008, p13). Furthermore, it is emphasised that COSATU played a key role in this process. The quotation is decidedly triumphalist in tone.

Frustrated and marginalised by the ANC government under the Mbeki administration, the leadership of COSATU believed that replacing Mbeki and his supporters with Zuma would open the door for them to exert more influence over government policy. Consequently, the federation had gone all out to mobilise for Zuma’s victory. Furthermore, as Beresford explains, the ascension of COSATU’s

preferred candidate to the Presidency suggested that the Tripartite Alliance would remain for many years to come.

“From their point of view, Zuma’s victory was a ‘new era’ for the Alliance, which would see a recalibration of Alliance decision making and restore some of the influence that COSATU had lost under the Mbeki administration... Zuma’s victory, it would seem, deferred any expectation or hope that COSATU’s leadership could agitate for a split in the alliance.” (Beresford, 2009, p394)

This prediction has been proven correct, and some years later, COSATU remains a committed partner in the Tripartite Alliance, and is certainly not agitating for a split with the ANC. COSATU itself has split however, following the expulsion of NUMSA, and a new federation, SAFTU, has been established.

The election of Zuma to the Presidency is a significant moment in Alliance politics because it was seen as confirming the continuation of the policy of COSATU towards the Alliance, and it involved a significant mobilisation. COSATU’s campaign to oust Mbeki was not merely a lobbying exercise carried out by national trade union leaders amongst the elite of the ANC. The process took place in the context of mass mobilisations of communities to express their frustration at the perceived failings of the Mbeki administration. This did not come directly from COSATU or from any other labour organisation, but rather developed organically in communities where what were perceived ANC’s broken promises had begun to cause bitter resentment. While the economy was said to be performing well following the adoption of GEAR, COSATU claimed that unemployment had risen to 40%, and “worker’s share of national income had dropped from 50% to less than 45%” (Ceruti, 2008, p110). From

the perspective of working-class South Africans, there was much to be angry about. It was in this context that service delivery protests began:

“Protests exploded first in a township in the Cape. Residents took to the streets, burning tyres and facing down rubber bullets. A wildfire spread. In 2005 there were some 881 ‘unrest incidents’ in some part of South Africa and the figure rose the following year...The delivery protests precipitated a crisis in the 2005 ANC national general council.” (Ceruti, 2008, p110)

The issue of COSATU’s campaign to replace Mbeki with its preferred candidate then took place at a time of heightened mobilisation when frustration was building with the ANC and when there was a great deal of anger at the perceived lack of engagement with COSATU.

It is this that made it possible for COSATU to mobilise its affiliates to influence the structures of the ANC in support of Zuma, who as was discussed in the introductory chapter of this thesis was viewed as a preferable candidate by the federation, who would restore its influence in the Alliance. As Beresford explains:

“...COSATU had thrown its weight behind Jacob Zuma to become ANC President during his bitter, long-running battle with former President Thabo Mbeki. Its affiliates had consciously resolved to swell the ranks of the ANC itself in order to bring about this leadership change...COSATU proclaimed that Mbeki’s era of a ‘government led Alliance’ was now over and that in its wake would be formed a new ‘Alliance led government’ under COSATU’s preferred ANC President.” (Beresford, 2016, p26)

This was therefore a significant mobilisation which attempted to reshape the Alliance. The enthusiasm of the federation for the Zuma Presidency did not match the reality, however. In 2017, COSATU released a statement revoking its support for

Zuma and calling upon him to step down in April 2017:

“COSATU no longer believes that the president is the right person to unite and lead the movement, the Alliance and the country. We think that after all his undeniable contribution to both the movement and government, the time has arrived for him to step down and allow the country to be led forward by a new collective at a government level.” (COSATU, quoted in Allison, 2017)

Zuma did eventually resign, although not until February 2018, almost a year later. After a Presidency marred by corruption scandals, the Marikana Massacre and general resentment of his handling of the Alliance relationship, he had done nothing to improve COSATU's with relationship with the ANC and had exacerbated long-standing ideological divides within COSATU” (Beresford, 2016, p16, p26). The leadership of COSATU had already endorsed Cyril Ramaphosa (perhaps surprisingly, given his involvement in the Marikana Massacre) to succeed Zuma as President of the ANC and South Africa in 2016, when COSATU First President Tyotyo James stated:

“He (Ramaphosa) is a unifier, a person of high integrity. He united the mineworkers, they were tribes before he formed the (National Union of Mineworkers) but he united them into an understanding that, before being tribal groups, they are workers.”

(James, quoted in Whittles, 2016)

COSATU supported the ANC in the 2019 General Election, as it has always done.

The perspective of NUMSA activists towards the election of Zuma is interesting, however. On the one hand, it was felt that the union had had to push COSATU to act

“NUMSA led COSATU in the struggle to oust Mbeki, it had to because COSATU was not reflecting the frustrations with Mbeki. But they have been bitterly disappointed. Marikana, Nkandla...Under Zuma’s leadership the rule of law has broken down. Zuma cannot stop corruption, he is corruption.” (Mayekiso, 2014)

This approach, which could quite understandably be seen as channelling militancy into Alliance insider politics (Beresford, 2016, p118) does not seem to sit well with NUMSA’s shopfloor tradition. Respondents interviewed in the field confirmed that NUMSA had mobilised along with other COSATU affiliates to replace Mbeki with Zuma and had put a great deal of energy into this. But this was presented not as an attempt to reshape the Alliance, as with the RDP or when NUMSA members stand in civic elections. Rather, it was suggested that this was something that had to be done because there was a mandate to do so.

“Of course, we mobilised for Zuma, we told the ANC that is who NUMSA wanted. That is the mandate members gave us. They were angry with Mbeki, they saw that there was anger in the Townships, they wanted Zuma because he is coming from the struggle (a reference to Zuma’s membership of Umkhonto we Sizwe).” (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

None of the respondents interviewed acknowledged having any personal enthusiasm for Zuma’s leadership, however. A significant number of interviewees did acknowledge that the perception of Zuma among NUMSA’s members at the time had been positive, because of his involvement in the armed struggle against

Apartheid and his imprisonment on Robben Island. But instead of personally identifying with this perspective, respondents appeared to express the view that the process had provided a useful education for members.

“Yes, they thought because Zuma fought against Apartheid, he was a comrade. But now they are learning. This teaches them to understand worker leadership.”

(NUMSA Local Office Bearer, 2014)

It was even suggested by one Local Office Bearer that Zuma’s appeal for NUMSA members was based upon ethnic lines, and that the process of NUMSA’s support for Zuma had been driven by identification with his Zulu ethnicity, which was again framed as a lesson for members.

“You see, Zuma, he is Zulu, and we have a great many Zulu members in NUMSA. So we had to support Zuma because so many of them wanted him. They were thinking that because he is Zulu, he will listen to them where Mbeki did not. But now they see that just because someone is the same as them, that does not mean he will listen to workers.” (Local Office Bearer, 2014)

This certainly fits with the analysis of both Ceruti, who noted that Zuma was a self-described Zulu traditionalist (Ceruti, 2008, p107) and Beresford, who noted that Zuma presented as “the stereotypical figure of ‘Zulu’ masculinity” (Beresford, 2009, p406). Both suggest that this was part of Zuma’s appeal for those who were frustrated with Mbeki’s leadership.

The perspective that NUMSA had to mobilise for Zuma because the union’s members mandated it to do so provides an interesting insight into how the shopfloor model of unionism that operates within NUMSA functions, given the suggestion that members will sometimes give grassroots leaders a mandate for actions that they

themselves are not enthusiastic about. NUMSA's support for Zuma was therefore framed as a 'lesson' that members would learn from. It seems that in this example, the shopfloor model of unionism necessitated that member views had to be reflected within the Alliance, to respect the mandate that had been given to them. But while the agreed form of action was carried out, union representatives interviewed after these events portrayed the mobilisation for Zuma as more akin to an unpleasant learning experience that the union needed to go through rather than a serious attempt to challenge the politics of the ANC. The strong implication seemed to be that while the union leadership had little faith in Zuma, it was necessary to reflect the political will of members, significant sections of which had hopes that Zuma would represent a shift in the Alliance.

Regardless of this framing however, there is no doubt that the union quickly moved on from the issue. By December 2013, newly elected President of NUMSA Andrew Chirwa proclaimed:

"We need to deal with this Nkandla saga. NUMSA has condemned this misuse and theft of public funds. Should we not ask that President Zuma resign in the interest of the poorest of the poor of our people?" (Chirwa, quoted in Letsoalo, 2013)

Many NUMSA representatives also spoke negatively of Zuma, and their pride in the fact that NUMSA had taken a firm stance on Zuma's Presidency:

"Zuma, he is a criminal, he is showing us the ANC is nothing but criminals." (Local Office Bearer, 2014)

"It is important that we were the first to say that Zuma must resign. We are showing the way, when politicians are saying that they will not be accountable, then workers must say that they will not accept this." (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

If Zuma was popular enough with NUMSA members that the union felt obliged to mobilise in support of him in 2007, by 2014 this was no longer the case.

Under Zuma, the ANC government announced the National Development Plan (NDP) in 2012. This document drew an extremely public and critical response from NUMSA, who described the document as thoroughly neoliberal, and released a 32-page document criticising the NDP in detail. This document drew point by point comparisons between the NDP and the political program of the Democratic Alliance, highlighting similarities such as the emphasis on economic opportunity, labour market flexibility and prioritising economic growth. NUMSA declared: “The ideology of the NDP is exactly the same ideology as that of the DA” (NUMSA, 2012, pp8-9). NUMSA’s analysis also made the point that COSATU had published a paper on the ANC leadership issue in 2007 that placed the following demand on the ANC, and by extension Zuma:

“The leadership that must lead an ANC rooted amongst our people and led by the working class must have an unquestionable commitment to this mass-based NDR (National Democratic Revolution). It must not have an ambivalent commitment to all the demands of the Freedom Charter including its call for nationalisation, redistribution of wealth and land, and free and compulsory education.” (COSATU, quoted in NUMSA, 2012, p14)

This was done to highlight the issue of nationalisation, which is central to NUMSA’s political vision for South Africa, in order to deal with the economic legacy of Apartheid:

“We trace the problem back to the negotiated settlement. In 1994, the white capitalist class exchanged racial dominance for the protection of their property rights...To overcome the colonial legacy in South Africa, we need to use the wealth of the dominant class to pay for schools, hospitals and services.” (Azwell Banda, 2014)

Yet the NDP represented the ANC’s economic strategy until 2030, contained no plans to democratise or broaden ownership of the economy, and continued the policy of BEE. NUMSA asserted that:

“This means that the continued concentration and centralisation of economic power in the hands of a few people, and the concentration of unemployment, poverty and negative effects of extreme inequality among the majority, which have been the characteristic economic features of colonialism of a special type, must continue well after 2030!” (NUMSA, 2012)

For NUMSA, it was confirmation beyond any reasonable doubt that economic transformation would never come from the ANC. The COSATU campaign to replace Mbeki with Zuma had reiterated the mandate of organised labour, and the Zuma government was ignoring the demands that COSATU had made during the process, despite Zuma presenting himself as someone who would be the voice of the Alliance. Furthermore, COSATU was perceived as silent on this:

“With the NDP, it was clear that the ANC was saying it did not respect the mandate of COSATU. But COSATU said very little. COSATU does not seem to care about our mandate either.” (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

In September 2013, NUMSA warned the ANC that if it did not abandon the NDP, it would not campaign for the ANC at the next election. (Letsoala and Molele,

2013) Three months later at its annual Congress, the union resolved to end its support for the ANC and the Tripartite Alliance.

“When we were confronted with the RDP, NUMSA could no longer ignore what was in front of us. It was not possible to continue with things as they were. What is worse is that some in COSATU were saying that we were too loud in our criticisms.” (Azwell Banda, 2014)

A tipping point had been reached, and NUMSA was no longer prepared to accept the Alliance.

5.4 Chapter Conclusions

This chapter has demonstrated that NUMSA as a union originated directly from the shopfloor tradition, and that furthermore this tradition has influenced and shaped the unions approach to the Tripartite Alliance throughout its history. NUMSA never wanted to be a part of the Alliance and had called on COSATU to break with the ANC and form a worker’s party. This reflected a continuation of the approach of MAWU, which had been bitterly opposed to the political linkages that the COSATU CEC developed with the ANC, in its view without a mandate from COSATU affiliates. However, NUMSA accepted the majority view within COSATU, and with it the role of a partnership with the ANC.

Informed by the shopfloor tradition, NUMSA saw COSATU’s role as communicating the expectations of workers to the ANC, and participating in the Alliance, by developing what would become the RDP and seeking to send worker leaders into positions of power within the Alliance. However, the unions experiences of this process led it to believe that this was futile, as the ANC or its representatives

did not recognise or accept the tasks that NUMSA mandated them with, or would go back on its word.

None of this is to suggest that the populist tradition had no influence on NUMSA, in fact the support that Zuma appears to have enjoyed among NUMSA members suggest that it is the case that many NUMSA members came to accept the Alliance. But the campaign to mobilise for Zuma to become President of the ANC represented not so much an enthusiasm for his candidacy as an acceptance that membership of the Alliance meant that the union must participate within its structures and mobilise to achieve its goals.

COSATU's campaign for Zuma however appears to have been a tipping point however, because Zuma presented himself to COSATU as someone who would speak for workers and respect the mandate of the labour movement. When NUMSA was confronted with the NDP, which they regard as representing a confirmation that the ANC had become completely wedded to neoliberalism, it was treated as proof that the Alliance would never respect the mandate of workers, and that they were not only unwilling partners but subordinate.

6. Marikana, Populist Unionism and Shopfloor Unionism: A Comparative Analysis of NUM and NUMSA

In previous chapters, it has been demonstrated that the formation of COSATU represented a strategic compromise between these two models, undertaken for the sake of workers unity against the Apartheid state. While the populist model is built upon a perspective which recognises the ANC, the party of the liberation struggle, as its political leadership, and argues that the material interests of workers are best served through the active participation of labour organisations within a cross-class alliance, the shopfloor model emphasises the importance of labour unions independence from cross class organisations and of democratic and worker led decision making from the factory floor upwards.

This chapter will demonstrate that following the strategic compromise that led to the formation of COSATU and the negotiated settlement of 1994, these two competing models have continued to exist within COSATU and have consequently played a role in the split that is taking place within the federation. It will do this through an examination of South Africa's 2012 platinum strike wave and the Marikana Massacre, one of the most significant events in labour relations in South Africa for many years, and through a comparative analysis of the dominant traditions and practices in NUM, the union which previously represented platinum workers, and NUMSA, once the largest COSATU-affiliated union (up until its expulsion from the federation). Through this comparison, it will be shown that while the collapse of NUM and the development of the 2012 platinum strike wave was in large part due to the deterioration and bureaucratisation of NUM's representative structures at the grassroots level in the mines, within NUMSA the practices of democratic accountability, worker leadership and well organised shop steward networks

associated with the shopfloor model of labour organising that developed out of the new trade unions in the 1970's has been kept very much alive. Furthermore, it will be shown that these two models of labour organising represent one of the key dividing lines in the split that has taken place within COSATU.

The demise of the Apartheid regime created the conditions for a corporatist labour relations model to emerge, whereby trade unions secured formal collective bargaining rights and sophisticated dispute resolution systems, the right to strike (which was enshrined in the constitution) and a formal political alliance with the ruling political party. Through this process, the South African state completed a strategic transition in labour relations, which as Chinguno explains can be understood as a move from a coercive model of labour relations towards a regime based on consent and facilitation, also served to act as a method of regulating labour organisations through a process of institutionalism (Chinguno, 2015, p579).

During the Apartheid era, trade unions for black workers were rarely recognised, and certainly the right to strike did not formally exist for much of this period. As a result any and all collective bargaining power remained contingent on a union's ability to organise and mobilise workers in struggle; it was this that made the development of the shopfloor model of labour unionism so important, because the level of workers democratic self-organisation associated with the shopfloor model in the workplace was necessary in order for workers to co-ordinate tightly organised and unified mobilisations, and in order to minimise the risk of reprisals from employers or the state in the aftermath of disputes.

While the advent of this corporatist form of labour relations since the end of Apartheid has allowed labour organisation to use legal reforms and institutional

bargaining arrangements to communicate workers grievances and secure reforms, the need for such tightly organised networks and self-organisation at the grassroots level has reduced. It will be argued in this chapter that in a union such as NUM, which was heavily based on the populist model of labour organising and was not part of the wave of new 'shopfloor' unions which developed in the 1970's, the traditions of worker control and democratic and accountable shopfloor structures were much weaker. Furthermore, over time the corporatist model of labour relations which was introduced in 1994 resulted in the 'hollowing out' of the unions structures at the grassroots level. By contrast, NUMSA has developed directly from the shopfloor model of unionism and retains this model today. As a result of this, it is argued that the unions in which the populist model was dominant were far more vulnerable to the risks of institutionalisation, demobilisation and collapse following the end of Apartheid, as demonstrated by the experiences of NUM in the platinum belt.

Undoubtedly, the contentious processes at work within COSATU entered a new stage in the wake of the Marikana Massacre in 2012. Since then, a spotlight has been shone on the turmoil created by the competing tendencies within COSATU and its affiliate unions. The massacre precipitated a crisis within COSATU in which NUMSA, the largest union in the federation, was expelled and which led to a wholesale split. The collapse of NUM in the platinum belt, combined with the rise of NUMSA as COSATU's largest affiliate union and the only one to record continuous growth in membership at the time, provides an informative example of the vulnerability of unions based on the populist model being 'hollowed out' from below because of bureaucratised and unresponsive grassroots structures when compared with unions based on the shopfloor model. comparative examination of the internal politics and practices of NUM with those of NUMSA therefore tells us a great deal

about competing models of labour unionism within COSATU and of the contentious processes that these two models have subsequently generated.

6.1 The 2012 Platinum Strike Wave and the Marikana Massacre

Undeniably, the Marikana massacre marked the beginning of a period in South Africa in which the contentious processes within COSATU became truly and permanently visible to the outside world. In and of itself, this act of state violence against workers engaged in strike action would have raised huge questions in relation to COSATU's alliance with the ruling party, particularly as many of the miners involved in the dispute were still members of NUM, COSATU's largest affiliate union at the time. The impact of the massacre on the Alliance was even more serious, however, as it quickly became clear that there was at least one senior ANC official who was closely involved in the decision-making processes which guided the police who opened fire that day; current President of South Africa Cyril Ramaphosa. A member of the ANC's national executive at the time, he had previously been the ANC's first Secretary General following the unbanning of the organisation in 1990 and has served as both an MP and Deputy President. Ramaphosa was a major shareholder who sat on the board of Lonmin at the time of the incident and had communicated with the police to demand 'concomitant action'. Ramaphosa's involvement is a fitting symbol for the divisions that have grown not just within the Alliance, but within COSATU affiliates such as NUM as well, as prior to his rise through the ranks of the ANC he had formally been the General Secretary of NUM. Following the resignation of President Zuma in 2018, Ramaphosa was elected President of South Africa unopposed by the National Assembly (Whittles, 2018).

The incident was made all the more shocking by the fact that most of the dead were found to have been shot in the back, far from police lines, and did not as was initially suggested represent a violent or dangerous threat to the police. Dali Mpofu, one of the main legal advocates for the Marikana workers, has described the actions of the police as the “premeditated murder of defenceless people” (Mpofu, quoted in Hlongwane, 2012). To make matters worse, following the shootings 270 miners were charged with the deaths of their fellow strikers.

“The legal basis for the charges was found in the ‘common purpose’ doctrine, ironically much favoured by apartheid prosecutors dealing with political unrest”, a decision which “caused both a national and an international outcry.” (Serjeant At The Bar, 2012)

The charges were later dropped, but the use of legislation commonly utilised by prosecutors under the old Apartheid system created very uncomfortable parallels in many people’s minds between the current ANC government and their predecessors.

While the strike at Marikana received global press coverage following the massacre of workers, it was part of a strike wave throughout the platinum sector that did not in fact originate at the Lonmin mine:

“The South African platinum belt was hit by an unprecedented, rolling strike wave in 2012. Initiated at Impala Platinum, this impacted Lonmin, then Anglo Platinum and persisted into 2013, involving over 100,000 workers.” (Chinguno, 2015, pp577-578)

The strike wave began at the Impala Platinum mines, initiated by rock drill operators (RDO’s) who demanded an unprecedented 200% wage rise, from R3000 to R9000

per month. From the very beginning, the workers “rejected representation by the recognised trade union, the NUM and the formal industrial relations institutions” and in their place formed “impromptu independent committees to advance their demands” (Chinguno, 2013, p160). The independent committees became members of AMCU, a previously minor union which had broken away from the NUM in the late 1990’s and had officially formed in 2001.

AMCU does not appear to have had any pre-existing presence at Impala in the form of members or a basic branch structure; however despite this the new union was able to develop a relationship with the strikers during the six week long strike and “successfully merge with the ad hoc workers’ committee created by the strikers to represent themselves in defiance of the NUM” (Botiveau, 2014, p130). By May the same year, AMCU had recruited 12,000 new members working in Impala Platinum in Rustenburg, almost 40% of Impala’s total workforce in the region (de Lange, 2013). While many workers involved were members of AMCU or went on to join the union however, it is important to note that at Lonmin in particular the organic self-organisation of workers was equally important to the development of the strike wave. David Van Wyk of the Benchmarks foundation claimed that the strike had begun before AMCU even had a presence at Lonmin:

“At Lonmin RDO’s were not part of any union. The company called AMCU to come to talk to the strikers, they didn’t know how to deal with it.” (David Van Wyk, 2014)

Striking miners in the platinum belt utilised a dual strategy, whereby strikers who were traditionally represented by NUM organised themselves both through independent and unrecognised workers committees but also through an emerging rival union in the form of AMCU. The multiple and sometimes apparently

contradictory mobilisation strategies employed by workers in the platinum belt are an example of 'experimental mobilisation', in which groups of workers utilise a variety of different strategies to secure their goals. When strategies fail to return a desired outcome they are abandoned by workers, but on the other hand when strategies are seen as successful they can often be taken up by other groups of workers, and can come to characterise or define particular waves of mobilisation. Frustrated by what they perceived as NUM's failure to deliver results for members through collective bargaining and mobilisation, platinum mine workers experimented with seeking out assistance and organisational capacity from other labour organisations, particularly AMCU, at the same time as developing their own capacity to organise independently from any official labour organisation. Both of these strategies were taken up in the platinum belt, and where these methods were perceived as aiding mobilisation both strategies were taken up by other workers at other mines in the region.

The Lonmin strike was an example of this tendency for successful strategies of mobilisation to be utilised and replicated by workers elsewhere; inspired by the strike at Impala Platinum, mineworkers at Lonmin in Marikana began organising in June. Again, the strike was built initially by the RDO's, again the workers rejected the NUM and the official collective bargaining agreements in favour of electing independent strike committees, and again the dispute led to a huge growth in AMCU membership. This time the demands were even more radical. The mine workers demanded R12500 per month and refused to budge on this figure, even later on in the dispute after management violated its collective bargaining agreements with the NUM in order to meet with them and offer a compromise deal (Chinguno, 2013, p162).

Violence had been in evidence during the Impala strikes, but at the Lonmin mine in Marikana it became even more pronounced. After management initially refused to acknowledge the workers' demands, arguing that they were illegitimate as they were not delivered through the proper NUM channels, the workers marched on the NUM offices to demand that officials take up their wage demands. In response, NUM officials, who felt threatened by the self-organisation of the RDO's, met this march with violence:

“The stakes were too high for the NUM given how events unfolded at Impala and its subsequent loss of appeal to its membership. Thus in a desperate attempt to extinguish the strike, the NUM branch officials opened fire at the march...two RDO's were killed as a result of the NUM shooting and several injured.” (Chinguno, 2013, p162)

This is an indication of the extent to which contentious processes had become ingrained within NUM, even before the Lonmin strike, and it is significant that as Chinguno observes, NUM branch officers on the ground felt pressure to deal with the challenge posed by the demands of their members and the threat of the new rival union. NUM had been losing members to AMCU at Lonmin for quite some time by 2012. Moreover, this was often as a direct result of workers perception of NUM as collaborating with employers against their own members. Indeed, the first major example of this was an unprotected strike at the Karee section in Marikana in 2011, well over a year before the Massacre. The strike involved 9,000 workers, who were subsequently sacked by the company (Botiveau, 2014, p129). Somewhat unusually, this strike was launched not against the employer, Lonmin, but against the workers own union, NUM, following the unions' decision to suspend a local union officer on the grounds of corruption:

“AMCU’s first breakthrough at a major platinum mine was at the Lonmin Karee mine following unprotected strike action in June 2011 over NUM’s suspension of the Karee branch chairperson concerning allegations of misappropriation of funds. The workers claimed the union was collaborating with management in victimising a union representative with workers’ interests at heart. Over 9,000 were dismissed. NUM negotiated for their reinstatement and Lonmin agreed to reinstate 7,000. However, when the workers were rehired they declined to join NUM. AMCU thus became the majority union at Karee and gained minimum recognition in Lonmin although NUM still held the majority across all operations.” (Chinguno, 2013, p17)

The Karee strike is highly significant in terms of understanding the process through which AMCU came to replace NUM as the dominant union in the platinum belt; as a consequence of the workers dissatisfaction with NUM, even after the union had managed to negotiate the re-employment of most of the striking miners, it opened the door to AMCU to begin organising at Lonmin mine and establish itself as a union with some limited recognition. As a result, NUM was forced to attempt to regain lost ground from the upstart rival union, as Botiveau writes:

“Following this, the NUM had to re-sign its members in order to regain its position with the company and to resist the challenge of the AMCU, a minority union that had in the meantime established a local branch around leaders expelled from the NUM. The AMCU, accordingly, had been present on the ground for more than a year when the August 2012 strike started.” (Botiveau, 2014, p129)

Perhaps even more significant however is the fact that Karee demonstrated clearly the division and contention present within NUM well before the Marikana strike. When 9,000 union members take part in a wildcat strike in defence of one local

official against not just their employer but their own union, it is an indication that a very serious point of contestation had developed between NUM's membership at Karee (and at Lonmin more generally) and the structures of the union. It is commonplace for a union to take industrial action of some kind in response to victimisation of trade union representatives on the part of an employer, but to take action against a union itself is very rare. This shows how internal contentious processes within NUM played significant role in shaping subsequent external contentious processes between mineworkers and their employers.

The workers chose to do this because they trusted their branch chairperson but did not trust NUM:

“Mineworker 8 provides an account of events. According to him, members ‘loved’ the chairperson, Steve, because he refused to take bribes from management and ‘he always came with straight things... things that NUM never wanted us to know’. The suspension followed a dispute about a payout from a trust fund established to enable workers to benefit from profits made over the preceding five years.” (Alexander et al, 2012, p27)

The Karee strike was indicative of a serious crisis of confidence in NUM within its membership and must be understood as a key signifier of the decline of the unions ability to reproduce itself as a union in the platinum belt. In this next section, the processes that led to this situation - the ‘hollowing out’ of its organisational structures at the grassroots level – will be examined.

6.2 The Rise and Fall of NUM: A Failure of Union Structures

NUM was formed following a strike in July 1982, when mineworkers approached the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA) to ask for support in

forming a union for mineworkers. Previous attempts to unionise miners had been undertaken by both FOSATU and SACTU but had met with little success. While the new unions of the 1970's had experienced rapid growth in a variety of sectors, the mines had presented a huge challenge, due to the fact that almost all miners were migrant workers:

“Unionisation had been most rapid in manufacturing, commerce, construction and transport where the workforce was more skilled, stable, and urbanized. Unionism was much less advanced, or completely non-existent, in sectors such as agriculture and mining with a predominantly migrant workforce.” (Crush, 1989, p5)

Migrant workers presented a huge challenge to the labour movement of the 1970's' and 1980's'. This was in large part due to their marginal position in the labour market, which was even more insecure than other black workers in South Africa at the time, and consequently they were often most at risk of reprisal from employers if they engaged in union activities, as well as more likely to work as strike breakers. Even more significantly however, attempts to unionise mineworkers faced a huge obstacle in the form of the compound system. This system, which had been employed for over a century in the industry, housed migrant workers in company-provided compounds. Each compound was segregated on ethnic lines, with workers housed with others from the same 'tribal group'. The aim was to control workers by controlling their accommodation, by separating and dividing workers from each other through constructed inter-ethnic rivalries and from the outside world (the mines and compounds were usually in remote locations), and to make union organisation very difficult (Crush, 1989, p6; Buhlungu and Bezuidenhout, 2008, p267).

In response to requests from mineworker's for support, CUSA assigned Cyril Ramaphosa, an activist and lawyer who worked as a legal adviser for CUSA at the time, the task of forming a union which could successfully bring together mineworkers. Working alongside a handful of CUSA activists, Ramaphosa and his team formed the NUM in August 1982. The new union "achieved phenomenal success and managed to recruit thousands of members in a relatively short period" (Buhlungu and Bezuidenhout, 2008, p267). By December 1982, when NUM held its first ever conference, it had grown to a paid-up membership of over 14,000 and had established itself as the largest union in the mines. Following this initial rapid rate of growth organisers built upon this success and by the end of 1987 the union "had been through three major strikes and claimed a membership of 360,000 (over 60 per cent of the work-force on the gold and coal mines)" (Crush, 1989, p8).

Undoubtedly this rapid growth in members was a testament to the organisational capabilities of the new mining union:

"The NUM's rapid emergence as the dominant black union on the mines owed much to the tactical skills of its organizers, the leadership's responsiveness to grassroots' concerns, and the democratic structures which were quickly put in place." (Crush, 1989, p10)

One aspect of NUM's success was informed by the Black Consciousness tradition of CUSA. While the proliferation of ethnic divides provided a major challenge to NUM, the context of the racially oppressive Apartheid state provided a powerful enemy to unite around, and the union successfully cut across these through the construction of a "common Black identity" (Buhlungu and Bezuidenhout, 2008, p267) CUSA had

been formed in 1980, by unions from the Black Consciousness tradition which had refused to join FOSATU. CUSA had at one stage pulled out of the unity talks which led to COSATU's formation, because it was opposed to the principle of non-racialism that FOSATU demanded; however, NUM, which had already become CUSA's largest affiliate, stayed and became part of COSATU (Forrest, 2011, 64).

NUM was also aided in its recruitment however by a shift in strategic response to labour on the part of the mines and the state however, as a result of the growth in new trade unions and in worker militancy from the 1970's onwards. The mine owners and Apartheid state could no longer control workers through coercion alone. Even though unions had not yet been established in the mines, labour protest and unrest were commonplace:

“The mine compounds were racked by recurrent wildcat strike action, attacks on mine property, and severe internecine strife between workers of different ethnic origin. Between 1973-1979, there was extensive damage to mine property, over 200 black miners died, and over 1,000 were injured. These struggles were diverse in form and complex in origin, but they served to show how defective existing structures of control were in defusing, much less in managing, worker protest.” (Crush, 1989, p7)

Because of the failure of purely coercive measures to contain and control worker unrest, some mining companies began to perceive a need for some form of basic bargaining structures, in order to channel and facilitate workers grievances. (Buhlungu and Bezuidenhout, 2008, p267)

Until 1981, the Apartheid state had barred all African workers from any form of association with a trade union. As a result of significant and recurrent labour unrest during the 1970's however, and particularly in the wake of the Soweto uprising, Prime Minister BJ Vorster established the Commission of Enquiry into Labour Legislation, which came to be known as the Wiehahn commission.

“Led by Nic Wiehahn, Professor of labour law at the University of South Africa, the Commission released the most important part of its report to Parliament on Labour Day 1979. In what has been labelled a historical concession, the Commission recommended the legal recognition of African trade unions and the right of African workers to organize.” (van Zyl-Hermann, 2016, p10)

This marked the beginning of a significant shift in the strategy of the Apartheid state, from repression to facilitation, precisely because the strategy of repression of worker organisation was failing. Despite the attempts of the Apartheid state, by 1975 around 75,000 African workers were thought to be members of around 25 active labour unions (van Zyl-Hermann, 2016, p10).

Furthermore, in order to facilitate some limited form of consensual labour relations, not long after NUM was founded, in late 1982 “the Chamber of Mines announced that it would permit access to mine workers under controlled conditions and would bargain with any representative unions that emerged” (Crush, 1989, p6). This provided a huge boost to NUM; as a union it was in the right place at the right time to take advantage of this new opportunity, and once it had access to the housing compounds in which mineworkers spent most of their lives, the compound system which had previously been an insurmountable obstacle to organising became a fantastic recruitment tool:

“Once the NUM colonized the compounds, it became much easier to hold meetings. The union could also use space in the compounds for offices...The union did not have to put vast resources into traveling to dispersed workplaces. Rather, regional structures could be built around mines that were clustered in specific geographic spaces, such as Carletonville, Klerksdorp, and Welkom.” (Buhlungu and Bezuidenhout, 2008, p267)

The removal of restrictions on the organising of migrant workers, combined with the opening up of the mine industry to trade unions, created the conditions for NUM to grow at an almost unheard-of speed. Given the geographical concentration of workers in the mines – some mining companies employed up to 20,000 workers in a single cluster of mine shafts – and the huge disruptive power at the point of production that came with high levels of unionisation, NUM quickly became the largest and most powerful union in the history of South Africa.

The roots of NUM's collapse in the platinum belt were perhaps located in this period of dominance, however. Two important developments stemmed from the position of power which NUM found itself in. The first was that the union was accepted by the mining industry as a negotiating partner and NUM quickly adapted to a partnership approach to labour relations in which employers were happy to grant paid facility time to union representatives. This was somewhat different to the experience of the FOSATU unions, who had been forced to develop their ability to organise without formal recognition. indeed, NUM was founded at a time when the shift from a coercive/repressive strategy of labour relations to a strategy of facilitation had already begun within the South African state. NUM used the willingness of employers to recognise the union to promote the principal of full-time ‘shaft stewards’ (shop stewards associated with a specific mine shaft), by which workers elected to

the position of shop steward would spend 100% of their time on union duties and responsibilities. This stands in stark contrast to the 'worker leader' structure associated with the shopfloor model, which still operates in NUMSA today, in which elected representatives must remain workers on the factory floor.

The second consequence of NUM's rise to prominence was the leading role the union played not just in COSATU, but in the National Liberation movement and what would later become the Tripartite Alliance. NUM was the first COSATU affiliate to formally adopt the Freedom Charter as a guiding document in 1987, and later the same year was instrumental in pushing for COSATU as a federation to do the same. The unions first General Secretary, Ramaphosa, chaired the meeting at which COSATU was founded and was part of Nelson Mandela's reception committee upon his release from prison, before becoming a leading ANC politician. NUM as a union is proud of its support for the Tripartite Alliance and for the ANC, and in fact records proudly in its own history its pivotal role in linking "worker aspirations and the national liberation project", and of taking this perspective "into COSATU which signalled a death knell to workerist tendencies within the federation at its inception" (NUM, 2021). While it is unlikely that anyone without a knowledge of the formation of COSATU would understand this reference to 'workerist tendencies', undoubtedly this statement is intended as a criticism of COSATU affiliates which stand in the tradition of FOSATU and of the shopfloor model of unionism, and which display a more sceptical attitude to the utility of the Tripartite Alliance, as has been shown in previous chapters. Nor was Ramaphosa alone in his rise to prominence. Many NUM officials over the years have gone on to serve in the ANC or the government in some form; indeed, NUM states on its' website that:

“The Union regards itself as a leadership grooming institution hence it has always been willing to avail its graduates to assume important roles within the alliance structures e.g. Cyril Ramaphosa who became ANC Secretary General 1995 and currently the Deputy President of the ANC, Kgalema Motlanthe who became ANC Secretary General 1997-2007 and who became Deputy President of South Africa 2009, and the current incumbent Secretary General of the ANC Gwede Mantashe, to mention but a few.” (NUM, 2021)

Not only have many of the unions former leaders moved on to political careers, but also business careers as well. Frans Baleni, who was General Secretary of the union at the time of Marikana and only narrowly failed to win re-election in 2015, has served as a Director of the Development Bank of Southern Africa since 2010. Not only have many of the unions former leaders moved on to political careers, but also business careers as well:

“James Motlatsi, a past president of the NUM...is now a significant player in the mining industry on the other side of the negotiating table, as well as Marcel Golding, who used the NUM’s investment company to launch his own career as new South African capitalist.” (Buhlungu and Bezuidenhout, 2008, p267)

NUM, with its close relationship to the ANC and prominent position within the Alliance, has been perfectly placed for its members and leaders to benefit from the social mobility provided by opportunities within the ANC, the ANC government and the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) program. As was noted in the introductory chapter of this thesis, BEE effectively replaced the ANC’s pledges to nationalise large sectors of the South African economy as the policy solution to the racialised nature of the Apartheid economy. However, this system, which Southall identifies as

a key driver of what he terms “crony capitalism” has incentivised a relationship between COSATU and the ANC which rewards political loyalty with positions in politics and business (Southall, 2007, p69).

NUM is not alone in this – indeed it has become commonplace for labour leaders in COSATU to graduate to “key positions in government and big business” (Twala, 2013, p64). But the populist tradition in which NUM locates itself has made it more susceptible to the negative effects of COSATU’s close relationship with the ANC. Not only this, but the unions close relationship with the ANC has had a direct impact on the internal politics of the union; a member’s attitude towards the ANC or to factions within it can result in that member being deemed unsuitable to hold high office in the union. For example, Baleni, General Secretary of NUM from 2007 to 2015, was first elected totally unopposed. That was not because he had no opponents however, but because Archie Phalane, a rival candidate who was serving as Deputy General Secretary and had been nominated by NUM members in the platinum sector, was barred from contesting the election at the last minute by the union’s national leadership, on the grounds that he had not been a mineworker. In fact, it was suggested that the decision was political:

“It seems straightforward enough, yet Phalane and his platinum sector supporters were seen to be sympathetic to the cause of ousted president Thabo Mbeki, and Baleni is supportive of current African National Congress leader and President Jacob Zuma. The union was behind Zuma.” (Marinovich, 2012)

Phalane was a popular leader in the platinum belt, who had headed the securing of an important Employee Relations policy for Amplats workers in 2000, following a month long strike (Dunbar Moodie, 2015, p573). He and his supporters argued that

the new rules were designed to exclude him, as previously others such as Ramaphosa and Motlanthe had held the position despite not having worked in the mines, and claimed that the decision to ban him from contesting the election was driven by “the tribalism of a Xhosa-dominated faction” (Phalane, quoted in Buhlungu and Bezuidenhout, 2008, p263). This example provides an idea of how politics within the ANC has come to influence politics within unions such as NUM who have developed from the populist tradition.

The use of NUM’s democratic structures to secure individual benefits or advancement is not solely reserved for national leaders either. By the time of the 2012 strike wave divisions based upon hierarchies within NUM had damaged the trust of members in their union. Becoming a shop steward in NUM offers serious material and social benefits in and of itself, as Buhlungu and Bezuidenhout note:

“Full-time shaft stewards do not stay in their jobs but become full-time union operatives working from offices within the premises. Others work from the union’s regional offices. In virtually all cases, full-time shaft stewards receive higher remuneration and benefits and often never go back to their shop floor positions. A mineworker who gets elected to the position of full-time shaft steward can triple his monthly salary, as the norm is to remunerate these positions at the level of a personnel officer. This raises the stakes, and where shaft stewards were often victimized in the past, the position has now become a ticket to advancement.”

(Buhlungu and Bezuidenhout, 2008, p270)

Furthermore, as Alexander et al’s research shows, positions within the unions structures can offer further opportunities for personal enrichment; mineworkers at Lonmin reported that NUM officials were often corrupt, colluding with management to

determine who was first in the pecking order when jobs became available for example, or securing the best company housing for themselves and their friends (Alexander et al, 2012). The position of NUM as a union steeped in a corporatist model of labour relations provides shop stewards with the ability to personally enrich themselves. Corruption is so endemic that for many years even NUM's own leaders have been forced to acknowledge it.

One of the most damaging effects of BEE was the emergence of what Buhlungu and Bezuidenhout termed the 'entrepreneurial union representative', meaning that becoming a union representative has become recognised as a means to secure personal enrichment. This has had the effect of subverting NUM's power base, the compound housing system. These buildings played a huge role in helping to establish the NUM's dominance in mining, as has been discussed. But because of shop steward's ability to secure the best housing for their friends, or for those willing to pay for the privilege, there has been a major shift in workers choices in relation to housing. Many now prefer to stay in informal settlements, in shacks they construct themselves, as this is often cheaper than securing decent housing in the compounds, where drinking and female companionship are often limited or prohibited. This is particularly the case for the poorest sections of the workforce, those most likely to be frustrated with NUM's failure to bargain on their behalf, such as the RDO's who were the first to take action in the 2012 strike wave. This created a situation in which AMCU was able to grow in the informal settlements, away from NUM's bases of support in the hostels:

"In a number of informal settlements AMCU has been actively involved in organising workers. This is facilitated by the majority of AMCU local leadership living here.

AMCU has thus managed to capture the informal settlements where a significant number of workers live in a similar way to that by which NUM captured the hostels in the 1980s.” (Chinguno, 2013, p19)

In this manner, the entrepreneurial practices of NUM stewards have effectively driven mineworkers to live in an environment where AMCU could recruit freely, away from the control of NUM or mine management.

Ultimately, the political partnership with the ANC that has always served to guide NUM’s organisational practices and the subsequent rise of ‘entrepreneurial union representatives’ served to ‘hollow out’ democratic structures at the grassroots level that were once effective and responsive. AMCU as a union has been able to grow substantially as a result of this degeneration; worker dissatisfaction with NUM is what has driven the rise of AMCU. In fact, the roots of AMCU itself originate from a similar unprotected strike to that which took place in Karee, albeit many years earlier, which was also carried out without the endorsement of the national union:

“AMCU was formed in 1999 as a breakaway union from the NUM. This followed a clash between the former NUM General Secretary, Gwede Mantashe, and Joseph Mathunjwa who was the chairperson of the local NUM branch at Douglas Colliery in Mpumalanga. He led an unprotected strike for two weeks in which workers occupied mine shafts underground for ten days. The colliery had availed R2 million through the Social Labour Plan to develop retrenches (provide training for workers who had lost their jobs). Muthunjwa faced disciplinary charges for abusing the funds but was absolved after two hearings. However, Mantashe insisted on a third hearing which he wanted to chair. Mathunjwa declined and demanded a neutral chairperson. This resulted in the cancellation of his NUM membership. The 3,000 branch members

waged a strike in solidarity with Mathunjwa. They subsequently resolved to form an independent union and AMCU emerged.” (Chinguno, 2013, pp16-17)

AMCU remained a tiny union for many years, with small bases of support in just a few regions, until the 2012 strike wave which saw tens of thousands of former NUM members join the splinter union. Its very existence comes as a direct result of contention between local branches and the union nationally, and it is as a direct result of internal contentious processes within NUM that AMCU has been able to transition from a minor and virtually unheard of union to one which represents the vast majority of workers in a mining belt with the largest platinum reserves in the world. Indeed, Chinguno asserts that “most new members moved to AMCU without it having any serious organising campaign. They were simply disgruntled NUM members. It became a matter of AMCU rising from the ashes of NUM” (Chinguno, 2013, p18). Since securing both recognition and national attention, AMCU has pronounced itself an “apolitical union”, with no formal linkages to any political party (Chinguno, 2013, p18). It has not joined SAFTU and shows no enthusiasm for NUMSA’s aim of building a political party of the working class. David van Wyk is a representative of the Benchmarks Foundation, which monitors corporations in the mining sector and uses a community-embedded approach to assess the social, economic and environmental impact of the mining industry (Bench Marks, N.D). As van Wyk explained during our interview:

“AMCU says it is independent. But the AMCU leaders are all NUM guys, they have the NUM culture.” (David Van Wyk, 2014)

This is potentially a point of some significance; despite the frustration those who

joined AMCU felt with NUM, and the fact that the union has chosen to work outside of the Alliance, these workers still come from a different trade union tradition and have not shown interest in what NUMSA is doing. In any case, the growth of AMCU demonstrates the way in which contention within the labour movement itself shapes the character of contention between labour and capital.

For a variety of reasons, it is clear that NUM had lost the confidence of its members in the platinum belt. Ultimately though the issue which forced them to experiment with other strategies of mobilisation was the fact that “NUM was not advancing workers’ claims for better remuneration, and the big problem was getting Lonmin to talk directly with the workers” (Alexander et al, 2012, p29). Consequently, workers increasingly came to the view that they would have to advance their own demands independently of NUM. It is certainly true that many workers in the platinum belt were quickly becoming members of AMCU, but the new union was not yet in a position to put forward their demands over pay:

“Workers realised that NUM was too close to the bosses and obstructed their struggle, and that the other union involved, the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU), lacked the formal bargaining rights that could advance their demands. In order to be strong they needed to unite amongst themselves.”
(Alexander et al, 2012, pp21-22)

While it would be incorrect to draw sweeping connections between the experiences of the mineworkers who left NUM and the experiences of NUMSA’s activist layers, it is instructive that parallels can be drawn between the experiences of the mineworkers in the platinum belt and the experiences of workers organising in the new unions of the 1970’s. Faced with unions standing in the populist tradition whose

capacity to organise and mobilise workers had been negatively affected by their partnership with the ANC and with employers, the mineworkers were forced to rely on their ability to organise at the point of production in order to mobilise around their goals – in effect they were forced to begin organising at the shopfloor.

6.3 After Marikana: Contrasting Responses from NUM and NUMSA

Following the Marikana Massacre, the divisions within COSATU became more public and visible; a key illustration of this was the differing responses of COSATU affiliates and Tripartite Alliance partners to the shootings. Frans Baleni, the General Secretary of NUM, actually defended the actions of the police, stating in a radio interview that ““The police were patient, but these people were extremely armed with dangerous weapons” (Baleni, quoted in Polgreen, 2012). Furthermore, just three days before the massacre, Baleni had called for the state to intervene in the dispute in a press statement:

"We call for the deployment of a special task force or the South African National Defence Force to deal decisively with the criminal elements in Rustenburg and its surrounding mines. We appeal for the deployment of the Special Task Force as a matter of urgency before things run out of hand. For months on end we have argued that the situation in Rustenburg requires special intervention and we are seeing no difference." (Baleni, quoted in Hlongwane, 2012)

Not only then did a national leader of NUM attempt to justify and excuse the actions of the police in shooting striking workers, but he had also publicly appealed to the ANC government to send not just the police but the army to the mine at Marikana to deal with workers who had decided to mobilise independently of NUM. While there

may well have been genuine reasons to fear violence from the strikers, some of whom were armed with pangas, it is an indication of the severity of the NUM membership's loss of confidence in their union that NUM officials would call upon the state to protect them from their members in such a way. The description of at least some of the strike organisers as 'criminal' is also highly significant, indicating an attempt to delegitimise the mobilisation even before the massacre.

The SACP, another partner in the Tripartite Alliance who in the past along with COSATU had been critical of the ANC's record in government at times, released a statement the very next day calling for the "immediate arrest of both Steve Kholekile and Mr Mathunjwa (two key leaders of AMCU) as co-ordinators, planners, and leaders of this anarchic worker to worker violence that has left many lives dead and some injured" (Sambatha, 2012).

Not all COSATU affiliates took the same approach, however. In sharp contrast to NUM, whose General Secretary defended the actions of the police just one day after the massacre, NUMSA released a press statement describing the events of Marikana as a massacre, criticising the actions of the police and demanding an enquiry:

"As NUMSA we are of the firm view that there are other ways of dealing with the Lonmin mine crisis without the use of automatic machine guns, where live ammunition has been used against workers armed only with spears and knobkerries as we saw the police doing yesterday. The barrel of a gun cannot supersede a platform for collective engagements! We call for an urgent investigation of the causes of this massacre of workers by police. If we are not careful, we might slide into a police state wherein the men and women in blue uniforms are recklessly used

to bring an end to all forms of protest under the pretext of maintaining law and order.”
(NUMSA, 2012)

NUMSA was in fact the first organisation in South Africa to describe the shootings as a massacre. This is a point of pride amongst its membership; shop stewards in NUMSA see their union as being at the forefront of legitimately criticising and holding to account the state and the ANC government for its actions in relation to Marikana.

“We used the term massacre because it was important to say that it was a massacre, that these were not criminals or counter-revolutionaries but workers who were massacred by the state.” (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

Furthermore, NUMSA has also placed strong emphasis in all of its public statements and within its own structures on the importance of recognising the worker mobilisation at Lonmin and elsewhere, and the activities of the new AMCU union as legitimate manifestations of working-class struggle, in contrast to the attempts of NUM, the SACP and the ANC to paint AMCU and the mine workers as ‘criminal’. NUMSA sees this as highly significant, because of the parallels between the ways in which the responses of various actors within the Tripartite Alliance sought to delegitimise the struggle of the miners in the platinum belt and the attempts of the old Apartheid state to paint the anti-Apartheid movement as terrorists or criminals rather than a legitimate movement against a rigidly entrenched and enforced system of racial discrimination and oppression. Steven Nhlapo, the head of Collective Bargaining at NUMSA, was quick to draw attention to this point during our interview, pointing out that:

“The Apartheid state called workers terrorists. Now the ANC calls us vigilantes and criminals.” (Nhlapo, 2014)

This speaks clearly to the conception of the fall of Apartheid and the transition to South Africa's new multi-racial democracy as a 'negotiated settlement', as it is generally described within NUMSA. In contrast those who stand in the populist tradition see this process as one of revolutionary transformation. However, the comparisons which NUMSA and others have drawn between the Apartheid state and today's South Africa indicate that while the majority black population may have won political rights previously denied to them, the economic and social conditions within South Africa have remained fundamentally the same; certainly this is true of the relationship between labour, capital and the state, as demonstrated by the willingness of the ANC government to utilise deadly force against workers struggling for better wages. Moses Mayekiso, the first General Secretary of NUMSA who stood as a Presidential candidate in the 2014 election for the small Workers and Socialist Party (WASP), went so far as to say that the Marikana massacre was worse than the Sharpeville massacre, itself one of the most heinous acts of violence during the Apartheid era, because "in Sharpeville we expected to be killed" (Mayekiso, 2014).

6.4 NUMSA, 'Worker Leadership' and the Shopfloor Model of Unionism

The Marikana Massacre was a key intended focus of the interviews carried out during fieldwork, and questions on this topic produced rich responses, not least because as well as condemning the Massacre NUMSA activists have discussed it extensively within their own union structures:

“Marikana showed to our members clearly whose side the ANC are on...it clarified things for workers. We had to have many discussions about Marikana within NUMSA, to understand what happened there.” (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

Undoubtedly the violent repression and killing which took place has in and of itself transformed the way many South Africans see the ANC government, and as such must be recognised as a significant reason for NUMSA’s breaking away from the Alliance.

NUM provides in many ways an intuitive counterpoint to the ‘shopfloor’ model of labour unionism, which is ingrained in the democratic and organisational practices of NUMSA. Prior to 2012, NUM was the largest union in South Africa, and very loyal to the ANC; following the platinum strike wave however it haemorrhaged members to AMCU, its emerging rival in the sector. NUM’s failure to retain the confidence of its members in the platinum sector was driven by two primary causes; firstly, the union’s failure to listen to or mobilise around workers concerns, and secondly, workers perception of the union as possessing a culture of corruption and collusion with management.

Within NUMSA, the consensus opinion is that these issues stem primarily from the problem of ‘social distance’, whereby the representative structures of the union, such as local and regional networks of shop stewards and union officials had come to be composed predominantly of individuals who (as discussed earlier in the chapter) lived and worked in very different conditions from those of the members they represented, partially as a result of using their positions within the union for material gain. Consequently, their willingness and ability to communicate worker’s

grievances to management and to mobilise around these grievances were compromised, as a shop steward explained:

“In NUMSA we have seen what happens when shop stewards are cars and mobile phones, when they spend all their time in the office. What they had in NUM was a problem of social distance, the shop stewards there were distant from the lives of the workers.” (Shop Steward, 2014)

In NUMSA, representative structures are designed to prevent and limit the problem of ‘social distance’ between the members and the shop steward networks through means of the ‘worker leader’ system. The principle behind this system effectively is that in order to avoid becoming removed from the realities of worker life, shop stewards and local office bearers must remain employed in their factory or other workplace and continue to work there for the majority of their week, receiving only paid time off from work for union duties, and no other benefits. Because they remain employed by the company they work for, they see wage rises only when other workers employed there also see wage rises. Unlike NUM, a union which is heavily based upon the principle of full-time shop stewards, in NUMSA shop stewards remain in their respective workplace.

High levels of expectation are placed on the shoulders of shop stewards within NUMSA; for example, attendance at local shop stewards’ councils every Saturday morning is mandatory for all local union representatives. These meetings can often run as long as six or even eight hours and include political education sessions as well as training and organisational aspects.

“The Local is where we are learning. We must be educated in the history of NUMSA and in the struggles of the working class.”

Shop stewards are expected to provide a report from their workplace and to act as a communication link between the factory floor and the 'Local', NUMSA's term for its geographical branches. Accountability, too, is a key expectation of worker leaders. If a steward is unable to attend their shop stewards council or complete some other duty, they must submit an apology stating their reasons for absence in writing, and the meeting must decide if the grounds that they provide are sufficient. If a shop steward is deemed to have missed too many meetings, then they can be suspended as a steward and the local chairperson can recommend new steward elections take place in the company or factory they represent. Missing as few as two meetings can be grounds for a shop steward to be suspended if it is the view of their Local shop steward's council that they have not provided valid reasons for doing so.

Furthermore, if the Local is concerned that are not adequately representing the issues of members or communicating discussions back to their own workplace, they have the power to invite workers from the relevant workplace to elect a new steward if they wish.

"If we are concerned that a shop steward is not being accountable to their members on the shopfloor, then we need to be able to remedy the situation." (NUMSA Local Office Bearer, 2014)

Shop stewards are expected to adhere strictly to the rules; during one participant observation of a Local shop steward council meeting, a discussion was observed in which Local Office Bearers and shop stewards debated whether they could accept a written explanation of absence from a steward as it was not submitted on the correct size paper, as specified in the Local rules. Viewed in isolation this could be seen as unnecessarily pedantic, but it contributes to a culture in which shop stewards are expected to take their duties extremely seriously.

Members have the right to contact the local chairperson too if they do not feel a steward is providing them with the information they need and to lodge a complaint with the Local:

“If members are not happy, which can sometimes happen, they can contact their Local Chairperson to talk about their problem.” (Local Office Bearer, 2014)

In general, the union demonstrates that it has strongly maintained the principles of the shopfloor unions of the 1970's, including worker control and the ability to hold shop stewards to account.

While becoming an activist or worker representative in NUMSA does not come with the privileges that are afforded to shop stewards in NUM, NUMSA members nonetheless see becoming an elected shop steward as something desirable and to aspire to. Indeed, at many NUMSA local shop stewards' councils, there will often be many workers who are not yet elected representatives yet, but hope to be in the future, and attend the compulsory meetings in their own free time to learn from the more experienced members and to demonstrate their dedication to the union. One interviewee, when asked about their position in the union, explained that they did not have one, but defined themselves as an Active Member:

“I am not yet a shop steward. But I am an Active Member. I attend the Local when I am not working, I am educating myself, and I hope to become a shop steward soon.”

(NUMSA Active Member, 2014)

For workers who come from poor backgrounds and have few opportunities in life, becoming a 'worker leader' is seen as a source of pride and something to aspire to:

“We receive no material benefits as shop stewards. But we get the chance to learn, to educate ourselves and to be a worker leader. Being a shop steward is something to be proud of.” (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

Furthermore, pride in being a shop steward is intrinsically linked to a strong shared working-class identity.

In NUM, in which becoming a union representative essentially provides opportunities and therefore resentment, the shop steward structures have been linked to “eroding workers trust in their stewards while simultaneously eroding the collective identity of the union as a bastion of working-class solidarity” (Beresford, 2016, p151). In NUMSA, however, it is strongly emphasised that part of the purpose of worker education is to help members understand their position in society as a worker:

“In NUMSA, we take worker education very seriously. How can a worker understand what needs to be done in the factory to build power if he does not understand what a worker is and how capitalism exploits workers?” (NUMSA Local Officer Bearer, 2014)

It was also sometimes emphasised that in the context of Alliance politics, ‘worker’ and ‘comrade’ may not always mean the same thing. As one shop steward explained:

“Many people call themselves comrades, because they are coming from the struggle. In South Africa we are all coming from the struggle! But that does not make them a worker. Sometimes we need to know the difference between those who call themselves comrades and the workers.” (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

This raises an interesting parallel to a point made by Beresford in relation to the term 'comrade' as it is understood in NUM, where a comrade can refer to someone who may be in politics or even in business. (Beresford, 2009, p399)

A related distinction was made repeatedly in the context of worker leadership; it was recognised that there existed leaders within the ANC or within other unions that could be trusted and that NUMSA could work with, but it did not mean they were worker leaders. "Only a worker can exhibit qualities of worker leadership." (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

Shop stewards' councils are sites of serious and sometimes controversial debate; as has been referred to in a previous chapter, when shop stewards are not happy about something, such as a settlement to a strike, this will be discussed in detail and all parties will be given a chance to voice their opinions. NUMSA's shop stewards' councils remain lively sites of debate and difference. Even when minority views exist within a local, they are accommodated rather than pushed away from the union. Again, this contrasts with NUM, where members felt powerless to communicate their frustrations to union representatives to the extent that they began to organise independently of themselves.

NUMSA's emphasis on shopfloor democracy and accountability is intrinsically linked to its ability to mobilise members, and this also stands in sharp contrast to NUM. While NUM in the past was regarded as a militant union, able to mobilise and struggle, in the wake of Marikana it has lost this identity:

"The Marikana Massacre – and NUM's response to it – has further eroded the unions identity as a militant 'union of toyi-toyi'." (Beresford, 2016, p115)

NUMSA on the other hand has retained a reputation for struggle and is frequently referred to as South Africa's most militant union. This reputation is supported by the month-long engineering strike NUMSA was engaged in during the time fieldwork was undertaken, which this thesis has already referred to. This strike, involving 220,000 NUMSA members, is one of the most significant labour mobilisations that has taken place in South Africa in recent years, alongside the mobilisations in the platinum belt. But the unions' ability to sustain this record of militancy relies upon its ability to continually reproduce the sense of ownership and 'worker control' that members feel over the union through grassroots decision making.

An example of this was provided through a participant observation of a NUMSA strike at the Rand Refinery in Germiston in September 2014. The strike involved over 300 members and was about pay, but also about the use of polygraph tests, which the company used on its workers and which it was claimed were related to several dismissals (Marais, 2014). A shop steward from the Rand Refinery, which refines gold, explained:

"The company here they are using lie detector tests, they test our members at random. They say it is to ensure we are not stealing. But our members, when they are taking these tests, they are asked questions about the union, if they are a member, what NUMSA is saying. That is why we are striking for two weeks now, because we cannot allow them to target people for being members of NUMSA."

(NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

During the visit to the picket line, an employee from the company came out to deliver an offer for the strikers, whereby the company would agree to suspend the use of polygraph tests for two years if the strike was suspended. The agreement was in

writing and sufficient copies had been printed so that every member of the union present (around 100) could have their own copy to read. While members were reading, the shop stewards gathered people together and reminded them that the company was offering to suspend polygraph testing for two years, but that NUMSA's demand had been that testing would be banned permanently. After a brief discussion, it was resolved to reject the agreement and to continue striking. The agreements were ripped up and the strikers resumed picketing, sending a shop steward to communicate their decision to management.

This is a small-scale example of a local strike but gives an indication of the culture of the union during disputes. The provision of written copies of the proposed agreement meant that all members had the opportunity to see what was being offered in exchange for suspending the strike. Discussions took place and decisions were made out in the open for all members to see, rather than taking place between management and union representatives. This gives an indication of what NUMSA's emphasis on worker decision making at the shopfloor looks like and stands in contrast to the culture in NUM where union representatives were seen as being too close to management and not sufficiently engaging with union members.

6.5 Chapter Conclusions:

Undoubtedly, the 2012 platinum strike wave erupted because of the perceived failure of NUM to fulfil their role as representatives and advocates for the pay, terms and conditions of the workers in the mines, but also the perceived failure of the Tripartite Alliance and the ANC government to secure a genuine economic transformation of the Apartheid economy. In this context, two factors which are key to understanding the collapse of NUM was the failure of its democratic structures

and the development of an 'entrepreneurial' culture among shop stewards, both of which are closely linked to the model of unionism on which NUM is based.

Furthermore, NUM is not the only COSATU affiliated union to have experienced such issues, as Botiveau writes:

“The NUM’s collapse is indeed part of a series of recent failures for COSATU. For example, in 2011, a majority of members of the South African Municipal Workers’ Union decided to ignore their leadership’s call to strike. Similarly, a group of leaders from the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union launched a splinter union in 2012, and a massive strike started on the Western Cape’s farmlands just after Marikana, with strikers largely taking over the Food and Allied Workers’ Union.”

(Botiveau, 2014, p136)

The Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU) later became the first COSATU affiliate to officially abandon the federation and join NUMSA in building a new network of trade unions outside of the Tripartite Alliance.

The events of Marikana and the subsequent platinum strike wave demonstrated that NUM had severely lost the confidence of its members in the sector, and that this loss of confidence was related directly to the question of the Tripartite Alliance and the relationship with the ANC. The Massacre revealed the defining contradiction of the Tripartite Alliance; namely that the leadership of the Alliance, having ascended to the position of a national bourgeoisie, has developed interests which run counter to those of the organised working class with which they remain formally allied to. In the Platinum strike wave of 2012, the impact of this contradictory partnership could be clearly seen within NUM, which at the time was

the largest union in South Africa and one of the most loyal of the COSATU affiliated unions to the ANC and to the Alliance.

Furthermore, when compared with the grassroots structures and internal culture of a union such as NUMSA, it can be clearly seen that the shopfloor model of unionism has provided workers with a more durable, democratic, and accountable basis for organisation. Outlined in this chapter is an account of how NUMSA has continued to reproduce strong democratic structures, a sense of shared worker identity, and an ability to be responsive to members concerns and to mobilise around their grievances. Consequently, this comparative analysis of NUM and NUMSA provides a basis with which to understand the very different trajectories of the two unions in the post-Apartheid era. While NUM remains a committed Alliance partner, quite possibly to the detriment of the union's future, NUMSA has broken decisively with the Alliance and is attempting to develop a completely different political approach. In the next chapter, this approach and its consequences will be considered and evaluated.

7. NUMSA, The United Front and the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party: An Assessment of Progress and Challenges

“We have a historical responsibility to form a party that will fight for socialist transformation for the working class. To do otherwise allows exploitative demagogic formulations like the EFF to grow.” (Azwell Banda, 2014)

At the December 2013 Congress, NUMSA resolved as a union to initiate a United Front of organised workers and communities to challenge the neoliberal policies of the ANC, and to build an explicitly working-class political party in South Africa. Given that one of the central foci of this thesis is concerned with the impact of these resolutions on labour relations and the trade union movement in South Africa, this chapter will critically assess these resolutions in an attempt to shed light on the likely implications. It took until late 2018 for the union to announce tentative plans to form a Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party (SRWP), and while initially NUMSA made some progress towards the creation of a United Front of workers and communities, the formation has not yet realised the potential that NUMSA activists believed was possible. It is unsurprising that the union has not achieved rapid results however given the ramifications caused by NUMSA’s decisions within COSATU and the Tripartite Alliance. In a significant escalation of tensions within the federation NUMSA was expelled from COSATU in late 2014, a decision that angered other COSATU affiliate unions. In response, seven of COSATU’s twenty-five other affiliate unions suspended their participation in the federation and demanded a special national Congress be convened in order to address the situation. This never took place, and in 2016 a new independent labour federation was formed – SAFTU.

The formation of SAFTU emerged as a direct consequence of NUMSA's Congress resolutions, and the union's subsequent expulsion from COSATU. Consequently, responding to these developments became a key focus of the union. Because of this, a significant proportion of this chapter will focus on that process, and how it has intersected with NUMSA's aims of building a movement of workers and communities and a new political party of the working class. This chapter will analyse the impact of this on the labour movement and on industrial relations in the country. It is also necessary however to examine NUMSA's attempts to carry out the building of a United Front, and of a socialist party of the working class, and assess some of the questions and challenges NUMSA faces in achieving these goals.

This chapter will firstly examine the attempt to create a 'United Front' between organised workers and communities in South Africa, assessing some of the challenges faced by the union. Secondly, it will assess the union's attempts to form a party, and analyse the challenges faced by a union attempting to become actively involved in electoral politics. Since the bulk of this chapter was written prior to the 2019 General Election, it does not include any discussion of the election itself, which the SRWP did eventually resolve to contest, but is limited to a discussion of the process in which NUMSA engaged in that led to the formation of this party. Thirdly it will consider the conflict that took place in COSATU and the processes that led to the creation of SAFTU will be discussed, to understand how the federation came into being. Finally, the chapter will consider how SAFTU can be characterised, through an assessment of its founding statements and initial mobilisation. It will be argued that although SAFTU was not prepared to support the party NUMSA has built, it is significant that SAFTU has made commitments towards organising with working-class communities beyond the confines of the present labour movement and towards

considering the question of workers political representation and building a working-class political party. This thesis therefore contends that SAFTU, like NUMSA, can be understood as a resurgence of shopfloor unionism.

Through this process, the chapter will seek to examine some of the challenges involved in the projects that NUMSA has resolved to build. It will also be argued that the formation of SAFTU marks an important resurgence of shop floor unionism in South Africa and opens possibilities to build a working-class movement for economic transformation in the country. Consequently, while the decisions taken by NUMSA have resulted in the externalisation of the internal contentious processes which existed within COSATU, the resulting reorganisation and the debates that have shaped this process will now shape internal contention within the new labour federation. The significant development of a new labour federation means that questions such as how to build a movement of united workers and communities, how to relate to other political and social organisations, and what a party of the working class and the labour movement should look like can potentially take on even greater importance.

Finally, the chapter will assert that these developments represent a shift from a model of labour relations within South Africa based upon facilitation and partnership, towards a new phase of more open contention between labour and the state. In conclusion, this chapter will explain that while these questions are a long way from being decisively resolved, the steps taken by NUMSA and the resulting realignment of the South African labour movement is a momentous process, one that has permanently altered the dynamics of industrial relations in South Africa. Furthermore, it is asserted that this can be characterised by the resurgence of the shopfloor model of labour unionism.

7.1 The United Front: Uniting the Working Class?:

*“3.2 As NUMSA, we must lead in the establishment of a new **UNITED FRONT** that will coordinate struggles in the workplace and in communities, in a way similar to the UDF of the 1980’s’. The task of this front will be to fight for the implementation of the Freedom Charter and be an organisational weapon against neoliberal policies such as the NDP.”* (NUMSA, 2014b, emphasis in original)

One aspect of NUMSA’s frustration with COSATU and the Alliance stems from the union’s perspective that in the post-Apartheid era organised workers have become separated from communities, destroying the unity that had existed at the height of the anti-Apartheid movement by the United Democratic Front. The union believes this was done primarily through the demobilisation of united struggles and by bureaucratically disrupting and frustrating attempts to push COSATU to develop links with communities, which in South Africa are increasingly engaged in protests relating to the provision of services, often directed at local and national government. Furthermore, it is argued that COSATU has been unresponsive to rectify the situation.

“When we are raising the service delivery protests in COSATU, resolutions are passed but no action is taken. The federation does not act on the mandate that has been given.” (NUMSA Local Office Bearer, 2014)

As stated in the Congress resolution, NUMSA’s intention is explicitly to recreate the class unity between workers and communities that had existed within, and was built by, the UDF during the anti-Apartheid struggles of the 1980’s’. This is significant, as it reflects the extent to which the developments around NUMSA are

historically conditioned and contingent, with the union explicitly linking the new project to past methods of organisation.

“COSATU has failed to reach out to the communities, to the protests at the lack of service delivery. In the townships there is anger but COSATU has not engaged. With the United Front we can build unity.” (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

However, there are significant challenges that will need to be overcome for NUMSA to be successful in their goal of building a movement of workers and communities. In this section their progress will be assessed in relation to three key thematic issues. These are as follows; how the United Front project relates to the political party NUMSA has launched, what the political goals of the United Front project are, and how NUMSA intends to build solidarity and political unity between its members and wider working-class communities.

While NUMSA bases the United Front on the UDF, there is also an aspect to the project that is markedly different to the UDF of the 1980's'. While the UDF was never formally affiliated to the exiled ANC, the ANC's status as the de facto political leadership of the anti-Apartheid movement and the fact that many UDF leaders were members of the ANC meant that the UDF was never likely to become the basis of a political party. Indeed, Marina Ottoway described the organisation as acting as “a substitute for the banned ANC, maintaining its presence inside the country”.

(Ottoway, 1991, p72)

NUMSA however is attempting to build a United Front ‘side by side’ with a new socialist and working-class political party, which dramatically changes the nature of the project. That does not mean that NUMSA is explicitly building the United Front as part of the political party they wish to create; indeed, a pamphlet on

building the United Front published for NUMSA activists explicitly states that the organisation should not be built upon support for any political party.

“The United Front is about concrete demands of the working class and is not an electoral pact...The only condition for going into the United Front is commitment to joint struggle against the class enemy.” (NUMSA Education, 2014, p15)

NUMSA does intend however to argue within the project that “one of the aims of the United Front should be the radical implementation of the Freedom Charter.” (NUMSA Education, 2014, p24) NUMSA activists therefore argue within the Front that this ‘radical implementation’ of the Freedom Charter should in effect be the program upon which the project is built. This represents a potential contradiction of the position that the union held in the past; that the Freedom Charter was insufficient and that it was necessary for the labour movement to produce a Worker’s Charter. The significance of this is that while NUMSA, coming from the shopfloor tradition, has previously argued for the necessity of a Workers Charter, in relation to the United Front the union seems to suggesting that a ‘radical implementation’ of the Freedom Charter would be sufficient as a political program for the project.

Activists in NUMSA also believe that building unity between organised workers and the broader working class in communities is essential to creating the basis for a political party. This was a view expressed in several interviews, as indicated by the following quote:

“A party of the working class must unite workers and communities. That is who a working-class party must speak for.” (NUMSA Local Office Bearer, 2014)

While NUMSA is not therefore building the United Front as an explicit component of the new political party, the union sees a need for such a party to reach out to communities. This may present a problem, as NUMSA's strongly stated opposition to the ANC government could potentially alienate working class communities which still express support for the ruling ANC, as the 'party of liberation'. Marcel Paret suggests that while in the 1980's the United Democratic Front could build clearly around opposition to the Apartheid state and to the government of the day, in the contemporary political period this would provide a much greater challenge to the unions efforts to build unity between communities and organised workers:

“Rather than sharply opposing the state, now many community residents identify with the ruling party...In terms of party politics, for some workers opposition to the state and the ANC encourages solidarity with community struggles, while for others a fear of engaging the electoral arena encourages distance.” (Paret, 2015, pp268-270)

It is certainly possible, given the widespread media coverage of NUMSA's rejection of the Alliance, that among communities that still demonstrate strong support for the ruling party, NUMSA's position could act as a barrier to co-operation.

However, the union is in fact wary of demanding support for the new party as a condition of participation in the United Front and is keen to stress that they intend to engage and organise with communities even in cases where these organisations demonstrate political loyalties and identities which conflict with the unions own political stance.

“We cannot expect communities to support what NUMSA is saying about a party straightaway. We must show we want to support their struggles first.” (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

While the union recognises that the political party it is attempting to build will require support from working class communities to gain any kind of serious political traction, the United Front is conceived of as a vehicle for bringing organised workers and communities together in struggle. Any intensification of this political unity, in the form of a more engaged and electorally focused partnership or even participation in a new party, is clearly seen by the union as something for the future, and not an immediate goal.

However, there is still the question of what the purpose of the United Front is, what function it serves, and what the political goals of the organisation are.

“The basis of the United Front is the fact that different sections may in certain situations be marching under different banners. Some banners may be reformist and others revolutionary...The United Front is about bringing struggles together...The demands of the United Front have to be acceptable to all sections of the working class. You cannot go into a United Front and demand that the other section of working class adopts your political ideology (Marxism-Leninism for example or political programme eg. the Freedom Charter). The only condition for going into a United Front is commitment to joint struggle against the class enemy.” (NUMSA Education, 2014, p15)

This passage, again from a pamphlet produced by NUMSA for use by activists involved in the United Front, shows that the union does not conceive of participation in the organisation as requiring support for socialism, or even of the Freedom Charter, much less any commitment to building a new political party to directly challenge the ANC. However, it also demonstrates that the only precondition for unity NUMSA raises in the United Front is ‘joint struggle against the class enemy’.

This could be seen as confusing, since it suggests there is no specific political aim of the United Front, not even the implementation of the Freedom Charter, yet for many NUMSA activists the Freedom Charter is seen as the very minimum that is necessary to confront the issues faced by the working class in South Africa.

Additionally, the conception of the 'class enemy' in the context of the United Front is potentially unclear. For NUMSA as a workplace trade union, the 'class enemy' is simple to define; it is in the main employers, including state employers, who the union is struggling against to secure better wages, terms, and conditions. In the context of communities engaged in struggles primarily around housing and service delivery however, whose protests are usually directed at municipal or national government (ie the ANC) but include participants who are often loyal voters or even members of the ruling party, it is far less clear who or what the 'class enemy' is in this context. Consequently, there is a lack of clarity around what it is that the United Front is fighting for, or whom it is fighting against.

However, as NUMSA activists are keen to explain, the goal of the United Front is to foster unity between workers and communities, which they argue was eroded during the post-Apartheid years because of COSATU's unwillingness to challenge the ANC politically.

"What we are doing with the United Front, we are reaching out to communities, and saying we will support your struggles, NUMSA wants to rebuild the unity that existed in the past. The United Front is about reaching out to support class struggles in the communities. We are looking for allies and we must show solidarity." (NUMSA Local Office Bearer, 2014)

This is entirely in keeping with the shopfloor model of unionism which developed in the 1970's. The General Secretary of FOSATU Joe Foster declared "That FOSATU should be involved in community activities is correct since our members form the major part of those communities" (Foster, quoted in Paret, 2015, p270), and from 1982 onwards FOSATU unions had an explicit policy of involvement with community struggles since the in the majority the community was part of the working class.

NUMSA's goal is very clearly to build solidarity with community struggles and given the level of service delivery protests in South Africa there is clearly a wealth of struggles with which to engage. As far back as 2010, Alexander described South Africa's townships as experiencing a "Rebellion of the Poor", noting that during both the Mbeki and Zuma eras an explosion of protests has taken place, which were "principally about inadequate service delivery and lack of accountability by local councillors." (Alexander, 2010, p37) The general level of protests, which in some cases developed an insurrectionary quality, have led to a description of South Africa as the "protest capital of the world" (Runciman, 2017).

Furthermore, the forces organised together in the Tripartite Alliance have generally failed to engage meaningfully with these communities and the anger that exists in a society where despite the end of Apartheid and the significant political and social transformations that have taken place, many black workers believe that aspects of the Apartheid economic system still remain intact. In more recent years when there has been engagement it has largely been tokenistic:

"Since the beginning of 2014, the number of community struggles has increased to almost four instances of protests per day. In almost every part of the country, community activists are protesting against water cut-offs, no services and poor

housing, expressing their anger that 20 years after the end of apartheid the quality of life for the poorest sections of the working class has got worse... Between 1994 and 2002 the old Left within the Congress milieu largely ignored the struggles or dismissed them as opportunist and hostile to the ANC... From the Left in the Congress Alliance, resolutions started being passed that COSATU and/or the SACP branches should 'provide leadership' which they hardly were able to do given their social distance from these struggles." (Gentle, 2014, p674)

NUMSA has determined that in post-Apartheid South Africa, because of the Tripartite Alliance and the unwillingness of COSATU to show support for the struggles of communities, that unity between the organised working class and wider working-class communities has broken down substantially. NUMSA activists recognise that these communities are engaged in struggles over living standards, and understand these as class-based struggles, which they want to support.

"What is happening in the communities is that people are struggling, people do not have access to water or electricity, we have to show them that we will struggle with them." (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

But good intentions alone cannot overcome the class cleavages that have developed between organised labour and working-class communities; there are huge challenges involved for trade unions who seek to become involved in what is effectively a whole series of heterogenous and isolated struggles.

7.2 Building the Front in Practice:

In 2014, the union began work on the United Front through the introduction of Political Discussions Forums (PDF) based on NUMSA's local structure. The purpose of these forums was to create structures in which NUMSA members and activists

could discuss politics and struggles with members of communities and social movements. While these meetings initially took place in the offices of NUMSA locals, NUMSA intended that they should eventually become based in townships themselves to better attract community participation.

The intention for the PDF's' was that they would form the basis of an organisational link between NUMSA and communities, helping the union to better understand the situation in communities and to develop unity in practice:

“Our national leadership cannot know everything that is going on in the Township, but the PDF can co-ordinate struggles between NUMSA and communities.” (NUMSA Regional Office Bearer, 2014)

Even this step of bringing workers and communities together to discuss the struggles they are involved in however is not without challenges. As part of fieldwork research for this thesis observations were conducted on two of the first Political Discussion Forum (PDF) meetings to be held in South Africa. While the Germiston and North Johannesburg locals did have some level of success in attracting a handful of people involved in community protests, as well as from social movements such as the Democratic Left Front and Right2Know, in general activists were somewhat disappointed with the response from the community.

These were of course very early attempts to set up branches of the United Front in practice, but observations of these attempts presented some potential challenges that could be experienced by the union. A central problem for NUMSA is the fact that their members and activists are not, for the most part, directly involved in the service delivery protests taking place in communities. In South Africa, unemployment is extremely high – it was “33.8% in the fourth quarter of 2015”

according to NUMSA's own website (NUMSA, 2016), engaging with working class communities means engaging with communities who are unemployed or making a living through informal work.

This creates a certain distance between NUMSA members who are in employment and the working-class communities they are seeking to connect with. As one shop steward put it:

“We live in the communities, but during the day, we are at work. We are in the workplace, not in the community. We need to talk to the people we live alongside if we are to get them to come to us.” (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

While NUMSA is a well organised workplace trade union, with strong levels of communication with members on the factory floor in keeping with the shop floor tradition, it does not have strong networks and links with community organisations involved in the service delivery protests that are a key feature of class struggle in contemporary South Africa. Nor does the union have extensive experience of working with community campaigns; while NUMSA has attempted over the last few years to push COSATU to support and actively engage with the service delivery protests, the focus of the union has been to argue within COSATU for this position rather than to attempt to do this independently, at least until the December 2012 conference.

This lack of experience with community engagement creates practical obstacles; at the first PDF in Germiston, one shop steward remarked:

“The community has not come to this meeting because they don't know about it, they don't know what the United Front is for or that we are having this meeting. Perhaps

we need to go to the community, with leaflets, and tell them why we want them to come.” (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

This suggestion of a simple method of promoting the United Front in communities drew mixed reactions from NUMSA activists, however. Some agreed that to build the United Front, this was the kind of activity they would have to engage in, but others expressed reservations and a lack of confidence about going to the townships and to service delivery protests to hand out leaflets in this manner. This might sound surprising, but it is important to recognise that NUMSA is very well organised in workplaces, and much of their strength as a union comes from their strong shop steward networks. The United Front project requires them to go outside of their comfort zone, and to engage on issues outside of the realm of the workplace. As one Local Office Bearer put it:

“Our shop stewards know how to discuss with workers in the workplace, they know how to listen to the concerns of workers, how to bring these concerns into the structures of the union, how to organise workers to strike. But this is different, this is a new thing we are asking them to do, asking to talk to others in their communities.”
(NUMSA Local Office Bearer, 2014)

Indeed, for many NUMSA members, building the United Front means not just organising within their community, but may in fact require going into townships and settlements, which are quite unlike the environments they themselves live in. As Paret notes, “with the growth of flexible employment and unemployment in the post-Apartheid period, union members have become a relatively privileged section of the working class” (Paret, 2015, p270). Some of the most militant service delivery

protests often take place in the poorest townships and in informal settlements, where NUMSA members are unlikely to live themselves.

This clearly presents a challenge for NUMSA activists simply in terms of making connections with community struggles taking place in South Africa. But it also raises issues in terms of the politics of the campaigning work that NUMSA members anticipate the United Front will be engaged in. One example of this arose during fieldwork observation of a PDF meeting in Germiston, where the subject of opposition to 'e-tolls' was raised by NUMSA members, and by members of the Democratic Left Front in attendance. 'E-toll' refers to an electronic freeway tolling project launched in Gauteng in 2013, whereby vehicle drivers must pay a charge when they use the roads. The project, described as "the largest open-road tolling project in the world", has attracted criticism on the basis that "the tolling of previously free roadways will be inflationary and raise the cost of living, especially for lower-income groups" (Venter and Joubert, 2014, p63). It was therefore a politically relevant issue to people in poorer communities, but also potentially not the most engaging.

While still part of COSATU, NUMSA opposed the introduction of e-tolls, warning that the system would lead to an increase in food prices and retrenchments of workers due to the higher cost of transporting goods and stating the unions "principled opposition to the commodification of our national assets, particularly our public roads" (NUMSA National Office Bearers, 2012). The policy, which involves revenues being used by a private company to expand and maintain South Africa's roads, is clearly reflective of the neo-liberal economic policies of the ANC government that NUMSA is keen to organise against. Consequently, it is unsurprising that union activists wish to use the United Front to build opposition to e-tolls. However, in a country where two thirds of households do not have access to a

vehicle, the cost increase of using roads will not be felt directly by most of the population, and certainly not by the majority of those involved in service delivery protests. These protests focus on more directly pressing issues, such as access to clean water, electricity, and sanitation, or on the provision of housing.

This creates an issue for NUMSA activists; NUMSA's members are skilled workers and while they do not live lives of material luxury, many can afford to run a car, not least because of their union's ability to collectively bargain and to mobilise strike action in pursuit of better wages. Just as NUMSA members observe a certain 'social distance' between shop stewards and members in unions like NUM, so too does a certain 'social distance' exist between NUMSA members and the wider working class. For the wider working class in the communities however, e-tolls may not be quite as likely to be a priority issue. As one NUMSA steward raised during the discussion:

"We are many of us driving, we use cars, so we are losing money because of e-tolls. But the people in the communities that are not driving, how can we explain to them that e-tolls will affect them too? If we want their support to fight e-tolls we will need to explain how they will affect prices." (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

E-tolls are of course only one issue among many that the United Front movement has attempted to campaign against. Nevertheless, participant observations of PDF revealed that there are challenges to the unity that NUMSA seeks to build with communities through the United Front, and that the issues that NUMSA sees as a priority to organise around may not be a priority for everyone in the communities.

Even attempting to build active solidarity with the service delivery protests and participation in the movements taking place is challenging for NUMSA. The union has a strong emphasis on discipline – meaning no violence or vandalism in the main - on all of its marches and picket lines, and within NUMSA members and activists hold a firm belief that ‘undisciplined’ behaviour will be used by the media and the state to criticise and undermine the union.

“We must always be disciplined when we are marching and when we are striking. If we are smashing windows, or drinking, or committing violence, then the bosses and the media, they will use this and say to people, NUMSA is making trouble, NUMSA is destructive.” (NUMSA Active Member, 2014)

This is reflected in NUMSA’s stated aims in building the United Front, with Locals reminded of the need for all United Front supporters to “take full responsibility for ensuring maximum discipline, tolerance, absence of violence and complete freedom to participate” during campaigning activity (NUMSA Education, 2014, p26). However, this again presents challenges; the diffuse and heterogeneous community struggles taking place in South Africa are often far more informally organised and embrace a wide range of tactics, some of which are alien to the methods of NUMSA, as Alexander notes.

“They have included mass meetings, drafting of memoranda, petitions, toyi-toying, processions, stay-aways, election boycotts, blockading of roads, construction of barricades, burning of tyres, looting, destruction of buildings, chasing unpopular individuals out of townships, confrontations with the police, and forced resignations of elected officials.” (Alexander, 2010, p26)

In addition to the various challenges posed by the practicalities of building links with community struggles, the union also must deal with what exactly it is offering by way of support for “struggles of the working class and poor” (NUMSA Education, 2014, p27). During fieldwork research, it was noticeable that the small numbers of community activists that did attend these early PDF meetings wanted to hear what NUMSA could offer them in practical terms to support struggles in communities, and that the focus of these struggles was very much focused on service provision, be it sanitation, electricity, or housing. The service delivery protests are a key area of class struggle that the United Front must orientate towards if NUMSA is to build unity between communities and the organised working class in the manner that it hopes to.

However, fieldwork interviews revealed a lack of clarity about how the United Front could be utilised to support service delivery protests and the struggle of communities. It was frequently argued that the United Front could function to bring the struggles of different communities together, thus uniting communities on a national basis, as well as building links between organised workers and communities.

“The United Front can bring together people in struggle, it can unite all of these community struggles for a better standard of living.” (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

This is certainly true and represents another important aspect of the project. The service delivery protests taking place in the communities are disparate, usually very poorly resourced and with little in the way of connections to each other in the various communities and regions. However, NUMSA activists were not always clear on how solidarity with community struggle could be demonstrated in practice. NUMSA is now

the largest union in South Africa by some margin, and its size means that one significant form of solidarity it could provide would be resources in the form of offices and finance. Activists were keen to stress however that they did not believe the union could offer money to these campaigns:

“NUMSA does not have endless money we can afford to give away to the communities who are struggling. We are already financing the building of a United Front, this is a huge commitment from us, but we cannot say to those who are protesting that we will bankroll their campaigns. Instead, we will attempt to build solidarity with them and organise with them.” (NUMSA Regional Office Bearer, 2014)

The challenges that NUMSA faces are significant, and not easily overcome in a short space of time. As an aside, this raises questions about the prescriptions of SMU; that the labour movement can successfully reinvent itself simply by building alliances with other organisations. This is an attractive idea on paper but in reality, it is challenging; not only are there organisational and practical difficulties involved but organisations and communities that NUMSA attempts to work and build with will understandably have questions about what is in it for them, unless they are already effectively convinced of the need to build a movement, and perhaps a party as well, to oppose the ANC government.

7.3 Assessing the United Front Project

NUMSA faces a raft of challenges and opportunities in building the United Front. There is huge potential power in a rejuvenated alliance between organised workers and working-class communities in South Africa, but it is not a simple task to build this given the challenges detailed. Clearly, NUMSA has experienced some

difficulties in the task it has set itself as a union, something which was underlined by the fact that the proposed national launch of the United Front in 2014 was delayed, and has been delayed multiple times since, with both a lack of resources and preparation cited as reasons (Paret and Runciman, 2016, p313). Undeniably, events surrounding NUMSA and COSATU has also limited the resources and time the union has been able to spend on the United Front. The challenges involved in the creation of the United Front, combined with NUMSA's suspension and expulsion from COSATU, led journalist Philip de Wet to claim in 2015 that although "token organisations in most of the provinces" had been established, "while NUMSA has been battling it out with COSATU, the United Front has been largely absent from the national stage" (De Wet, 2015). De Wet further claimed that several anonymous leaders of the United Front were frustrated with the project's progress, and that NUMSA was not releasing sufficient financial support. In response, United Front National Secretary Mazibuko Jara described the article as misinforming the public, and stated that while the project had suffered setbacks, particularly in terms of becoming financially self-sustaining, 240 affiliate organisations were now part of the United Front:

"The UF is not waiting for the emergence of a new workers' political party or a new trade union federation. It exists in its own right as a broad coalition of workers, youth, women, the unemployed, civic organisations, social movements, rural people, progressive activists and academics, and other mass organisations. There is broad consensus about the non-party-political nature of the front. There is ongoing consideration of, and debate about, how the UF should relate to the process by the

National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) for a movement for socialism, as well as to the ongoing political struggles in COSATU.” (Jara, 2015)

Jara went on to state that the United Front formation was a process, not an event, and that Front had been active in several struggles, supporting local struggles for service delivery such as the Amadiba Crisis Committee in Xolobeni, organising protests against police brutality and xenophobia, and protesting against the youth wage subsidy and the 2015 budget. However, it is significant that in this reply the ‘non-party-political’ nature of the front was restated, and it was again suggested that the United Front would be built not as an electoral project but as a coming together of struggles on a ‘non-party political’ basis.

Given that service delivery protests are largely directed at municipal government, the union could have benefited from explicitly linking the project to a political challenge to the ANC at local level, with the explicit aim of electing United Front supporters to municipal councillor positions. Until 2016 however, NUMSA had maintained that the Front would not be built in this way, to attract wider layers of support. This shifted in January 2016, when it was announced that “some United Front structures have registered to contest the local government elections in the Eastern Cape, including Sterkspruit and the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro.” (United Front, 2016) While NUMSA had still made little progress on the formation of a new workers party, the union confirmed it would support United Front candidates contesting elections. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given that the Front announced that they were registering candidates less than seven months before the municipal elections, the results were not spectacular. However, the Front did succeed in electing a councillor in Nelson Mandela Bay (Jacobs, 2016). Mkhusele Mtsila,

Regional Secretary of the United Front in Eastern Cape, was elected a councillor and immediately declared a coalition with two other small parties, Congress of the People (COPE) and the Patriotic Alliance (PA). COPE had split from the ANC some years before, and the PA is an economically centrist party

“We decided to form this block with the three parties to start with, because we are stronger as a unit. This way whoever wants to negotiate with us is talking to a united opposition.” (Mkhuseli Mtsila, quoted in News24, 2016)

Since 2016, the United Front has received much less media coverage, has produced far fewer public statements, and the organisations blog has not been updated. While in some areas the United Front is continuing to organise, its development has stalled. Undoubtedly, NUMSA’s focus has been elsewhere, particularly because of the union’s expulsion from COSATU. However, the union has not achieved what it hoped to through the United Front, at least not at this stage. The promised official launch event has never taken place.

Sean Jacobs, writing in Jacobin, has suggested that the reason for the failure of the Front to develop has been the failure to focus resources on engagement with working class communities in struggle, and a misguided attempt to orientate primarily to middle class social movements and NGO’s:

“When NUMSA turned its back on the ANC in 2013, declaring a new path forward for the Left through the formation of a “United Front” of social movements, communities, and workers, it inspired hope. But its leadership largely comes from South Africa’s numerous left-leaning NGOs, who have failed to connect with workers or communities in struggle.” (Jacobs, 2016)

This suggests that in NUMSA's search to find new allies, the union has not had an explicit and exclusive orientation to working class communities and campaigns, and that the United Front has welcomed partnership with various NGO's and more middle-class social movements. Furthermore, this could suggest an approach more in keeping with the populist unionism promoted by sections of COSATU and by SACTU in the past. However, this is unsurprising, as NUMSA was part of COSATU throughout its history, and therefore the internal contentious processes that have shaped the trajectory of unionism in South Africa, will undoubtedly have had an impact on the union. In a similar way, the shopfloor unions of FOSATU played a role in shaping the character of COSATU from the time of the federation's formation and before. NUMSA has kept the shop floor model of unionism alive within COSATU. But this does not mean, that NUMSA has not been influenced by the populist model of unionism in the process.

However, at no point in this process has NUMSA demonstrated any sign of subordinating itself politically to these organisations and it retains its independent socialist politics. Moreover, to dismiss the perceived lack of progress of the United Front as simply the result of a failure to engage sufficiently with working class communities ignores the fact that links between organised labour and communities in the context of post-Apartheid South Africa have been severely weakened in the post-Apartheid era. Over time, COSATU has engaged less and less with these communities outside of the structures of the Tripartite Alliance. In addition, the union has also been concerned with the building of a new party, with the conflict that has led to the split in COSATU and the formation of SAFTU.

Furthermore, what NUMSA is trying to do is not an easy thing. While progress has been limited, in some localities, the union has taken genuine steps forward towards engagement with working class struggle over service delivery local government accountability and this represents a basis on which further collaboration between the organised working class in the workplaces and the wider working class in the communities can be organised. The United Front initiative may not have delivered the instant results that the union or many other organisations, had hoped for, but it represents the first serious attempt by a trade union to do so on a national scale in the post-Apartheid era.

At times and in certain areas the Front has orientated more towards middle class activist groupings or shown itself to be out of step with the key concerns of working-class communities, for example on the issue of e-tolls. Furthermore, while formally NUMSA has not sought to impose any political program on the Front, the union has set out to argue that the Front should organise around a 'radical interpretation' of the Freedom Charter. In the past the union has been clear it did not believe this was sufficient, favouring the development of a Worker's Charter to point explicitly towards a class-based political approach and towards Socialist transformation. This indicates the influence that the populist model of unionism has had on NUMSA and others during the time they have spent as part of the Alliance, as can be indicated by the use of the terminology of the National Democratic Revolution and the Freedom Charter in some public statements. The internal contentious processes that existed in COSATU, primarily around the competing models of labour organisation that existed within the federation, result in a dialectical reshaping of all agents within the federation as well as divergence and opposition. The clear emphasis that NUMSA activists place upon the primacy of class politics

and the importance of the political independence of the working class also demonstrates, however, that while the influence of populist labourism is visible in the projects the union is now engaged in, the key characteristics of the shop-floor unionism developed in the 1970's has survived. Furthermore, this emphasis on the independence of the working class is likely to be bolstered by genuine engagement with communities actively struggling on class issues.

The United Front initiative must not be understood as a project in isolation, but in the orientation of NUMSA that it represents; the first attempt on a wide scale for organised labour to support and struggle with working class communities in post-Apartheid South Africa. It therefore represents, alongside the political break from the Alliance taken by NUMSA and the steps towards political representation for the working class, the potential development of a resurgence of shop-floor trade unionism, which was such an important and powerful weapon in the fight against Apartheid.

7.4 Towards a New Party: NUMSA's Campaign For A Political Voice for Workers

“3.3. Side by side with the establishment of the new UNITED FRONT, we in NUMSA must explore the establishment of a MOVEMENT FOR SOCIALISM as the working class needs a political organisation committed in its policies and actions to the establishment of a Socialist South Africa.” (NUMSA, 2014b: emphases in original)

The above quotation, taken from the resolutions of the December 2013 Congress, sets out one of the key objectives undertaken by the union; to explore the formation of a political party of the working class, explicitly committed to the Socialist transformation of South Africa. Though the resolution states only that the union must

explore the establishment of such a party, it was abundantly clear during all of the interviews, observations and fieldwork conducted for the purposes of this thesis that NUMSA was absolutely committed to the formation of a party. In every interview, regardless of any other opinions expressed, respondents confirmed that the union would form a party, and that they would support and build that party. Indeed, one National Office Bearer indicated that they did not believe it would be possible for the union to reverse its decisions, stating that “a Party will be formed. I do not believe we can turn back now.” (Steven Nhlapo, 2014)

As discussed in previous chapters, NUMSA took the decision to break with the Alliance and establish a new political party of the working class for several reasons: these included suspicion of the ANC as a cross-class political party, frustration at its record in government, and the perceived passivity of COSATU as a labour federation. This generalised opposition to the populist tradition of labour unionism represented by COSATU and the Alliance was present right from the formation of COSATU and found expression in NUMSA’s suspicion of the Tripartite Alliance and strong emphasis on the political independence of the working class. Since the end of Apartheid, this suspicion of populist unionism and the cross-class politics of the Alliance have developed into a deeply ingrained hostility toward COSATU itself, as a direct result of the contentious processes NUMSA has engaged to reshape the political character of the labour movement. It is this contention within the Alliance, and particularly within COSATU itself, which led NUMSA to the decisions it took at its December 2013 Congress, and consequently towards the formation of the United Front and the SRWP.

With respect to the United Front, while the task of forming such organisations represented a significant challenge, for NUMSA there exists a blueprint on which to

base these organisations within the history of South Africa's labour movement. The United Democratic Front formed in the 1980's, which played a crucial role in bringing workers and communities together to fight Apartheid, is seen by NUMSA as representing a model on which to base the United Front. In the case of SAFTU, the various labour federations in which NUMSA and its forebears have been part of, particularly FOSATU, also provides lessons, which can be utilised to build the new federation. This is an indication of the historically contingent nature of the development of new strategies and ideas within the labour movement; inevitably expressions of worker agency are conditioned by previous historical processes. However, when it comes to the question of building a new political party of the working class in South Africa, the union faces a very different challenge, precisely because there has never been any mass party of the working class in the country.

As has been outlined previously, the ANC was always a 'multi-class' political project, formed in the 1950's by black middle-class professionals, although it has always been heavily reliant upon the electoral support of the black working-class majority. During the 1970's and 1980's, and particularly at the high point of FOSATU, the question of an explicitly working-class political party was very much a live debate within the labour movement. However, these sentiments never led to the formation of a party, and although there was serious debate about the need for a political voice of labour and the working class, a critical mass of support for the creation of such a party never developed. Consequently, because a mass party of the working class has never existed in South Africa, unlike with the United Front and with SAFTU, NUMSA does not possess any kind of roadmap or blueprint for how to create the party it has resolved to build. Indeed, while a consensus has clearly developed within NUMSA on the need to break with the Alliance, to build a movement of workers and

communities against the 'neoliberal' and 'anti-worker' policies of the ANC, where consensus has not yet developed is on what kind of party the union is to build – or even on the timescale around which a party would be formed.

During the fieldwork conducted to inform this thesis, it was abundantly clear that NUMSA activists at the grass roots level expected a party to be built, and that they would actively assist in the building of this party. This was very clearly the case in all interviews conducted, even with NUMSA members who still held some attachment to the ANC. This is illustrated by the quotes below:

“The ANC is not a party of workers. It will not act in the interest of workers. That is why NUMSA, which is a leader of workers, must build a party. We will fight to build the party of workers that NUMSA creates.” (NUMSA Local Office Bearer, 2014)

“It’s good that we have resolved to build a party. We struggled for the vote, and now there is no one to vote for, there is a lot of youth unemployment, young people are losing hope.” (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

“I still voted ANC this year. I have always voted ANC. It will be strange not to vote for them. But a party is needed, and I will struggle with my comrades in NUMSA to build this party.” (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

Regardless of any variance in perspective or attitude amongst respondents towards the ANC, in most interviews conducted there was some level of indication that a party was viewed as a positive, or perhaps necessary, decision.

However, it is important to state that enthusiasm for the decision to form a party that was not unanimous, and some interviewees encountered in the field

seemed less keen. While none of the NUMSA activists expressed criticism or opposition towards the decision (quite possibly because they were almost all elected representatives of the union, and therefore saw themselves responsible for defending the position the union had taken to outsiders) some respondents were less forthcoming on the question of a party.

This is not particularly surprising given that as recently as 2008, a longitudinal survey of COSATU members carried out by the Society, Work and Politics institute indicated that 60% remained supportive of the continuation of the Alliance (meaning COSATU's support for and partnership with the ANC). As Pillay notes, this represents a decline over time:

“A survey of COSATU members' political attitudes confirmed the continued, if gradually declining, popularity of the ANC and the Alliance amongst workers. Support still remains at 60 per cent (down from 82 per cent in 1994, 70 per cent in 1998 and 66 per cent in 2004).” (Pillay, 2011, p71)

Nonetheless, it indicates that a majority of COSATU members still supported the Alliance, and we would expect this support to be reflected to some extent within NUMSA.

Perhaps one of the most striking comments from any of the NUMSA representatives encountered in the field however came from a North Johannesburg shop steward during a council meeting. During the meeting (and not during interview) a shop steward expressed their opposition to the decision to form a party, while simultaneously reaffirming their support and commitment to NUMSA.

“I did not agree with the resolution to form a party. I voted against it, and I am still a member of the ANC. But I stay with NUMSA, and support NUMSA, because NUMSA is based on the working class.” (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

This quote was particularly interesting since it was the clearest indication that there did exist disagreement within the union on the decision to form a party, yet at the same time the shop steward's loyalty to NUMSA was clearly much stronger than their opposition to the policy of the union. This thesis has argued that developments in the South African labour movement have been conditioned by the state of permanent contention of opposing forces within COSATU, and that this state of permanent contention is present in all unions and labour movements. It is therefore not surprising that there does exist disagreement within NUMSA on this question. However, the way in which this disagreement was expressed in this instance suggests that perhaps NUMSA's shopfloor model of labour organisation facilitates this contention in a way that for example the more distant and bureaucratized structures in NUM did not.

There was however a significant level of enthusiasm for the decision to form a party, and a belief that this project was not only objectively necessary, but that the black working-class majority in South Africa would welcome this formation. Within NUMSA, this is viewed as particularly the case because many shop stewards believe that NUMSA has a record of struggle recognised by the wider South African working class, but also because of frustration at the record of the ANC in government, which NUMSA members believe is keenly felt by the black working-class majority in South Africa.

“The ANC has failed us. The Townships are burning with protest! The black working-class majority is frustrated by the ANC. I believe they will support NUMSA’s worker’s party. There is a desire for a party that truly represents the working class. People know that NUMSA fights for workers.” (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

The size and geographical spread of NUMSA as an organisation is also seen as a key reason that NUMSA’s new party would quickly receive support from the wider working class. NUMSA is a large and growing union, with nearly 350,000 members; in fact, it is quite possibly the largest single labour union in the history of the African continent. Unlike some other unions in South Africa, which are based mainly in key geographical areas relating to specific sectors of employment, NUMSA is active all around the country. This was something Moses Mayekiso, NUMSA’s first General Secretary, stressed during our interview:

“NUMSA is spread all over South Africa. It is not like NUM, concentrated in the mining areas. NUMSA has a track record of fighting for workers, it has the backing of workers. I believe that the formation of a party will be welcomed by the working class. It is already a popular call.” (Moses Mayekiso, 2014)

Amongst respondents during fieldwork research, there was a strong belief that because of NUMSA’s size and reputation, and because of frustration at the ANC, the formation of a working-class political party would receive strong support. There is certainly some evidence to support the claim that a ‘workers party’ would be welcomed; in 2014 an Ipsos survey found that “a third of South African adults definitely think that “a new political party, a workers’ or labour party, will assist with current problems facing SA...A further 39% answered “maybe” to this question” (Webster and Orkin, 2014).

7.5 Building A Party in the Context of Weakening ANC Hegemony and in Competition With Other Forces:

While NUMSA activists displayed confidence in their ability to build a party that can gain support in South Africa, this confidence could be seen as misplaced given that in the 2014 General Election the ANC secured their fifth successive election victory with 62.15% of the vote, a majority which many elected governments around the world could not hope to achieve. However, this is a reflection of the hegemonic position that the ANC occupies in South Africa:

“Two decades after the democratic transition in 1994, the legacy of the anti-Apartheid struggle continues to loom large in South African politics. The ANC continues to reap a significant “liberation dividend”, due to its role as the hegemonic leader of national liberation.” (Paret, 2016, p422)

This hegemonic role flows directly from the ANC’s position as the de facto political leadership of the anti-Apartheid movement, discussed in detail earlier in this thesis, prior to the transition to democracy in 1994. This is typical of “a broader pattern of political dominance by liberation parties within the Southern African region”, also seen in countries like Namibia, Angola, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. (Paret, 2016, p420) This was not necessarily perceived as an obstacle by NUMSA members however, who see their union as possessing a record of leadership:

“NUMSA has always shown the way forward, in the Apartheid struggle and in the Alliance. Many people are voting ANC, but that is because there is not yet an alternative.” (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

Despite the ANC’s hegemonic dominance of South African politics, three key factors suggest that support for the ANC is in decline: 1) a decline in electoral results

for the ANC, 2) a rise in support for other parties, and 3) the high level of protest in South Africa, particularly in the form of service delivery protests.

The ANC received 62.15% of the vote in 2014, which represented a significant decrease from the party's highest share of the vote in 2004, when it secured close to 70%. Its vote share fell even further in 2019 when it received 57.5%, the lowest vote share the ANC has ever recorded in a general election. Furthermore, data suggests that there has been a steady growth in the unregistered proportion of the voting age population, as well as a decrease in the turnout of registered voters, since the advent of multi-racial democracy. As Schulz-Herzenberg notes:

“The turnout of registered voters in the 2014 elections was 73%. This represents a decline of 4% on the last two elections’ turnouts of 77%. When turnout is examined as a proportion of the eligible voting-age population turnout over 20 years, the figures confirm a decline in participation from 86% in 1994 to 72% in 1999 and 58% in 2004. Only in 2009 was there a slight rise to 60%, but this was again followed by a drop to 57% in the 2014 elections.” (Schulz-Herzenberg, 2014, p2)

In 1994, the ANC secured 62.65% of the vote, just barely higher than the percentage secured in 2014 – but this figure represented a much, much higher percentage of the voting age population. While the ANC continues to enjoy the support of a significant majority of those who vote, the ability of the party to mobilise the voting age population has significantly declined.

In contrast, support for other parties in South Africa has grown significantly; the Democratic Alliance (DA) received its highest ever vote, securing 22.2%, an

increase of nearly 8% on the 2009 election. The newly formed Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) also performed reasonably well, securing 6.4% of the vote in their first ever election. The Workers And Socialist Party, also newly formed, did not record a significant vote, but did attract some limited support from trade unionists, perhaps because their Presidential candidate was the first NUMSA General Secretary, Moses Mayekiso. Certainly, a small number of respondents during fieldwork research expressed sympathy with WASP.

“WASP is talking about socialism; WASP was there at Marikana among the workers. NUMSA too will talk about socialism.” (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

The pattern of decreasing ANC support and increasing support for other parties continued in 2014. ANC vote share fell even further, with the party receiving 53.9% of the total vote and losing control of three metropolitan municipalities. The DA and EFF also increased their share of the vote in comparison to 2014, to 26.9% and 8.2% respectively. This is significant for the NUMSA project; declining levels of support for the ANC indicate that there may well be space for a left and explicitly working-class political party, which could appeal to voters who have lost patience with the ANC. However, forming a party means that NUMSA will be in direct competition with other political parties, not only with the ANC, but with parties such as the DA and the EFF as well.

Despite its electoral success, NUMSA members do not view the DA as a direct rival in the struggle for votes. While the DA has taken huge steps forward in terms of its electoral results since its founding in 1994 and has functioned as the official opposition to the ANC in the South African Parliament, it faces a significant obstacle to its future progression; it is largely unable to persuade significant numbers

of black voters to support it. In the words of Sejamothopo Motau, a senior DA MP, “Most black people still perceive the DA as a ‘white party’” (Motau, quoted in Southern, 2011, p288). This is a huge hindrance to the DA’s electoral prospects in South Africa, where almost 80% of the population is black and where the racial divisions of the old Apartheid system affect all aspects of politics. NUMSA as a union is deeply suspicious of the DA, as illustrated by this quote from a 2012 press statement:

“We are convinced...that Helen Zille’s white DA is still steeped in its white supremacist racist culture and thinks Black and African people are white people’s inferiors.” (NUMSA, 2012b)

Research carried out in the field confirmed that this attitude is widely held within the union, with almost all respondents critical of the DA as a party.

“In NUMSA we know the DA is a white liberal party. The DA does not care about the black working-class majority; they are not interested in the lives of workers.”

(NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

Electoral support for the DA is comprised primarily of white, coloured and Asian voters and the party has struggled to attract black voters in South Africa.

Consequently, NUMSA does not view the party they are building as competing for votes with the DA. However, there is a belief that the DA is the main beneficiary of both of the decline in active support at the polls for the ANC, as well as frustration at the ANC’s failure to implement the Freedom Charter and transform the economy. As one Local Office Bearer told me:

“The working class is frustrated by the ANC, they are staying away, not voting, some are even voting for the DA. That is dangerous, the DA are an out and out party of capital, they are interested only in representing business. Because of the failure of the ANC to implement the Freedom Charter, to improve the lives of workers, we are seeing DA gain support. That is why a worker’s party is necessary.” (NUMSA Local Office Bearer, 2014)

For NUMSA members, the rise in support for the DA is not significant primarily because their party would be competing against the DA for votes, but because they fear that the DA is becoming a more influential political force as a result of the decline in support for the ANC. They see this as particularly reflected in the NDP introduced by the Zuma administration, as was discussed in Chapter 5 of this thesis. NUMSA members are opposed to what they see as the neoliberal business friendly policies of the ANC and believe that the increasing influence of the DA will push the country in an even more neoliberal direction.

The EFF on the other hand is a more complex issue for the union, and views amongst members are more wide ranging. The party is in essence a product of factional struggle from within the ANC itself, led by Julius Malema, who was the President of the ANC Youth League until he was suspended and eventually expelled for ‘bringing the party into disrepute’ in 2012. Malema played a prominent role in the election of Jacob Zuma as President of the ANC and gained popularity by portraying himself as “a champion of the poor, a radical voice for the nationalisation of mines and the seizure of white-owned land”, but later became critical of Zuma’s Presidency, which was a factor in his expulsion (Akinola, Oluwaseun and Adeogun, 2015, p106). Immediately after the Marikana Massacre, Malema visited the mining community there and made a speech to the workers demanding that Zuma resign as

President (De Wet, 2012). The following year, Malema officially launched the EFF at the Marikana Koppies, along with the former ANC Youth League spokesperson, Floyd Shivambu, who had also been expelled from the ANC. As with WASP, the founding of the EFF was consciously framed as a response to the Marikana Massacre, and to the ANC's betrayal of the black working-class majority, as Sithembile Mbete explains:

“The party’s founding manifesto explains that its socialist commitment...‘draws inspiration from the radical, working class interpretation of the Freedom Charter’...The party’s official launch was held in Marikana in October 2013. Julius Malema had been a frequent visitor to the platinum belt township following the brutal police killing of 34 miners in August 2012. The decision to hold the launch there gave the EFF the chance to emphasise some of its key messages. Marikana, the party maintains, symbolises what appears to be an ANC sell out to big capital, its failure to protect the interests of one of its largest labour constituencies, mineworkers, and its susceptibility to the excesses of force that are a feature of authoritarian regimes.” (Mbete, 2014, pp39-41)

Mbete also notes the plethora of ideological descriptors has been applied to the EFF, and the party's leaders themselves explicitly reference a diverse range of political influences, ranging from Marx and Lenin to Fanon and Biko. Undoubtedly, the organisation consciously utilises symbolisms of socialism and struggle, indeed party representatives dress in red workers overalls, even when in Parliament. The EFF is therefore inevitably perceived as occupying electoral space to the left of the ANC, and while it does not have a comparable voter base to the DA, the party is a much more direct competitor for the black working-class voters that the NUMSA political project is seeking to win support from.

This is a complicating factor for NUMSA; research conducted in the field showed that significant numbers of respondents held a favourable attitude to the EFF, with a significant number of respondents indicating some degree of support for them or even saying that they had voted for them in the 2014 elections. This was particularly the case with younger members of the union, who were often enthused by the fiery rhetoric of the EFF and by the promises of nationalisation – fulfilling the commitment to the Freedom Charter that NUMSA members believe was abandoned by the ANC.

“I voted EFF because Malema is telling Zuma to pay back the money, they are talking about nationalising the wealth in South Africa. It’s good that someone is speaking to Zuma this way”. (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

This does not necessarily mean that NUMSA members would support the EFF over the party that NUMSA forms, and almost all respondents who stated that they had voted for the EFF made that clear. Furthermore, other respondents were deeply hostile to the EFF, particularly because of Malema’s ostentatious displays of wealth and the allegations of corruption and unpaid taxes which have persistently been levelled against him. While for some NUMSA members, the workers overalls and socialist language is appealing, for others, given that the leadership of the EFF come in the main from the ranks of the ANC, and have been just as much a focus of allegations of corruption as many leaders in the ANC itself. The following quote neatly summarises some of the attitudes towards the EFF revealed through field interviews:

“Why do they wear overalls? They are not workers. He (Malema) has never worked,

he is not a worker, why do they dress this way? They are imitating workers, why? Malema, that one, he is rich because of the ANC, why should workers vote for him now he says he is against Zuma?" (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

The rise of the EFF poses an important issue for NUMSA and the project of a party of the working class. On the one hand, from the perspective of the union, the EFF is not a party built by workers, nor even a party for workers, but on the other hand, the EFF is echoing many of the same political criticisms that NUMSA has levelled against the ANC. In particular, the EFF voices the same criticisms of corruption within the ANC, and the party's failure to implement the Freedom Charter.

While some activists interviewed displayed clear hostility and suspicion towards the EFF, others showed varying levels of enthusiasm. This was reflected in discussions of the 2014 General Election, with the significant minority of respondents indicating some level of approval for the EFF and some even saying that they had voted for the new formation. Not all respondents who reported that they had voted for the EFF were necessarily strongly enamoured with the party however and expressed varying levels of enthusiasm. For example, one shop steward expressed mistrust in Malema:

"Malema, I am not sure about that one. He was in ANC for so long. But I will not vote for the ANC anymore, and we do not yet have a worker's party. We struggled for the vote, so I voted for them." (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

Nonetheless, of the NUMSA members interviewed a significant proportion held views of the EFF which were either favourable or indicated some sympathy.

This poses an issue for the union as not only do Malema's party offer similar criticisms of the ANC but similar policies to NUMSA as well, with a heavy focus on nationalisation, in line with the interpretation of the Freedom Charter favoured by NUMSA. This is a difficulty for NUMSA as the central thrust of their criticism of the ANC is the failure of the party to transfer the wealth of South Africa from the old Apartheid elite into the hands of the working class in the country through nationalisation and public ownership of the economy. For a new party to develop to the left of the ANC, which is making progress electorally and which promises a similar economic transformation of the economy, creates a huge problem for NUMSA and for the project of a worker's party. This does not mean the position of the EFF on the question of nationalisation is identical to that which NUMSA holds, as Steven Nhlapo explained during our interview.

“At face value the EFF offer a similar position, but it's not the same. NUMSA calls for nationalisation to redistribute wealth to the working class, not simply to transfer it from white hands to black hands. That is what EFF are wanting, to put wealth into black hands, not into the hands of the working class.” (Steven Nhlapo, 2014)

This is a significant point and touches upon one of the central aspects of the debate about the respective political programs of the populist tradition and the shopfloor tradition respectively.

During our interview, Azwell Banda developed this further, explaining that:

“Malema comes from a specific political tradition, which is based on the National Democratic Revolution, but which says that the Liberation struggle was not consummated, because much of the wealth is still in the hands of the whites. But

he's not a socialist, he is talking about a radical interpretation of the National Liberation struggle.” (Azwell Banda, 2014)

From this perspective, the EFF represent of the Black Nationalist politics of the ANC, and while they may utilise the language of socialist doctrine, they do not represent a genuinely socialist political formation.

NUMSA instead focuses on building an explicitly socialist political party, for the South African working class, and talks about worker control of the economy. However, the union faces a challenge in how it explains this to its members, activists, and wider South African society if it is to build an alternative political vehicle and differentiate itself from the EFF.

This is particularly the case because as with the United Front, there appears to be confusion within the ranks of the union as to whether NUMSA is still in favour of the development of a ‘workers charter’, as it was in 1992, or what it terms a ‘radical interpretation’ of the Freedom Charter. In previous chapters, NUMSA’s failed attempts to win COSATU to a position of developing a worker’s charter and to break with the Tripartite Alliance was discussed, and how this caused the union to adapt its strategy, were discussed. Now that the union has formally broken with the ANC, and indeed with COSATU, it is free to adopt a more explicitly class-based and socialist program, going beyond the limitations the union believes exist within the Freedom Charter. However, this is again not a simple process. The next section of the chapter will discuss what form of party NUMSA discussed building, what program it will adopt, and reflect on the divergences of timescale reflected through investigation in the field.

7.6 What Form of Party, What Party Program, and When?

NUMSA resolved at the 2013 Congress that it should explore the establishment of a political party to address the need of the working class for an organisation that was committed to the establishment of a Socialist South Africa. The union agreed a mandate, and the mandate had to be fulfilled. But the resolution did not specify what exactly it was that should be explored or formed. The union therefore was left with something of an open question. There was a recognition that:

“NUMSA Regions were coming up with different proposals. Some spoke about a Mass Workers Party. Others were resolving on a new Vanguard Party and some were even calling for a Labour Party.” (NUMSA Education, 2014, p18)

This was reflected in fieldwork interviews, with respondents who indicated a preference opting for the formulation of a ‘mass party of the working class’ or simply ‘workers party’ but recognising that this might not there were alternative viewpoints within the union:

“As with the United Front, I believe that we should be seeking to unite both reformist and revolutionary workers in one mass working class party. But there are different viewpoints in NUMSA.” (NUMSA Local Office Bearer, 2014)

Steven Nhlapo explained that the union intended to do research on the form of party, through a series of commissions that would engage in international studies of other countries:

“It is a very big decision we are taking. We will need to carefully research and consider the kind of formation we want. We could form a mass workers party, or perhaps a revolutionary vanguard party.” (Steven Nhlapo, 2014)

The idea of a revolutionary vanguard party has some currency in NUMSA, because of the SACP, which several respondents explained NUMSA had supported financially in the past, although respondents generally spoke of the SACP itself extremely negatively.

NUMSA also recognises that “Political parties require political programmes that clearly spell out what they are fighting for.” (NUMSA Education, 2014, p18) As has been discussed several times throughout the thesis, NUMSA holds a collective view that the end of Apartheid and the transition to multi-racial democracy was a ‘negotiated settlement’, because the wealth of society remained in the hands of the capitalist class. The most common component of explanations of socialist transformation found within the union is that this means “nationalisation under workers control”, so that wealth can be collectively owned by the workers.

However, while this aspect of NUMSA’s political program is very clear, there remain divergences on the question of what program a socialist and working class political party should be based upon, whether that be a ‘radical interpretation’ of the Freedom Charter, or a new ‘Workers Charter’ as NUMSA had argued that COSATU should draw up when it became clear that the transition from Apartheid to multi-racial democracy would take place.

Despite NUMSA’s historical emphasis on the limitations of the Freedom Charter and the need for a Workers Charter discussed in this thesis, much of NUMSA’s political material focuses on the Freedom Charter, and of the need to

address the ANC's failure to implement it. Consequently, it becomes much more difficult for the union to differentiate itself politically from formations such as the EFF. For example, speaking in 2014 at the Ruth First Memorial Lecture at the University of Witwatersrand, NUMSA General Secretary of Irvin Jim reiterated the union's commitment to the Socialist transformation of South Africa, but focused his comments exclusively upon the failure of the ANC to implement the Freedom Charter.

"I promise you, you will find absolutely nothing wrong with the Freedom Charter and everything good about it: it is our blueprint towards making the first real steps towards a sane South Africa, a South Africa well on its way to resolve the race, gender, national and class oppression and exploitation that threatens to destroy the entire country today." (Irvin Jim, 2014)

Many NUMSA activists still raise criticisms of the limitations of the Freedom Charter, since it is open to different interpretations and is not an explicitly Socialist or class based political program. Yet in its attempts to build a new Socialist political vehicle, the union seems unclear on what the program of this party could be. At times it seems to be attempting to organise around a 'radical interpretation' of the Freedom Charter, with heavy emphasis on nationalisation of key sections of the economy, and at others the necessity of developing a Workers Charter is emphasised, focused on the needs of the working class rather than the 'people'. Inevitably, this lack of clarity raises a problem in differentiating this new political project from the populist politics of the ANC in the past or indeed of the EFF in the present.

Furthermore, this tension raises the (age-old) question of what socialism means in practice for a socialist political party, and how it could explain its policy and

program to potential voters and supporters. It is not yet clear that the union has a definitive answer to this question. In interviews with respondents, many suggested that Socialism was a question of power and ownership; while under capitalism the ownership of the economy remained in the hands of a small minority, under socialism wealth and productive capacity would be owned and controlled by the working class.

“Socialism is the working class owning the wealth in society that the working class produces.” (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

This is a useful starting point, but at the same time does not deal more concretely with how NUMSA explains its socialist politics to the broader working class, or what kind of policies and program the NUMSA political project would adopt. NUMSA activists generally explain socialism in terms of improvements in the living standards of the working class, and even when communicating with members of the union, some shop stewards suggested that it was important to explain socialist politics in these terms.

“When we are talking to members about what Socialism means, we cannot overcomplicate. We explain socialism in terms of what it means to the working class – jobs, healthcare, education and decent homes for all.” (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

Without seeking to suggest building socialist politics should not focus on meeting the material human needs of the working class, at the same time it is necessary to recognise that this method on its own does not provide sufficient differentiation from the Freedom Charter, and a clear and distinct politics that NUMSA can build a party upon.

The union is conscious of this and has attempted to develop its ideas through a whole series of discussions at local, regional, and national level. As well as the Political Discussion Forums utilised within the United Front, the union has convened a whole series of events in which to discuss what form the political party should take. This included a series of events in 2014, including a national political school for members and activists titled 'What is Socialism?', meetings with left political parties in South Africa, and even an International Symposium of Left Parties and Movements to which organisations around the world were invited. These events were significant, with many organisations from South Africa and internationally invited, and although not all organisations did attend (the Chinese Communist Party were invited but declined) many did. (Satgar, 2014)

NUMSA intends through this process to develop its ideas in relation to the program and form of the party it intends to build. Several activists in interviews made points around the need to educate NUMSA members and activists politically about the new party, as well as involving the membership in building it.

“Numsa hosted a symposium of left parties and movements to learn about left politics in the world today and to inform its political decision-making on a strategic way forward.” (Satgar, 2014)

However, these discussions take time and resources, and some of the organisations the union is working with are frustrated by what they see as a delay. For example, during an interview with 'General', from the Democratic Left Front, it was suggested that the expensive International Symposium was largely a waste of time and in particular money.

“The symposium was a waste of money. It cost R1.3million! They flew people in from all over the world. That money could be used for building in the townships. The NUMSA leadership is comfortable, it is not urgent for them to establish the Movement for Socialism. The leadership are delaying the whole process.” (‘General’, 2014)

Weizmann Hamilton, a leader of the Workers and Socialist Party, went further, speculating that in part the series of discussions, conferences and seminars was part of a deliberate strategy on the part of some of the unions leaders to slow down progress towards a party.

“NUMSA has a strong tradition of worker leadership and decision making from the shop floor upwards. But it also has a history of bureaucratism in its own way! The members, the shop stewards, they demanded this party. The leadership are unsure what to do so they are delaying. They do not want to frustrate the membership, but they are taking their time.” (Weizmann Hamilton, 2014)

The question of *when* a party would be formed was a key point of divergence, with differing views expressed. A significant number of respondents expressed varying levels of expectation that the union would form a party in advance of the 2016 Municipal elections:

“We are ready to form a party. I believe we will form party before the 2016 Municipal Elections, to challenge the neoliberal policies of the ANC. We must, the working class urgently needs a political alternative.” (NUMSA Local Office Bearer, 2014)

A small number were more cautious, expressing that NUMSA “needed to develop a mandate” first (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014) but in general, where NUMSA

representatives at the level of the Local had considered the question, there was a preference that a party would be formed sooner rather than later.

Even amongst veteran former leaders of NUMSA there is concern; Moses Mayekiso suggested that the delay was a huge error and that the speed at which NUMSA was implementing the Congress decisions was allowing others time to respond to what the union had resolved.

“I’m frustrated by the delay. NUMSA made a big call at the conference. But resolutions are taking time. The ANC still has roots politically in NUMSA’s structures. Politically, you don’t make a call and then allow a lull for your opponent to organise...It’s a mistake that they are delaying the building of a party. If they wait until 2019 the momentum will be lost.” (Moses Mayekiso, 2014)

When speaking about the question of when the union would form a party however, Azwell Banda explained that the union had to be careful not to rush into decisions that could alienate its members and said that if anything NUMSA was moving too fast:

“NUMSA is a trade union. It cannot hold a completely homogenous political position throughout the union. We have members who support ANC, EFF, COPE. Sometimes we think we’re moving too fast. To those who say 2019 is too late, I say perhaps it is too soon.” (Azwell Banda, 2014)

The other current National Officer Bearer interviewed expressed a similar position, saying that:

“People are saying to us, ‘why are you waiting?’ But NUMSA is a broad church, we have members with a range of opinions. There is not yet a consensus on what we

must do...We could have launched a party instantly, like COPE or EFF, but we do not want to build formations like these.” (Steven Nhlapo, 2014)

This comment was a recognition that many other political parties have attempted to launch a serious political challenge to the ANC but have ultimately failed to do so. These responses also potentially indicate a concern amongst national NUMSA leaders that rushing towards the formation of a party could alienate sections of the union’s membership who still personally support the ANC or other political parties in South Africa. This is an important issue; NUMSA has become the largest union in South Africa precisely because it has been able to continuously reproduce itself, retaining the confidence of its members and recruiting in new sectors in a way that the more populist inclined COSATU affiliates, such as NUM, have struggled to do. Furthermore, as indicated previously, it is inevitable that many NUMSA members will disagree with the decision; the dynamics of permanent contention exist within NUMSA just as they do within COSATU. Moving in a political direction that sections of its membership are unhappy with would clearly threaten that.

Through the United Front, NUMSA did support/field candidates in the 2016 municipal elections in some areas, but a party was not initiated, despite the expectations of union activists that this would be the case.

Again, this shows that on the question of what form the new party will take, what the program of the party would be or even on the timescale in which a party would be formed, there was no real consensus within NUMSA. While over time the internal contentious processes taking place within COSATU itself led to the development of a consensus within NUMSA that a break with the Alliance was necessary and a new party must be formed, the next stages of this question remain

essentially unanswered. At the grassroots level of the union fieldwork interviews suggested enthusiasm for a party and a desire to move towards a party as quickly as possible, but interviews with those in the leadership of NUMSA revealed a certain caution and a desire not to move too quickly for fear of alienating other sections of the membership. As with all unions, NUMSA must continue to reproduce itself by retaining and recruiting members; there are risks to taking decisions that could potentially alienate existing members or cause them to lose political confidence in the union. Although NUMSA is now outside of COSATU, the dynamics of internal contention within the union continue to shape the collective action taken by the union.

It is for this reason that the NUMSA leadership has attempted to foster discussion amongst its membership on the questions it faces in forming a party. However, in 2014 there did not seem to be conclusive evidence that a broad consensus had been reached upon the character of the party that should be formed, or when a party would be formed.

There was also evidence of divergence on the question of the political program of the party whether this party should adopt a 'radical interpretation' of the Freedom Charter or develop something more in line with the 'Workers Charter' that NUMSA believed it was necessary for COSATU to develop in the early 1990's.

On many questions, the high level of political education, discussion and debate fostered within NUMSA means that the union generally displays confidence and certainty in the political positions it expresses. However, regarding the question of whether the Freedom Charter represented a necessary political program for the union, or whether something more significant was needed, the union seems to lack

clarity. Moses Mayekiso, the first General Secretary of NUMSA, believes that it was a mistake for NUMSA to abandon the call for COSATU to develop a Workers Charter in the early days of the Alliance:

“The Freedom Charter was not a socialist document, but it was a document you could use to give people houses, electricity, clean water. For a socialist society, we need to go beyond the Freedom Charter. We abandoned the call for COSATU to develop a Workers Charter in NUMSA, which I think was a mistake.” (Mayekiso, 2014)

Had NUMSA pushed harder for COSATU to develop an explicitly socialist political program for South Africa, it certainly would have made the process of forming a party to put this program forward much easier.

In November 2018, nearly 5 years after the Congress decision to explore the formation of a party, the Electoral Commission of South Africa confirmed that the SRWP had been successfully registered as a political party, which would be able to contest elections. In a statement, NUMSA welcomed the decision of the Electoral Commission and stated that its newly registered party would be a “Marxist-Leninist political party fighting to overthrow the brutal capitalist system” (Smit, 2018).

However even at this stage the union did not confirm that it would definitely contest the 2019 General Election. This, the union’s General Secretary Irvin Jim explained, was a strategic and tactical question that would require further discussion.

“The question of contesting state power is a strategic and tactical question, which any serious revolutionary workers’ party cannot rule out. However, the party we are

building is a party that must mobilise the working class and weld it into a class for itself and to take up working-class struggles.” (Jim, quoted in Bendile, 2018)

It seems NUMSA eventually decided to adopt the strategy of building a ‘vanguard’ party, explicitly laying claim to being a party of revolution.

In the case of both the United Front and the SRWP, NUMSA has taken huge steps in attempting to develop political projects driven by the organised working class outside of COSATU and outside of the structures of the Alliance. Importantly these projects explicitly reject the cross-class nature of the Alliance and the National Liberation Movement, in favour of the political independence of the working class, a key tenant of the shop floor unionism that characterised the trend within South African unionism that developed in the 1970’s and played such a key role in the fight against Apartheid. However, while these projects are significant, they have not at this stage at least developed into the organisations that NUMSA hoped to build.

One reason for this lack of progress however is that NUMSA has been extremely busy. The attention of the union has been somewhat diverted however by the open political conflict that has developed as a result of NUMSA’s 2013 Congress, particularly the response of the populist wing of COSATU.

7.7 LIMUSA: An Attempt to Destablise NUMSA

Even before the decision was made to expel NUMSA from COSATU, supporters of the Alliance within the South African labour movement were responding to the stance NUMSA had adopted in 2013, including within the ranks of the union itself. A competitor union, the Liberated Metalworkers Union of South Africa (LIMUSA) was formed in 2014 specifically to “compete with NUMSA for members” among metalworkers, formed by former NUMSA President Cedric Gina.

(Beresford, 2016, pp58-78) Initially LIMUSA was not officially a COSATU affiliate while NUMSA remained a formal affiliate of the federation (the federations rules specified that there must be only one COSATU affiliate per sector, excluding competitor unions from membership). However, soon after NUMSA's expulsion LIMUSA registered as an affiliate of COSATU, thereby 'replacing' NUMSA.

According to its founding statement, LIMUSA formed following "a long period of internal resistance and struggle against the reactionary direction taken by NUMSA leadership which opportunistically imposed its will over that union through various form of despotic manipulation" and accused NUMSA of focusing too much on the "setting up of a new political party using the resources of the workers" (LIMUSA, 2021). By the unions own admission, its members broke from NUMSA explicitly in response to the decision to break with the ANC and consider forming a new political party, following the conclusion of a process of internal contention. This demonstrates precisely why some in NUMSA held concerns over the speed at which they were moving towards forming a political party; an awareness existed that a populist contingent within the union would split away, siding with the populist wing of COSATU and attempt to undermine NUMSA's efforts. NUMSA's active participation in COSATU and the Tripartite Alliance over more than two decades has inevitably influenced the internal dynamics of the union, and supporters of the Alliance are present in the union.

However, despite the concerns of some figures within NUMSA's leadership, fieldwork interviews revealed either very little knowledge or awareness of LIMUSA, or a confidence that the new breakaway union would not succeed in undermining the political project. Several interviewees stated that they had heard nothing about the breakaway union, and of those respondents who had, they suggested that they

either did not think NUMSA members would be likely to join it or had heard themselves that members were not joining.

“I have heard that no one is joining LIMUSA. Why would they? NUMSA is strong, we are organised, we can bring employers to negotiate with us, we have effective worker leadership.” (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

A Local Office Bearer also suggested that Cedric Gina did not carry enough weight within NUMSA’s ranks to recruit from the union, despite being a former President.

“Even in the company he worked in, the shop stewards are not joining LIMUSA. What does that say about him when the shop stewards that know him do not follow? He says we are abandoning our members, that we do not care about their struggles, but the ANC does not care about NUMSA members, and they know this.” (NUMSA Shop Steward, 2014)

During an interview with Steven Nhlapo, NUMSA’s head of collective bargaining, he explained that while NUMSA had to be cautious about the possibility of a break away union, the shop floor model of organising on which NUMSA is based made it difficult for another union to challenge them.

“We knew this was possible, that not every NUMSA member would accept the democratic decision we had taken in a disciplined manner. But our strength comes from the shopfloor, from worker organisation. They cannot challenge us there! We are too strong.” (Steven Nhlapo, 2014)

The confidence shown in interviews appears to be well founded; certainly, while LIMUSA is now formally a COSATU affiliate there is no evidence to suggest that it has become a significant union or that it has been able to attract many

NUMSA members to join. At the founding congress of SAFTU, NUMSA reported a membership of 340,687 (SAFTU, 2017, p1), demonstrating that its plans to launch a political party and the split that had taken place within COSATU had not dented its membership. This represents an interesting feature of contention between the two trends within COSATU and the broader labour movement. While the populist wing of the movement seeks to undermine NUMSA for the stance they have taken in regard to the Alliance, the strength of traditionally shopfloor unions such as NUMSA is precisely their strong levels of workplace organisation, and consequently members high levels of confidence in the union's democratic structures and collective bargaining power. This means that they are in fact very difficult to challenge organisationally at the level of the workplace.

However, the founding of LIMUSA and the expulsion of NUMSA from COSATU demonstrate an important feature of the dynamics of permanent contention; while internal contentious processes within COSATU shaped NUMSA's responses to the Alliance, the break with the ANC triggered further contention within COSATU, externalising contention that existed within NUMSA itself in the form of a breakaway union. In both examples, the expulsion of NUMSA and the formation of LIMUSA demonstrate the dialectical interplay of internal contention within the labour movement and the multi-dimensional nature of agency within organised labour. While contentious processes within NUMSA are to some degree separate from contentious processes within COSATU and vice versa, in fact these contentious processes condition and shape each other, and consequently shape the character of labour mobilisation.

7.8 Breaking from COSATU: The Split is Confirmed

Significant attention, particularly in the media, has focused on NUMSA's plans to build a United Front and a new political party. However, a key aspect of what the union had resolved at the December 2013 Congress was that COSATU was "no longer a campaigning federation" and that there was an urgent need to save it, unify it, rebuild it and reclaim it from forces who want to destroy or liquidate it." (NUMSA, 2014b) A key part of this, the union resolved, was to call upon COSATU to break with the Tripartite Alliance, and to this end, the union called for the convening of a Special Congress of COSATU, to resolve "the current crisis in the federation" (NUMSA, 2014b). As a Local Office Bearer explained during our interview:

"We want to preserve the unity of COSATU, of workers. But we must talk about what kind of unity. COSATU is not campaigning, it is not fighting for the working class, and it cannot be a fighting federation if it is a labour desk for the ANC. COSATU must be independent." (NUMSA Local Office Bearer, 2014)

The expulsion of NUMSA from COSATU however made this impossible.

A further demonstration of the dynamic interaction of contentious processes came when eight other COSATU affiliate unions, including FAWU whose members notably continued striking in 2012 after COSATU regional officials declared their dispute to have been resolved, announced that they would refuse to participate in COSATU's structures until NUMSA's expulsion was rescinded. This tension came to a head prior to the COSATU Executive Committee (CEC) meeting in March 2015, when the General Secretary of COSATU Zwelinzima Vavi announced his refusal to participate.

“I will not join the COSATU CEC. I don’t believe going ahead with half of the unions refusing to participate is the best way to unify. Instead, I will join the court proceedings in Pretoria in solidarity with mineworkers abandoned by Aurora bosses years ago.” (Vavi, quoted in Letsoalo, 2015)

Vavi had previously been suspended from his position as General Secretary, after having been accused of rape by a female employee of COSATU. Vavi denied the allegation, which was later withdrawn by the employee, but did admit to an extra-marital affair. He was suspended for having an affair with a junior employee, among other issues. However, he had at times been critical of the ANC and the Alliance, and his suspension was seen by some as a political move on the part of the populist faction in COSATU. NUMSA successfully challenged Vavi’s suspension in the High Court, and Vavi was reinstated. It is notable that many of the unions who opposed Vavi’s suspension later went on to join SAFTU, as did Vavi himself. (Sapa, 2014).

Just as NUMSA had intended to argue its position of breaking with the Tripartite Alliance within the structures of COSATU, the eight affiliate unions intended to fight for NUMSA’s reinstatement to COSATU in the same way, by pressuring the leadership of COSATU to reverse their decision. In early 2014, NUMSA and the eight supporting unions had demanded that the CEC convene a Special Congress, to “deal with the infighting and paralysis in the federation.” (Munusamy, 2015) The union saw this as a means with which to challenge the political direction of COSATU, and to elect a new leadership to the CEC. Following the expulsion of NUMSA the calls for a Special Congress were redoubled, in order to challenge the decision. However, the populist faction within COSATU was resistant to agreeing to hold a Congress – indeed the COSATU National Spokesperson stated during our interview that COSATU was:

“...unlikely to agree to a Special Congress now. Initially it seemed they would as they thought a majority of affiliate unions would support them. But now they are worried they will not get support from the delegates. They do not want a Congress.” (Patrick Craven, 2014)

This is a significant point; when NUMSA agreed to accept the will of the majority in COSATU and to participate in the Alliance prior to 1994, it seems clear that the populist influence was dominant and that the majority within COSATU was enthusiastic in its support for the Alliance. In 2014 though it is suggested that the CEC was no longer confident of being able to win support for continued membership of the Alliance and for its expulsion of NUMSA.

The CEC did in fact refuse to organise a Special Congress, until the South Gauteng High Court ordered them to do so in 2015. (Munusamy, 2015) Having been instructed by the court that they had a constitutional obligation to organise a Special Congress, COSATU duly did so, but was not going to allow their authority to be challenged by the delegates. Indeed, as one journalist put it, “the dominant faction would rather have COSATU bankrupt than have Irvin Jim and his crew back in the federation” (Munusamy, 2015), a comment which related as much to the significance of NUMSA’s financial contributions to COSATU as to the unwillingness of the populist faction within the federation to accept NUMSA back into the fold. In order to ensure that this would not happen, the CEC expelled Zwelinzima Vavi for his refusal to attend the CEC meeting in March, and then voted to allow LIMUSA to become part of COSATU, thereby effectively replacing NUMSA within the federation. (Ashman, 2015, p48) Significantly, this meant that not only NUMSA, but Vavi too were no longer part of COSATU and would not be able to attend the Special Congress. Furthermore, COSATU President Sdumo Dlamini announced that the

Special Congress would not debate or discuss appeals against the expulsion of NUMSA and Vavi, nor would it allow the opportunity to elect a new leadership for the federation. (Letsoalo, 2015)

Effectively this decision made it impossible for the affiliate unions supporting NUMSA and Vavi to continue to challenge and contest the politics of COSATU internally. The leadership majority in COSATU were unwilling to permit a continuation of the internal contentious process within the federation and shut down the possibility of the debate continuing within COSATU. This raised the question of how NUMSA should respond. The resolutions passed at the unions December 2013 Congress had mandated the union to fight for COSATU to break with the Tripartite Alliance, and to restore COSATU as a fighting and campaigning union federation, but also to “guard against splinters in COSATU and the fragmentation of the federation.” (NUMSA, 2014b) While NUMSA acknowledged that it was possible a split would take place, the mandate of the union leadership from the conference floor was to fight to preserve unity at the same time as attempting to challenge the political direction of the federation.

At this point in the thesis, it is worth acknowledging that some observers are sceptical about the motivations of actors such as Zwelinzima Vavi. On the one hand, Vavi has at times been extremely critical of some within the ANC and accused them of using their positions to enrich themselves, even implying that this may have involved corruption (Maree, p62, 2012). Like NUMSA, Vavi was outspoken in his opposition to the NDP (Friedman, 2013b). On the other hand, Vavi championed the Presidency of Jacob Zuma far more enthusiastically than many NUMSA activists, a fact that he now claims to regret (Gasnolar, 2016). The developing contestation within COSATU, combined with the fact that Vavi had been accused of both

corruption and sexual violence, meant that his position as General Secretary and associated privileges were under threat. His expulsion from the federation certainly demonstrates that some within COSATU were keen to remove him from power. Vavi throwing his lot in with NUMSA and the 2013 Congress resolutions is not therefore automatically a simple reflection of his political leanings; he and other individuals caught up in the contentious processes within the federation may well be just as motivated by concerns of individual privilege and power as with the collective political questions facing organised workers. It is even possible that Vavi felt pushed towards the oppositional current within COSATU precisely because this allowed him to paint accusers as political opponents. This is a small point, but it is worth acknowledging that within the processes of contention that develop within labour movements, there are a whole range of issues of positionality that may influence the direction that individuals choose to move in.

Following their expulsion from the federation, the only route available to NUMSA to challenge the expulsion was through the courts. The union therefore resolved at its National Executive Committee (NEC) meeting in July 2015 to embark upon a process of consultation within its structures, asking the question of the unions nine regions and fifty-two Locals: “should NUMSA continue with its court case to set aside its expulsion from COSATU?” Some months later, following a meeting of NUMSA’s NEC in November 2015, the union released a statement asserting that the response from its members was a “resounding no.”

“We have fulfilled the directive of the December 2013 NUMSA Special National Congress to do everything possible to save and reclaim COSATU as an independent, militant, democratic, worker controlled, anti-imperialist and socialist orientated federation... We cannot waste any more of workers’ money in trying to get

a court to force the federation to take us back when it is clear that COSATU has been hijacked by the ANC-led Alliance, turning COSATU into a labour desk of the ANC and the SACP.” (NUMSA, 2014)

Despite NUMSA’s stated desire to preserve the unity of COSATU, the union ceased its attempts to remain an affiliate of the federation, and the most significant split in COSATU’s history was confirmed.

7.9 SAFTU: A New Federation Born of Contention

NUMSA’s decision to withdraw its support for the ANC in 2013 set in motion a chain of events that led to the formation of an entirely new labour federation in South Africa, SAFTU. Throughout its history, NUMSA has prioritised worker and trade union unity, and this was one of the key reasons that the union accepted the decision of COSATU to maintain the Tripartite Alliance after the 1994 elections, despite the fact that NUMSA had argued the Alliance should be broken and that COSATU should be independent from the ANC. The union prioritised unity within the trade union movement above its suspicions of the cross-class Alliance. Even after having reached the decision to end its support for the ruling party, NUMSA did not seek to break with COSATU itself. NUMSA’s opponents within COSATU claimed that in breaking with the ANC, the union had violated the constitution of COSATU and must reverse its decision or leave the federation. NUMSA strongly disagreed.

“Why should we leave COSATU? It is not NUMSA who is in an Alliance with the ANC, it is COSATU. We do not want a divided labour movement. That would be disastrous for the working class! But some of them in COSATU, they are so blind they will do it. They will split our forces.” (Azwell Banda, 2014)

However, NUMSA's decision to break with the ANC and call upon COSATU to do the same was the result of the conflict between two divergent approaches to labour unionism which have been present in the federation for many years; it was an explicit attempt to reshape COSATU in accordance with the principles of the shopfloor tradition.

This needs to be understood, in order to understand the response of the populist wing of COSATU. The response of COSATU's Executive Committee did not equivocate; in November 2014 NUMSA was expelled from COSATU following a Special Executive Committee meeting, despite strong opposition to this decision, with the expulsion motion passed by 33 votes to 24 in a secret ballot (Hunter, 2014). The decision to expel NUMSA was a political decision, taken in order to prevent NUMSA from promoting its position that COSATU should break with the Tripartite Alliance and the ANC within the structures of the federation:

"As the COSATU press statement explaining NUMSA's expulsion made clear, the first charge levelled at NUMSA was that it had flouted the COSATU constitution when it took 'the decision to call on COSATU to break its alliance with the African National Congress (ANC)'. The continuity faction within the Alliance could not afford to let NUMSA stay within the COSATU fold and thus set the train in motion for the purging of the union from the federation" (Beresford, 2016, p58).

In essence, the expulsion of NUMSA represented the culmination of a process of internal contention, which had been present within the federation for years. The expulsion was a defensive move, that sought to prevent the debates that NUMSA had instigated from being unleashed within the federation and thus preserve the dominant populist model of unionism embodied within COSATU. However, it resulted

in several other COSATU affiliates following NUMSA out of COSATU and triggered a complex re-alignment of labour organisations.

SAFTU's founding Congress in April 2017 was attended by representatives of 24 founding unions, with a combined total membership of almost 700,000, making it the second largest labour federation in South Africa after COSATU (SAFTU, 2017, p1). A further 16 unions who expressed interest in becoming SAFTU affiliates in the future attended the Congress as non-voting delegates (Luckett and Munshi, 2017). The Congress resolved, as part of a resolution submitted by FAWU, to adopt principles of worker control and democracy, non-racialism and non-sexism, and of a socialist orientation, in keeping with the shopfloor tradition. (SAFTU, 2017, p3) The name, too, could be seen as a nod to FOSATU, reverting from the term Congress to the term Federation.

However, the resolution also suggested that SAFTU would not support NUMSA's SRWP, stating that:

“Unions must be independent from employers (in the private and public sector) and from political parties. This does not mean that unions are apolitical.” (SAFTU, 2017, p3)

This also reflects continuity with the shopfloor tradition, prioritising the organisational and political independence of labour unions from other class forces, but indicated that SAFTU was unlikely to throw its weight behind the SRWP, despite NUMSA's hopes that other unions would do so.

This seemed to be confirmed in a news report entitled 'SAFTU rejects NUMSA's Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party' in 2018, shortly after the SRWP

was registered, which stated that:

“SAFTU reiterated its political independence, saying it would “resist being stampeded into becoming a labour desk for, or forming an alliance with, any political party.” (Mahlahkoana, 2018)

However, SAFTU released a press statement refuting this, saying that the federation had merely reiterated the principle adopted at its founding conference, that it would remain independent of political parties, and that “SAFTU has not “rejected” the SRWP!” (SAFTU, 2018).

Furthermore, SAFTU stated that while it would resist becoming a ‘labour desk’ for any political party, it was organising a symposium to consider the question of a socialist and working-class political party, and that:

“SAFTU is not suggesting that it should itself form or turn itself into such a party, but rather that in the current political vacuum the working class needs to create a political voice for itself...In line with its commitment to not being apolitical, the federation has the duty to provide leadership to help to facilitate all working-class and socialist organizations to discuss what the NEC statement described as “such issues as the timing of the creation of a working-class party, its modalities and programme, its relationship with existing socialist-oriented parties and international experiences in forming such parties”.” (SAFTU, 2018)

While the new federation would not support NUMSA’s SRWP directly then, it seems that it is committed to exploring the question of working-class political representation and allowing debates that were prohibited within COSATU to take place, and while

the federation will remain independent, it is committed to addressing the creation of some form of political party.

The new federation seems to be sensitive that it must not alienate those within its ranks, which appear to be politically diverse. Webster wrote of the unions founding conference:

“What was striking at the launch was the wide range of political and ideological views. An illustration was the lively debate over the relationship between pan-Africanism and Marxist-Leninism.” (Webster, 2017)

In a sense this political eclecticism also demonstrates continuity with the range of different political ideas that found expression in the shopfloor tradition and in the structures of FOSATU. SAFTU also resolved at its founding Congress to launch a recruitment campaign aimed at “the 76% of unorganised workers” who are not members of a labour union in South Africa. (SAFTU, 2017, p5) This also can be seen as demonstrating continuity with the shopfloor tradition, which was so successful in organising new layers of workers and establishing new unions.

A year on from its founding conference, SAFTU engaged in its first significant national mobilisation, when it called a one-day strike in April 2018:

“The turnouts in major centres around the country...revealed clearly that Saftu has substantial support. The strike call was aimed at "all workers irrespective of affiliation"...In this case, the protest was against the "poverty level" of the proposed R20 an hour minimum wage and against amendments to the labour laws that would curtail the right to strike.” (Bell, 2018)

Significantly, SAFTU called on workers from other unions to take part, meaning that it encouraged members of COSATU affiliates to join. The federation called the government proposed R20 an hour minimum wage poverty pay. Patrick Craven, who had become the National Spokesperson for the new federation, explained:

“We want a living wage, we haven’t set a specific figure (but) we were very impressed with Marikana Lonmin workers who wanted R12 500 (per month). R20 is an insult to their memory.” (Craven, quoted in Niselow, 2018)

In contrast to SAFTU however, COSATU released a statement making clear that it would not taking part in the strike and that:

“COSATU supports the National Minimum Wage and we have no reason to strike over something that will benefit the workers. The minimum wage will be a huge achievement.” (COSATU, 2018)

While this is only one example of the different approach that SAFTU and COSATU will adopt towards political demands and mobilisation, it perhaps gives some indication of the new dynamic that that will be introduced to South African labour relations because of the development of the new labour federation. It seems likely that SAFTU will continue to adopt more radical demands upon the ANC government than COSATU, and furthermore it will be far more willing to mobilise around these demands. This will introduce a new dynamic, potentially characterised by more open confrontation between organised labour and the state, and it is an open question how both COSATU and the ANC government will respond. Ultimately, SAFTU may well be the most significant outcome of NUMSA’s 2013 Congress resolutions.

7.10 Chapter Conclusions

NUMSA has resolved to build a United Front and an explicitly socialist and working-class political party because of its perspective that the Tripartite Alliance has been demonstrated in practice to be incapable of delivering the economic transformation that it believes is essential to do away with the racialised economic legacy of Apartheid inequality. However, in resolving to attempt such ambitious projects, the union has been forced to begin to address the massive challenges involved in radical economic transformation.

In relation to the United Front, NUMSA as a union has developed a detailed criticism of the impact that the Alliance has had on working-class unity in post-Apartheid South Africa. It recognises, quite correctly, that in comparison to the days of the struggle against Apartheid, the labour movement has effectively abandoned working-class communities, and that they have been left to struggle alone. However, in attempting to rebuild this unity, the union is being forced to re-engage with communities in a way that it has not done on a national basis in some considerable time. While NUMSA activists displayed considerable optimism about the possibilities that could be brought about by a revitalisation of the links between organised labour and communities, they have also had to engage in a learning process in how unity in practice can be built with broader communities, where political priorities may be divergent and where union members may even discover some sense of social distance exists between themselves and these communities. Furthermore, the methods of struggle they employ may not match with NUMSA's own ideas about how to organise and mobilise.

In relation to the question of a political party, while NUMSA has demonstrated a detailed critique of the failures of the ANC, it has experienced challenges in developing a consensus about what kind of party it wishes to build, what timescale it is working towards, and what the program of that party should be. Having resolved that a party must be built, the union then had to confront a debate about what type of party would be built, what the program of this party would be, and when a party would be formed. Research conducted in the field revealed some divergence of tactical questions, particularly on when a party would be formed. There were some indications, too, that some within NUMSA do not support the decision, and that there are risks of alienating a section of the membership. This is of course expected; the dynamics of permanent contention exist in all labour movements. However, it is significant that NUMSA has not suffered any loss of membership following the 2013 Congress.

A key issue for the union is that while it is united in its analysis of what has taken place (a negotiated settlement that has not dealt with the economic legacy of Apartheid) and what is needed (a radical economic transformation of society based on nationalisation and public ownership), it has not yet developed consensus on how that can be achieved. The union is clear that working-class unity must be rebuilt and that the working class must have a political voice, but what that looks like and how it can be achieved has not yet been determined. The union is a product, too, of its time in the Alliance, and clearly bears the influence of Alliance politics, despite the fact it has clearly maintained the shopfloor traditions which formed the basis for the founding of the union. In particular, this can be seen in the issue of the discussion around the Freedom Charter and the political program that the union would adopt in both the United Front and the SRWP. While NUMSA is based on a shopfloor

tradition which has generally viewed the Freedom Charter as not representing a program of socialist transformation, at the same time the language of the Freedom Charter and of the National Democratic Revolution has been present in NUMSA structures for a long time, right back since the formation of COSATU and before. Furthermore, it is clear that in attempting to articulate a vision for both the United Front and for a working class political party, NUMSA makes frequent reference to the Freedom Charter that the ANC has promised and failed to deliver. Sometimes this is framed with the qualification of being a 'radical interpretation' of the Freedom Charter, but it nonetheless represents the influence which COSATU and the Alliance has had on NUMSA.

None of this should not be seen as a failure; however, simply by raising these questions and debating the issues, NUMSA has had a dramatic and lasting impact on the political situation in South Africa. The union has shaped political debates in South Africa that have had an influence far beyond the realm of the factory shopfloor.

Furthermore, because of its political stance, NUMSA has found itself attacked by the populist wing of COSATU, who were determined to prevent a split in the Tripartite Alliance, even at the cost of a split within COSATU itself. NUMSA has had to deal with Alliance supporters setting up a rival union and attempting to spread discord among its members, it has had to defend itself against political attack, and it has been bureaucratically expelled from a labour federation despite its appeal for COSATU to remain united. Undoubtedly, this has had a big impact on the extent to which NUMSA has been able to focus on the United Front and the SRWP.

The most significant impact of the resolutions that NUMSA took at its 2013 Congress however is arguably the formation of SAFTU. This federation has the potential to revitalise the South African labour movement, just as FOSATU did in the 1970's and 1980's. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to make any analysis of SAFTU, other than that its founding statements suggest that it has developed directly from the political conflicts inside COSATU, characterised by the divergent populist and shopfloor traditions that have been present in the federation since its inception. But given the rich tradition of shopfloor unionism that SAFTU is tapping into, it can reasonably be expected that the new federations development will be informed by principles of worker leadership, of the centrality of the political and organisational independence of the working class, and of democracy and accountability. It is also reasonable to assume that it will be far more open to collaboration with workers struggles than COSATU, and that it will be influenced by the ideas that NUMSA has raised.

SAFTU has not supported NUMSA's SRWP, but while it has resolved that the federation must be independent, it has also resolved to address the question of working-class political representation. It is likely that if this is taken forward, SAFTU will have to go through the same processes that NUMSA has already begun, debating a whole range of questions throughout its structures on what a political party would look like, what program it should adopt, and how it will appeal to the wider working class. Nonetheless, the early signs are that SAFTU will facilitate this debate, rather than shutting it down.

8: Thesis Conclusions: How NUMSA's Political Struggle has Precipitated a Re-Emergence of Shopfloor Unionism

At the 2019 NUMSA's Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party (SRWP) stood in its first ever elections, in both the ballot for the National Assembly and for the nine provincial legislatures. The results were extremely modest, with the party securing only 24,439 votes nationally in all elections (Grootes, 2019). For a newly launched party, which only held its launch Congress and elected its national leadership two months beforehand, these results could perhaps be seen as a respectable first attempt at winning electoral support. However, as Stephen Grootes has pointed out, for a union of NUMSA's size and resources, this figure represented "only around seven percent of NUMSA's claimed members...not what was envisaged when NUMSA decided in December 2013 to stop supporting the ANC" (Grootes, 2019).

The SRWP, however, released a relatively upbeat statement, reiterating their commitment to socialist politics and their belief that elections are not themselves a means with which to achieve socialist transformation, but simply a platform which could be used to promote socialist politics and to build the SRWP as an organisation.

"In our examination and analysis of the elections, we were consistent with our attitude that the bourgeois electoral system is not the solution to our problems, nor the route to Socialism but a necessary terrain of struggle for the working class in our struggle for Socialism...In just under two months after our Launch Congress, the SRWP has been able to create a Party apparatus that was able to participate in these elections across all the nine provinces of South Africa...We were very clear about our reasons for participating in these elections...Yes, we hoped to secure both

provincial and national seats so that we could use these platforms to advance our struggles for Socialism. All the time, however, as confirmed in our policy document on elections, we have been very clear that our strategic objective is not to deceive ourselves that incrementally winning seats would lead us to Socialism. Rather, benefiting from the political climate generated by the elections, we were determined to create and develop the apparatus of the Party and to expose our members and the working class to the falsehoods of all capitalist elections. We have won on both counts!” (SRWP Press Statement, 2019)

Despite this optimistic perspective however, which suggests that the leadership of the SRWP remain undeterred by their experience and intend to carry on the SRWP in some form, there is certainly no doubt that the party that NUMSA has built has not realised the expectations held by NUMSA activists interviewed in 2014. At the time of writing, it is unclear whether the SRWP will contest the 2021 municipal elections. Furthermore, NUMSA’s United Front project appears to have stalled; the proposed national launch of the project has been delayed many times and has still not taken place. Some local United Front structures did contest municipal elections in 2016, and could well do so again in 2021, but again, this is currently unclear.

At the present time, NUMSA has made limited progress towards its goals of rebuilding unity between the organised working class and communities, and to build an explicitly working class and socialist political party that could fight for what NUMSA perceives as the material interests of the South African working class. If NUMSA’s struggles in recent years to achieve these aims are assessed narrowly against these specific goals, undoubtedly the union can be said to have failed to achieve its aims, at least thus far.

However, a broader analysis of the processes taking place within the South African labour movement, which considers the complex internal contentious processes within the movement itself, suggests that the split within COSATU and the formation of SAFTU is of far greater significance than the challenges NUMSA has faced in organising with communities or contesting elections. SAFTU is a new labour federation, formed only in 2017, but one which has already reached a significant size, which has developed directly from the political conflict between populist and shopfloor unionism within COSATU, and which has already begun to mobilise around far more oppositional and confrontational perspectives and demands towards the ANC government than its alliance partner, COSATU.

While SAFTU has chosen not to support NUMSA's SRWP, and in fact declared at its founding conference that it would maintain independence from all political parties, it has also resolved that it must explore the building of an explicitly working-class political party. As was demonstrated in the penultimate chapter of this thesis, the foundation of SAFTU is based on an explicit commitment to the political and organisational independence of the working class, and to the principle of worker control of worker organisations. SAFTU can be understood as the most significant indication of the re-emergence of shopfloor unionism in contemporary South Africa, and its formation is a direct result of the resolutions NUMSA took at its 2013 Congress. While NUMSA's stated intention was never to threaten workers unity in COSATU, and indeed the union made a commitment to oppose any split within its ranks, SAFTU has arisen as a direct consequence of NUMSA's decisions.

This concluding chapter of the thesis will be divided into four distinct sections. The first section will briefly summarise the chapters of the thesis, and reiterate the points and analysis included within each. The second section will summarise the

conclusions of the thesis in relation to the processes that led NUMSA to adopt the 2013 Congress resolutions, what this tells us about the union's experiences of the post-Apartheid era, and why contemporary developments can be understood as a resurgence or re-emergence of the shopfloor model of labour unionism. The third section will summarise how mobilisation theory has been utilised to understand the processes taking place in relation to the South African labour movement and the South African state, as well as explaining how adapting mobilisation theory using the concept of permanent contention can provide us with a more detailed and nuanced picture of the evolution of these processes in recent years by allowing for the complex and multi-dimensional nature of collective worker agency. It will also discuss the potential utility of applying this adapted interpretation of mobilisation theory to other labour movements and struggles outside of the South African context. Finally, the fourth section will consider what the implications of contemporary developments within the South African labour movement, understood most simply as a resurgence of shopfloor unionism, are for labour relations within South Africa.

8.1: Summary of Thesis Chapters:

In the introductory chapter of this thesis, a brief history of the Tripartite Alliance and the tensions that existed between COSATU and the ANC were introduced. A literature review of the debates surrounding the Alliance, focusing on the question of COSATU's partnership with the ruling party was discussed. It was explained that these debates have for the most part not considered the possibility that COSATU itself would experience a split over the question of the Alliance, and were instead primarily focused on the possibility of COSATU breaking its partnership with the ANC.

The second chapter outlined how research informing the thesis was conducted in the field and reflected on some of the challenges and experiences that involved. Importantly, this chapter reflected on the fact that a key finding of the fieldwork was that from the perspective of NUMSA activists at the grassroots, while contemporary conflicts between labour and the state had informed the decisions taken at the 2013 Congress, in fact the decision to break with the ANC represented the culmination of a political struggle within COSATU itself that dated back to the struggle against Apartheid in the 1980's. Consequently, it was explained that an analysis of NUMSA's decisions needed to consider not only the conflicts that existed between the ANC and organised labour, but also the internal conflicts within the South African labour movement itself.

This meant that it was necessary to utilise a theoretical framework which held explanatory value both in terms of labours external struggles with capital, but also simultaneously accounted for internal contentious processes within the labour movement itself. Therefore, in the third chapter of the thesis, John Kelly's mobilisation theory was introduced. It was explained that this theoretical framework recognises how cycles of contention develop between labour and capital which begin with the grievances of workers but are conditioned and shaped by the strategies adopted by capital in response to labour mobilisation, and labour mobilisation responds to state. The chapter outlined how this framework explained how the labour movement and labour relations within South Africa developed, drawing upon the work of Upchurch and Mather, acknowledging how the state utilised a strategy of open coercion and repression in the days of Apartheid, which conditioned and shaped a new wave of labour mobilisation, embodied by the growth of the new unions developing from the Durban strike wave of 1973.

Within this chapter it was also argued that the argument that COSATU represented a key example of SMU was flawed and that the SMU formula for the reinvention of labour movements risks obscuring the capital-labour dynamic which shapes the emergence and development of labour movements and potentially undermining the political and organisational independence of the working class. It is the perspective of this thesis that analysis of labour movements around the world and not only in South Africa should be suspicious of this formula, which suggests that the building of alliances between labour and social movements is crucial to the revitalisation of the labour movement, since this perspective ignores the need for labour movements to be able to organise workers and fight for material improvements to workers conditions if they are to prosper and grow. While this is not to disregard the value

The shopfloor model of unionism embodied by these unions presented a new challenge for the Apartheid state, which began in the 1970's to move from a strategy of repression towards a strategy of facilitation, granting concessions such as recognition and collective bargaining rights for the first time. This culminated in 1994 with the end of Apartheid, with what NUMSA views as the "negotiated settlement", in which the black working-class majority were granted democratic rights. Furthermore COSATU, which had emerged as the dominant labour federation and had established a partnership with the ANC, was drawn into a relationship with the new ruling party. However, it was acknowledged that Kelly's framework of mobilisation theory did not account for internal contentious processes within the labour movement and the ways in which these processes shaped subsequent labour mobilisations. It therefore could not account for the divisions which existed within COSATU, and the split that took place within the federation. Therefore, the concept of permanent

contention was proposed, to account for the fact that while from an external perspective contention between labour and the state could be understood as cyclical, emerging and dissolving over time, from the perspective of those within the labour movement, contention over how labour organises and mobilises is permanent. Consequently, contention is not cyclical but continuous and historically contingent, and in order to fully understand how labour mobilisations develop it is necessary to understand that organised labour exists in a state of permanent contestation.

In the fourth chapter, the attention of the thesis turned towards NUMSA itself and the unions development, history, and experience of COSATU and the Tripartite Alliance. This begins by demonstrating that two broad models of labour can be observed within the South African labour movement, the populist model, and the shopfloor model, and explaining that COSATU's formation represented a strategic compromise between these two models. The thesis goes on to argue that the roots of NUMSA's decisions and the split that has taken place within COSATU can be traced directly back to these competing models of labour unionism.

The fifth chapter draws upon fieldwork to develop a picture of NUMSA's experiences of the Tripartite Alliance, showing firstly that NUMSA's shopfloor tradition meant that it was deeply sceptical of the Alliance prior to the end of Apartheid, so much so that it was opposed to COSATU's participation and reluctantly accepted the Alliance only because the union chose to abide by the majority perspective within COSATU at the time, in order to preserve the unity of the federation. Secondly, following this acceptance of the Alliance, NUMSA has attempted to reshape both the character of the Alliance and of COSATU itself in line with its own political goals and traditions, a process which the union regards as

ultimately unsuccessful. This is significant as it demonstrates that NUMSA's decision to break with the ANC and to attempt to build a United Front between organised labour and communities, as well as a party of the working class, were informed not simply by their frustrations with the ANC and the Tripartite Alliance, but also by the unions unsuccessful attempts to challenge the politics of COSATU itself. NUMSA's political strategy in recent years has therefore been shaped and influenced not only by the evolving strategic response of the state to labour, but also by the processes of international contention within the labour movement which NUMSA has been a direct participant in.

The sixth chapter of the thesis introduced a comparative analysis of the contemporary experiences of two unions which have developed from the two divergent models of labour unionism which existed within COSATU; NUMSA and NUM, which until the 2012 platinum strikes and the Marikana Massacre had been the largest affiliate union in COSATU. Drawing upon contemporary literature on the collapse of NUM in the platinum belt, the thesis contrasts the populist model of unionism embodied by NUM with the shopfloor model of unionism on which NUMSA is based, to demonstrate the significant differences in tradition, politics and organisation which existed in the two most significant COSATU affiliates prior to NUMSA's expulsion and the subsequent split.

Finally, in the seventh and penultimate chapter, the aims that NUMSA established at its 2013 Congress (the establishment of a United Front, the formation of a working-class political party and the 'reclaiming' of COSATU) are explored and the initial progress towards these goals are assessed. It is acknowledged that there are serious challenges involved in both the formation of the United Front and the SRWP and unresolved debates within NUMSA and the wider labour movement

about how these projects can be realised. However, it is suggested that the limited progress made towards these goals is at least partially explained by NUMSA's expulsion from COSATU and the subsequent split in the federation, which has occupied a great deal of the unions time and which has been the central focus of internal debates and struggles within the South African labour movement in recent years. Furthermore, the formation of SAFTU, which took place as a direct consequence of NUMSA's 2013 Congress resolutions, is outlined and it is suggested that this formation represents a further and more generalised expression of the re-emergence of the shopfloor model of labour unionism within South Africa.

8.2: Understanding and Contextualising NUMSA's Break with the Alliance

The first contribution to knowledge made by this thesis lies in an explanation of the processes that led NUMSA to break with the Alliance which is informed by fieldwork conducted within NUMSA structures themselves, replicating the 'politics from below' approach taken by Beresford in relation to NUM. Through this fieldwork, it is revealed that while a state shift in strategy towards labour from a model of partnership and facilitation towards a model increasingly based upon coercion and repression (illustrated particularly by the Marikana Massacre but also by other examples of state responses to labour mobilisation and by the increasingly neoliberal direction of the South African state) goes some way to explaining developments within the South African labour movement but does not tell the whole story. From the perspective of NUMSA, while the record of the ANC in office and the rising levels of state violence towards labour mobilisations and the working class are important factors in the political decisions they have taken, these decisions are also the logical conclusion of political and organisational debates between conflicting models of labour organisation that have been in process within the South African labour

movement since the days of Apartheid. Understood within the context of the historical development of the labour movement in South Africa, and within the context of the conflict between two broad political trends within this movement, it becomes clear that the roots of the political conflict and subsequent split that has emerged predate both the Tripartite Alliance and COSATU itself.

This began with the development of the shopfloor model of labour unionism, which arose in response to state repression of the labour movement during the Apartheid era. The initial development of workers organisations and trade unions in South Africa, which has initiated in many areas by the CPSA (later the SACP) culminated in the formation of SACTU. Strongly influenced by the Communist Party, and closely affiliated to the ANC, this federation of labour unions was a significant achievement and united together black workers across many unions for the first time. It was strongly influenced by the Communist Party, and closely affiliated to the ANC, which was regarded as the political leadership of the federation. SACTU represented a model of labour organising which is conceptualised in this thesis as 'populist'. However, this became a problem for SACTU when the ANC was banned in 1960; because of its affiliation with the ANC, and while SACTU continued to exist, many of its leaders were forced to live in exile and it was effectively destroyed as an active force on the ground.

The vacuum this created was filled by the new unions of the 1970's who grew out of the Durban strike wave of 1973. These unions were based on a model which prioritised strong organisation in the workplace, based on tightly organised networks of shop stewards on the factory floor. Furthermore, they chose to remain politically independent from the ANC and of all other political parties. This alternative model of unionism, conceptualised in this thesis as the shopfloor model, was embodied within

the formation of FOSATU, a federation which placed strong emphasis on the concept of worker leadership and on the centrality of the organisational and political independence of the working class from other forces. Consequently, this made it far harder for the Apartheid state to respond to the worker mobilisations of the 1970's with repression; the high levels of union density and worker organisation in individual workplaces meant that mobilisations and strikes could no longer be quickly quashed by victimising or arresting individual leaders. Furthermore, because these new unions were not officially linked to the banned ANC, it was no longer as straightforward for the state to justify the repression of union activists based on their connection to an illegal organisation. This forced both employers and the state to offer concessions to mollify worker mobilisations, such as limited recognition agreements and collective bargaining rights, which in turn further fed the growth of the new unions, who could now boast significant achievements such as winning pay rises or successfully reversing retrenchments of workers.

These two divergent models of labour organisation – the populist model with its emphasis on the political alliance with the ANC and the shopfloor model with its emphasis on worker leadership and the independence of the working class – came together in the 1980's to form one united labour federation in COSATU. This was a hugely significant achievement and the most powerful single worker organisation in the history of South Africa, recognised as playing a crucial role in the Apartheid struggle because of its ability to mobilise generalised strike action and its role in the UDF. But from its inception, it represented a strategic compromise between the populist and shopfloor models of unionism.

It is this strategic compromise between divergent traditions that explains how NUMSA found itself a part of the Tripartite Alliance; while NUMSA and other unions

based on the shopfloor model were deeply sceptical of the Alliance. NUMSA favoured the idea that COSATU should instead build their own working-class political party rather than work in partnership with the ANC and develop a Workers Charter rather than adopt the Freedom Charter as a political program. But the union found itself in the minority within COSATU and felt that it had to accept the view of the majority to preserve unity within the labour movement.

NUMSA therefore set out to attempt to influence both COSATU and the federations Alliance partners as best it could. Examples of these attempts have been discussed in this thesis, such as NUMSA's experiences of trying to push COSATU towards providing practical support and solidarity to communities engaged in struggles around service delivery, and the unions involvement in COSATU's efforts to replace President Thabo Mbeki with Jacob Zuma. But these efforts have been understood by the union as unsuccessful, and furthermore as serving to demonstrate the serious problems associated with the populist model of labour unionism and the partnership between organised labour and cross-class political parties.

It is in this context that NUMSA's break with the Alliance and the subsequent split within COSATU must be understood. While the policies of the ANC in government and the shift towards an increasingly repressive state strategy towards labour mobilisations have been important factors in shaping the context of NUMSA's 2013 Congress resolutions, this does not tell us the whole story. In fact, because of the shopfloor tradition which NUMSA as a union developed from, these factors could even be seen as confirming the political and organisational perspectives which the union has held throughout its history. The decisions that NUMSA has taken – to break the Alliance and call on COSATU to do the same, to build a United Front between organised labour and communities, and to build a working-class political

party – can therefore be understood as the union attempting to revive and reassert the shopfloor model of unionism.

8.3: Adapting Mobilisation Theory Through the Concept of Permanent Contention

The second contribution to knowledge made by this thesis has been to propose an adaptation to Mobilisation Theory, in the form of the concept of Permanent Contention. In the third chapter of this thesis, mobilisation theory was outlined, and it was discussed that this framework, with its emphasis on the dialectical relationship between labour mobilisation and state responses to labour mobilisation, provides an explanation for how ‘cycles of contention’ between labour and capital can emerge, with each cycle conditioned by the resolution of the previous cycle. It was asserted that mobilisation theory provides a rich explanatory framework with which to understand the development and evolution of the South African labour movement. This can be seen firstly in the development of the shopfloor model of unionism, which developed as a direct and necessary response to the Apartheid state strategy of repression utilised against the South African labour movement, SACTU. Conditioned by this strategy of repression, workers were forced to experiment with new tactics and strategies of organising, and this produced the shopfloor model, with its emphasis on high levels of workplace organisation that could not be easily disrupted by victimisation of activists. Furthermore, the experiences of state repression of the unions in the populist tradition because of their explicit and direct connection to the ANC caused workers organising based on the shopfloor model of the 1970’s to value and prioritise the political and organisational independence of their unions.

The development of the shopfloor model of unionism presented a challenge for the Apartheid state which resulted in a gradual shift in state strategy from one of repression to one of facilitation. This was initially extremely modest, limited to basic recognition and collective bargaining, but as the power of organised labour in South Africa grew, so too did the states need to offer concessions and accommodations to the labour movement, a process which culminated in the end of Apartheid and the advent of multi-racial democracy in 1994. So ended the 'cycle of contention' between labour and the state which had begun to develop in the 1970's and reached its zenith in the mass strikes of the 1980's at the height of the anti-Apartheid struggle. The position of organised labour in South Africa was completely transformed; where in the past unions had been illegal and repressed to the point of non-existence, now they were invited into partnership with the government of the new South Africa, thus ending a major 'cycle of contention' between labour and the South African state. However, this process of facilitation could go only so far. While the unions were invited into partnership with the government, and their role as worker organisations was incorporated into the new South African state, the ANC would not go so far as to concede to worker demands around radical transformation of the economy. Furthermore, over time worker mobilisations have been met increasingly with state violence; this was demonstrated most dramatically by the Marikana Massacre. Consequently, this has generated a new 'cycle of contention' between labour and the state.

The account that mobilisation theory offers is a convincing one; however, what it does not capture is the dynamics of internal contentious processes taking place within the labour movement itself. While this theoretical framework is useful to understand the dynamics of conflicts between labour and the state, it does not

account for the multi-dimensional nature of labour organisations themselves, which are by their very nature sites of contestation around issues of politics, strategy, affiliations, traditions, and models of organising. From the external perspective of mobilisation theory, contention between labour and the state is seen as episodic and cyclical, with labour mobilisations met with either repression or facilitation, ending one cycle of contention and laying the basis for a future cycle. From the perspectives of workers themselves however, even following the resolution of a 'cycle of contention', the internally contentious processes within labour movements continue to develop. Consequently, this thesis has introduced the concept of permanent contention, proposed as an adaptation to mobilisation theory, in order to better capture the complex nature of the agency of organised labour. Through this addition, mobilisation theory is adapted to consider how both state strategies towards labour, and the dynamic interaction of competing agencies within the labour movement themselves, serve to shape the form which labour mobilisations take.

In this way, we can develop a more nuanced picture of the way in which the shopfloor model of unionism developed, as well COSATU itself, through analysing the ways in which competing agencies within the labour movement shaped these mobilisations. Furthermore, we can see how while the political settlement of 1994 may have ended a particular cycle of labour mobilisation, from the perspective of NUMSA, this "negotiated settlement" shaped the way in which contentious processes within COSATU developed throughout the post-Apartheid era.

It is proposed that through this adaptation of mobilisation theory can have a more generalised utility. Using the theoretical framework of mobilisation theory with the incorporation of the concept of permanent contention, it becomes possible to provide much more nuanced and detailed accounts of how and why labour struggles

and mobilisations develop. Furthermore, it is proposed that by utilising this concept, we can avoid accounts treat labour organisations as politically and organisationally homogenous and one-dimensional actors and recognise the complex nature of labour agency.

8.4: Considering the Implications of the Resurgence of Shopfloor Unionism for Labour and Labour Relations in South Africa

Having provided an account of the split within COSATU which argues that this split can be understood as representing a resurgence of shopfloor unionism, this poses the question of what the significance of this resurgence is, and what the implications of this are for the South African labour movement. In this final section, some thoughts on the significance of this resurgence are given.

One possible significance of NUMSA's decision to initiate a United Front of workers and communities and to establish a working-class political party was of course the fact that these projects, successfully realised, could have significantly altered the political situation in South Africa, providing both a new mass social movement and an explicitly working-class political voice. As was discussed in the penultimate chapter of this thesis, there are reasons to believe that such a development would be welcomed and could gain some support. However, as was also discussed in this chapter, realising the intentions of the 2013 Congress resolutions has proven a far more complex process than perhaps some within the union expected, and NUMSA has now experienced some of the challenges involved in creating such organisations. In terms of realising the expectations that NUMSA members held in 2014, by any measure the union has not been successful.

However, where NUMSA has been successful is to regenerate the debate within the South African labour movement around the necessity of creating new organisations in the mould of the shopfloor model of labour unionism, centred upon the primacy of the political and organisational independence of the working class. In particular it has revived the debate around the need for a worker's party, which has not been raised in any significant way since 1993 when NUMSA's proposal that COSATU reject the Alliance and form a party of the working class, despite the fact that it was an idea that had serious support within the unions of the 1970's and 1980's who stood in the shopfloor tradition.

Furthermore, the most significant consequence of NUMSA's 2013 Congress resolutions has been the formation of SAFTU, a new labour federation in which debates around questions such as how organised labour should relate to working class communities and service delivery protests and what attitude organised labour should take towards 'politics and political parties. Given that the populist wing of COSATU preferred to initiate a split within COSATU by expelling NUMSA from the federation, this is an important development.

SAFTU has not agreed to support NUMSA's United Front initiative, or to support the SRWP at the 2019 election (although some support for the party clearly exists within SAFTU in the form of individual leaders and affiliate unions) and the federation adopted an explicit position of independence from all political parties at its founding conference. However, as has been discussed in the penultimate chapter of this thesis, the new federation has resolved that it will explore the possibility of a worker's party and is not fundamentally opposed to the idea. Furthermore, a wide range of community campaigns and social movements attended SAFTU's founding

Congress, and the federation is committed to rebuilding unity between labour unions and the wider working class.

Perhaps the most immediate impact of SAFTU however is the fact that a large and militant labour federation has been formed based on opposition to the ANC government, rather than to operate in partnership with it. SAFTU has already demonstrated its willingness to put demands on the ANC which are more radical than those put forward by the ANC, and furthermore to mobilise around them, as shown by the demonstrations and strikes around the question of the minimum wage. It remains to be seen what form state responses to SAFTU will take, or indeed how COSATU will respond to SAFTU in the long term, and what impact the new federation will have on COSATU's internal politics and affiliate unions.

SAFTU is likely to become the centre of debates around the future of the labour movement, whether these debates are around the program that labour should adopt, how labour should orientate towards the wider working class, and what approach labour should take to political questions – at least for that section of the labour movement which rejected the populist model of labour unionism. Whatever the future for organised labour, it is certain that the dynamic and historically contingent evolution of competing traditions, politics, and agencies of the labour movement will be just as significant in shaping labour mobilisations as the strategies that the state adopts to respond to them.

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APPENDIX: List of Interviews

Steven Nhlapo, NUMSA Head of Collective Bargaining, 28/07/2014

Weizmann Hamilton, Workers and Socialist Party, 07/08/2014

Azwell Banda, NUMSA Head of Policy, 28/08/2014

Moses Mayekiso, Former General Secretary of NUMSA, 02/09/2014

Patrick Craven, COSATU National Spokesperson, 05/09/2014

David Van Wyk, Bench Marks Foundation, 08/09/2014

General, Democratic Left Front, 12/09/2014

Mametlwe Sebei, Workers and Socialist Party, 16/09/2014

For reasons explained within Chapter 2 of this thesis, all interviews with NUMSA Regional Office Bearers, Local Office Bearers, Shop Stewards and Active Members have been anonymised and these respondents are only identified within the thesis by their position within NUMSA

