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**PUBLIC SECTOR TRADE UNION  
RESPONSE TO CHANGE  
IN SOUTH AFRICA**

**A CASE STUDY OF THE SOUTH  
AFRICAN MUNICIPAL WORKERS  
UNION (SAMWU) IN THE WESTERN  
CAPE  
(1992-97)**

*Thesis*



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## ABSTRACT

The thesis explores the relationship between the public sector trade unions and the government in South Africa from 1992-7. The research is located in debates concerning the ANC government's endorsement of the 'free-market' economy in the post apartheid period. The Marxist method of historical materialism is used to explain the changing relationship between the state and the trade unions

To expound these issues, a single case study of the Cape Town branch of the municipal union - SAMWU - is examined. The case served several functions, it illustrated the nature of apartheid, it took account of the government's introduction of privatisation in the public sector, and simultaneously provided a vehicle for the development of the theory of the state and its inter-relationship with the trade unions. The questions that arose from the case were linked to whether SAMWU would engage in conflict or conciliation to stop privatisation in the public sector, and whether the state would be free to respond favourably to labour's actions and demands. A number of key findings were established relating to these areas.

With regard to the state, the materialist analysis developed by the 'state derivation' theorists provided a useful tool, but for reasons outlined in the dissertation, neglected the basic structural dependence on capitalism. The theoretical conclusion of the thesis: was the state was not independent of capitalism, that it – along with business and labour - was ultimately bound up with the relations of capital. However, as an integral part of capitalism, the state was also affected by the 'contradictions' or potential conflict found within the exploitative relations between capital and labour. Consequently, in order to control any serious challenge from labour to the system – arising as a result of the 'contradictions' within capitalism - the South African state had chosen to engage in conciliation with the trade unions, with the aim of minimising any overall threat or resistance to the existing system.

As to whether SAMWU would engage in this conciliation, or choose resistance to stop privatisation, the answer was viewed as related to the union members' levels of class consciousness, and the policies and organisation of their union. The class and collective consciousness of SAMWU members was seen as inherently tied up with issues of race – in particular their 'coloured' identity. The thesis conceptualised apartheid and race as a function of capitalism. It concluded that the continuing use made of the 'coloured' identity in the region, to disguise economic inequality, had the potential to negate against the members' collective ability to resist privatisation. With regard to the acceptance of conciliation, although no clear answers were immediately forthcoming by 1997, it was possible to deduce that formalisation and partnerships had, at this stage, done little to prevent free market practices from being introduced in the workplace. Finally, although the thesis was unable to conclude in 1997, that SAMWU would ultimately resort to industrial action to stop privatisation, the re-organisation of the union to remain rooted in rank-and-file activity, the campaigns and protests against privatisation, plus the declared intention of the leaders and membership during interviews to take strike action, all seemed to indicate this would be the case.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my Father, Ken, who unfortunately died before my PhD. was completed. As a good socialist and class fighter I think he would have approved of the sentiments contained within the work.

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

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ALA	Andrew Levy Associates (Pty) LTD.
ANC	African National Congress
APO	African Political Organisation
BCEA	Basic conditions of Employment Act
BLA	Black Local Authority
Black	synonym for African
BMWU	Black Municipal Workers Union
CAC	Coloured Affairs Council
CAWU	Construction and Allied Workers' Union
CBC	Central Bargaining Council
CCAWUSA	Commercial Catering and Allied Union
CCC	Cape Town City Council
CCMA	Commission for Conciliation, Mediation, and Arbitration
CEC	Central Executive Committee
CMC	Cape Municipal Council
CNETU	Council for Non-European Trade Unions
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CPA	Cape Provincial Administration
CSS	Central Statistics Services
CTMWA	Cape Town Municipal Workers Association
CWIU	Chemical Workers Industrial Union
DBSA	Development Bank of South Africa
DCC	Durban City Council
DP	Democratic Party
FAWU	Food and Allied Workers Union
ESCOM	Electricity Supply Commission
EXCO	Executive Committee.
FEDSAL	Federation of South African Labour unions
FCWU	Food and Canning Workers Union
FEDSAL	Federation of South African Labour Unions
FOSATU	Federation of South African Trade Unions
GAWU	General and Allied Workers Union
GEAR	Growth, Employment and redistribution
GNU	Government of National Unity
GWU	General Workers Union
GWUSA	General Workers Union of South Africa
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
HDI	Human Development Index
ICA	Industrial Conciliation Act 1924 and substantially amended in 1956
ISCOR	Iron and Steel Corporation of South Africa
ICU	Industrial and Commercial Workers Union
IDS	Incomes Data Services
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMATU	Independent Municipal and Allied Trade Union
IPS	Institute of Public Servants
JCC	Johannesburg City Council
LFA	National Framework Agreement

LGNF	Local Government Negotiating Forum
LRA	Labour Relations Act (1956) (1995)
LRAA	Labour Relations Amendment Act (1988)
MEC	Member of Executive Council
MEO	Municipal Employers' Organisation
MK	Umkonto we Sizwe (Spear of Nation)
MSc	Manpower Services Commission
MWUSA	Municipal Workers Union of South Africa
NACTU	National Council of Trade Unions
NALEDI	National Labour and Economic Development Institute
NBC	National Bargaining Council
NEC	National Executive Committee
NEDCOM	National Education Committee
NEDLAC	National Economic Development and Labour Council
NEF	National Economic Forum
NEHAWU	National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union
NEUM	Non-European Unity Movement
NFA	National Framework Agreement
NGO	Non-government organisation
NOB	National Office Bearer
NMC	National Manpower Commission
NP	National Party
NRC	National Representative Council
NSA	New South Africa
NUM	National Union of Miners
NUMSA	National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
OHS	October Household Survey
PAC	Pan African Congress
POPCRU	Police, Prisons Civil Rights Union
POTWA	Posts and Telecommunications Workers' Association
PPWAWU	Paper, Printing Wood and Allied Workers' Unions
PPPs	Public Private Partnerships
PSC	Public Service Commission
PSSC	Public Sector Shop Stewards Council
RDP	Redistribution and Development Programme
REC	Regional Executive Council
ROB	Regional Office Bearer
RSA	Republic of South Africa
RSC	Regional Services Council
SAAME	South African Association of Municipal Employees
SAAWU	South African Allied Workers Union
SACCAWU	South African Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union
SACTWU	South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union
SACP	South African Communist Party
SACPO	South African Coloured Peoples Congress
SACTU	South African Congress of Trade Unions
SADTU	South African Democratic Workers Union
SADWU	South African Domestic Workers Union
SAIC	South African Indian Congress
SALB	South African Labour Bulletin
SALGA	South African Local Government Association
SALGBC	South African Local Government Bargaining Council
SAMWU	South African Municipal Workers Union
SANCO	South African National Civic Organisation

SAPSA	South African Public Servants Association
SARHWU	South African Railways and Harbours' Workers Union
SASOL	South African Coal, Oil and Gas Corporation
SGT	Self-governing Territories
TBVC	Transkei, Bophutatswan, Venda and Ciskei, commonly known as the black homelands
TGWU	Transport and General Workers Union
UCT	University of Cape Town
UDF	United Democratic Front
UWC	University of the Western Cape
WESGRO	A non-profit organisation promoting economic growth in the Western Cape.
WIP	Work in Progress
WM&G	Weekly Mail and Guardian
WRSC	Western Cape Regional Services Council

# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The thesis is concerned with the changing relationship between the public sector trade unions and the South African state between 1992-7. The relationship is examined using a case study, focusing on the development of a trade union branch and its responses to state policies of privatisation. The purposes of the research are two-fold: firstly, the case study is employed to evaluate whether the union and its members are capable of resisting government policies of privatisation during the period under review; secondly, the study is to be used as a reflection on wider society, the case being utilised to advance the theoretical understanding of the nature of the state and trade unions. Overall, the study contributes to the knowledge and improved understanding of public sector trade unions by providing a greater awareness of the tensions and contradictions embedded in their relationship with the state.

### 1.2 THE CASE STUDY

The case study is historical, and follows the maturing of the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) in the Western Cape from 1992-1997 - during the critical transition from pre to post apartheid. The research focuses on one division of the state, the public sector. This area was proving especially difficult for the African National Congress (ANC) during this period, but was of importance because the sector had been defined by groups within the national liberation movement, as the basic foundation for translating into reality the ideals of post-apartheid South Africa. The critical problem was one of funding, particularly in local authorities where some municipalities were close to financial collapse. The solution proposed by the ANC government, as with the old apartheid government in the 1980s, was to adopt the strategies and practices associated with the private sector. The Cape Town branch of SAMWU became the focus of the study, because throughout the whole of the 1992-97 period under review, the branch and its union consistently opposed government policies of privatisation (Ray and Adair 1998).

### 1.3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical analysis of the state and trade unions is used to assist in evaluating whether the public sector trade unions would engage in collective resistance to stop government policies of privatisation. The thesis uses a Marxist, essentially historical materialist, view of both the workplace and society when analysing the state and trade unions within a changing South African public sector. Such a method employs a theory of history which places labour at the centre of social change. History is seen as a social and material process, with the development of the proletarian class consciousness being the dynamic for change.

Within this framework, the theory of the state is explored to help explain the actions of governments in relation to labour. The subsequent reasoning provides not only an indication of the class nature of the state, but also an understanding of the limits of the government's reformist policies under capitalism. Equally, the trade unions, a component of the organised voice of the working class, are also analysed. As part of the changing South African civil society, unions are seen as contradictory organisations: defined as part of bourgeois society - playing a central role in the preservation of capitalist civil society - whilst simultaneously providing an arena for workers' conflict and struggles. An example of their contradictory behaviour is found in the way trade unionists engage both in strike action (conflict), and the more conciliatory activities of negotiation and consultation.

Crucially though, it is conflict that is identified in the dissertation as the most effective method of challenging state policies of privatisation and deregulation. The research perceives the relationship between 'labour and capital' - employees and employers - as being exploitative and principally conflictual. It is during the periods of struggle between these two classes - labour and capital - that trade union members' perceptions of society alter and their collective consciousness, or awareness develops (Brecher, 1997). More especially, it is the continual experiences of workplace problems and conflicts, that can force trade union members to link their own individual struggles with those associated with the state and the system as a whole. Or to argue more theoretically, the relationship of specific struggle to wider struggle can be deduced from the continual experience of workplace conflict; the process of which can increase the collective awareness and -as a consequence - potential power of labour. To this end, an analysis of the members' level of collective consciousness is considered important, being viewed as an effective

means by which to measure the possible strength of opposition to the government's policies, amongst this group.

#### **1.4 QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS:**

The theorisation of the state and trade unions, is applied to the case study and used to evaluate whether the public sector unions will, or can use collective resistance to force the government to abandon its commercial ethos in the state sector. Such theoretical deliberation, prompts the further question of whether the state enjoys the freedom to respond to such pressures from labour - or to express more directly, whether the state can ever be free to determine its own national policy, if it differs from those of global capitalism? This in turn, helps to reflect upon whether trade unions can realistically improve their members' material circumstances by the use of reformist methods (such as the corporatist agreements with the ANC government), or whether they will be ultimately compelled to resort to force to bring about change.

#### **1.5 THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS**

To obtain an understanding of the changing relationship between the state and public sector trade unions in South Africa, the dissertation firstly provides a background - a contextual, chapter - detailing events in South Africa prior to the 1994 election (**chapter 2**). The aim of this chapter is to locate the black public sector trade unions within the wider historical framework. **Chapter 3** furnishes, on the basis of an evaluation of the existing progressive literature, the conceptual framework for the thesis. The nature of the state and trade unions - using a Marxist materialist perspective - are explored, in order to facilitate a fuller (theoretical) understanding of the changing relationship between the government and public sector trade unions in South Africa. More especially, the chapter focuses on the questions and issues needed to be addressed in the dissertation. **Chapter 4**, explores and justifies the research design and methodology used in the dissertation.

These early chapters are followed by an empirical examination of the Cape Town branch of the public sector union - SAMWU - which although essentially addressing whether the union has the collective strength, leadership and organisation to resist local government privatisation and deregulation, concurrently acts as an instrument

to advance the theoretical understanding of the state and trade unions. The case study is divided into two time periods: the period leading up to, and including the abolition of apartheid (1992-4); and the immediate post apartheid era (1995-7). The first period, **part 1** of the dissertation, initially surveys the social, material and workplace background of the SAMWU workers in Cape Town, as a means of understanding the factors that contribute to the levels of class consciousness amongst this group (**chapter 5**). It then focuses directly on the Cape Town branch (within the general development of the union as a whole). It highlights its history and development (**Chapter 6**), it then studies its growth and internal structure (**Chapter 7**), and finally considers the union's external activities - associated with conflict and conciliation - within the context of an increasingly privatised, deregulated work environment, (**Chapter 8**). The overall period (1992-4) is then analysed (**Chapter 9**) before proceeding to the second time period, 1995-7.

Before moving directly to **Part 2** of the analysis of the Cape Town branch however, the dissertation provides the reader with a further historical background and update of events in South Africa (with regards to the state, the trade unions and the public sector) post 1994 (**Chapter 10**). The SAMWU branch is then once again considered, with the same areas as those in part 1, being re-examined (**Chapters 11-14**). Where appropriate, part 2 is compared with part 1, in order to assist in addressing - in the final conclusion (**Chapter 15**) - the areas/questions originally outlined in the conceptual framework.

# **Chapter 2**

## **SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT**

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### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

In order to locate the black public sector trade unions within a wider historical framework, the following chapter explores the development of the apartheid state, the black labour movement, and public sector, prior to the 1994 election. The purpose is to provide a background to the case study and show how the South African state and capital - which had long collaborated to provide a legitimacy for separate development - were eventually forced to abandon the system of apartheid. The black trade unions, and the racially inscribed institutions of the public sector, are seen as an integral part of this transformation. As a consequence the following account considers the historical nature of apartheid, from its origins in segregation, through to the birth and collapse of its doctrine. The growth and resistance of the black workers movement, receives equal attention, especially from the 1970s to the 1990s when the burgeoning trade unions and national federation COSATU, contributed to the demise of the system and the creation of the 'New' South Africa (NSA). Finally, from the mid 1970s, the effects of the economic and political crisis in the country, are highlighted, with particular attention given to their impact on the public sector and its workforce.

### **2.2 THE ORIGINS OF SEGREGATION IN SOUTH AFRICA**

Long before the emergence of the apartheid system in 1948, the South African state had denied its black population any political or economic rights. Subjecting its overwhelmingly black working class to restrictive controls, the state routinely colluded with the gold-mining industry to maintain a cheap, black migrant labour force, without trade union or political representation (Lipton and Simkins, 1993). Segregation (and not apartheid) was the term used in the early twentieth-century South Africa, for the set of

government policies and social practices which sought to regulate the relationship between white and black. Many components of this segregation had their origins in the nineteenth-century Boer republics and British colonies (Beinart and Dubow, 1995)

Yet it was the discovery of diamonds and gold, that really transformed South Africa. When diamonds were found in Kimberley in 1867, large mining companies quickly established control. The most successful being De Beers, whose owner, the staunch British imperialist Cecil John Rhodes, first developed the classic system of labour control and theft prevention, by confining African miners in closed compounds for the duration of their contracts (Callinicos and Rogers 1977). The new prosperity eventually helped to establish the first government of the Union of South Africa in 1910 - an alliance between mining capital, led by Smuts (English), and big Afrikaner landowners, led by Botha (Afrikaner). The union was to face continual challenge, but for now appeased the hostile English and Afrikaner constituencies, angered by the Anglo-Boer War of 1899 (Riley, 1991).

It was from this point that social divisions and separation in society, increasingly took on a rigid racial character. The fact that white settlers and indigenous Africans were not the only established communities, added to the elaborate form of segregation. In the Cape, a group known as 'coloureds' (descendants of the Khoisan, imported slaves and settlers) came to occupy an intermediate social position between black Africans and whites, whilst the importation of Indian indentured workers into Natal in 1860s, gave rise to another legally defined racial group (Beinart and Dubow, 1995).

### **2.3 SEGREGATION 1920s-1940s**

Radical interpretations of apartheid (Wolpe, 1972; Wolpe, 1988; Legassick, 1974; Legassick, 1995) challenge the view that later twentieth century segregation simply represented a survival of prior racial beliefs. For them racial ideas in themselves could not explain the development of such a complex system. Instead they extend an economic interpretation of imperialism as motivations for segregation; especially evident in the early mining industry, where the overwhelming need for cheap labour was identified as the chief cause of the introduction of early racist legislation and the demise of the African economy (Beinart and Dubow, 1995).

### **2.3.1 Black Labour**

The system that had previously allowed African tenants to work the land in exchange for paying the white farmers rent was gradually replaced by low wage-labour. The African rural economy now supplied the labour power to the advanced capitalist sector, but it was migrant and temporary. Africans deprived of any rights or status in the white areas, were to return to their separate reserves in between periods of work, in order to retain a subsistence level of production in the impoverished African areas (Wolpe, 1972).

Pass laws directed blacks to areas where employers most wanted labour. The 1911 Mines and Works Act ensured segregation in employment, further controls were reinforced by the compound system, where a rigid social division between white and black was assured (Riley, 1991). Such practices were much more than simple restrictions, they were part of a composite ideology that legitimised social difference and economic inequality in every aspect of African lives (Beinart and Dubow, 1995).

### **2.3.2 White labour**

Most interpretations of segregation emphasise the perceived economic threat to white workers posed by rapid African urbanisation - especially as mine owners were becoming increasingly anxious to replace skilled workers with semi-skilled whites, or even blacks. In response, skilled workers (mainly English) changed the old craft unions to industrial unions, whilst emphasising the need for job reservation for whites, mobilising the interests of white workers on the basis of race rather than craft (Callinicos and Rogers, 1977).

In 1924, the Hertzog, the Prime Minister of the newly formed 'Pact Government' (a political alliance of white agriculture and labour), replaced Smuts, and committed a major share of the surplus from the mines towards white interests. The Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924, gave considerable rights to white labour, whilst denying African workers the power to form registered trade unions. Overall, the state, was intent on favouring the white constituency, which although poor had the vote (Callinicos and Rogers, 1977).

Nevertheless, throughout the late 1930s and 40s, the government's policy increasingly came under criticism from business wanting cheaper, more mobile black labour, and liberal whites opposed to discrimination. Moreover the rapid urbanisation and industrialisation, fostered by the second world war, served to intensify industrial and political resistance from Blacks and 'coloureds'. The Council for Non-European Trade unions (CNETU) formed in 1941, and claiming 158,000 members in 119 unions by 1945, managed to organise a massive strike of over 75,000 African mineworkers in 1946 (Finnermore and van der Merwe, 1990). Further developments of the squatters' movements and bus boycotts, led to the beginnings of the alliance of African, 'coloured' and Indian political movements. This in turn engendered the mass political demonstrations and the emergence of the militant African intellectuals (Wolpe, 1972). For the English-dominated large-scale capital (particularly mining) the solution to the threat, implicit from growing African militancy, was to alter the structure of segregation in favour of Africans (Wolpe, 1972).

## **2.4 CONSOLIDATION OF THE APARTHEID STATE: 1948-1960s**

It was largely due to the developments in the labour field and the fears of conservative white workers, that the National Party was elected to power in 1948. Thereafter the ideology of apartheid (Afrikaans word for separation) and the implementation of racial divisions would intensify. For some, apartheid simply represented a mere elaboration of earlier segregationist measures; for others, so great was the intensification of segregationist ideology that it was considered qualitatively different - some even likened it to fascism (Bunting, 1969).

The National Party (NP) represented the old alliance of white agriculture and white labour reinforced by the rising Afrikaner urban bourgeoisie (Finnermore and van der Merwe, 1990). Over the next two decades it used the power of the state to increase the status of the Afrikaner over English speaking whites, and reinforced the racial controls to protect white labour, agriculture and small business against competition from blacks. Yet, apartheid also required a framework of protection to safeguard its implementation. An enormous state bureaucracy developed to create and promote import-substitution industries, and controls over both capital and labour (Lipton and Simkins, 1993).

A crucial aim of the policy was to extend the migrant labour system to the African working class as a whole; henceforth all Africans were to exist as temporary workers in urban areas and cities. The 'modernisation' of the pass laws under the Natives (Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents) Act (1952), and the establishment of labour bureaux were used to direct African workers to where white employers required them. The Group Areas Act (1950) gave the government sweeping powers to remove black people from their homes and expropriate their property. The limited rights which Africans and 'coloureds' had previously won were abolished. The revision of old and the introduction of new repressive laws (The 1950 Suppression of Communism Act, and 1962 Sabotage Acts), made it illegal to organise any type of opposition. Moreover, under the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act (1953), strikes were illegal for Africans, with no recognition of their trade unions (Wolpe, 1972; Callinicos and Rogers, 1977; Riley, 1991).

#### **2.4.1 The Homelands (Bantustans)**

Government policy in the rural reserves had also undergone a change, culminating in the programme of self-development. The newly established reserves, renamed the Homelands and known as Bantustans, were now to be given independence as sovereign nations, and controlled by their own self-governing tribal authorities. In reality, the crumbling economies of the African reserves were incapable of sustaining the local population and remained effectively South African colonies (Callinicos and Rogers, 1977; Callinicos, 1988).

Significantly, the ideological shift from white supremacy to self-determination in the Homelands was also accompanied by a change in the ideology of race. Previous NP ideology had used biological inferiority of Africans as the justification for its racist policies; now it stressed the ethnic differences, emphasising the notion of 'different but equal', and replacing race with terms like 'nation'. This was important, because the ideology of racial inferiority was incompatible with the attempts to set up the complex machinery of government and administration needed to institutionalise relations between the state and the reserves, and to carry out certain administrative functions necessary for the continual development of a cheap labour force (Wolpe, 1972).

## 2.4.2 Black resistance in 1950s and 1960s

The Nationalist electoral victory had a radicalising effect on many black political groups. The 1950 Suppression of Communism Act, led to the arrest of large numbers of trade unions, and political activists. The subsequent political mobilisation involving several stay-aways (stay-at-home protests) and defiance campaigns by the ANC, the SAIC (South African Indian Congress) and the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) - formed in 1955 with close links to the ANC - intensified (Finnemore and van der Merwe, 1990). Of equal significance was the adoption by the ANC, and other groups, of the Freedom Charter in Kliptown in 1956. Its purposefully vague anti-capitalist rhetoric, setting out basic rights and freedoms, allowed the ANC to establish a loosely defined coalition, united around the single cause of dismantling apartheid (Murray, 1994).

In 1960 the Pan African Congress (PAC) - a black Nationalist organisation that had broken away from the ANC - launched a passive resistance to the pass laws. The South African regime responded by slaughtering African demonstrators at Sharpeville and Langa. In Sharpeville Police opened fire on 20,000 protesters, killing 67 people and wounding 186. The great national 'stay aways' that followed were crushed by the government's state of emergency. Attempts by the ANC to reciprocate by forming its own armed wing, Umkonto we Sizwe, (Spear of Nation) (MK), was a disaster. The MK leadership - Mandela, Sisulu and Mbeki - were captured in 1963 and given life sentences, causing resistance to virtually disappear during the 1960s as surviving activists fled into exile (Finnemore and van der Merwe, 1990; Callinicos and Rogers, 1977).

More especially, despite international criticism, South Africa's recovery from the Sharpeville crisis was swift as the nationalist regime went on to preside over the biggest boom in South Africa's history. Fuelled by a massive influx of foreign capital, the economic expansion was used to enrich the white population and finance the construction of the most powerful military machine in Africa (Finnemore and van der Merwe, 1990; Callinicos and Rogers, 1977; Spence, 1999).

## **2.5 APARTHEID IN THE 1970s**

By the 1970s the position of whites in South Africa, especially the NP's Afrikaans constituency, had been transformed to one of prosperity and stability. However, a succession of blows were about to strike the South African rulers, and challenge their complacency. Particularly symbolic were the widespread strikes by black workers in 1973, which erupted in Durban and spread to other centres, bringing industry to a standstill. No trade unions were involved, and employers anxious to negotiate, could identify no leaders (Finnemore and van der Merwe, 1990).

Equally momentous were the events on June 16th, 1976 when students, protesting against the compulsory use of the Afrikaans language in schools, took to the streets of Soweto - the vast township outside Johannesburg. The South African Police reacted by mowing the demonstrators down; the first victim was thirteen year old Hector Peterson. As a consequence, Police brutality turned the demonstration into a riot, which lasted for over a year (Callinicos, 1988). After Soweto it became increasingly difficult for the state to contain protest and insurrection; a culture of opposition emerged shaped by the black consciousness movement (with inspiring leaders like Steve Biko), and the industrial militancy of the independent trade unions (Beinart and Dubow, 1995).

### **2.5.1 Black trade union movement in the 1970s**

It was the rise of the independent trade unions in the seventies that seriously threatened the hegemony of the apartheid state (Callinicos, 1992a; Andrew Levy Associates (ALA), 1993-4). The increasing militancy from the black population eventually forced concessions from the white state - resulting in the scrapping of the job colour bar in the late 1970s, the recognition of black trade union rights in 1979 and the easing of controls over mobility (Callinicos, 1988).

Nevertheless, in the 1970s the formal industrial relations system continued to offer little to the majority black workers in South Africa. The main labour legislation - the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924 (substantially amended in 1956)<sup>1</sup> - underpinned the collective bargaining process, providing a statutory structure of industrial councils, conciliation

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<sup>1</sup> The original Industrial Conciliation Act was passed in 1924. Further significant amendments were made in 1956. In 1981 major changes were implemented and the name of the Act was altered to the Labour Relations Act of 1956 (LRA). (Finnemore and van der Merwe, 1990)

boards and works councils, but Blacks remained excluded from such institutions on account of being denied the definition of 'employee', a pre-requisite for recognition under the legislation (Kraak, 1993; Luckhardt and Wall, 1980).

The industrial councils were the cornerstone of the system. Comprising of a registered trade union(s) (50% representation), and employers or employers' organisations (50%), they recognised only separate white, 'coloured' and Indian workers' organisations. They operated at a industry-wide level and negotiated wages, working conditions and other procedural issues. Agreements were legally binding on all parties and could be extended to non-parties, offering some protection to non-unionised workers in smaller companies (Finnermore and van der Merwe, 1990). Yet, African workers lack of formal recognition meant they could only really channel their grievances through factory-based works and liaison committees, established by the Bantu Labour Settlement of Disputes Act of 1953. After the Durban strikes, the Bantu Labour Relations Regulation Act (1973) allowed parties to agree legally binding contracts, but since the representatives on the committees were often appointed by management, they were usually boycotted by black workers in favour of their own more militant, unofficial unions (Kraak, 1993).

#### Wiehahn Commission 1979

The apartheid government, disturbed by the increasing levels of resistance, addressed these concerns by setting up the Wiehahn Commission in 1979. Recognising the lack of formal structures for negotiation with black workers as the problem, it recommended freedom of association for all, along with the abolition of job reservation (Finnermore *et al.*, 1990; Kraak, 1993). The government only adopted a few of its recommendations. Under the 1979 Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act, migrants and commuters were still to be excluded from the definition of 'employee'; registration of a new union would initially be provisional, and if constituted on non-racial lines, barred. More significantly the government retained severe restrictions on the right to strike, especially for those workers in essential services - including all central state and municipal workers (Kraak, 1993).

Some unions registered but most black unions refused, viewing the 1979 amendments as more concerned with control than reform. Moreover, despite the employers resistance to unregistered unions, the organisations began to flourish to a point where it

was no longer possible for the government or employers to ignore them. A major breakthrough came with the creation of FOSATU (Federation of South African Trade unions) in 1979, founded on principles of non-racial and industrial unionism, its emphasis was on democratic decision-making and shop floor steward organisation (Finnermore and van der Merwe, 1990).

### **2.5.2 Economic and political crisis in 1970s**

The popular insurgency and upsurge in trade union militancy also developed against the backdrop of an increasingly serious economic crisis. 1973 was the year when the long world boom of the 1960s came to an end. South Africa, was profoundly affected by the international recession that followed, especially as Western investors withdrew their support fearing their economic interests would be damaged beyond hope of recovery (Spence, 1999). Furthermore, the cushion of white settler colonial states around its boundaries was beginning to collapse. A coup in Portugal in 1974 led to the collapse of Portugal's colonial empire in Africa: Angola and Mozambique; and settler rule in Zimbabwe was abolished in 1979. Such events, along with the growing militancy of its black population, fuelled the Nationalist government's paranoia that Communists were engaged in a 'total onslaught' against the Republic (Callinicos and Rogers, 1977; Spence, 1999).

## **2.6 APARTHEID IN THE 1980s**

It was in the 1980s that the greatest crisis was to emerge. The various elements - political reform, economic instability, township rebellion and working-class militancy - all came together in September 1984 to precipitate the greatest wave of mass resistance to white rule in South African history. Student and community organisations joined with political groups and unions to openly mobilise against apartheid. The community-based organisation, the UDF (United Democratic Front) became the driving force behind a national campaign: formed in 1983 it was a non-racial political organisation, broadly sympathetic to the aims of the ANC (Kraak, 1993). For nearly two years the country was shaken by township rising, far greater than 1976, and all the more threatening because they were accompanied by mass strikes mounted by the growing movement

of independent unions. The most important of these united in 1985 under the federation, COSATU (Congress of South African trade unions).

### **2.6.1 Black trade union movement in 1980s**

By the early 1980s, employers throughout the country had been subjected to sustained shopfloor pressure for recognition. Some employers recognised black unions, others became critical of the law that prevented them from doing so. In 1981 the government was forced to revise the legislation. The Industrial Conciliation Act, whose name was changed to Labour Relations Act, (but still dated 1956), gave full trade union rights to every worker and autonomy to unions in respect of membership, but still sought to limit industrial action outside of the formal bargaining machinery, by increasing penalties for illegal strikes (Kraak, 1993). The Act was further amended in 1982, replacing works and liaison committees with works councils. Nevertheless, it was still viewed as inadequate by African workers, chiefly because the new liaison committees had no legal rights - unlike the old works committees - to negotiate wages. Overall, the legislation failed to eradicate conflicts, mainly because reforms in industrial relations were not consistent with social divisions in wider society (Finnermore and van der Merwe, 1990; Kraak, 1993).

#### **Launch of COSATU (1985)**

On the 30th November 1985, a national union federation: the Congress of South African Trade unions (COSATU) was formed. The original discussions in 1981 had been impeded by opposing attitudes towards registering under the Labour Relations Act (Finnermore and van der Merwe, 1990). At the root of some unions' reluctance to register was the issue of non-collaboration with formal labour relations structures and commitment to worker's control. This was further complicated by political perspectives and the question of whether to participate in community politics by affiliating to the UDF (United Democratic Front) (Baskin, 1991).

At its launch in 1985, COSATU had acquired 500,000 members (450,000 paid up) making it the largest federation in South Africa. It included the former affiliates of FOSATU, the GWU (General Workers union), FCWU (Food and Canning Workers Union), CCAWUSA (Commercial Catering and Allied Workers union) and a small number of general and unaligned industrial unions. The largest affiliate was the

National Union of Miners (NUM) with 100,000 members. The new federations' principles were non-racialism; 'one-union, one industry'; worker control; representation on the basis of paid-up membership and co-operation between affiliates at national level (Kraak, 1993).

#### Political alignment of COSATU

Despite temporary set backs the trade unions grew in numerical strength. However, the federation's first three years were marked by a bitter internal dispute known as the 'workerist-populist' debate. It evolved around issues of political orientation and the future partnership with the ANC (Callinicos, 1988). 'Workerists' were those who focused narrowly on economic (wages and hours) issues. Tending to see apartheid as a mask concealing capitalist exploitation, 'workerists' still, according to Callinicos (1988), failed to grasp the significance of wider political struggles for working-class advancement. They rejected the ANC-SACP's, 'two stages' strategy' - which argued that national liberation was the necessary pre-requisite before the struggle for socialism could take place - and called instead for a socialist revolution at the same time as national liberation. Overall, the 'Workerists' aimed to build a strong, politically independent trade union organisation, whilst rejecting the need to prioritise the building of any political party. Conversely, the popularists or 'nationalists' concentrated on community struggles, contending that the proper place for the workers' movement was as part of a broad alliance, led by the ANC and concentrating on the national democratic struggle against apartheid (Callinicos, 1988; Baskin, 1991).

The 'workerist' led unions such as NUMSA (National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa) were from the beginning outnumbered by the 'populists', who were headed by the NUM (National Union of Miners). From the outset the 'populist' tendency insisted that COSATU affiliates swear allegiance to the ANC's Freedom Charter; the 'workerist' tendency countered with calls to endorse a Workers' Charter, placing questions of socialism squarely on the political agenda. When the Freedom Charter was adopted at the Congress in 1987 it was evident that the 'workerists' had lost and COSATU was symbolically identifying itself to the ANC (Murray, 1994). Over time, the growing ties between COSATU and the still-underground ANC and SACP, evolved into a functioning tripartite alliance (Lipton and Simkins, 1993).

## Union Organisation within COSATU

Throughout the 1980s, COSATU had managed to spearhead the growth and development of the progressive trade union movement, achieving remarkable success in expanding its membership, particularly among black semi-skilled and unskilled workers. The black trade unions were involved in three distinct areas, the workplace, the sectoral and national levels. At the local level, the struggle for the right to organise saw the evolution of independent trade unionism rooted in shop floor structures. Rank-and-file organisation not only won influence in the workplace, but later provided unions with the ability to influence economic and political events strategically (Catchpole, Stanworth and Winters, 1998). Nevertheless, where once plant-level bargaining was the means for building strength, COSATU centrally, now saw it as a dispersal of power leading to union difficulties in concentrating their forces. Although, many local shop stewards disagreed, the argument became less of an issue when employers opted for centralised bargaining in an attempt to minimise wage competition between companies and neutralise plant base activity (Kraak, 1993; Murray, 1994).

Consequently, from mid 1980s, the most powerful trade unions turned with increasing regularity toward centralized collective bargaining and participation in industrial councils to replace plant-level bargaining. In practice however, the South African industrial relations system was a bureaucratic maze, depending on voluntary participation within regional or local industrial councils, and rewarding disproportionately the strongly organised trade unions. In reality, it never truly matured into a coherent framework regulating industry wide, national collective bargaining (Murray, 1994). Nevertheless, the employers still felt the need to undermine it. By mid-1987, the employers changed tactics again arguing for the need to switch to local bargaining to match the newly emerging decentralised management styles. Attempts to destroy centralised bargaining were supported by the government, whose new 1988 Labour Relations Amendment Act (LRAA) intended to restrict the unions scope to mobilise, by outlawing solidarity action and allowing employers to sue unions for company losses. From this point on COSATU's position on centralised bargaining strengthened and became a core principle of the federation (Murray, 1994).

Equally at this stage, COSATU began concentrating its efforts politically at a national level. Events around the trade union resistance to the LRAA in 1988 served to draw

the national organisation into a greater political alliance with the ANC, with distinctions on the ground between unions and community organisations becoming increasingly blurred, as COSATU assumed leading roles vacated by banned organisations. In reality though, it was not really until the 1990s that the trade union movement actively sought to secure a voice for itself at a national level (Kraak, 1993).

### **2.6.2 Economic and political crisis in 1980s**

It was during this period - the 1980s - that the economic costs of preserving apartheid began to rise. The slow growth of the economy could be attributed to factors like the lack of a systematic exporting policy, costly state investment in "strategic" industry, inadequate provision of education and skills, and poorly functioning labour markets. These problems were further sharpened by sustained political resistance (Murray, 1994; Moll, 1993). Although, the state of emergency imposed by Botha in 1986 appeared initially to be effective, its success was short-lived. Moreover, political blundering and economic mismanagement during the 1980s eventually precipitated a severe crisis in South Africa's growing foreign debt, rendering the country vulnerable to international financial sanctions. Internal and external threats<sup>2</sup> drove South African businesses into a closer, though uneasy, working relationship with the government. Business used this leverage to press for reforms, first from Prime Minister B.J Vorster, then from Pres P.W.Botha, and when these proved inadequate, to lobby for their replacement (Callinicos, 1988; Lipton and Simkins, 1993).

By the end of the decade, apartheid was discredited. The response of the West to South Africa's unsteady business climate, namely capital flight and the cessation of international loans, had put further pressure on political elites to arrive at a possible alternative basis for their political legitimacy, especially as the increasing globalisation of capital, meant South African business was "losing out" on international inward investment "opportunities". The NP's intelligentsia was the first to recognise this; and so with the prospect of losing power, began to consider an alternative ideology to apartheid, namely the "free market" and a call for "rolling back of the state" (Lipton and Simkins, 1993). As a consequence, constraints were imposed on the state by the

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<sup>2</sup> Overseas banks, led by Chase Manhattan in New York, refused to roll over South Africa's external debts, and the US Congress, the Commonwealth and the European community passed a variety of sanctions packages.

promotion of privatisation, reduced levels of state expenditure, and the adoption of strict monetarist policy aimed at cutting inflation and tightening the money supply (Murray, 1994; Kibazo, 1994). It was inevitable that the public sector would be most affected by these changes, with the local authorities singled out for particular criticism, on the grounds of producing some of the most costly inequalities and structural deficiencies in the country. (Swilling and Boya, 1997).

### 2.6.3 The public sector in 1980s

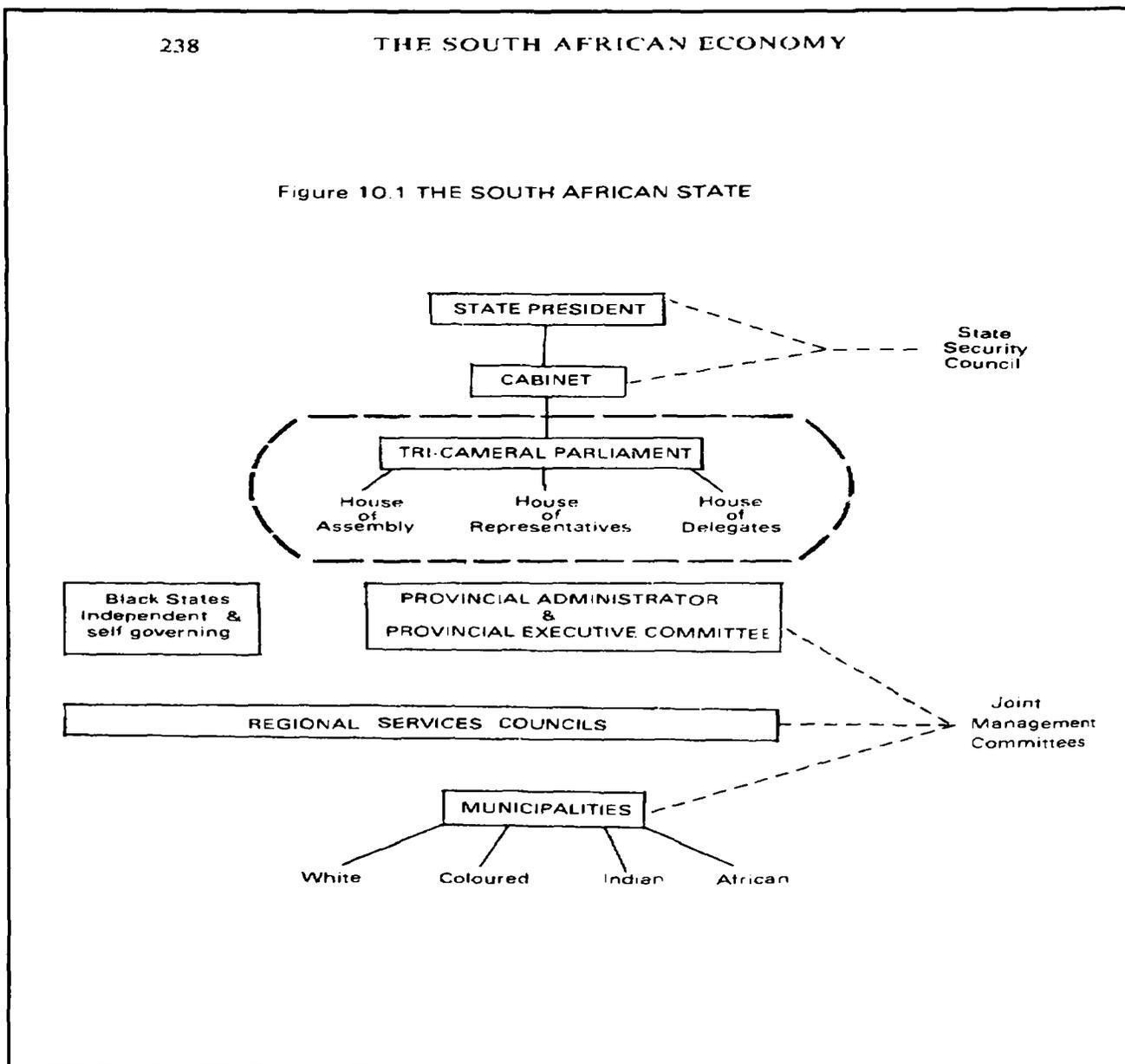
The public sector - a wide term describing the Public service<sup>3</sup>, Departments of Posts and Telecommunications, South African Transport Services, parastatal institutions and local authorities - had evolved into an extremely complex network of organisations. It operated at national, regional and local level, and included central, provincial and local government bodies, parastatals (autonomous bodies), public corporations, the bantustans (Homelands) and the security and apparatus of the state (SALB, 1990a). In 1984, the system had been made even more confusing by the introduction of a tricameral parliamentary form of government - consisting of a newly created 'White' House of Assembly, an 'Indian' House of Delegates and a 'Coloured' House of Representatives. All three had separate responsibility for what was known as "own affairs" (such as education, cultural matters, housing) - while "general affairs" (including defence and the budget) remained centrally determined. The responsibilities of governments of the black states fell somewhere between those of the provincial administrations and those of the central government (Nattrass, J, 1988; SALB, 1990a). Figure 2.1 summarises the overall structure of the Apartheid State.

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<sup>3</sup> The 'public service' is a narrower term describing the administration of Parliament, Provincial Administrations, and various government departments such as the Department of Justice, Department of Manpower, the various education departments, the South African Defence Force and the South African Police (SALB, 1990a).

Figure 2.1

STRUCTURE OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN APARTHEID STATE



Source: Nattrass, J 1988, p.238

The size of its total activities reflected the wide range of responsibilities the South African government held. The government was accountable for the maintenance of law and order, national defence, education, health care, payment of unemployment and pensions, the postal, telecommunications and road networks, the railways, harbours airways and power generation. In addition, it was heavily involved in the industrial sector, through the corporations producing iron, steel, chemicals, fertilisers, oil, coal and enriched uranium. Moreover, with different departments responsible for own-affairs (issues that affected individual race groups) and general affairs (issues that affected all race groups), the South African public sector emerged as a peculiar mixture of centralisation, regional deconcentration and devolution - with its structures fragmented along racial lines (Markham, 1987; Mc Lennan, 1997). The scope of its activities are summarised in Table 2.1 below.

**Table 2.1  
PUBLIC SECTOR ACTIVITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

<p><b>1) CENTRAL GOVERNMENT (First tier) general and own affairs:-</b></p> <p><b>i) General Affairs</b> - matters affecting all race groups (such as budgets and defence).</p> <p><i>examples of Departments:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Service Departments</b> (South African Police, Defence &amp; Correctional services)</li> <li>- <b>Civil Departments</b> (Foreign Affairs, Public Works, Finance, Manpower Transport &amp; justice)</li> </ul> <p><b>ii) Own Affairs</b> - matters affecting separate race groups. Including social services, recreational &amp; cultural facilities, health, education, housing, community development &amp; local government</p>
<p><b>2) PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION (Second tier)</b></p> <p>Four provincial administrations: <b>Cape, natal, Orange Free State, and Transvaal</b> rendered services on a regional level, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health,</li> <li>Roads,</li> <li>Community Development,</li> <li>Environment &amp; Local Government</li> </ul>
<p><b>3) TBVC (commonly known as the black homelands)</b></p> <p><i>Transki, Bophutatswan, Venda and Ciskei</i></p> <p>Rendered services in the black homelands, responsible for the administration of all affairs. Supposedly fully independent, but major proportion of their funds provided from Central Government</p>
<p><b>4) CIVIL SERVICES OF THE SELF-GOVERNING TERRITORIES</b></p> <p>included: <i>Gazabkulu, KaNgwane, KwaNdebele, Kwa-Zulu, Lebowa Qwaqwa</i></p> <p>Rendered services for the independent self-governing areas</p>
<p><b>5) LOCAL AUTHORITIES</b></p> <p>Rendered all local government services, included:</p> <p><b>City Councils or Municipalities, and Town councils,</b> (including white-controlled local authorities, black local authorities (BLA's) &amp; 'coloured' management cttees)</p> <p><b>Regional Service Councils (RSC),</b> replaced District Councils in 1987</p> <p>Other bodies operating at this level included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health cttes.</li> <li>Regional water service corps.</li> <li>Water boards,</li> <li>Mgt. cttes for smallholdings,</li> <li>Local govt. affairs council,</li> <li>Development &amp; services board &amp; mgt. boards of rural areas.</li> </ul>

<p><b>6) PARASTATAL INSTITUTIONS</b>  for example:  Council for Scientific and Industrial Research,  South African Bureau of Standards,  Human sciences Research Council</p>
<p><b>7) UNIVERSITIES &amp; TECHNIKONS</b></p>
<p><b>8) AGRICULTURAL MARKETING BOARDS</b></p>
<p><b>9) PUBLIC CORPORATIONS</b>  including:-  Transnet Ltd,  South African Post Office  Telkom.</p> <p>(N.B In fact any public enterprise in which the State has a majority interest)</p>

Source: adapted from CSS (1993b), P0251: **Employment and Salaries and Wages: Public Sector Statistical Release, Decembe, pp. 2-3; Heinecken, 1993, pp. 4-6.**

Overall, it was possible to conclude that the public sector was poorly co-ordinated - with apartheid making the demarcation of various functions of the public sector extremely difficult to organise (Markham, 1987; Mc Lennan, 1997). Indeed, such a complicated structure was highly bureaucratic with the separate departments' attempts to service the distinct race groups resulting in costly duplication (Bridgman, Palmer and Wolfgang, 1992).

**Local Authorities**

The local authorities were particularly perplexing, with the institutions and functions inevitably divided along race lines. Table 2.2 shows the three different types of local government in South Africa

**Table 2.2**  
**TYPES OF LOCAL AUTHORITY COUNCILS (1987)**

<b>Municipalities or city councils</b>	<b>Town or community councils</b>	<b>Regional Services Councils (RSCs)</b>
<p>Functions varied, usually provided similar services to the Town and Community Councils but on regional basis,</p> <p>i.e water supply, transport for the metropolitan area, electricity, fire &amp; ambulance services</p>	<p>health, refuse removal, sewage, parks and recreational security, water supply, electricity, protection services, fire-fighting ambulance services, traffic control, passenger transport</p>	<p>Prior to 1987 District Councils were responsible for municipal services' in areas outside the boundaries of cities and towns.</p> <p><i>RSCs (1987)</i>  <b>aims:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• rationalise the provision of services on a sub-regional basis.</li> <li>• channel funds into the physical development of poorer areas.</li> </ul>

Source: Adapted from Markham, 1987, pp. 89-90

The entire structure of the apartheid city was governed by the racial regulation of urban space, via the Group Areas Act (first introduced in 1950). The act empowered urban administrators to slice up the cities into four racial segments reserved exclusively for whites, Africans, 'coloureds' and Indians respectively. Each segment was then separately governed and administered by a different body of planning, municipal and administrative law (Swilling and Boya, 1997). Such a system was not only expensive but frequently inept. Even the more affluent white local authorities - such as the Johannesburg City Council (JCC), Durban City Council (DCC) and Cape Town City Council (CCC) - struggled to deliver adequate services to its poorer, black and 'coloured' residents.

### Pressure for reform

Whilst the National Party was painfully aware of the need to reform the public sector, it was only when faced with demonstrations, rent and rate boycotts and further unresolved financial crises in budgeting, that central government began to attempt to implement long-standing plans to restructure local government. A radical solution to the problems of local authorities and public sector organisation, was mooted in the mid 1980s, with the intention to introduce the free market into sections of the public sector. This represented a fundamental shift in the National Party's ideology, especially since its power base historically lay within the state sector, functioning essentially as the control mechanism for the apartheid system. Nevertheless, by the mid-1980s the party's intelligentsia began to realise that the economic costs of administering the public sector was spiralling out of control, and a restriction on public spending - with a reduction in public sector employment costs - seemed to be the only solution. (Moll, 1993; Murray, 1994).

## **2.7 THE 1990s: TRANSITION TO POST- APARTHEID STATE**

In 1990, the continuing economic and political crises resulted in Botha and his regime being replaced by de Klerk who instituted far-reaching reforms. He accepted the need for negotiations for a new political framework if South Africa was to avoid sliding into economic collapse - or even full-scale revolution. It is debatable what factors caused de Klerk's turn about, but pressures on several fronts - deteriorating trade, rising

unemployment figures, declining living standards, growing political unrest, costs imposed by international financial sanctions, change in the world order due to the collapse of state capitalism in the Soviet Union - must all be taken into account. When de Klerk moved into government, he inherited an economic recession with no end in sight and a fragile political stalemate, both of which imposed an unprecedented pressure on the political elites to find an alternative workable solution to South Africa's long-standing crisis (Murray, 1994; Catchpole, Stanworth, and Winters, 1998).

### 2.7.1 Trade Unions in the 1990s

At the beginning of the 1990s the black trade unions enjoyed one of the highest union densities in the world - at the end of 1993 almost 40% of all workers with jobs belonged to a union (Baskin, 1996)<sup>4</sup>. From the 1970s unionisation had grown dramatically with the National Manpower Commission estimating the membership increasing from 700,000, to approximately 3.4 million by the end of 1993 (Andrew Levy and Associates (ALA), Annual Report, 1993-4, p.5)

#### COSATU IN THE 1990s

In 1994, COSATU was the largest, mainly black trade union federation. There were at least five national union federations, but only three COSATU, NACTU and FEDSAL<sup>5</sup> were represented at the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC). Table 2.3 shows the share of union membership by national centre

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<sup>4</sup> This figure rises to 50% if one excludes agricultural workers and domestic service (Baskin 1996)

<sup>5</sup> COSATU was, and is unquestionably the single most important player, with its industrially based unions dominating most factory floors. NACTU, originally identified itself with the black consciousness movement, but in the early 1990s shifted its ideological position from one of blacks only, to that of working class leadership, worker control, and a non-affiliation to political parties. Although originally a whites only, white-collar union, FEDSAL attempted to change its image in 1993, by increasing its black and blue-collar membership. In 1994 efforts were made, for COSATU, FEDSAL and NACTU to form one federation, but the organizations failed to carry their constituencies with them.

**Table 2.3**  
**SHARE OF UNION MEMBERSHIP BY NATIONAL CENTRE (1994)**

Congress of South African Trade unions (COSATU)	43%
National Council of Trade unions (NACTU)	11%
Federation of SOUTH AFRICAN Labour Unions (FEDSAL)	8%
Other federations (including South African Confederation of Labour (SACOL), Federation of Independent Trade Unions (FITU) & unaffiliated unions	38%

Source: Baskin, 1996, p.9.

### Race, class and gender composition of COSATU

In 1985 at COSATU's launch, delegates were mostly urban African manual workers employed by the private sector, and migrant workers. There were few white delegates but all were union officials. This delegation reflected the membership, which tended to be black, occupying low-paid and less skilled jobs. They traditionally sought unionisation as a means of strengthening their bargaining power and expressing their social and political grievances (Baskin, 1991).

The racial and class character of the federation remained the same until the 1990s when mergers began to strengthen the non-racial character of COSATU. In particular, large numbers of 'coloured' and Indian workers in manufacturing and services were brought into the organisation. There was also a resurgence in white members joining unions during this period (Baskin, 1996). Although density for white males had never been substantially lower than blacks - due to the apartheid state's active encouragement of white unions – the further recent rise in white membership was probably linked to increased insecurity felt amongst white workers<sup>6</sup>. In essence, by the 1990s, whilst the majority of membership continued to be African, the racial mix began to mirror more closely South Africa's working class population (Andrew Levy and Associates (ALA)1992-4; Baskin, 1996). Table 2.4 outlines the percentage of unionisation by race in 1994.

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<sup>6</sup> Most whites, especially artisans and less skilled workers in the public service and parastatles, tended to join right-wing or house unions, but some openly elected to join black unions on the grounds that they were more effective. Clerical and lower level management positions who were increasingly coming under threat, particularly in the state sector, were also registering some interest in the more militant black trade unions (Baskin, 1996).

**Table 2.4**  
**UNIONISATION % BY 'RACIAL CATEGORY' (1994)**

Race	Total
Black	35.4
Asian	32.9
Coloured	30.3
White	22.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>31.3</b>

Source: Baskin 1996, p.12.

The membership in COSATU remained largely male, except for unions like SADWU (South African Domestic Workers Union) and CCAWUSA (Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union - now SACCAWU, (South African Commercial and Catering Allied Union)). With regard to gender there remained a lack of reliable data regarding trends <sup>7</sup>. Using early approximations presented by affiliates to COSATU's national women's seminar, Baskin suggested that women comprised approximately 36% of COSATU membership in 1990 (Baskin, 1991, p.371). The government's October Household Survey (CSS: OHS, 1995) suggested that women in 1994, comprised 29.1% of the overall union members - although the number was higher for black women with 36% <sup>8</sup>. Table 2.5 outlines the percentage of unionisation by race and gender in 1994.

**Table 2.5**  
**UNIONISATION % BY 'RACE AND GENDER' (1994)**

Race	Men	Women
Black	35.1	36.0
Asian	32.7	33.2
Coloured	29.5	31.5
White	26.9	16.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>32.4</b>	<b>29.3</b>

Source: Baskin, 1996, p.12.

Baskin (1991) reported that women workers in South Africa - unlike many other countries - were no less keen to join unions than men. Many were in the forefront of joining the black democratic unions, but whereas women tended to be amongst the most militant and dedicated members, they were usually to be found among the ranks of shop stewards rather than in the senior positions in the union. Consequently, despite determined attempts to introduce changes, the general status of women in the union,

<sup>7</sup> Most figures are estimates and can usually give only an indication of trends and patterns. For further discussion as to difficulties of obtaining reliable data see the methodology chapter.

<sup>8</sup> These figures included significant numbers of women in domestic service. This sector remains historically difficult to organise, with large sections remaining outside of the formal sector. If one excludes this sector, women and men had roughly an equal propensity to unionise (Baskin, 1996).

throughout the early 1990s, reflected their position in the South African economy and society. Women in all sectors performed the lowest-paid jobs, were often temporary, and more likely to be found in the informal sector. As a result their claims to triple oppression - as blacks, as workers, and as women - were justified, with their standing in the black community being as low as in the white society (Baskin, 1991; Mokgalo, 1995).

#### Affiliate membership of COSATU

At the end of the 1980s, COSATU affiliated trade unions were at the vanguard of the anti-apartheid movement. Ideologically, these unions embraced non-racialism, despised capitalism and apartheid and called for the revolutionary overthrow of the apartheid state. By the 1990s, such unions had established themselves as the core of South Africa's labour movement. Most sectors were dominated by a COSATU affiliate (Baskin, 1996). COSATU's long-term commitment was the principle of ten broadly-based industrial unions - with one industry one union. In 1985, there were 33 unions, by 1993, there were 15 (Mokgalo 1995; Andrew Levy and Associates (ALA), 1993-4). Table 2.6 shows the COSATU affiliated unions in 1993.

**Table 2.6**  
**COSATU- AFFILITATED UNIONS IN 1993.**

Union	Sector organised	Membership	Head Office
NUM	Mining & Energy	253,796	Jo`burg
NUMSA	Engineering, Motor, Auto Assembly	237,741	Jo'burg
SACTWU	Clothing, Textile	170,000	Durban
FAWU	Food & Allied	121,534	C`Town
NEHAWU	State, Health, Education and Welfare	40,565	Jo`burg
<b>SAMWU</b>	Municipal Workers	72,342	C`Town
SADWU	Domestic workers	16,172	Jo`burg
SADTU	Teaching	74,349	Jo`burg
SACCAWU	Service Industry Retail and Catering	102,234	Jo`burg
TGWU	Transport, cleaning, security	38,036	Jo`burg
PPWAWU	Printing, Pulp	37,951	Jo`burg
CWIU	Chemical, Petro-rubber	41,462	Jo`burg
POTWA	Communications	23,081	Jo`burg
SARHWU	Railways, Harbour	41,081	Jo`burg
CAWU	Construction	24,300	Jo`burg.

Source: adapted from COSATU Affiliates, ALA 1993/4, p.10.

### Public sector unions in COSATU

One sector that became increasingly important during this period was the public sector. COSATU organised the majority of public sector workers. In June 1986 members of the

South African Allied Workers union (SAAWU), the General and Allied Workers Union (GAWU) and two independent health workers' unions merged to form the National Education, Health and Allied Workers union (NEHAWU), with a membership of 9,000, they were to represent workers in the health and educational sectors. In October a second merger of public sector unions took place. The Cape Town Municipal Workers Association (CTMWA), the Municipal Workers Union (MWUSA) and members of the SAAWU, (South African Allied Workers union) and GWUSA (General Workers Union of South Africa) combined to form a new union, the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU), with some 17,000 members (Markham, 1987).

However, it was not until the early 1990s that public sector unionisation was able to register a real change in its growth . By this stage the sector included municipalities, local authorities, hospitals, educational institutions, telecommunications, and railways (ALA, Annual Report, 1993-1994) Table 2.7 shows the increase in membership of public sector affiliates in COSATU from 1991 - 1993

**Table 2.7**  
**MEMBERSHIP OF PUBLIC SECTOR AFFILITATES IN COSATU**  
**(1991 and 1993)**

COSATU affiliates	Membership 1991	Membership 1993
National Education Health & Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU)	18 110	40 565
Posts & Telecommunications Workers' Association (POTWA)	21 081	23 081
South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU)	60 304	72 342
South African Railways and Harbours' Workers Union (SARHWU)	36 243	41 018
South Africa Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU)	N/A	74 349

Source: ALA, Annual Report on Labour Relations in South Africa, 1993/4, p. 10

In 1993, the amalgamation of the public sector unions into one industrial union failed to materialise and COSATU was eventually forced to consider new strategies for the servicing and recruiting of the public sector unions. In essence, the public sector was rapidly acquiring a reputation for being a semi-marginalised "difficult" sector to control (ALA, 1993/4; The Shopsteward, 1995b).

Nevertheless, developments in the early 1990s in the public sector appeared to have opened up new "markets" for unionisation. In 1993, overall black union membership appeared to have reached a plateau and was stagnating - September 1993 figures reported that the COSATU membership had fallen slightly, from 1,267,252 in 1991 to 1,220,232 in 1993 - whereas the public sector membership began to grow at a rapid rate (see Table 2.7 above). In particular, public sector unions reported an increase in white-collar membership, especially as these - once secure - employees came under increasing threats from downsizing and retrenchments (ALA, 1993/4).

### COSATU'S political aspirations in the 1990s

It was during this period that COSATU increasingly attempted to shape macro-economic policy. As an organisation COSATU, had acquired positions on statutory bodies such as the National Training Board, National Housing, National Electricity, and the National Economic Forums (NEF) - it was its powers of mobilisation that had helped it to achieve such national presence. The Labour Accord (1990) - reached between COSATU and the Minister of Manpower at national level - had been swayed by COSATU's first three-day national 'stayaway' in May 1988 (involving 3 million workers on the first day). The agreements in this accord had paved the way for reversing the anti-union 1988 Labour Relations Amendment Act (LRAA), and included a commitment from government to consult labour - along with business - on key issues concerning them. Furthermore, COSATU's anti-VAT (Value Added Tax) campaign, with its nationwide marches and accompanying general strike (November, 1991) opposing taxes on basic foodstuffs etc., was often credited with bringing business to the negotiating table. It and providing the roots for tripartite forums such as NEDLAC (National Economic Development and Labour Council, a national forum for management, unions and Ministers) (Seftel, 1995; Catchpole, Stanworth and Winters, 1998).

More directly though - after the unbanning of the ANC and the SACP in May 1990 - the process incorporating COSATU into a triple alliance hastened. The move seemed to contribute to the federation's main aim of entering into a reconstruction accord with the ANC, in the hope of influencing the future national agenda. However, by 1993 political and economical changes, meant the situation had become a little more complex and COSATU was increasingly forced to evaluate its role in the tripartite alliance (Murray, 1994). In the 1980s the main task facing COSATU had been to organise and unite

black workers. The previous practice had largely been for trade unions to operate as a conveyor belt for the popular-nationalist organisations. But replacing the 'struggle for liberation' with the new aim of electing the ANC into government was not without its complications. By 1992 it was becoming increasingly difficult for COSATU to maintain the allegiance of its very diverse membership - with their very different occupational, social and political backgrounds - whilst actively campaigning for ANC votes. Moreover, some 'Militants' - radicalised during the 1970s and 80s and fiercely determined to guard their trade union independence - were quick to express their dissatisfaction, when COSATU announced its loss of twenty of its most experienced leaders to the ANC's national electoral list (Callinicos, 1992a; Murray 1994).

The COSATU leadership for its part, appeared to be moving away from an earlier belief in a system based on workers' control. A pattern was emerging in South African labour relations, more reminiscent of the accommodation between national leaders and capital, evident in parts of Europe in the 1970s. New union-employer social contracts were now being viewed as means, of shifting away from adversarialism in the workplace towards co-operation and partnership. Yet, paradoxically, such corporatist tendencies were taking place in a period of increased commitment to tight fiscal policies, privatisation, and a push for deregulated labour markets (Murray, 1994; Catchpole, Stanworth and Winters, 1998).

### **2.7.2 Economic and political changes in South Africa in 1990s**

The 1990s also brought economic changes. Already in the mid-1980s, it had been possible to identify alterations in the workforce structure, with a general African movement from unskilled to semi-skilled jobs. From 1965-1985, the number of unskilled manufacturing jobs declined from 300,000 to 200,000 while semi-skilled jobs doubled in number from 400,000 to 800,000 (Kibazo, 1994; Horwitz, 1995). Furthermore, new technology and long-term structural adjustments were mainly responsible for job losses in mining and manufacturing (Catchpole, Stanworth and Winters, 1998).

Of significance was the effects of the country's annual average growth - less than 1% over period 1983-94 - and much of it accounting for the general decline in formal sector employment. With over 5.5 million people unemployed or under-employed, this represented a figure of over 40% in some areas (Horwitz, 1995). The levels of unemployment were further exacerbated by the decreasing number of job opportunities

- 1.5 million new job seekers could not find work in the formal sector. With such high levels of unemployment, trade unionists in particular, had come to represent a declining group of relatively well paid workers, in relation to the growing masses of unemployed (Andrew Levy Associates (ALA), Report 1993/4, p5.).

More directly, since the early 1990s - economists had been predicting that any economic 'uptum' would not be accompanied by increased employment - that the process of jobless growth witnessed elsewhere would be visited upon South Africa also. Many companies were already introducing participative management' schemes such as Quality Circles, Just-in-time and Green Field Site Areas in the hope of securing flexible work patterns (Rogerson, 1993; Horwitz, 1995) A process, that had emerged in the 1980s, was beginning to accelerate in the early 1990s, with local managers actively by-passing shop stewards and pushing aggressive strategies of 'lean production', increased sub-contracting and casual working (Murray, 1994; Catchpowle *et al.* 1998.)

Interestingly, whilst national union officials were increasingly involving themselves in the principles of decision-making, team-work and co-determination with the newly 'reformed' employers, wholesale retrenchments were being threatened on the factory floor if the deregulated flexible work schedules failed to be agreed by the local workforce. These economic changes were further exacerbated by the ANC's seeming acceptance of the free-market ideology . In truth the ANC had begun to abandon its previous commitment to state intervention in the early 1990s, and by the time its 1992 draft policy guidelines (DPG) appeared, the ANC economic policy had become noticeably more business friendly. Little wonder then many black trade union activists were experiencing feelings of confusion and mistrust (Murray, 1994; Weekly Mail and Guardian (1996b); Catchpowle *et al.*, 1998).

### **2.7.3 Public sector in 1990s**

Such a shift in the economy - and a change in NP ideology away from state control and spending - was sure to have a major impact on public sector employment, especially as the state was the largest single employer in the country. CSS figures for June 1985, indicated that 1,413,892 were employed in this sector as opposed to 1,346,300 in manufacturing and 755,712 in trade and catering. By 1989, this figure had risen to approximately 1,684 million, and accounted for at least 15.6% of the economically active population (SALB, 1990a, p.78). However, by June 1993, when the numbers

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Of significance was the effects of the country's annual average growth - less than 1% over period 1983-94 - and much of it accounting for the general decline in formal sector employment. With over 5.5 million people unemployed or under-employed, this represented a figure of over 40% in some areas (Horwitz, 1995). The levels of unemployment were further exacerbated by the decreasing number of job opportunities

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More directly, since the early 1990s - economists had been predicting that any economic 'upturn' would not be accompanied by increased employment - that the process of jobless growth witnessed elsewhere would be visited upon South Africa also. Many companies were already introducing participative management' schemes such as Quality Circles, Just-in-time and Green Field Site Areas in the hope of securing flexible work patterns (Rogerson, 1993; Horwitz, 1995) A process, that had emerged in the 1980s, was beginning to accelerate in the early 1990s, with local managers actively by-passing shop stewards and pushing aggressive strategies of 'lean production', increased sub-contracting and casual working (Murray, 1994; Catchpowle *et al.* 1998.)

Interestingly, whilst national union officials were increasingly involving themselves in the principles of decision-making, team-work and co-determination with the newly 'reformed' employers, wholesale retrenchments were being threatened on the factory floor if the deregulated flexible work schedules failed to be agreed by the local workforce. These economic changes were further exacerbated by the ANC's seeming acceptance of the free-market ideology . In truth the ANC had begun to abandon its previous commitment to state intervention in the early 1990s, and by the time its 1992 draft policy guidelines (DPG) appeared, the ANC economic policy had become noticeably more business friendly. Little wonder then many black trade union activists were experiencing feelings of confusion and mistrust (Murray, 1994; Weekly Mail and Guardian (1996b); Catchpowle *et al.*, 1998).

### **2.7.3 Public sector in 1990s**

Such a shift in the economy - and a change in NP ideology away from state control and spending - was sure to have a major impact on public sector employment, especially as the state was the largest single employer in the country. CSS figures for June 1985, indicated that 1,413,892 were employed in this sector as opposed to 1,346,300 in manufacturing and 755,712 in trade and catering. By 1989, this figure had risen to approximately 1,684 million, and accounted for at least 15.6% of the economically active population (SALB, 1990a, p.78). However, by June 1993, when the numbers

employed fell to 1,636,207, there appeared to be evidence that an earlier 1986 state policy of freezing jobs in the public sector was starting to have an effect (CSS: PO251,1993a - Total figures used).

However, viewing the composition of the public sector in terms of overall quantitative figures is far too simplistic and fails to highlight the racial dimension of the state sector. Table 2.8 shows the racial breakdown of the public sector in December, 1993:-

**Table 2.8**  
**RACIAL BREAKDOWN OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR, Dec. 1993\***

Category	White	Coloured	Asian	Black	Unspecified	Total
General Affairs	147, 815	32,743	6, 512	179,266	1,991	368,327
Own Affairs	75,063	57,462	15,581	19, 600	--	167,706
Provincial Affairs	63,424	32,382	7,407	110,102	--	213,315
Self-Governing Territories	nil	nil	nil	261,003	--	216,003
Parastatals Institutions	7,050	1 150	137	9, 234	5,940**	23,511**
Agricultural Marketing Boards	1,289**	98**	58	495	--	1,940**
Public Corporations	87, 947	17,223	3,324	68,290	132, 231	309,015
Local Authorities	48, 599	36,403	7,321	80,403	45, 251	217,977
Universities/ Technikons	20, 542	3, 871	1,545	10,103	9, 838	45,899
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>451,729*</b>	<b>181, 332*</b>	<b>41, 885</b>	<b>738,496*</b>	<b>195, 251*</b>	<b>1, 608, 693*</b>

Source: CSS (1994b) P0251: Employment and Salaries and Wages , Public Sector Statistical Release June, pp. 5-16.

n.b. CSS full-time equivalent figures used.

-- = data not available

\* = revised figures

The figures indicated that blacks dominated in all areas of the public sector, yet the distribution and location of the power was far from proportional to their size. Although, Blacks were the largest racial group in the public sector in 1993 - approximately 48% of the staff were 'Africans', 36% were whites, 11% were coloureds and 3% were Indians - they were still disproportionately represented in skilled and managerial

positions, especially in comparison to whites. For example, whites ritually held the most senior positions in the public sector: of the top 3,239 public servants in 1991, only 4.5% were non-white, of which 0.6% were black (Mc Lennan, 1997, p.101). More especially throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, the public sector continued to be largest employer of white labour : a third of all whites were engaged in state employment, and over half - the majority of Afrikaners - were employed by the state. Consequently, any serious attempt to reduce jobs in the public sector would have affected the white, especially the Afrikaner community, disproportionately. Since the apartheid government obtained the majority of its support from these groups, any significant downsizing of public sector jobs, especially in the crucial months leading up to the election, would have been political suicide for the National Party. It was for this reason that the state`s intentions to commercialise the public sector appeared - on closer scrutiny - to have been largely rhetorical. Table 2.9 shows that the public sector employment figures from June 1993 to Mar 1994 remained in reality, fairly constant.

**Table 2.9**  
**TOTAL NUMBER OF WORKERS EMPLOYED IN THE**  
**PUBLIC SECTOR (June 1993-Mar 1994)**

	June 1993	Sept. 1993	Dec. 1993	Mar 1994
Total Number of Workers	1 636 207	1 631 652	1 633 452	1 630 192

Source : CSS (1994a) ` P0251: Employment and Salaries and Wages - Public Sector Statistical Release March , p.16. \* Based on revised figures

## **2.8 1994 ELECTION - THE NEED FOR CHANGE.**

On the 27th April a new interim Constitution replaced the existing constitution of 1984. It ushered in the Government of National Unity (GNU), which was to run until the finalisation of the national constitution by the Constitutional Assembly, in 1999. From 1994 the Republic of South Africa (RSA) was to have three Government Capitals: Pretoria(administrative), Cape Town (legislative); Bloemfontein (judicial). Central government (first tier ) was to consist of the following (Table 2.10):

**Table 2.10**

**STRUCTURE OF CENTRAL GOVERNMENT IN THE 'NEW' SOUTH AFRICA**

<p><b>1) Executive branch -</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Chief of state and <i>Head of government</i> - Executive President (Mandela) and</li><li>• 2 <i>Deputy Executive Presidents</i> (Mbeki &amp; De Klerk)</li></ul>
<p><b>2) Legislative branch:</b> of government consisting of:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>The National Assembly</b> - 400 seats (200 from regional lists proportional to population and 200 from a national list)</li><li>• <b>Senate</b> members nominated by the 9 provincial parliaments</li></ul>

Source: adapted from Election 94, Argus, 2nd May, 1994c, p.2.

The second tier of government was the *Provincial Parliaments* - there were to be nine administrations (Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Northern Cape, Eastern Transvaal, PWV, Northern Transvaal, North-West, Kwazulu-Natal, and Orange Free State), to replace the previous four provincial administrations (Cape, Transvaal, Natal, Orange Free State), the four homelands (Bophuthatswana, Ciskei, Transkei, Venda) and the six independent states (Gazankulu, Kangwane, KwaZulu, Lebowa, QwaQwa). The provinces were to enjoy exclusive powers and effectively rule themselves. Its powers were to include making laws affecting agriculture, education, the environment, health, housing, local government and provincial police, transport, regional planning, tourism, trade and industrial development (Argus, 1994b; Argus, 1994c). The third tier was to be local government. If the national and provincial tiers of government were to create the structures to facilitate sustainable growth, then local government was to deliver the mechanism for improvements in housing, health care and infra-structural development. In July 1993, the Local Government Negotiating Forum (LGNF) published its recommendations - transition would take place in three phases: the pre-interim phase would replace the existing local authorities with nominated, but more representative, local government structures; the interim phase would take place after the 1995 local elections for transitional local government; and phase three, the final local government dispensations, would be implemented after the adoption of South Africa's final constitution by the Constituent Assembly in 1996 (Pycroft, 1997).

### 2.8.1 The `New' Public sector structure

The New South African (NSA) public sector was to offer the prospect of greatest change. Issues regarding the role of the public sector in civil society, the nature of participatory democracy, local accountability, the management of human resources, and affirmative action programmes all had to be addressed. Public servants would no longer be permitted to act solely in the interests of the white minority - there was to be fundamental realignment of the apartheid bureaucracy. Its basic orientation would no longer be one of control, but democratic representation and political accountability. These changes would necessitate a complete reversal in the form and style of service delivery and a reorganisation of the racial composition of the sector (Reddy and Bendix, 1993).

`Unbundling' the apartheid public sector with its various homeland and central components was to prove one of the most complicated tasks facing the New South Africa (NSA). The new Public Service Commission (PSC) and its Administration Minister, Zola Skweyiya had the task of repealing no fewer than 21 laws, including a host of Public Service Acts, in order to dismantle the old apartheid public sector and the homelands administration. Restructuring was to be complicated by the need to integrate a series of racially and ethnically defined departments and services into either national or provincial or local departments, with consolidated service outputs and employment practices. The human resource management implications were immense. The transfer of staff and administration powers to the newly established provincial government, would entail a costly harmonisation of terms and conditions of employment between the centre and the regions (Ryan, 1994). From the beginning this task implied a battle over resources, between existing and new departments and the different levels of government (Mc Lennan, 1997).

#### Local government in the NSA

It was the issue of local government, a strategic part of the public sector which was of interest here. Its transformation went to the heart of the expectations raised in black households, but its reorganisation was to prove an imposing task. No other case could be found where a national-level constitutional transition had been accompanied by complex local-level transition (Swilling and Boyd, 1997). In theory, the emergence of organised local government gave the individual municipal worker and township resident

a voice and afforded them the opportunity to participate in the national and provincial political areas. In reality the sector was in crisis with some municipalities already close to financial collapse. Much of this was due to the design of the old structures, but the reorganisation and amalgamation strains had also taken their toll. In many municipal areas, particularly the rural areas, the population was simply too small, with little economic activity to be financially viable. The tax base was insufficient, the residents too poor, and debts too immense to allow the municipalities to raise sufficient money to function effectively (Swilling and Boyd, 1997).

## **2.9 CONCLUSION**

Chapter three furnishes a historical background to the subsequent case study. The account of the historical development of the apartheid state, had shown that the system of apartheid was not simply a racist ideology, but a doctrine which - for many decades - sustained and reproduced the segmented social relations within a capitalist framework of production (Wolpe, 1972). For that reason, the election of Nelson Mandela, the repeal of the apartheid legislation, the enfranchisement of the majority, all appeared to signal, in 1992, a fundamental shift in the trajectory of South African history (Murray, 1994).

However, the ANC's apparent failure to construct a socio-economic restructuring programme independent of the existing world-wide capitalist system was already forcing them to comply with the conventions of the market-driven doctrine. As a consequence, the twin objectives of restoring business confidence and attracting foreign investment were now beginning to dominate. Nevertheless, the ANC was not solely a political party, it had pledged itself to a coalition - a formal tri-partite alliance - with the SACP and COSATU, and so this noticeable paradigm shift in socio-economic discourse and policy discussions, had major implications for its partners, especially COSATU.

The historical struggles of South Africa's trade unions had provided for its members unprecedented rights in the post-apartheid era. Unions crushed in the 1960s, re-emerged in the 1970s and 80s and managed to secure a role for themselves in the workplace and broader anti-apartheid movement. Many shop stewards were politicised

by the specific historical circumstances of the struggle and managed to pose a serious challenge to local managerial control and the political domination of the apartheid regime. The black unions of the 1990s owed much to this shop floor militancy which almost certainly contributed to the high union density - significant even by international standards (Baskin, 1996).

It was the development of such a strong labour movement from 1970-1990s - and COSATU's political alliance with the ANC and the SACP - which explained why the post-apartheid government could not simply ignore the black trade unions. More notably, it clarified why the ANC were forced to implement a formal, conciliatory system of industrial relations – beneficial to the trade unions - alongside its free market policies of work intensification, deregulation and privatisation. Such a model was highly contradictory, and despite the emergence of a 'union friendly' employee relations culture, the broader issue of COSATU's relationship with the ANC - and what it would mean in practice to share a tripartite alliance with the 'new' government - was beginning to surface in 1992.

The public sector had become a focus for much of this confusion and dissent. The sector had historically been used to maintain and perpetuate the apartheid state, but its high cost and notoriously inefficient organisation made it a prime target for free market restraint and cutbacks. Yet, the issue of adequate financing - particularly for local government (a strategic part of the public sector) - went to the very heart of fundamental change for many black people. Thus a reluctance on the part of a newly liberated black government to fund this sector, was emerging as a source of conflict between the 'new' state and the public sector unions.

To enable a fuller evaluation of these issues the next chapter provides a theory of the state and trade unions. The following theoretical framework, developed on the basis of a critique of the existing progressive literature, will then be used to aid an empirical examination of the Western Cape branch of the public sector union, SAMWU, which in turn will help further the conceptual understanding of the state and trade union

# Chapter 3

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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### 3:1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to establish a theoretical framework which can be used to aid the exploration of the empirical data of the SAMWU branch in Cape Town, whilst concurrently advancing the theoretical understanding of the relationship between the state and public sector trade unions in South Africa. Accordingly, the analysis centres on an comprehension of the state, the trade unions and capitalism in South Africa. The Marxist method of historical materialism is used to explain the mode of their changing relationship, with conflict and contradiction being viewed as integral to the process, and therefore central to the overall discussion (Ferner, 1988).

The discussion of the *state*, using a Marxist perspective helps to assess the class position of the ANC government and analyse its relationship with the South African trade unions. The analysis is presumed important because it reveals the state's autonomy from global capital and denotes its freedom to adopt policies that favour trade unions (labour), as opposed to the employers (capital). The transformation of the South African public sector is seen as an integral part of this process because of the structural, organisational and workforce changes that had taken place within it, both before and after the 1994 election. As a rule, government ideology and its subsequent policies are applied stringently in the state sector, owing to the Government's desire and ability to 'set an example'. As part of the state: the public sector's logic of action, and the functioning of its industrial relations, can be understood in terms of the place it occupies within the state structure.

The *trade unions* are also considered fundamental to the discussion. In the 1992-97 period, the South African state was being confronted by a powerful labour movement, perceived as a branch of the newly emerging South African civil society. Traditionally used to open conflict with the state and employers, the post-apartheid trade unions were experiencing a period of containment. The state and business were being forced, in the short-term at least, to accept compromise with labour by engaging in corporatist experiments designed to contain any major resistance to the

system. Such reformist arrangements ran contrary to prevailing world-wide economic trends, but appeared essential if the ANC was to secure the mediating role of the unions, and maintain its legitimacy with the black electorate.

In addressing these issues, the following sections of the chapter firstly explains the theory of historical materialism, the conceptual framework which guides the overall analysis within the dissertation. Secondly, the author elects to use the materialist approach contained within the state derivation theory - in preference to other radical analyses - to explain the nature of the state. And, while support for the theory is not uncritical, it is initially applied to the 'real world' of South Africa, with particular emphasis on apartheid and the subsequent adoption of free-market policies in the post-apartheid public sector. Thirdly, the Marxist analysis of historical materialism - as developed by Gramsci - is used to explore the nature of trade unions. It explains the notion of civil society and collective consciousness, whilst highlighting the role of trade unions within this framework, and their direct contribution to the development of a class consciousness. The account ends with an examination of the trade union tactics of strike and conciliation in South Africa; the aim being to explore the contradictory behaviour of trade unions within civil society, and assess the seemingly inconsistent policies – corporatism and free market - of the ANC government.

### **3.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: HISTORICAL MATERIALISM**

The Marxist method of historical materialism is used to explain the process of social change in the relationship between the state and public sector trade unions in South Africa from 1992-97. The dissertation takes a materialist approach to the subject and perceives capitalism as comprising not of 'things' but of 'relations'. The central insight of historical materialism is that in the final analysis all history depends on the production of the necessities of life; that every advance in the effectiveness of the production alters the social relations between people and their ideological and political circumstances (Callinicos, 1983).

For Marx, material production is identified as the dynamic in society that moves the relations and society in a specific direction, since such a force is perceived as having the tendency to achieve cumulative development on its own. For example, the output of material production is wealth or resources - it is this which allows lives to be free

from material deprivation. The desire for such an outcome provides the momentum for new forces of production to develop (tools, machines, access to raw material), which can increase the output of labour, produce more profits, and create the desired wealth. But, since production is organised socially, the process also entails adopting new ways of working, with humans finding new methods of relating to each other. Initially, these changes are so small they are barely noticed, but as they continue they bring about a qualitative change in the whole of the social structure. In sum, changes in the way material production takes place, leads to changes in the relations of society in general (Harman, 1998)

To expand, however, such a process is not conflict free. In developing a theory of historical change, Marx interpreted Hegel in a radical way, using the dialectical critique of positivism (or enlightenment rationality) as a means of explaining the changes taking place in society (Harman, 1998). The method involved three principles: *totality, change and contradiction*. Each of these on their own do not constitute a dialectical approach; they only become dialectical when they are taken together (Cooper, Smith, Taylor and Catchpowle, 2000; Callinicos, 1983).

The method views all *change* in society as being generated by the *contradictions* internal to that system. *Change* is not the same as the 'cause and effect', commonly found in positivist theorising, this usually entails pure description and fails to explain the how or why. This approach seeks to find the cause of change within the system - the cause is seen as internally generated, the result of *contradictions* internal to the system (Rees, 1998; Callinicos, 1983).

The main depiction of this contradiction under capitalism, can be found in the mutual but exploitative relations between the opposing classes of 'labour and capital' - a relationship of a 'unity of opposites'. For Marx, society was comprised of these 'unity of opposites', it was the historical development of the struggles of these 'opposites' which creates change from one form of society to another. Under capitalism each class is dependent on each other, yet only exists in its antagonistic relationship to the other. Capital is inseparable from wage-labour, since the latter creates the profits which capital lives off, but it is also an exploitative relationship because one class exploits another opposing class (Cooper *et al*, 2000; Callinicos, 1983).

Such a *contradictory* relationship cannot be understood in isolation. The notion that society forms a whole and its change can only be understood historically is central to the Marxist theory of dialectical materialism. The dialectical method means taking a holistic approach to changes in South Africa and analysing all the parts and *all* the relations of that system. We need to view the complete picture, the '*totality*', over a period of time, and in the course of historical development, to be able to fully explain the actions of states and labour in South Africa during this period (Callinicos, 1999). In sum, the dialectical method contained within the theory of historical materialism is essentially what guides the overall analysis contained within the thesis. Within that framework we now turn initially to the debate concerning the nature of the state

### **3.3 THE STATE**

In order to understand and explain the actions of the ANC government during the 1994-7 period, the *class* nature of the state is examined. The progressive theoretical literature associated with the 'theory of the state', provides a useful means of assessing the states independence and appraising whether the corporatist policies being implemented by the ANC government in 1994 would benefit the labour movement.

#### **3.3.1 State derivation debate**

The research gives priority to the work of the state derivation theorists (Bonefield and Holloway, 1996; Burnham, 1991; Burnham, 1996; Burnham, 1997; Burnham 2001; Clark, S, 1988; Clark, S 1991; Holloway 1996; Holloway and Picciotto, 1977; Holloway and Picciotto 1980), who develop a materialist not an economic hypothesis of the state. The political superstructure of the state is not viewed as separate from its economic base, but rather the economic and the political are both forms of social relations, assumed by the basic relation of class conflict in a capitalist society. This is in keeping with Marx's ideas that the economic categories are the abstractions of social relations of production (Marx and Engels, Collected Works, 1975, vi. 165). The basis of the material 'real world' is the class conflict found in the relationship of production assumed by the 'employers - owners of the means of production' - on the one hand, and 'workers - sellers of labour power' - on the other (Callinicos, 1983).

## Economic and political divide

The 'state derivation' theorists (Burnham 1996; Holloway, 1996; Holloway and Picciotto, 1980), disagree fundamentally with the traditional belief that the political superstructure is a reflection of the economic base. They particularly criticise the economic determinist view of Yaffe and Bullock (1975): who see the superstructure as a reflection of the base, and reject the supposition that economics and politics are separate. Such a determinist approach sees limitations imposed on state action by nature of its relation to the process of accumulation. By focusing exclusively on one aspect of these limitations, namely that state expenditure represents a deduction from total social surplus value, Yaffe and Bullock (1975) propose that the state is restricted by the competing claims of private capitals on that surplus value, which must be met if accumulation is to continue. Within these limits, the determinist school assumes the state acts rationally in the interest of capital. However, the state derivation theorists claim such an 'economic determinist' approach remains limited, because the argument fails to explain why individual states periodically take actions which do not appear to be in the interests of capital (Holloway and Picciotto, 1980, p.13); for example a number of post-war European governments adopted corporatist policies, that could be construed as giving labour rather than capital a greater 'voice' in the managing of the national economy (Palmer, 1983).

'Separate superstructure' theories of the state.

The 'state derivation' theorists view can also be distinguished from the more common view of 'the state as a separate superstructure' (Holloway and Picciotto, 1980: pp 3-10). Pre-capitalist societies regarded political power as overtly tied to class rule, with political rights being restricted to members of economically and socially privileged groups. Unlike the aristocracy of feudal time, the capitalist class is in the first instance an economic class whose position does not automatically accord political power. This helps to explain the general acceptance of a political and economic divide in society (Hyman, 1975).

Such theories (often associated in the U.K with the journal, *New Left Review*) see the state as possessing a separate superstructure to the economic base, and being external to the capitalist economic system. Miliband (1973, 1983), argued an 'instrumental' view of the state, it being tied to the capitalist class only because its leading personnel comes from the same group as the owners of private capital. The

state may develop historically to provide the political prerequisites for capitalist production (police, services, etc.), but is distinct from the system itself. This separation was used to argue for the autonomy governments have, and explained why state actions may not always be in the interests of capitalism.

Poulantzas (1969, 1972, 1978) equally viewed the state as a separate superstructure, but challenged Miliband on the grounds that the state's character was greater than those who controlled its top structures. Poulantzas took a 'functional' view of the state: it fulfils the needs of the society of which it is part; and since this is a capitalist society, it is a capitalist state. As a function of that society, a change in that system would mean it could still find expression through the state. Poulantzas argued that the state was not just called upon to meet the needs of capitalist accumulation; but to also maintain stability in a class-divided society by being a 'symbol of legitimacy' for all groups. The notion led to the concept of 'relative autonomy', driven directly from the dual functions of the state - the securing of accumulation and legitimisation. Legitimacy being possible only if the state was seen as separate from the direct control of capital (Ferner, 1988).

Harris(1986) also developed the thesis that the state was separate from capital. Whereas, capitalism was viewed as global, being free to pursue profits without being restricted, the state was seen as a geographically based political entity, whose confines cut across the operations of individual capitals. Capitalism may have originally grown up within a particular nation state, but now operates within any states(s) willing to accommodate its needs (Harman, 1991). Nevertheless, whereas the nation state was once a necessary instrument for one stage of capitalist development - a superstructure essential to capital accumulation - this did not imply the state was about to decline. Instead there has been a redefinition of the state, with its bureaucracy remaining and developing interests of its own (Harris, 1996, p169). These interests invariably include a nation state striving to maintain a balance of class interests, attracting capital, building up its military strength; or more notably using its national boundaries to restrict trade in a way, which at times, proves irrational to capitalism.

However, whilst it is possible to be critical of Yaffe and Bullock - considering it necessary to consider other limitations on state action than just state expenditure - it is equally possible to query the 'state as a separate superstructure' claim. Writers such as Zeitlin (1985), question the 'relative autonomy' of the state on the grounds

that if such an autonomy was authentic there would be nothing to prevent individual states from adopting non-capitalist policies, yet he finds little evidence to support this proposition. Perhaps even more significant is the deduction from the 'separate superstructure' theory that the problems and events that arise in the political sphere are somehow separate and distinct from those that arise economically (Harman, 1991). More directly, the 'state derivation' theorists accuse the proponents of the 'state as separate' of neglecting the essential structural links between the bourgeoisie and the capitalist state, arguing that the modern nation state is not autonomous or simply *related* to the 'economy', but intrinsically capitalist because it is part of the wider social relations whose overall form is (as explained in Marx's section in Capital Vol. III. chapter xlvii.) determined by the manner of surplus extraction (Burnham, 1996, p.93).

#### State as a form of social relations

The state derivation theorists argue that the state is not to be understood as a 'thing' in itself, but a form of social relations. They use the analogy of physics where there are, despite appearances, no hard categories or separations - energy can be transformed into mass and mass into energy. To understand social phenomena in a similar manner is to view it as forms of social relations between people, uneven and changeable but, rigidifying into certain forms; forms which appear to acquire their own autonomy, their own dynamic. The state then is a rigidified form of social relations, with the major question being (posed by the so-called state derivation debate) why do social relations rigidify in this way? (Holloway, 1996, p119).

Part of the answer - for the state derivation theorists - lies in the historical change in the form of the state, which occurred gradually as political revolutions overthrew sovereign power and social struggles prompted and became expressions of changing social relations of production. In the process these struggles abolished the direct political character of civil society - relations were now to be characterised by modern private property relations subject to the rule of money and law.

Simultaneously the turmoil effected the separation of the state from civil society and produced the modern political state (Burnham, 1996.p.99). The capitalist state is characterised by an institutional separation from the immediate process of production. What remains distinctive about the 'state derivation' theory is its emphasis on the differentiation between economics and politics, not the dominance of the 'economic' over 'politics'. The form or particularisation of the state is seen as

being peculiar to capitalism - a product of the historical separation of the state and civil society' - achieved by the gradual disintegration of feudal social relations (Burnham, 1996).

This differentiation between the economic and political, although important, is not seen as a fundamental one; the rule of law and the rule of money are equal, defined as two aspects of the rule of capital. They are not two totally distinct logics; such capital relation 'forms' whilst enjoying a separate existence, spring logically and historically from the nature of that relation (a sort of 'two heads on one body'). In fact, the enforced separation of state and civil society is seen as an institutionalised illusion. The state as a 'political' sphere presupposes the 'depoliticising' of civil society, yet the very act is itself political and obscures a reality founded on the basis of private property (Burnham, 1996 p101). Therefore, the development of the political sphere is not to be seen as a reflection of the economic, but is to be understood in terms of the development of the capitalist relation of class exploitation in capitalist production.

Marx's view of 'capital as self-valorizing value', (Marx, 1978,185) helps make this point clearer. Marx understood capital as a 'movement', a circulatory process, not as a static thing. He recognised the successive transformations of capital - for example, money-capital into labour-power and means of production, being used to produce commodities, which are sold to produce larger sums of money etc. - as the different circuits of capital. Money capital and commodity capital do not denote separate branches of business, rather they are particular functional forms of industrial capital, which are assumed at any one time during the 'circulation sphere'. Accordingly the Marxist tradition equally refuses to fetishize either the 'market' or the 'state', instead focusing on the changing character of the form of the 'political' in relation to the circuit of capital (Burnham, 2001. p104-5).

Therefore, the 'state derivation' theorists' rejection of the 'primacy of economics' means a rejection of the determinist school (Yaffe and Bullock, 1975), with their fundamental error of only being able to understand social relations of production in terms of technical economic relations (Burnham, 2001.p105). Equally they reject the functionalist's theses purported by Poulantzas (1972, 1978), because the state is not seen as being compelled to functionally serve the capitalist system. Likewise, the

state in capitalist society, is not - as the instrumentalists<sup>9</sup> (Miliband, 1973, 1983) would argue - the result of the class composition of the personnel of the state apparatus, but rather the position occupied by the state in a capitalist mode of production. Instead the 'state derivation' theorists argue that the focus should be on the changing character of the form of the 'political' in relation to the circuit of capital. The state is not seen as autonomous of the economic base, rather it is an aspect of a wider more fundamental set of social relations based on the separation of labour from the conditions of production. Any limitations on state action arise from the nature of the structural relation between capital and state, a process which is capable of restricting or rendering state action in the overall rational interests of capitalism (Burnham, 2001).

Equally, globalisation is not seen as a 'defeat' of the state by the world market. Such a perspective exaggerates the actual decline in state power vis-a-vis the market, and tends falsely to see them as two distinct areas, modes of power or social logics, rather than aspects of a wider thing: the rule of the bourgeoisie and capitalism. More importantly it understates the degree to which the 'roll back of the state' is itself a deliberate political project conducted by states (Burnham 1996). A similar argument is made by Clark, I (1996), when he suggests the withdrawal of state regulation in the economy and labour relations in Britain in the 1980s is not, as the free market theorists would imply, a complete separation of the state from the dynamics of capitalist production, but rather a political project of the state aimed at removing the state from direct involvement in post-war social democracy and collectivism.

The 'state derivation' debate, therefore helps to provide a clearer materialist understanding of state actions. It is possible to recognise that the state is capitalist because it is part of the whole 'bourgeois society'. As a form of capitalist social relations its existence depends on the reproduction of those relations, with any changes in its various modes of regulation being ultimately founded on the tensions and contradictions intrinsic to the capital labour relations. The modern state is not just a state in capitalist society, but a capitalist state, since its entire existence is tied to the promotion of the reproduction capitalist social relations as a whole (Burnham 1996; Holloway, 1996).

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<sup>9</sup> The 'Instrumentalists' are also classified as 'functionalists', the leading personnel identified in their theory as being there to functionally serve capitalism

## Critique of the 'State derivation' theories

Nevertheless, whereas the materialist approach of the 'state derivation' theorists provides a more discerning approach to the actions of states than the 'economic determinist' and 'state as separate superstructure' arguments do, the theory still neglects to address a number of related issues. Firstly, because of the abstract nature of the theory, the state is usually only conceptualised in a singular 'form'; Secondly (and this is linked to the first criticism), for the 'state derivation' analysts, it is the structural differentiation of state and business, the 'distinctiveness' of politics and the state from the business of 'economic' exploitation and the mechanism of money, that makes the state capitalist. Yet precisely because two distinct but equal forms are defined in society, difficulties occur. Such an abstract analysis fails to provide for the precise causal links between the two modes of regulation: it is not clear what actually causes the capitalist system and the state to shift from the 'rule of law' to the 'rule of money'? More importantly such a distinction between the economic and political, completely rules out the state ever merging with, or acting as capital. The state can never take the lead and impose its will on the private business class, or even totally usurp the business class, which makes it impossible to explain the experiences of Nazi Germany, or Stalin's Russia. An understanding of such events are essential, especially as capitalism is not made up of a single state but a world system of different states, with the competition between the multiplicity of capitalist states having an influence on the form the capitalist state takes (Barker, 1978 p.118)

A third related criticism, is that for the 'state derivation' theorists (in particular, Holloway and Picciotto, 1977; Holloway and Bonefield, 1996) the policy of the state is the result of class struggle - the state is an aspect of the capital relations, and that is itself a relation of class struggle. But herein lies part of the problem, because such an approach only allows for part of the answer, it only recognises the capital-labour relations. The very number of different relations 'within' and 'between' the capitalist classes, are not really considered. Although the 'state derivation' approach takes account of the 'vertical' capital-labour relationship, it tends to neglect the 'horizontal' struggles between exploiters (capitalists), and even between the different states themselves (Barker, 1978, p120; Catchpole, Cooper and Wright, 1999).

### 3.3.2 Application to the South African State

Whilst these criticisms will be further addressed in the thesis, it is useful to initially apply the 'state derivation' theorists' materialist analysis of the state (outlined above) to South Africa - since such a supposition embodies only the form of the explanation. To truly understand how change occurs the theory must relate to the concrete, empirical conditions in society, especially as an approach rooted in dialectical materialism entails constantly empirically studying the world by utilising the 'actual world' rather than the 'ideological' world of Hegel.

#### APARTHEID STATE

Apartheid had traditionally been seen as a reflection of racial ideologies or a simple extension of segregation. For others, apartheid represented so great an intensification of segregationist ideology and practices that it could be considered as qualitatively different (Bunting, 1969). Whatever the merits of this argument, apartheid was a rigorous and totalizing ideology in a way that segregation had never been, and by the 1960s had come internationally to symbolize the evils of racist exploitation (Beinart and Dubow, 1995. p.13)

The transition from segregation to apartheid was addressed in the 1960s and early 1970s, when a group of Marxist intellectuals (Leggassick, 1974; Wolpe, 1972) insisted that apartheid could only be understood as a function of capitalism. Wolpe (1972) argued that apartheid was not a mere reflection of racial ideologies, but rather a doctrine sustaining and reproducing capitalist relations of production in a particular social and economic context. Wolpe's hypothesis explained how South African capitalists were able to secure cheap labour through the system of migrant labour, owing to the fact that African workers accepted paltry wages on account of being subsidised by their families maintaining subsistence agriculture in the reserves. The relationship between the state and capital was further strengthened in the post-1948 era, when a coercive homeland policy of tighter controls was instigated to safeguard the continuing supply of cheap migrant labour for South African industry.

Although the theory was challenged, it led to further writers on the left (for example, O'Meara, 1975; Webster, 1985; Callincos, 1988) to develop an economic and material explanation of race in South Africa, and to doubt whether the apartheid state could ever be abolished without a socialist revolution to tear out the roots of apartheid in

capitalism. Consequently it came as a surprise when in 1990 the NP, led by F.W. de Klerk, agreed to negotiate with the ANC, leading perhaps to the conclusion that the apartheid state enjoyed an independence separate from its capitalist base.

Yet, an alternative reading of the situation could simply be that South African business, realising its competitive interests were no longer served by the racist policies of apartheid, put pressure on the South African state to reform the system. The objective was to take full advantage of the changing markets and, or even perhaps, to avoid further full scale resistance to capitalism in that country. Therefore, in keeping with the 'state derivation' theorists' analysis, although the state appeared to be taking independent action it was in reality only making changes in order to safeguard its business community, and by inference (because the two share basic relations to capital) its own interests. All of which strengthens the view, that the state is not independent from, but an integral part of, the evolving logic of capitalism in South Africa. This observation immediately raises questions as to whether the 'New' South African state can ever favour its trade union alliance partners, if that policy runs (in the long-term) contrary to world-wide economic trends and practices of the capitalist system.

## POST-APARTHEID STATE

A further example of how the state is an integral part of capitalism is clearly evident in the ANC African government's conversion to the free market, in the post-apartheid period. The ANC has traditionally been influenced by statist traditions, with origins in both Fabian and Communist thinking. However, the transition to the market economy in formerly communist countries, and pressures from international business appeared to have influenced the ANC, forcing it to abandon state policies of intervention and to retreat to policies associated with neo-classical economics. Therefore, unable to implement a programme for socio-economic restructuring, independent of the existing world-wide capitalist consensus, the ANC leadership began complying with the rules of market-driven orthodoxy (Stoneman, 1993).

In short, the changes in the ANC policy appeared to support the state derivation theses: that because there has been a shift in the balance of capitalist power back towards the 'rule of money', the South African government, as an integral part of the capitalist system, was also forced to change its mode of regulation. Above all, this change in state policy and ideology was particularly evident in the South African

public sector where the debate regarding the effects of the ANC's changing ideological position had become even more notable.

### Public sector

The multiple functions the public sector performs - defined as a provider of services, employer of labour, and political institution for national, regional and local voice - has often contributed to a tension between the public sector as a vehicle for effective service delivery, or a political institution. Since the 1980s, this tension has become increasingly acute throughout the world, due to a changing political ideology emphasising a transformation in the structure of government and the control of public expenditure (Leach, Stewart and Walsh, 1994).

The new ideology was directly linked to the influence of the 'new institutional economics' which sought to remodel the machinery of government according to the idealised concept of competitive market system (COSATU 6th National Congress Report, 1997a). The theory replaced that of the 'Keynesian welfare state' which had previously stressed the role of the state in extending social welfare and combating market failure, and providing a balanced partnership between the state and the market to achieve economic growth and full employment (Bacon and Eltis, 1976). Instead, a powerful new ideology ('Government by the market') was used to outline the strategy for slimming the public sector - charged with 'crowding out' productive private investment. Instead the public sector was urged to promote the use of privatisation, subcontracting to private firms, and 'commercial' market-orientated approaches in central and local government, health and education. Fundamental to the policy was the challenge to the established interests of the public sector employees and their unions. Governments, especially in the U.S and U.K, engaged in successive confrontations with public service workers. These attacks, associated with claims to make improvements in the public service, were (are) strongly driven by the ideological goal of changing the balance between labour and the market in the crucial and once impregnable public sector (Bishop, Kay and Mayer 1994; Self, 1993).

### Implications for South African public sector

Such a shift in paradigm, had huge implications for South Africa. The transformation of the public sector and its institutions had been viewed by the ANC as fundamental

to building a new democracy, before 1994 (Swilling and Boyd, 1997). The apartheid public sector had come to symbolise the immense inequality between whites and blacks in South Africa, especially as the control of the public sector had been essential to the preservation of the apartheid system. The machinery of the state was needed not simply to provide services for capitalist enterprise, but also to reproduce a compatible racist-capitalist state apparatus. Conversely, the vision of the 'new' public sector was to be one of moving away from its regulatory role towards that of a developmental agency (Wooldridge and Cranko, 1997).

A recurrent ANC argument had always been that apartheid, inequality and capitalism were integrally related, and a strong state was needed to create a more equitable and acceptable economic system. There was to be less emphasis on economic growth, and more on nationalization as a means of redistributing wealth in the country. The public sector was to play a strategic role in this process (Nattrass, N 1994). The ANC's new demand driven programme, the RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme, 1994), especially emphasised the need to shift the delivery of basic services to previously marginalized communities. It prioritized greater democracy and stressed the importance of enhancing the quality of life of the poor, by calling on the public sector and local government organisation to meet the 'new' material and democratic demands. Yet indicatively, budgets provided by the ANC for such projects, showed very little prospect of growth (Wooldridge and Cranko, 1997).

In reality, since the 1994 election the ANC government had been moving at an increasing pace away from developmental strategies like the RDP, towards the implementation of privatisation. It made no references to restructuring or regulating the financial sector and even proposed that the role of the public sector might be reduced through privatization! Although this was quickly revised to reducing the public sector in certain areas in ways that will enhance efficiency, advance affirmative action and empower the historically disadvantaged (Nattrass, N 1994), the overall tone was highly supportive of market forces, with the public sector earmarked as one of the main recipients of the free market ideology (Catchpole and Cooper, 1999).

Undoubtedly from the beginning, it was clear that the public sector was going to be an area of conflict for the ANC, chiefly because the trade unions were championing the sector '...as the critical arena in the struggle for social solidarity and social justice

against the market' (COSATU 6th National Congress Report, 1997a). Although, up until mid 1995, the government managed to avoid using the "p" word, opting instead for the term "restructuring of state assets", they were forced in May 1996 (due to a crisis in the rand) to announce the appointment of advisers to privatise state assets. It took until August 1996 before advisers were actually appointed; part of the reason for the delay was a political struggle over who would control restructuring and privatisation, but the prime reason remained COSATU's opposition to privatisation (Financial Mail, 1994d).

Consequently - and to return to the 'state derivation' theory - it is possible to argue that because the state is not viewed as separate but as an integral part of capitalism, a shift in capitalist ideology back to the 'rule of money' means the South African government will also retreat to the doctrines associated with neo-classical economics. Equally though - as events in South Africa concerning the slow implementation of privatisation has shown - if the power and activities of labour (represented in this case by the black trade unions), are strong enough to threaten the labour-capital relations, it too can influence state actions. Especially, as the capitalist social relations can be altered by the tensions and contradictions intrinsic to the capitalist labour relations (Burnham, 1996; Holloway, 1996). Class struggle therefore lies at the heart of Marx's account of accumulation since capitalism must not only extract surplus from labour in the production process, but also ensure the successful reproduction of the total social circuit of capital (Burnham, 2001, p.104).

Thus according to the 'state derivation' theorists, trade union struggle can also affect government policies if their organisation and members are perceived as strong enough to threaten the stability of capitalism. It is useful to analyse the nature of the trade unions further in order to explore this presumption. The legitimisation and institutionalisation of trade unions and labour relations in post apartheid South Africa was obviously a historical victory for the labour movement, but the effects of such a change could only really be measured in terms of the trade unions' ability to persuade the government to decide policies in their favour. The following evaluation, gives a materialist analysis of the trade unions in relation to the state - *within* the exploitative relationship between labour and capital.

### **3:4 TRADE UNIONS**

The historical achievement of the April 1994 elections owed much to the black trade unions, whose contribution to the national liberation struggle served as the backbone to South Africa's mass movement. As a consequence of the mass action, on the part of many different and varied sections of the South African civil society, previously disenfranchised groups were now demanding a 'voice' in the 'New South Africa'. The trade unions were being viewed as pivotal to this process owing to their central role in the past 'struggle'. However, in order to conceive of the position of the trade unions in the newly emerging civil society, the next section initially explains the nature of civil society, the role of historical materialism, and their links to a development of a collective consciousness, based on the tensions and contradictions intrinsic to capitalist – labour relations. Secondly, it highlights the trade unions as a part of that civil society, with its contradictory role in such society demonstrated by its engagement in activities of both strike and conciliation.

#### **3.4.1 Civil Society and class consciousness**

Civil society, especially in South Africa context, is sometimes taken as a separate and autonomous entity to the state. Civil society<sup>10</sup> was first seen by the enlightenment philosophers as a realm outside of the state where individuals pursued their private economic interests. For Hegel it was a product of the modern world, arising out of individual needs in society. He was the first to contrast civil society with the state, seeing it as the outcome of a historical process and somewhat separate and independent from the state (Nina, 1992).

Gramsci's interpretations of the state and civil society provides further useful tools to comprehend the situation. He argued that the state was 'political society plus civil society' (Hoare and Smith, 1971, p.262). Gramsci understood the state as a dual entity in which the rule of the bourgeoisie could be exercised either via coercion or by consent (Nina, 1992). 'Political society', usually seen as the ordinary state, or as Gramsci sometimes called 'the state-as-government', uses direct domination

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<sup>10</sup> The term was used by eighteenth century Scottish philosophers such as Ferguson (1767) to mean 'civilisation'.

exercised through the state or 'juridical' government (armed forces, courts, prisons, administrative departments such as the social security). But this is only one among many of the defences used by the capitalist society, the other institutions are found in 'civil society' - church, trade unions, schools, political organisations, family. They are a network of voluntary organisations and situations that pervade every-day life and influence the consciousness of the individual and how they conceive of the world (Simon, 1988).

Such institutions and ideologies are an integral part of bourgeois society used to buttress the capitalist state and the system. Such a model comprises 'the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only maintains its dominance but manages to win the consent of those over whom it rules' (Hoare and Smith, 1971, p. 244). It is the method by which capitalism achieves ideological dominance or what Gramsci called 'hegemony' in a modern society (Simon, 1988).

#### Historical materialism

Gramsci's interpretation of the role of civil society arose out of a Marxist, materialist analysis of social relations. The organisations which make up civil society were (are) the result of a complex network of social relations. Capitalist society is composed of three sets of social relations: the relations of production (the basic relation between labour and capital); the coercive relations which characterise the state; and other relations which make up civil society - such as local, regional or bureaucratic forms of domination, where certain power is exercised and is given a material form in institutions and organisations (Simon, 1988).

Yet, at a practical, or even a theoretical level, one should not take the distinction between civil society and the state as though physically divided with boundaries. Each is composed of social relationships and is part of the same, what Gramsci called the 'integral state'. Gramsci uses the term 'integral state' to include both civil society (the sphere of hegemony) and the state (sphere of coercion). Whereas he distinguishes between the two, he is also grouping them together in the 'integral state'. He is using the term in both the ordinary sense and in a sense of power. What he wanted to suggest is that the social relationships of civil society are relations of power just as (but in different ways) to the coercive relations of the state (Boggs, 1974; Simon, 1988).

But, whereas Gramsci saw both types of power as essential, with no modern capitalist society being able to survive without exercising both coercion and consent it must - in order to have adequate stability for the ruling classes - rule mostly through raising a level of consent from the non-dominant sectors. A political equilibrium must exist in which the bourgeoisie (the minority), incorporates certain claims from the non-dominant (majority) sections of society. For this reason civil society is not an uncontested terrain (Simon, 1988). This relationship between the political structures, and the institutions and popular ideologies that support it, can change (Boggs, 1976).

#### Development of class consciousness

Gramsci believed civil society, however powerful, could not escape from the complex contradictions and conflicts in the network of relations of social forces, dominated by the central conflict between capital and labour. Although a sphere of control, power or hegemony for the capitalist classes, civil society was also a sphere of conflict, integral to the system because of the exploitative class relationship that lay at its heart. Gramsci believed that despite the strength of the ruling classes' dominant ideology, the majority's consciousness was uneven. It often included more than one understanding of the world - bourgeois and socialist. The socialist conceptions of reality being implicit in the workers everyday practice within the process of production - where the underlying conflict between capital and labour came to the surface (Callinicos, 1999; Boggs, 1976).

The extent and control of that conflict or struggle remains ambivalent to the ruling classes. In times of crisis, the variables protecting the ideological hegemony of the ruling elite can be stripped away. The upheaval can, according to Gramsci, jeopardise the modern state because it reduces it to a 'economic-corporate' existence, which reveals to the working classes the state's role in oppression. Such an erosion of ideological hegemony; therefore offers *possibilities* for the collapse of the old consciousness and the society it sustains, moving the majority towards a new set of belief systems and a corresponding social order (Boggs, 1976).

Yet there is nothing inevitable in this process, Gramsci stressed that for change in consciousness to be authentic it needed to be total and conceived of as an organic process. It was not one event or events but embraced all aspects of society, all

dimensions of human existence. Despite the insecure position of the dominance of ruling ideology, Gramsci still believed the conquest of such a highly developed modern society would require an elaborate strategy. In this Gramsci called for the more complex 'war of position' (he was making comparisons with the trench warfare of 1914-18) - the gradual capture of individual positions - as opposed to the crude 'war of manoeuvre', or direct frontal assault on the state. For that reason he did not focus on one single aspect such as economics but introduced instead the notion of '*ensemble of relations*' that incorporated all economics, politics, culture, social relations, ideology etc. Like Marx, Gramsci's work was a 'totalising' theory that embraced all aspects of society, incorporating the method of dialectics to explain and achieve change. As a consequence no realm of bourgeois society was outside of the class struggle, each dimension was closely interwoven with all the others. The struggle to change one area was inevitably bound up with the struggle to change all (Boggs, 1976).

### **3.4.2 Trade unions actions**

Gramsci's early critiques of the trade unions provided a useful springboard for many of his theories. Trade unions were viewed as an integral part of civil society, a prime institution through which the bourgeoisie sustained its hegemony. Such organisations in civil society were defined as strategically limited, if not co-operative with their narrow fragmented definitions of economics and politics serving only to articulate a notion of labour as a commodity to be brought, sold and negotiated. Yet, although trade unions advanced only the limited economic demands of a particular sector, Gramsci still believed they could be areas of defiance and struggle. Trade unions were viewed as areas of ambivalence, capable of co-option but equally areas of potential resistance (Boggs, 1976; Simon, 1988).

For this reason trade unions have sometimes been defined as principal arenas for Gramsci's 'war of position'; but Gramsci rejected such a suggestion, for him trade unions remained a central element of bourgeois hegemony in civil society, capable only of functioning within its logic because of originating from a bourgeois society. Gramsci did not claim that trade unions would overturn bourgeois legality, or even challenge the essence of wage labour as an aspect of capitalist exploitation. To seek anti-capitalist, revolutionary objectives within such an forum was dangerous and served only to create the illusion that socialism was possible under capitalism (Boggs, 1976).

In fact, in support of Gramsci's rejection of trade unions as vehicle for revolutionary change, he claimed that as the unions expanded they would become more like other corporate structures, increasingly bureaucratic and remote from the mass of the workers. They would fail to challenge the issues of *self-management or worker's control*, since its very articulation would challenge the power of the union leadership and almost certainly undermine the vested interests of its bureaucracy. He was not alone, Luxemburg also criticised the trade unions and their leadership, whose involvement in every day tasks, she described as blocking their wider horizons of the struggle (Frolich, 1972 p.138). But although Gramsci reasoned that trade unions could never transcend the logic of capitalism itself, he still viewed them as important institutions that could be used as tactical means of reaching the masses (Boggs, 1976, Simon, 1988). Luxemburg for her part, despite describing trade unions as organised defences of working classes rather than weapons of attack (Frolich, 1972, p.58), still believed they could provide the militant body needed to spark off a mass strike (Frolich, 1972,)

It is worth exploring the paradox or contradictory character of trade unions in civil society further, by examining the two main lines of actions open to unions in civil society - conflict or conciliation. Such actions – although not always entirely exclusive on account of being possible phases of 'regulated' industrial relations - are more commonly described as two contradictory, or opposing elements within the industrial relations forum. The events surrounding 'regulation' or 'strife' are reflected in the capitalist social relations of production. In terms of conflict, the fact that labour is treated as a commodity is at the root of the friction in the workplace. Rational attempts by workers (the majority class) to increase wages and improve conditions are a cost to the employer (the minority class), and must be reduced if control over the production process and profits are to be maintained. Consequently, there exists a conflict of interests between the two classes which underlies everything that occurs in industrial relations. The strike is the ultimate response to these diverging interests and represents some attempt on the part of workers to claw back an element of control (however small) over the production process and their own lives (Hyman, 1975).

However, governments have come to realise that union activity is far less dangerous if it is assigned a level of legitimacy through legal protection and formal consultation. Activities outside of the law and institutions are more likely to involve an explicit

challenge to the political regime, whereas the institutionalisation of trade unions allows the integration of sections of the working class into the capitalist society, acting as a mechanism of social control. Such collaborative relations between the state and trade unions are most developed during periods of corporatist experiments. The need for such inter-dependence is usually greatest when the working class is strongly organised, yet adversely affected by changing economic policies (Hyman, 1975). The following sections attempt to analyse these different strategies - strikes and corporatism - within the context of a changing South Africa.

### **3.4.3 Conflict - Strikes**

In considering the power of the trade unions it is important to deliberate on one of the major weapons open to the trade unions - the use of industrial action. Whilst, it is an undeniable fact that not all trade union struggles lead to conflict between the classes at the level of society - especially as those taking industrial action rarely consider social transformation, aiming instead for more modest goals of changes in wages or work practices - such action still has the potential to threaten the control of the minority (Hyman, 1971).

It is Rosa Luxemburg's writings on the 'The Mass Strike' (1989) that are most often quoted in Marxist literature on South Africa, especially during the 1980s when events on the ground appeared to offer a real prospect of a fundamental change. Historically, Rosa Luxemburg had been able to show - by tracing the mass revolutionary strikes of 1905 in Russia to a string of mostly wages and hours strikes dating back to 1896 - how workers were often drawn to socialist ideas by economic or social struggles. As a consequence of this process work-groups developed a sense of being part of a class as opposed to just a collective, the economic issues surrounding the strikes were therefore generalised to include political issues. The importance of genuine mass strikes for Luxemburg was they arose from the workers' own activity, often initiated by unorganised layers of the class, and tending to unite the whole of the proletariat across sectional divisions. Such actions exceed the barrier between politics and economics and pose the question of state power (Callinicos, 1988; Moody, 1997).

Usually in the workplace a symmetry exists between the two main classes - labour and capital - which represents a formal or informal class compromise, often embodied in rules or institutions, common to civil society. Periods of mass strike

reflect the disruption of such equilibrium and can challenge the subordinate position of workers. There is a realisation that as workers they form part of a working class whose problems and potential solutions can be found within their class position. Therefore, what distinguishes Luxemburg's 'mass strikes' from any other form of action is the historical events surrounding such activities expose the character of 'class' (Brecher, 1997).

The mass strike usually entails three related processes: the challenge to existing authorities, the tendency of workers to begin to take over the direction of their own activities, and their development of solidarity with each other. The sources of these processes are the same: control of production. The real issue is an attempt by workers to wrest at least part of the power over their working lives away from their employers and exercise it for themselves. The end result is the sense of being part of a collective with solidarity developing the individuals' control over their lives. More especially, during this process workers are transformed from people competing for jobs, to people co-operating in pursuit of common interests. From this perspective the mass strike can have a revolutionary potential: its outer demonstration lies in contesting the power of existing authorities, but its inner conceptualisation is the transformation of society, where the managers are replaced by self-management with individuals working together to meet their own needs by meeting each others (Brecher, 1997).

#### Strikes in apartheid South Africa

Despite Luxemburg's theorisation of the links between the economic and political strikes, and their potential to achieve fundamental changes in society, the undeniable proposition that not all basic struggles lead to political class conflict or class consciousness has led to a dismissal of such economic struggles. Yet the struggle for the right to organise in South Africa by an independent trade union movement, with shop-floor structures clearly orientated towards addressing both economic and political issues, appeared to challenge this view - for a while at least (Moody, 1997).

For the black trade unions the early waves of mass strikes brought not only collective bargaining and rapid union growth but also a broader fight for political inclusion. The dynamics of these struggles forced the trade unions to link the workplace conflicts with much wider struggles in the townships and communities. At various times and

places, the black trade union federations' power to mobilise national stoppages, resembled in an rudimentary way, Rosa Luxemburg's strategic conception of the 'mass strike'. Such activities pulled the unions towards other sectors of the working-class and helped them to emerge as a broader class-based movement, calling for a radical change in the infra-structure and society as a whole (Moody, 1997).

Yet on closer examination, a number of fundamental elements were missing. For example the 'stay-aways'<sup>11</sup> were not mass strikes, they were extensions of community action, based on township organisation rather than workplace discipline and solidarity. They did not arise from the workers' own initiative based on workplace organisation. Consequently, all too often the township struggles tended to radicalise bitter confrontations with the state, while the workers' movement remained confined to the trade union struggle. Even when major disputes did occur in the workplace, they did so in isolation from the broader political issues. The idea of linking concrete economic struggles with the broader movement for national liberation was never part of the ANC strategy (Callinicos, 1988; Callinicos, 1990).

A further major problem was a lack of conception of how to build a political alternative to the ANC, an essential task if COSATU was to later avoid becoming an appendage to that organisation. One obvious choice was the South African Communist Party (SACP), but this organisation had failed to exist as a viable alternative to the ANC for decades, especially as it had long chosen to attach itself to the political fortunes of the ANC. Consequently, even if the mass strikes had managed to pose the question of power in South Africa, that would not in of themselves have solved it. The experience of Solidarnosc in Poland (much studied in South Africa) confirmed this point - without an alternative party fighting within these organisations to win a majority for the seizure of power, even the greatest of workers' movements can be defeated (Callinicos, 1988; Murray, 1994).

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<sup>11</sup> A form of action unique to South Africa - involving the positioning of pickets at railway stations, bus depots and taxi (mini bus) ranks. The aim was to prevent workers leaving the townships in order to travel to work

## Strikes in post-apartheid South Africa

Nevertheless, although the strikes engineered by the black trade unions did not result in the revolutionary transformation of society, they doubtless played a decisive role in raising the class consciousness of black workers, giving them the power and confidence to contribute to the abolition of apartheid. But, whether this consciousness, raised during apartheid, could still be a force for change in the post-apartheid public sector, remained an essential question - and one pertinent to the dissertation. For certain though, the ANC's shift to the free market ideology and its new policy of tough fiscal discipline, did appear to be opening up the possibilities of further conflict within the public sector (Ryan, 1994). 1995 was particularly notable for strikes in the state sector, with two especially bitter disputes involving nurses and municipal workers (Mabogoane, 1995).

### 3.4.4 Corporatist experiments

Free market initiatives were only part of the state's strategy in the post-apartheid period. In 1994, the South African state appeared to be initiating a policy of state intervention, more reminiscent of the accommodation between labour movements and capital, common in Europe in the 1970s. The policy stemmed from the view that the democratisation of the post-apartheid state should include the representation of civil society to share in decision-making. The National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) - a national forum for management, unions and government - was seen as epitomizing the governments' enthusiasm for incorporating 'civil society' in formal decision-making institutions, (Friedman & Reitzes, 1996). Whereas, the Labour Relations Act of 1995 - providing for the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA), bargaining councils and workplace forums - represented the government's commitment to social partnership in the workplace (Bramble and Kuhn 1999). This section considers the radical arguments for and against the use of corporatism in South Africa, within the context of the ANC's equal commitment to free market policies.

Corporatist experiments defined by Palmer (1983), as prescriptions that call for active state intervention and joint decision-making machinery involving, governments with employer and employee representatives, have been the subject of much contention in South Africa. Liberal-pluralist theories of the state and many trade union leaders debating the merits of corporatism in South Africa, view such activities

as permitting labour to exercise its voice within the corridors of power (Nattrass, N, 1994; Baskin, 1993a; Maree, 1993; Schreiner 1994 and von Holdt, 1992,1995). In contrast, others see co-operation with such social contracts, as 'state-structured class collaborations' used to enforce union bureaucratization and exclude the poorest of the population (Callinicos, 1992a; Vally, 1992; Desai and Habib, 1994; Murray, 1994).

Radical advocates of corporatism in South Africa<sup>12</sup> also suggest that genuine 'bargained corporatism' is possible in situations when labour is strongly organised, when the state does not have the power to be coercive and when capital interests are divided (Crouch, 1977). Within South Africa, Alexander (1996) points to Friedman(1991), Bird and Schreiner(1992), Godongwana (1992), Saul (1992), and von Holdt (1994) as "radical reformers" who argue - not dissimilarly to Crouch (1977) - that "there are good social contracts and bad ones" and that whether a positive outcome follows will largely depend on "continued mobilisation around a programme of radical reform" (Bird and Schreiner, 1992:25, in Bramble and Kuhl, 1999).

Further groups in South Africa, supporting the 'democratic road to socialism'<sup>13</sup>, yet advocating more conventional support for corporatism (Cameron, 1984; Korpi, 1983; Stephens, 1979, Baskin, 1993a; Von Holdt 1995) concede that whereas not every labour-inspired reform will usher in socialism, social contracts may still promote some of the short-term interests of workers within capitalism. Baskin (1993a,b), is amongst those who advocate such an approach, arguing for 'bargained corporatism' to create 'building blocks' for socialism where conflict and struggle are channelled into an institutional form to bargain for influence and reforms, in return for restraint and compromise. 'Bargained corporatism' is seen as being accompanied by 'strategic unionism', a dominant strategy among a increasing number of South African unions, involving a shift from economic resistance, to conciliatory tactics aimed at achieving reconstruction, during a period of economic crisis. That given,

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<sup>12</sup> Gall (1997), explains that the majority of trade unionists and left-thinkers in South Africa see themselves not as social democrats but as radical socialists. Nevertheless, he views such groups as still espousing various reformist ideas.

<sup>13</sup> Supporters advocate gradual reforms within the existing capitalism system, as opposed to a total revolutionary transformation of society

Gall (1997) contends that such a strategy has more in common with the Scandinavian model of social democracy, than any prototype for socialism.

Nevertheless, even 'left' academics and theorists debating the value of corporatism, not just with regard to South Africa but more generally, have recognised that the actions of capitalist states are often contradictory and their policies may have unpredictable outcomes, which benefit labour. Zeitlin (1985) stressed that one of Marx's central insights was the idea of unintended consequences of state action. State policies designed to 'incorporate' labour may end up strengthening trade unions and weakening the power of employers. For example, involving the trade union organisation in corporatist projects may secure a short-term reduction in conflict as part of the political exchange between state and unions, but may in the longer term provide more workers with the resources to conduct conflict against their employers<sup>14</sup>.

Despite these arguments there is still a strong body of opinion criticising the use of corporatist policies. Panitch, (1976) asserts that social contracts are detrimental to working class interests, because social democratic parties, whilst introducing such policies, are invariably forced to adapt their programmes to operate within the confines of the capitalist state and economy. He accepts that the 'capitalist state' enjoys a transitory degree of autonomy from the ruling class, that it can respond to working-class pressure (within limits), but he still maintains that corporatism is a 'state-structured class collaboration'. He shows how failure of coercion in Britain in the early 70s led to new efforts by the state to revive corporatism. Unions agreed to the policy, only after exacting the promise of industrial democracy and a framework of progressive legislation. He views the gains from these reforms as illusory; with unions enmeshed into the apparatus of the state and effectively 'policing' a policy of wage restraint, which reduced the value of real wages for their members. A process referred to by Crouch (1985) as "incorporating labour's organisations within the structure of economic regulation".

Upchurch (2000) is also critical of the collaborative aspects of corporatist models, emphasising instead the value of a return to conflictual class relations. He explains

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<sup>14</sup> For example a number of state incomes policies have disintegrated in a wave of large and disruptive strikes, (Britain in 1969-70, 1974 & 78-9).

how in Germany the introduction of the 1952 Works Councils Act, served only to consolidate the power of the entrepreneur, and evict the trade unions from the plant (Upchurch, 2000, p.67). The unions were only given protected status in law and rights to co-determination in the larger industries, in return for a 'peace obligation' with the trade union leadership. The leadership themselves, then orchestrated the control of the rank and file through self-imposed restrictive strike balloting rules (Upchurch, 2000, p.69)

Within, the South African context, Gall (1997) also argues against corporatist strategies stressing that tripartism and codetermination promotes the ideas of social partnership, whilst forcing workers and their trade unions to take responsibility for state policies. Friedman and Reitzes (1996) question corporatist experiments, explaining that whilst there appears to be greater access to state decisions, the ability to use it is not equal. The pluralist theory, which sees formal democracy as a system in which all interests have an opportunity to influence decision-making, fails to acknowledge some groups have far greater capacity to influence the process than others. In the final analysis, an employer has the power to take his business elsewhere, and whereas individual workers may move, a whole labour force has no such option. Under this system, labour appears to have considerable formal power and political leverage, but in reality cannot match the strength or resources (the full force) of capital (Hyman, 1975).

#### Corporatism or the free market?

In reality though, despite a formal state commitment to corporatist experiments it was the free market ideology that commanded the support of many South African employers and the government, during the post-apartheid period under review. On closer examination, the South African state was removing itself from the direct management of the economy and embracing policies associated with free market regulation. Issues of rationalization and competitiveness at decentralized company level, plus flexibility of labour were now just as crucial as the central control of labour at national level (Horwitz, 1995; Ferner and Hyman, 1992).

Yet, this paradox of corporatist policies being implemented along side free market strategies in South Africa, can be more fully explained by the argument that governments do sometimes introduce policies that appear irrational to the interests of capitalism. In terms of the 'state derivation' theory, the policies of the state are often

the result of tensions within the capital and labour relationship. In the case of South Africa, despite a need on the part of ANC to preserve the conditions that allow for the dominance of the surplus-appropriating class (policies that favoured the business community), they were also being confronted by the class contradictions of capitalism (the conflictual relations between labour and capital). Thus, the prime reason for the introduction of formal structures of corporatism in South Africa remained the strength of the black union movement. The power of this group meant that the unions - as a leading force in society - could not easily be ignored by the government without risking a damaging industrial and political black-lash. The development of institutionalised social bargaining with the trade unions was an acknowledgement of this fact (Callinicos, 1996). Therefore, the idea that class struggle is of importance in influencing the policies of the state remains significant (Miliband, 1983).

Reflecting still further, corporatism and free market policies may not necessarily be incompatible. Indeed such a model may accommodate the needs of capitalism in South Africa, especially as what government and business require, in pursuit of their neo-liberal economic programme, is a disciplined union federation whose leadership is willing to accommodate the free market in return for a 'voice' in the political structures. Interestingly though, Schreiner (1994) contends that the inclusion of the market alongside corporatism may also benefit the South African working class. He criticises the advocates of traditional social democratic corporatism as unsophisticated and underdeveloped, arguing instead for the 'marginalised groups' to be included along side the usual three agents – state, trade unions and business. The recognition on an equitable basis, of such class 'groups', or inter-and intra-class groups, is viewed as strengthening civil society in South Africa. Within this context Schreiner (1994) sees a role for the market, with a strong competitive economy providing jobs and high wages. Such an economy has no place for nationalisation or state regulation, accepting instead short-term job losses and restructuring in order to obtain sustainable rapid growth in the long-term (Gall, 1997). The key question for South Africa labour though, is whether such corporatist structures, however different or sophisticated, may simply be acting as a political shell within which neo-liberal economic policies can be more easily implemented (Bramble and Kuhn, 1999).

### 3:5 CONCLUSION

As a precursory to addressing the changing relationship between the state and public sector unions, the theses conceptualised the nature of the state and trade unions within the transformation of South Africa. The explicit aim was to establish a theoretical framework which could be further examined - using the empirical data of the SAMWU branch in Cape Town - to produce a clearer understanding of the nature of the state and its relationship with public sector unions.

The Marxist method of historical materialism was used to explain the changing relationship between the ANC government and trade unions. The dissertation takes a materialist approach to the subject and perceives capitalism as comprising not of 'things' but of 'relations'. The central insight of historical materialism being that history is a material and social process, that depends on the production of the necessities of life (commodities), and whose advances alters the social relations between people, their ideology and politics (Harman, 1998; Callinicos, 1983). The proletarian class consciousness, is one of the major dynamics for change in this society. *Change* under capitalism is generated by the *contradictions* internal to that system, found essentially in the mutual but exploitative relations between 'labour and capital'. Yet undoubtedly, to truly understand change, *all* the relations of that system - the complete '*totality*' - over a period of time, and in the course of historical development, needs to be viewed (Rees, 1998). Such an approach helps explain the actions of the state and trade unions in the South African public sector from 1992-7.

#### 3.5.1 The State

Within this context, the state is not viewed as separate from the basic relations of capitalism, it lives off the surplus obtained by the exploitation of labour just as much as the direct exploiters. Such an analysis is used to explain the actions of the South African state, both during and post apartheid. For example, although apartheid has commonly been associated with race ideology the dissertation views apartheid, rather as a system specifically designed and supported by the state in order to sustain and reproduce the capital relations of production in a social and economic context (Wolpe, 1972; Leggasick 1974). Similarly, in post-apartheid South Africa, the ANC government as an integral part of capitalism, is complying with and driving the

current world market-driven orthodoxy. Given this inference that the state is an integral part of capitalism, the immediate question must be whether the state can ever favour labour if its aims run contrary to the interests of capital?

### State derivation theories

In reality, the form of the political superstructure rarely changes automatically in line with the economic base. An explanation of state action is more complex than this and linked to the contradictions internal to the capitalist system, primarily located in the mutual but exploitative relationship between the opposing classes of labour and capital. The materialist approach taken by the state derivation theorists makes the explanation clearer by analysing the state as a rigidified form of social relations. The political superstructure of the state is not perceived as separate from its economic base, but rather the economic and the political are both forms of social relations, assumed by the basic relation of class conflict in a capitalist society (Holloway, 1996). And, precisely because the state is an integral part of capitalism, it is also directly enmeshed in the class contradictions between 'labour and capital'. Which means the government is sometimes forced to over-ride the immediate interests of capital, by granting concessions to labour to prevent any real resistance to capitalism.

Nevertheless, the thesis is not uncritical of the 'state derivation' theorists analysis. Firstly, the abstract nature of the theory tends to only conceptualise the state in the singular; secondly, and this is linked to the first criticism, the level of abstraction which identifies two distinctive but equal forms - economics and politics - not only fails to make clear what actually causes the shift in regulation from the 'rule of law' to money, but also serves to illustrate the point that the state derivation' theorists conceptualises the state in the singular. In particular, such an approach rules out the state ever usurping or acting as capital, making it impossible to explain the concepts of different types of states such as Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia. Finally, although the 'state derivation' approach takes account of the 'vertical' capital-labour relationship, seeing the policy of the state as the result of class struggle - it tends to neglect the 'horizontal' struggles between the multiplicity of exploiters (capitalists), and even between the different states themselves.

### 3.5.2 Trade unions

The thesis also used Gramsci's theory of historical materialism, to understand the nature of trade unions within the newly emerging South African civil society. His analysis of trade unions, as contrary organisations within capitalism - performing a central role in the preservation of bourgeois civil society, whilst containing the nucleus for strife and solidarity - provides a useful framework to analyse their activities of strike and conciliation, two resources employed to cope with this contradiction.

#### Strikes

The experiences of strikes are identified in the thesis, as changing the working-classes' perception of the world and society, and developing a class consciousness, which challenges the existing order or status quo. Despite the absence of Luxemburg's classical 'mass strike' and revolutionary change, strikes nevertheless played a large part in defeat of the apartheid. This surely prompts the question, of whether it can, or will be used as an effective weapon in the struggle against privatisation in the post-apartheid period? (Callinicos, 1996; Catchpole *et al.* 1998).

#### Conciliation

Nonetheless, because of the disruptive nature of strikes to workers and employers, both seek to make open conflict an exception rather than the rule. Co-operation aims to institutionalise the conflict via rules and systems, and achieves its highest form with corporatism. The question here though, is whether corporatism runs contrary to the ANC's prioritisation of free market policies in South Africa? The answer may well be no, since it is conceivable that the state can still achieve the illusion of working-class influence, via corporatist institutions, whilst simultaneously implementing the neo-liberal agenda, with little opposition from unions (Bramble & Kuhn, 1999). Such an observation raises the further question of whether corporatist policies are really beneficial to trade unions in South Africa.

### 3.5.3 Summary

In sum, a number of areas materialised from the discussion within this chapter, and will need addressing in the dissertation if a fuller understanding of the changing relationship between the state and public sector unions is to be obtained:

- **Firstly**, a perception of the class nature of the state is crucial to understanding whether governments can, or will adopt policies that favour labour over capital. The 'state derivation' theory provides a useful analysis of the state but still leaves unanswered a number of questions (which will need further exploration and discussion) about the nature of the state,
- **Secondly**, a clear understanding of the nature of the state will help address the related issue of whether corporatism is a deliberate attempt on the part of the government to placate a strong labour movement, and thereby weaken its resolve to oppose privatisation; which prompts the question of whether such reformist policies are detrimental to South African trade unions.
- **Finally**, the question of whether the public sector trade unions (in this case the Cape Town branch of SAMWU) will use conflict (strike) rather than formal conciliatory methods to stop privatisation, needs consideration. The answer is linked to an understanding of the class consciousness of this group - in particular the influence of the 'coloured' identity in Cape Town - plus the ability of the trade union organisation and leadership to effectively develop and engage the collective solidarity of this group.

The next chapter, chapter 4, outlines the research process used to explore these questions further. It describes the research design and methodology used to report on the fieldwork, and process the data analysis. The rest of the dissertation will then present the findings and evaluation of the study's empirical research.

# CHAPTER 4

## RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The general aim of the research is to contribute to the knowledge and improved understanding of public sector unions, by exploring the changing relationship between the state and the public sector unions in South Africa. The research is located in debates concerning the current state ideology, and the ANC government's apparent shift from a policy of nationalisation to the endorsement of the 'free-market' economy.

The dissertation takes a critical, essentially Marxist, materialist view of the workplace and society. In short, it uses the Marxist method of historical materialism to explain how change occurs in modern capitalist society. Within this framework the main areas of deliberation focuses on the state, the trade unions and the public sector. The research questions that emanates from the theoretical discussion are:-

- i) whether the state is free to decide its own national policy if it differs from global capital - or more theoretically whether a state's political superstructure can ever be independent of the capitalist economic system?
- ii) whether the trade unions - viewed as part of the newly emerging civil society - have enough power to persuade the government to abandon its free market policies in defiance of current international policies and trends?
- iii) whether reformist methods of corporatism are detrimental to strong labour movements

### 4.2 THE CASE STUDY

The Cape Town branch of SAMWU (South African Municipal Workers Union) is the focus of the research. It is within the changing historical and theoretical framework, that the branch (within the general context of the union) is used as a means of advancing

the theoretical understanding of the relationship between the state and the public sector trade unions in South Africa.

The research is based on a longitudinal study, from 1992-1997. It focuses on two contrasting time periods: immediately prior and during the democratic election (from 1992-4); and subsequent to the election from 1995-7. The timescale is considered important because it allows for an investigation of how the state's rapidly changing economic policies and ideologies, impacted on the public sector trade unions. To this end, an exploration of the members' home environment and workplace, along with the structure, democracy and activities of the branch, are used as a means of assessing both the organisation and leadership of the union, and appraising the collective consciousness, solidarity and power of the membership.

The aim is to secure an explanation of events taking place in the South African public sector over this period, by interpreting the experiences of local municipal workers in Cape Town during apartheid, and over issues of privatisation. The study of this distinct group of workers in Cape Town is used to illuminate changes in wider society, and offers the possibility of achieving an insight into the complex nature of apartheid, and the continuing conflictual relationship between the state and trade unions in the public sector.

The distinctive characteristics of the union, and its members, are chiefly explored through qualitative inquiry. The case is both representative, yet atypical. The Cape Town City Council (CCC), the largest employer of labour in the area, was unusual with its supposedly 'liberal' reputation, but nevertheless still continued to implement racist employment practices, common to the apartheid public sector as a whole. Equally the council, along with many public sector employers, increased its use of free market policies after the 1994 election.

The Cape Town Branch itself, was unique in being a founder member of the national union, SAMWU, and as such was rare in influencing both policy and activities of the union, generally. Yet, in common with the rest of the union, the changes in the demographics of the country and the institutionalisation and legitimisation of the black trade unions, were producing strains on the organisation and activities of the branch.

However, with the majority of the Cape Town members being defined as 'coloureds', the membership displayed a complex, and often contradictory collective consciousness. Within apartheid 'coloureds' had historically occupied an unique status - enjoying a privileged position over Africans, whilst being oppressed by 'whites'. It was this position that accounted for the conservative reputation of 'coloureds' (the majority of whom resided in the Western Cape), and helped to explain their overwhelming electoral support for the architects of apartheid, the National Party (NP). Yet the membership - as with many black public sector trade unionists - continued to experience low wages, poor working conditions, an improvised home environment, and on the whole limited control and autonomy over their workplace, or neighbourhoods.

The conservative reputation of the 'coloured' community - from which Samwu members drew their roots - was in direct contrast to the radical image of the Cape Town branch; a characteristic it shared with many other black trade unionists during this period. Its origins may have grown out of the Cape Town Municipal Workers union (CTMWU), a 'coloured' only union, but it was from the beginning an ardent opponent of apartheid in the region. Furthermore, since the early 1990s the branch as part of SAMWU, had been one of the most militant in the public sector, consistently opposing policies of privatisation and expressing reservations about social contracts and codetermination. Such a contradictory consciousness on the part of its membership, reflected the uneven consciousness, demonstrated by the working-classes generally.

In sum, the aim is to use both the unique and typical characteristics of the study, to facilitate interpretation and reflection of the issues highlighted in the theoretical framework. Ultimately the case method, perceived as an instrument of insight, is used to refine and advance the theoretical understanding of the state and its relationship with the public sector unions.

**The specific research questions that flow from this case study are**

- i) whether SAMWU would reject strategies of corporatism and conciliation, and use instead rank and file resistance as the main agency for opposing state policies of privatisation.
- ii) whether the Cape Town branch of SAMWU and its members possessed the organisation and class consciousness to resist government policies, or

- iii) whether the peculiarly skewed membership (mainly 'coloured') would affect the members' class consciousness, and as a consequence the ability to use resistance to stop privatisation.

#### 4.2.1 Limitations of Case Studies as a research tool.

Nevertheless, although increasingly popular as a form of research the case study approach does contain limitations as a research tool. Firstly, investigators using case studies are often accused of straying from using objectivity and rigour, and producing studies of insufficient precision, largely due to the fact that the traditional approach to the research design is often quite 'loose'. However, it should be acknowledged that the strength of case studies are their flexibility, and ultimately this method was chosen because it allowed for change and modification, albeit with proper justification (Yin, 1994). Secondly, a sample of one, or a few number of cases, are unlikely to be a strong representation of others. Nevertheless, although an attempt was made to select a case which contained typical as well as unique characteristics, the purpose was not to conduct sampling research. As Stake (1994) explains, the aim is not to study a case primarily in order to understand other cases. The first obligation is to understand this one case, and although it remains important to consider the uniqueness and contexts of alternative selections, the choice of a single - or even a small number of cases - does not depend on being able to defend their typicality.

A third limitation to consider is generalization. Case studies are a poor basis for generalization, particularly as only a single or few cases are usually studied, albeit at length. Nevertheless, generalisations can be gleaned from the study by identifying certain activities, problems, or responses which come up time and again. However, damage occurs where the commitment to generalize becomes so strong, the researcher's attention is drawn away from the main features or characteristics essential for understanding the case itself. Consequently, in keeping with case study research protocol, the prime aim of the Cape Town case study was not to represent the world but to represent the case (Stake, 1995).

Finally, leading on from generalisations, it is important to emphasise the problems associated with interpretation.. The function of the researcher is to maintain vigorous interpretation, and on the basis of data, draw conclusions. But as Stake (1995) explains: it is not uncommon for case study researchers to make assertions on a

relatively small database, invoking the privilege and responsibility of interpretation . Since the interpretations of the researcher are more easily highlighted than the interpretations of those people being interviewed or observed, it is important that the case researcher maintains the authenticity of the case by presenting the numerous different, and contradictory views of all the people involved in the case study. Nevertheless, such objectivity continues to be problematic; and although a process of interpretation using formal rules of evidence and logic are useful, adequate guidelines do not exist (Stake, 1995).

In conclusion, although case studies have limitations in terms of 'looseness', sampling, generalisability and interpretation, a single case study was still considered appropriate. Especially as a study of this area allowed for the depth of analysis and particularization needed to illuminate the political and racial complexity of South Africa, during this period. The overall aim being, to examine the unique character of the case for its intrinsic value, as well as using it as an instrument to provide a general understanding of the theory of the state and its relationship with trade unions.

### **4.3 DATA COLLECTION**

The bulk of the data collection took place between 1992 and 1998 and involved the use of a variety of empirical materials as a means of understanding the changes taking place during the period under investigation. The primary research - predominately qualitative - was collected on two separate occasions, namely September 1993 until May 1994, and Summer 1997. The study encompassed interviews with both the SAMWU leadership, lay officers and rank and file membership, augmented by further interviews from other trade union members (NEHAWU), management consultants, and the users of the services. This data was subsequently enriched by the use of documentary evidence, various academic, trade union and government studies, and newspaper and journal articles.

### 4.3.1 Secondary data

A multi-method approach was adopted, with the collection of secondary data being an important component of the research plan. The secondary data consisted of both quantitative and qualitative information collected between 1992 and 1998. The original aim was to provide detailed background information to support the interviews, but was (as discussed below) an imperfect source of information. Secondary sources were varied and included official statistics, academic studies, trade union documents, consultancy reports, government documentation, newspaper articles, government (local and national), and non government organisation (NGO's) and trade union web sites.

#### Official Government data

The research used official statistics which emanated from the Central Statistics Services (CSS), a government body authorised since the Statistics Act of 1976 to collect, process and publish official statistics on a nation-wide basis. The main sources included the CSS Bulletin of Statistics, the population census from 1991, the 1993 and 1995 October Household Survey (OHS) and preliminary estimates from the 1996 Census and the final adjusted Census results (1998). Further CSS statistics included Manpower Surveys (Statistical Release PO201); Labour: Employment, Salaries and Wages (Summary (PO200) and most importantly the Employment & Salaries & Wages: Public Sector Statistical release (PO251). Other data used included the Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA) and the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) - a government agency

When using the various sources of CSS data a number of problems were encountered that require discussion here. The CSS Bulletin of Statistics, one of the country's oldest journals dating back to 1922 was a key source. Originally, a monthly it has been a quarterly since 1967 and was available at the end of March, June, September and December. Although it offered a coherent perspective for any single year, methodologies for data gathering varied - especially in the years before and following the elections - making accurate comparisons difficult, although overall trends were possible.

Overall, flaws were identified in all the CSS data used. The main reason was linked to the apartheid government's lack of dependable information about the black and coloured population - with many of the conclusions reached on the basis of racist assumptions endemic in the apartheid system. In particular, the 'new' 1994 CSS management believed that the model originally used by apartheid regime, in the 1991 census - to adjust the actual count of people - probably overestimated growth rates in the country, resulting in an over-estimation of the size of population and numbers of households. This had a further consequence of overestimating the labour market. This affected the 1995 and 1996 data because both used the 1991 census as a baseline.

The 1995 October Household Survey (OHS) - using the 1991 census, OHS 1993 and 1994 questionnaires - made some effort to overcome the sampling problems which had occurred. However, the CSS reported that when implementing the new sampling plan, field workers became confused about the exact geographical boundaries within which they were operating. Problems were compounded because the field work took place when staff were busy demarcating boundaries for the 1996 census. Consequently, since different methodologies were used to draw the samples in 1994 and 1995 for the OHS, and further diverse problems were encountered as a result of varying sample techniques the CSS warned against directly comparing the data.

The 1996 Census was also limited because it initially provided only preliminary estimates of the size of the South African population. The aim was to make selected summary data available as quickly as possible, especially as South Africa had lacked reliable demographic information during the last 20 years of apartheid. The remainder of the census was to be made available in late 1998.

Further problems resulted from the fact that many of the statistics in the immediate post 1994 period excluded the former TBVC (Homeland) states, whereas earlier statistics included these. This made comparisons very difficult, especially as the contributions from the former TBVC states, were usually not incorporated until the first quarter of 1996. In particular, surveys such as the 1994 Manpower Survey were inadequate because they failed to record the former TBVC states (or their unemployed) rendering the statistics unrepresentative of the economically active population.

Whereas the figures on the public sector as a whole were available in the PO251 releases, detailed final figures on particular groups within this sector - such as the

public service or local government - were not always available at the time of publication and so estimates were provided. Where possible the researcher used the updated figures, but the releases were not always consistent and different figures were often recorded. Moreover, data from a number of 'new' provinces were not yet available, which rendered the data obtained from the other 'new' provinces inadequate - making comparisons with the previous (pre-1994) provinces meaningless.

Another weakness was that the data used in the dissertation initially used a simple (total) count of the number of workers. The number of full-time equivalent workers (the number of full-time, the number of half-day and the number of hourly workers) has since been made available, but the dissertation did not use this data for reasons of consistency. However where a different definition was used, this was indicated.

Overall the main problem remained one of reliability of official statistics. The reorganisation of the central government and local authorities in 1994 made it impossible to use the CSS to make direct comparisons between 1992 and 1997. What exists is essentially to be seen as snapshots, the trends being accepted as indicative of the broad patterns of change in households in South Africa in general, and the Western Cape in particular, without being wholly reliable.

With respect to the other official data used in the research - for example the Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA), and the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) - the published data on demographic and labour force trends are once again inconsistent. The DBSA uses different classifications to the CSS data so direct comparisons cannot be made. Overall, the empirical bases used in these studies are often contradictory and largely dominated by inappropriate racial classifications.

The biggest difficulty in interpreting the data, particularly with the public sector employment patterns and trends, was the quality of available data. For example wage statistics remained patchy and are widely criticised by, amongst others, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (Standing, Sender and Weeks, 1996, pp.185-187). Data on the structure and trends of employment and unemployment are viewed as unreliable in South Africa and guesstimates (approximations) are frequently used. At least two definitions of unemployment are adopted in South Africa: the strict (taken steps in the last 4 weeks to find work) and the expanded (desire for work) definition - the expanded definition was used in the dissertation. Moreover, realistic estimates in

South Africa really depend on whether the informal sector is included in the statistics, but accurate information about the informal sector remained difficult to collect (ALA, 1994/5).

Consequently, it was problematic to gather reliable data on essential areas like wage or occupation trends in the local authorities, with the collection of more detailed data on the Cape Town City council proving even more impossible<sup>15</sup>. Particular problems were experienced when trying to obtain accurate information regarding the number of permanent and casual workers employed by the council. This was for several reasons: the deliberate avoidance of apartheid censuses on the part of the black population made it difficult to estimate the number of (im)migrants or their activities; apartheid recording meant certain groups were excluded or even discounted, usually for political reasons; and finally researchers found it dangerous (and so were often reluctant) to regularly visit hostels or townships to collect accurate figures.

#### Trade union data

The second major source of information used in the research was gathered by the trade union federation - COSATU - and its union affiliates. The distrust of official data, notably because of its association with 'unjust' government regulations and restrictions, meant that many official statistics before 1994 were treated with scepticism. Hence data provided by the trade unions and other labour-aligned research projects have been widely used by South African researchers. Nevertheless, although often viewed by international observers (ILO; IDS) as the only legitimate source of information on trade unions during the apartheid era, these data have their limitations.

Trade union research is written with a particular constituency in mind, and sets priorities and agendas on this basis. Moreover, the political climate of South Africa, with many trade unions operating under oppressive circumstances, or at the very least only beginning to obtain a level of stability and legitimacy, meant that the collection of long-term reliable figures were difficult. Many of the figures collected prior to the end of

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<sup>15</sup> Despite repeated requests to the CCC for more detailed information on 'coloured' and African employment, they reiterated that no such long-term data was available - although they were hoping to rectify this situation in the future

apartheid, even on the part of the union federation, COSATU, relied on guestimates (approximations) (Baskin, 1996), and could only provide an indication of trends and patterns.

#### Industrial relations consultants

A further source used data provided by the Industrial Relations consultants Andrew Levy and Associates - a respected firm of labour consultants, which since 1997 has published jointly with the U.K consultants, Incomes Data Services (IDS). The information came from both primary (interviews with consultants and researchers) and secondary sources. The latter consisted of newspaper and journal articles and statistics (supplied by the Department of Manpower and the National Manpower Commission). Therefore any shortcomings already indicated can equally be applied to the official sources used by Andrew Levy. Nevertheless, the consultants have experience in interpreting such data and have acquired an international reputation for objectivity, especially during the latter years of the apartheid era, and are widely quoted by academics and trade unionists alike.

#### Newspapers, journals and the Internet

Newspaper clippings, collected on a daily (1993/4) and weekly (1995/7) basis provided an additional resource. Some sections of the South African press were openly critical of the apartheid government and as a consequence acquired credibility as a source of information and independence. Still, the newspapers cannot be viewed as truly objective, and are more meaningfully interpreted as being representative of different interest groups during the apartheid era. Nevertheless, the author elected to use this rich and varied source of data. Papers like the Weekly Mail and Guardian (WM&G) - a liberal independent newspaper and a critic of the apartheid government - was widely consulted. Local newspapers were also utilised to document the differing opinions and in some cases prejudices of the local population: the 'Argus' and 'Cape Times' represented the mainly white and 'coloured' communities, and 'South', the black pro-ANC constituency.

Journal articles were also widely used. The South African Labour Bulletin (SALB), and the now defunct Work in Progress (WIP) were excellent sources of information on trade unions and labour relations. Other journals referred to included the Financial Mail, a

mainstream conservative source that produced highly respected factual surveys and reports.

Finally from 1995-7, the Internet provided a key resource. Since the 1994 elections, South Africans had increasingly used the Internet as a means of showing their commitment to a new open and democratic society. Useful web-pages included those provided by COSATU, SAMWU, the ANC, University of Cape Town, the Weekly Mail and Guardian, the Financial Mail and Cape Town Council. As with the newspapers and journals the internet provided a useful source for divergent opinions and sentiments. Nevertheless, the information had limitations and cannot be viewed as entirely impartial. Moreover, with many of the web-sites presenting the acceptable 'public face' of the organisation, especially in the months leading up to the 1994 elections it was possible that the tensions and ambiguities associated with the changing South African government and economy were glossed over.

#### **4.3.2 Primary Research**

In total, 82 interviews were completed in 1993/4 and 1997, respectively. **Appendix 1** lists all the individuals interviewed, by first name and in alphabetical order.

##### **Phase one**

The first period of field research took place in South Africa from Aug 1993- May 1994 (9 months). During this stage the researcher interviewed 35 people (**See Appendix 2 for a list of interviewees 1993/4**), 15 of these were SAMWU members, based mainly in Cape Town. They included full-time officers at the Head office in Athlone in Cape Town, a selection of lay-officials and members working in the Cape Town City Council (CCC). These interviews were supplemented by others: Interviews with the Cape Town City Council Industrial Relations consultant, other union members in the area (for example, the public sector union, NEHAWU - the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union) and ordinary users of the services of Cape Town City Council (from both the township and city).

The effects of the changes and policies in South Africa were explored in the conversations and interviews. In the process of describing both their routine and problematic moments in their lives - both in their homes, workplace and union - such

South Africans managed to provide an understanding of the events that moulded their consciousness. A comprehension of this, all too often uneven, consciousness, was used to understand the various and complex influences that might lead public sector unionists to resist state policies of privatisation and deregulation.

Access was initially quite difficult. Many full-time trade unionists appeared tired of answering yet more questions from white overseas academics, whilst even more stewards and members were understandably suspicious of what they may have perceived as a white middle-class woman, requesting information about their lives. However, the main SAMWU contact, Hennie (a steward, first met in 1992), guaranteed the researcher's credentials, as a trade unionist activist - and as a result a number of interviews with individuals (Hennie knew and trusted) were secured.

Entry to the townships and 'coloured' areas was somewhat more problematic (and at times dangerous). It was not until the months immediately preceding the election that the researcher was able to stay over night in the main township, Crossroads; and then only accompanied by a guide (recommended by local political activists) who ensured the researcher remained within the ANC controlled areas. Throughout this period the Pan African Congress (PAC - a black consciousness liberation organisation) territory remained strictly out of bounds for whites in the Cape Town townships. Attempting to enter this locality during this period would have been dangerous for the guide, the hosts and everyone involved. The 'coloured' areas were moderately more accessible, but once again it was necessary for a white woman to have her own transport, a definite appointment and not to travel after dark.

The length of the interviews varied considerably, those with the full-time officials and stewards usually lasted between one and two hours. The other main interviews (listed) ranged from 30 minutes to one hour. Further interviews (not listed) were either unproductive or consisted of short transitory comments. The organisation and approach to the interviews were adjusted in the light of experience. The questions were initially semi-structured. The original aim was to obtain an insight into what SAMWU members thought about the policies of privatisation being implemented in the council, and to gauge the possibility of resistance to those policies. However, despite the author's best efforts to encourage the interviewees to 'keep to the question' it soon became evident that SAMWU members were determined to provide the interviewer with a wealth of information about their personal and working lives, much of which

concentrated on the forthcoming elections and the stupendous change that was about to take place in their country. It was clear that the focus of early interviews was too narrow to encompass the reasons and understand the dynamic of change taking place in South Africa during this period.

Consequently, because of the limitations of the original strategy, the interviews were modified to include open-ended questions and allow for answers to reflect the full breadth and richness of personal experiences, working environment and trade union activities. The topics discussed generally (and where appropriate) were divided into the following areas (see Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1**  
**TOPIC AREAS DISCUSSED IN INTERVIEWS: 1993**

<p><b>Lives of interviewees in Cape Town:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• economic and social aspects</li> <li>• how apartheid affected their lives</li> </ul>
<p><b>Changes in government:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• views on the ANC and the forthcoming election</li> </ul>
<p><b>Cape Town City Council (CCC):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• as an organisation that provided services and as an employer (terms &amp; conditions, politics, ideology etc.).</li> <li>• change including the effects of privatisation and de-regulation in the council.</li> </ul>
<p><b>South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• general information on the structure and organisation of the union.</li> <li>• perceptions of the strength and power of SAMWU at both the grass roots organisational and leadership levels (non-SAMWU members were asked to give their general impressions of the union).</li> <li>• the association with other public sector unions, the national federation, COSATU and the new ANC</li> <li>• experiences of struggle, and their perceived ability and willingness to resist the changes posed by policies of privatisation and the free market</li> </ul>

## Phase two

The researcher returned to South Africa in Aug-Sept 1997 in order to review the process and experience of change. During this stage the researcher interviewed 47 people (see appendix 3 for a list of those interviewed in 1997), 20 of these were SAMWU members, based mainly in Cape Town. They included 4 full-time officers, a selection of members, working in the Cape Town City Council (CCC) and Johannesburg. Once again these interviews were supplemented by others: non-SAMWU union members in the area, and ordinary users of council services (from both the townships and city). Where possible, during this second visit the same people were interviewed (see appendix 4 for details of those re-interviewed in 1997). However, because a number of members had 'moved on', retired or were retrenched this was not always feasible.

New interviewees included the Johannesburg Regional Secretary and Branch Secretary, a number of lay-members from both Cape Town and Johannesburg, the new NEHAWU branch secretary, a white NEHAWU steward, users of the Cape Town council services (city and townships), and finally residents from a township in the Johannesburg and Durban areas

The researcher discussed similar issues to those addressed in phase 1, but now attempted to place them within a post-apartheid context (See Table 4.2)

**Table 4.2**  
**TOPIC AREAS DISCUSSED IN INTERVIEWS: 1997**

- the effects of the new government (State),
- the National Party in the Western Cape Provincial government
- the trade union relationship with the ANC and the social accords and labour legislation
- public sector in the 'New South Africa, both as employers and providers of the services.
- the position of so called 'coloureds' in the NSA.

## Limitations of the primary data

Initially it was hoped that a full ethnographic study could be conducted, observing SAMWU workers both in their home, work and especially in their union meetings. Several events made this objective naive and impractical - and served only to highlight the limitations to research in the context of radical social change. Christmas 1993 was a particularly difficult period, on account of the tensions and uncertainty during the progress of the negotiations. Following the brutal murder of an US researcher, and the bombing of a local mixed race bar in Cape Town, the researcher found a number of her guides reluctant to escort her into the townships, or allow her to travel to isolated sites. However, events were made tolerable in the weeks leading up to the elections and valuable information was acquired during visits to the 'coloured' and black areas.

In 1997 the interviews were easier with many more SAMWU workers willing to talk than in 1993. This was mainly due to the researcher's increased knowledge and experience, rather than a decline in tensions. For example, it was more productive to arrive at offices and depots and wait, rather than make appointments. However, problems of access to townships and remote districts remained difficult, especially as the increased violence, along with the development of gangland crime, in many 'coloured' areas made ethnographic study dangerous.

The interviewer also experienced difficulties encouraging lay members to speak to her. It transpired that the Councils use of the so-called 'entrapment officer', contracted to 'catch on video' employees illegally selling council property, meant the interviewees were reluctant to trust strangers. On one occasion, it was only the researcher's willingness to make tea for the workers on site, that finally convinced them she was worth talking to.

A further problem persisted throughout the period of research. The researcher sometimes found it difficult to understand the local 'coloured' afrikaner dialect common to this area, whilst the interviewees almost certainly found the researcher's - albeit slight - Birmingham accent, strange. Evidence to support this statement was supplied by the researcher's South African companion who explained that the group of workers - whom she had been interviewing for the past 2 hours - wanted to know what language she spoke. Overall there remained a question over whether the extracts from interviews should be edited in order to make the meanings clearer. But finally it was decided that

the interviewees should be reported verbatim, although at times, for reasons of clarity, the structure of the sentences are changed.

#### Limitations of selection of interviewees

Interviews were used throughout the research because they were considered one of the most common, and powerful means of obtaining data (Fontana and Frey, 1994). Nevertheless, there were limitations with regard to the selection of interviewees which need to be highlighted. Firstly, there was no endeavour to use a stratified sample, which obviously raises questions over representation and ability to generalise to a wider population. The research design used entailed the researcher selecting randomly from a sample of Samwu leaders, shopstewards, trade union members, users of public services in the township and city, and finally consultants and researchers, in the area. This sample was suggested by a small number of contacts in the area – usually insiders, or members of the group studied. The individuals - for example, Hennie, a SAMWU shopsteward - were often willing to be informants, acting as guides to, and translator of cultural norms, including at times jargon or language. Such contacts recommended other contacts, and other sources of valuable data, all of which may possibly been obtained without these people, but ultimately saved time and avoided cultural mistakes. A stratified sample was never used because it would have required a complete - easily accessible- frame from which to select respondents. Yet, for the reasons outlined above, regarding the difficulty of carrying out field research during changing and volatile periods, this would have been difficult to achieve.

However, such a methodology highlights the limitations of interviews – particularly as a source of primary data. Problems over bias are obviously common to this approach. In particular, the interviewer's own background is capable of influencing the interpretations and analysis of interviews, raising questions over validity and objectivity. Furthermore, such a method relies on the skills and sensitivity of the interviewers, with the course of the interview often being decided by the interviewer when asking open-ended questions or probing supplementary issues - thus leading to further accusations of subjectivity and unreliability (Fontana and Frey, 1994). Therefore, in recognition of the limitations of interviews, and in particular the lack of a stratified sample, the interview data was supplemented by the collection and analysis of further secondary materials and records (see secondary data section). Such empirical data,

although not aiming to be generalisable to any wider sample, did allow for further clarification of the issues under investigation.

#### **4.4 SUMMARY**

In sum, the overall aim of the research was to contribute to the knowledge and improved understanding of the relationship between the state and the public sector unions . The research used a case study of the Cape Town branch of SAMWU, from 1992-7, in order to understand the nature and power of the public sector unions, and their ability and willingness to challenge the government and its policies of privatisation and deregulation. Equally, the case method also served as an instrument of interpretation, used to refine and advance the theoretical understanding of the state and its relationship with the public sector unions.

It is to the case study of the union SAMWU, that we now turn. Workers such as those in SAMWU were centrally positioned to experience the contradictions and the pressures associated with changing relationship with the state, during the period 1992-7. Apart from its regular functions as a trade union, SAMWU had historically concentrated on the organs of local government and emphasised the unequal division of resources. Opposition to privatisation was a central theme in this discourse.



South  
African  
Municipal  
Workers  
Union



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**CASE-STUDY OF SAMWU IN THE  
WESTERN CAPE  
(1992-7)**

**Presentation and Discussion of  
Research findings**

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## INTRODUCTION

In an attempt to progress the theoretical understanding of the changing relationship between the state and public sector trade unions in South Africa, the Cape Town branch of SAMWU was studied from 1992-7. The South African Municipal Workers union (SAMWU) was one of the largest and most prominent trade unions in South Africa. Its growth had been substantial, its national membership grew from only 14,000 at its founding Congress in 1986, to 122,000 in 1997 (Baskin, 1996). The nucleus for this growth had originated in the Cape Town region, where almost two-thirds of the original membership had been located. From the beginning the Cape Town City Council branch was different from the 'emerging' African unions, principally because its 'coloured' membership had allowed it union recognition since 1961 - 'coloureds', unlike Africans had been permitted by NP to form their own trade unions.

The membership of the branch reflected the ethnic and demographic patterns of the region - the majority of South Africa's 'coloureds' resided in the Western Cape Province, whilst blacks were in the minority. Yet, Cape Town was distinctive in that, despite the conservative reputation of the 'coloured' population, the region had enjoyed a history of struggle against apartheid. In the 1980s, the United Democratic Force (UDF), the internal arm of the then banned ANC, was particularly strong in 'coloured' areas. Apartheid may have left deep divisions in the Western Cape by granting 'coloureds' marginal privileges over blacks, but at certain points these divisions disappeared with 'coloureds' deliberately identifying themselves with the 'black struggle' (Makhanya, 1994; Callinicos, 1996).

However, evidence of increasing militancy amongst the 'coloured' workers in the Western Cape could be contrasted with their overwhelming support for the National Party (NP) in the first democratic elections of 1994. The rest of South Africa was visibly shocked when the majority of the 'coloureds' voted the NP into Provincial Government and Hemus Kriel, a 'hard-line' Nationalist Party member, won over 800,000 votes. These figures confirmed what many knew, the party that invented the apartheid system, that had uprooted 'coloureds' from their homes and arbitrarily disfranchised them, had won the support of many 'coloureds' (Neill, 1994). Once again racism and fear appeared to have played a role. 'Coloured' workers in the Cape, believing the ANC

were about to reduce their meagre wages in order to uplift the black population, had voted for the white Afrikaners

This example of an uneven consciousness amongst the 'coloured' community, was further complicated by the evidence that SAMWU in Cape Town, the largest and most prominent branch in the Western Cape, with over 90% 'coloured' membership, persisted in distinguishing itself from other unions by consistently opposing government policies of privatisation and deregulation. Since the late 1980s, and throughout the 1992-7 period under review, prominent members in the Cape Town branch highlighted the threats posed by the introduction of the free market in the public sector. Moreover, by the end of 1994, their opposition and readiness to strike against privatisation had become policy, for both the branch and the national union. As a consequence, the probability of direct resistance from SAMWU to the government's free-market programmes emerged as a central theme in the research.

To provide an insight into this resistance - and in the process glean an understanding of the changing relationship between the state and public sector trade unions in South Africa - the research focuses on the Cape Town branch from 1992-7. The case study is divided into two time periods: the period leading up to, and including the abolition of apartheid (1992-4) and the immediate post apartheid era, 1995-7. Each respective part provides a brief introduction, summarising the aims and objectives of the branch during that period, followed by an outline of the chapters covered. In each case, the individual sections provide a survey of the social, material and workplace background of the SAMWU workers in Cape Town - along with a description and evaluation of the changing history, internal structure and external activities of the branch, within the development of the union generally. The aim is to examine the organisation, leadership and balance of class forces within the union, with the purpose of evaluating the potential strength of opposition to state policies of privatisation - whilst advancing the theoretical understanding of the changing relationship between the state and public sector trade unions in South Africa.

# **PART 1**

## **SAMWU IN THE WESTERN CAPE**

### **1992- 4**

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#### **Introduction**

The section firstly provides - by way of an introduction - a summary of the branch's general aims, objectives and strategic opportunities from 1992-4. This is followed by an outline of part 1 of the case study, with a rationale for the inclusion of different chapters provided.

#### **Aims, and objectives of the Cape Town Branch 1992-4**

In 1992, the Cape Town branch was poised to take advantage of the enormous transformation of the country. SAMWU nationally, had been the first union within the local government sector to embrace non-racialism, and so was well placed to welcome all workers regardless of their hierarchical positions, colour or social standing. SAMWU had grown steadily throughout the 1980s, and with the expansion of the public sector membership in the 1990s, and the much rumoured merger of all public sector unions, it planned to expand still further. The Cape Town branch hoped to be a beneficiary of these changes.

The branch itself was unusual, its overwhelmingly 'coloured' membership accounted for the 'conservative' reputation of the branch nationally, whilst its resistance to apartheid and consistent opposition to privatisation earned Cape Town an equally radical standing. Such resistance was linked to the aims it shared with the national union – namely achieving fundamental change in local government, and a longer term commitment to transform the nature of South Africa by striving for a socialist society. Yet, equally implicit in this thinking was a gradual acceptance - during this

period - that the ANC leadership no longer intended to defeat the South African ruling classes and their system; and the union would be forced to challenge the `new' government if it was to reform local government - let alone change society (Interview, Roger Ronnie, 8/10/93).

Nevertheless, despite the transformation of the country opening up new and different prospects and challenges for the union, it was evident during the 1992-4 period that the ability to cope with any changes, would be restricted unless the problems and issues associated with - firstly - the internal organisation of the union - and secondly - the external activities of the union, were addressed (Interview, Lance, 10/11/93).

### Internal structure and organisation

In 1992/3 the internal structure of the union was giving cause for concern. Although the change in government and the prospect of increased membership was welcomed, it was also imposing greater strains on the overall structure and organisation of the union. As early as 1992, the new role for the independent unions - within the newly emerging industrial relations system - was beginning to generate new demands. As a consequence there was recognition on the part of SAMWU that a re-organisation of their structures and organisation would be essential if they were to meet the increasing demands. In particular, a greater emphasis was to be put on formal lines of communications between the leadership and their members - as well as giving prominent consideration to the general `bread and butter' issues in the workplace. Moreover, the leadership was expressing a need for the branches to provide better administration and services for their members to meet these challenges (Lance, interviews, 10/11/93; Roger, interview, 8/10/93; SAMWU Congress Report: Organisational Issues, 1997a).

The move to accommodate these new demands meant the existing union structures were increasingly coming under review. Of concern, was the uneven size and power of large branches (like Cape Town), in relation to regions; and the possibility of the development of a layer of trade union bureaucrats at a local level. Overall, it was acknowledged by the union leadership that many of the stronger branches had simply outgrown the regions, to the point that regions were not functioning effectively (Lance,

interviews, 10/11/93; Roger, interview, 8/10/93; SAMWU Congress Report: Organisational Issues, 1997a) .

### External activities

In terms of its external activities, both the branch - and union as a whole - was changing during this period. Whereas opposition to apartheid and national liberation still continued to dominate the political ideology and actions of the branch, there was equally a willingness to look to the future and the economic and social prospect of a 'new' South Africa (Etkind and Harvey, 1993). Of crucial importance to SAMWU was the attainment of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) – the ANC's macro-economic policy (RDP), supported and formulated by COSATU for the post-apartheid economy. When the document was first unveiled in January, 1994, it claimed to make far reaching changes to the fabric of South African life by tackling poverty and deprivation - plus a commitment to nationalisation, and state intervention (Argus, 1994a). In addition, the document emphasised a role for trade unions in national economic planning, and local decision-making. SAMWU welcomed such a role, which was directly linked to an alliance between the trade unions and the new ANC government (Cargill, 1993).

Yet, alongside such overt political aspirations SAMWU was equally determined to address economic issues. Crucially, the independent local authority unions still lacked a centralised bargaining council - this emerged as one of SAMWU's main goals from 1992. It was hoped that national negotiations would assist in reducing some of the inequalities created by apartheid - especially for the low paid. For that reason the union began concentrating its efforts on tabling national demands for a "living wage", the eradication of the apartheid wage gap between blacks and whites (Andrew Levy and Associates, 1993/4).

Finally, of particular concern to SAMWU and the Cape Town branch was the issue of privatisation. From the beginning those branch members interviewed in 1993 seemed aware of the dangers of privatisation and deregulation. Members expressed a feeling of vulnerability about their jobs as a result of the free market ideologies and practices in the public sector. Considerable anger was especially directed towards any employer or state that intended to privatise. As the period under review progressed, this issue increasingly became the focus of the branch's activities, and had the potential to

effect their future relationship with the ANC government. The following structure will be used to explore these main aims, objectives and challenges more fully

### **Structure of Part 1**

Part 1 of the case study considers the Cape Town branch within the general transformation of SAMWU, and South Africa, from 1992-4. The aims of the following chapters are to explore Cape Town's ability and willingness to fight privatisation. **Chapter 5**, firstly provides a description of the social and material position of the 'coloured' workers in the Western Cape - along with the structure and organisation of the Cape Town City Council (CCC). Whilst the purpose is to provide a backdrop to the development of the branch in the region, it also permits a fuller understanding of the possible influences on the thinking, values, and class consciousness of the membership.

**Chapter 6**, shows the historical development of the branch, from its origins in the old established Cape Town Municipal Workers Association (CTMWA). An understanding of the branch history and its attempts to build a national union, assists in explaining why Cape Town remained so central to the organisation of SAMWU nationally.

**Chapter 7** explores the internal structure of the union. It examines the growth in membership; the problems associated with the unions changing structure and democracy; the servicing of its members; and the need for improvements in all these areas. An analysis of this overall area is important to assessing whether Cape Town, indeed the union as a whole, was developing the organisational ability and leadership to mount an attack on the government's privatisation policies.

**Chapter 8** considers the union activities and struggles during the 1992-4 period. In particular it highlights the increasing formalisation of the branch, alongside the continuing levels of conflict, made all the more acute because of government plans to increase privatisation and deregulation in the public sector. The purpose is to assess the activities and strategies of the branch, whilst evaluating the members' power and ability to stop privatisation.

Finally, **chapter 9** reviews the 1992-4 period. It summarises the changing social and economic environment in Cape Town, whilst acknowledging the tremendous effects of apartheid on the branches `coloured' membership. Secondly, it evaluates the internal structure and external activities of the branch; and finally concludes by considering - at this stage - SAMWU`s relationship with the ANC.

# **CHAPTER 5**

## **THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT OF THE SAMWU WORKER IN THE WESTERN CAPE.**

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### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

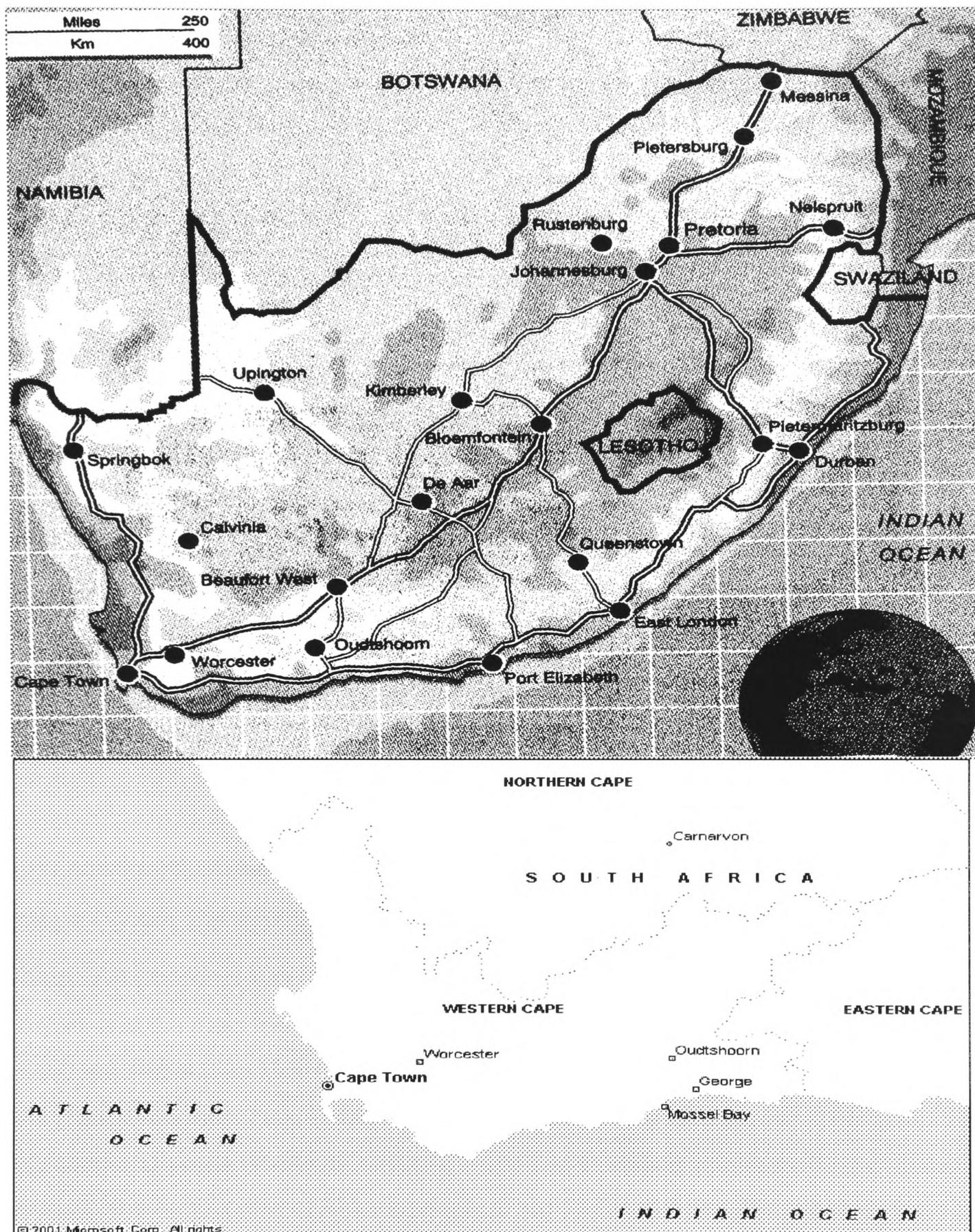
The description of the social and material position of the 'coloured' worker in the Western Cape - along with the structure and organisation of the Cape Town City Council (CCC) - whilst placing in context the development of the branch, also permits a fuller understanding of the possible influences on the thinking, values, and class consciousness of the membership. The chapter, firstly describes the location, demographic profiles, population and HDI (Human Development Index - a measure of the quality of life), of the Western Cape. This is followed by an account of the SAMWU workers' employers (the Cape Town City Council - CCC), including a general description of the local authorities that existed in the Western Cape; the structure and organisation of the CCC; along with the control and employment issues within the council. The overall purpose is to provide the reader with a understanding of the home and work environment of the SAMWU membership, and by inference its effects on the organisation of the branch and its levels of class solidarity

### **5.2 THE LOCATION OF SAMWU IN THE WESTERN**

The Cape Town branch of SAMWU was located in perhaps one of the most spectacular areas of South Africa, - the Western Cape province (see Map 5.1)

## Map 5.1

### LOCATION OF THE WESTERN CAPE IN SOUTH AFRICA



Source: Adapted from Microsoft Corp 2001; 'Survey on South Africa', *Financial Times*, July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1994, p.14; Bridgeman et al, 1992.

The Province occupied 129,386 km<sup>2</sup> or 10.6% of South Africa's land area, and contained 12% of the country's arable land. The region was different from the rest of South Africa because of its winter rainfall, pleasant 'mediterranean' climate and stunning indigenous vegetation (Bridgman, Palmer, and Wolfgang, 1992). It was

second most important economic region in South Africa. The bulk of South African wine estates, deciduous fruit, wheat, vegetables, and cut flower production were (and are) found here, and its west and south coasts supported inshore and deep-sea fishing industries. The area had a strong manufacturing base, with a high technology component, relatively important financial and insurance services, a large sea port - with historical roots in the Dutch seaborne empire, two major airports, and some of the most dramatic scenery in South Africa, supporting a developing tourist industry (CSS:1991 Census; 1993 OHS; 1995 OHS).

The population of the Western Cape, from which the 'coloured' SAMWU workers drew their origins, were distinctive. The displacement of the indigenous Khoisan peoples (herders), resulted in slaves being imported - many from Indonesia- as a source of labour. By the turn of the twentieth century the working class, largely of Khoisan and slave origins were called 'coloured' rather than 'Native'. The predominant language of the farms and streets was a form of Dutch, the forerunner of Afrikaans. Islam, carried by those sections of the slave community from Asia, survived in the face of a dominant Christianity. Historically, 'coloureds' either rejected the cultural hegemony of the whites to take up Islam or accepted the terms of white society and adopted Christianity. (Beinart, 1994; Ross, 1989).

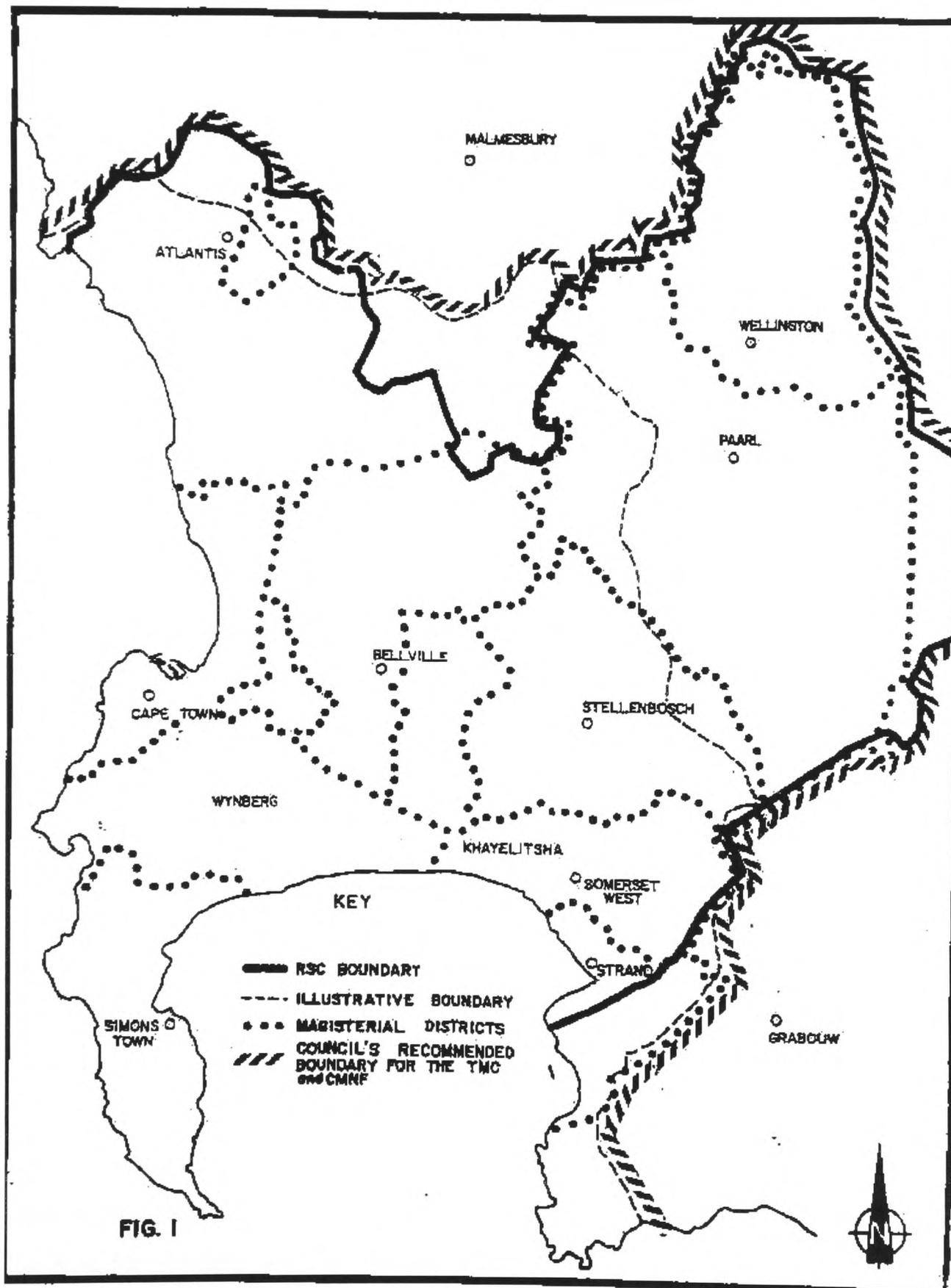
The entire peninsula on which the province was situated, was bounded in the north by Atlantis, Paarl and Wellington and in the east by Franschhoek, Stellenbosch, Somerset West and Gordon's Bay. At the heart of the Province was **Cape Town**, the provincial capital and the main metropolitan area - which was until 1904 the largest city in Southern Africa (see Map 5.2). Racial divisions were relatively fluid, and 'coloured' people moved more rapidly than Africans to the towns, on account of sharing the same agrarian and social worlds as Afrikaner. The Cape originally had few African reserves, but with the huge inflow of African people in the 1950s, the city had come to share the demographic and linguistic characteristics of most other South African cities (Beinart, 1994).

This area of the Western Cape was not only an important agricultural region but a political, cultural and intellectual centre. Some of the earliest advocates of Afrikaner nationalism came from these old agrarian heartlands which had lived longest in the imperial shadow. It was around the secondary cities of the region - Paarl and

Stellenbosch - that intellectuals defined the Afrikaans language as separate from Dutch and the first Afrikaner history of the country was written. In 1992 the area was considered a desirable area for whites to live and property development was an important source of growth (Bridgeman, Palmer and Wolfgang, 1992; Beinart, 1994).

Map 5.2

THE STRUCTURE OF GREATER CAPE TOWN



Source: Bridgeman *et al*, 1992.

**The Greater Cape Town** area was of strategic importance to the province. The high levels of urbanisation in the area were true for all race groups. A well developed settlement arm stretched from the City to the south and north-eastwards. These suburbs contained urban environments with a diversity of residential, commercial and industrial functions - along with a relatively well developed transport and infrastructure. To the west and south-west of the city centre lay the Atlantic suburbs and the southern peninsula - these white dominated upper-income residences, especially around areas like Seapoint, were among the finest in the world. In sharp contrast the Cape Flats in the east were sandy areas with old and new housing estates, inadequate social and recreational facilities, and only a few industrial centres. Expansion in this direction had resulted in the establishment of new townships stretching to the 'south-east sector'. Overall the suburbs on the Cape Flats remained isolated from employment, divided by major roads and allocated on racial lines to mostly poorer African and 'coloured' people (Bridgman *et al*, 1992).

Developments in the Cape Flats and south-east sector included the poor to middle-income 'coloured' suburbs of Mitchell's Plain and Blue Downs, where a large number of SAMWU workers resided. Many 'coloureds' were forcefully evicted to this area in the 60s when apartheid was rigorously applied resulting in large-scale removals of people from proclaimed 'white' areas. District Six, a mixed area close to the city centre, was perhaps the most notorious. Other areas on the Cape Flats embraced the 'coloured' townships such as Bonatelhauwel and Hanover Park, the airport industrial zone, the African townships of Nyanga, Gugletu and Crossroads, the Philippi farming area and - further still from the city centre, the black township, Khayelitsha (Bridgeman *et al*, 1992).

Of the approximately 2.5 million people resident in Greater Cape Town in the early 1990s (DBSA, 1991), 30% resided in the higher-income, predominantly white residential areas of the City bowl, the older suburbs and the new-income northern suburbs. 70% were settled outside on the Cape Flats (32%) and the south-east sector (38%). In debates regarding the development of the province, the housing crisis was often cited. Much of the discussion centres on the quantitative shortfall in 'proper' housing for Africans and, to a lesser extent, 'coloureds'. Although, still a major problem during the early 1990s, the housing of 'coloureds' went through its most difficult phase during the 1960s and 1970s, when 'coloureds' resorted to building spontaneous settlements because of accommodation shortage (Bridgeman *et al*, 1992: Smith,

1987). Nevertheless, during this period, the area had seen an enormous population increase, often far from adequate housing schemes, and only relatively little improvement of the commercial and social facilities in this area (Bridgeman *et al*, 1992).

In general though, the Western Cape during the 1992- 1994 period was a region with a good infrastructure, high employment, strong economic activity and a high level of taxation. It was one of the best resourced provinces in terms of health facilities, and its literacy rate was high (71%) - with education resources above the average. However this generalised picture masked the disparities within the region: the standard of living of whites in the Cape ranked among the world's top five developed countries, whilst the 'coloureds' in the rural areas were amongst the lowest in the world, with some of the highest incidences of tuberculosis of any province (CSS 1993 OHS; 1995 OHS)

### **5.3 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILES**

In many respects the demographic profiles in the Western Cape - from 1992-4 - were similar to the rest of South Africa, but they departed from the national picture in a number of significant areas (OHS, 1995,- using 1991 census and 1993, OHS ). It is useful - as a means of establishing the economic and social background of the 'coloured' SAMWU worker in Cape Town - to analyse these figures further. The following section considers the population and Human Development Index (HDI), a measure used to determine the quality of life in the area.

#### **5.3.1 Population**

The CSS (OHS, 1995 - using 1991 census; OHS 1993 & 1994/5 questionnaires) estimated the size of the South African population to be approximately 41 million people<sup>16</sup>. KwaZulu-Natal is the largest province in South Africa, whereas the Western Cape is fifth. Table 5.1 shows the population by province

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<sup>16</sup> Estimates of the South African population prior to 1994 differ greater. The reason is linked to the over-estimation of the black population on the part of the apartheid census in 1991 - see a clearer explanation in the Methodology chapter

**Table 5.1**  
**SIZE OF THE POPULATION BY PROVINCE**

Province	Size of the population in millions
KwaZulu-Natal	8.8
Gauteng	7.1
E.Cape	6.6
N.Province	5.6
W.Cape	3.7
North W.	3.3
Mpuma	3.0
Free State	2.8
N.Cape	0.7

Source: OHS October household Survey 1995

Africans constituted the majority of people in all provinces, except in the Western and Northern Cape, where 'coloureds' were in the majority. Therefore, the population groups in Western Cape remained markedly different from the rest of South Africa, as Table 5.2 indicates.

**Table 5.2**  
**RACE COMPOSITION OF THE POPULATION OF THE WESTERN CAPE**

Race	South Africa	Western Cape	% of pop. in South Africa	% of Pop. in the Western Cape
Africans	Three-quarters	1 in 5	76	18
White	1 in 7	1 in 4	13	24
Indian	1 in 30	small	3	1
Coloureds	1 in 10	more than half of the pop.	9	57

(because of rounding may not always add up to 100%)

Source: 1995 OHS 'Living in Western Cape'

Like all cities in South Africa the population of the Western Cape could not be separated from the economic and political considerations of apartheid planning. The segregation of towns and the use of so-called 'coloured reserves' divided the society in this area and led to a 'developmental dualism'. 'Coloured' people in Cape Town were amongst the primary victims of the early apartheid years (OHS, 1995; Beinart, 1994).

In poorer Cape suburbs, 'racial' barriers had been penetrable, along the Peninsula's Main Road 'coloured' people occupied common residential areas with poor whites.

Yet, Nationalists had long agitated for their segregation, by attempting to exploit white fears using notions of 'miscegenation'. This was a concept that played on the idea of purity -especially that of white women - and Social Darwinist fears that mixing would result in racial decline. The easy social interaction, and in some cases inter-marriage between 'coloureds' and poor whites became a prime target for such an ideology. These concerns led to legislation: the Mixed Marriages Act (1949) and the Immorality Act (1950), which prohibited marriage and extra-marital sex across racial boundaries. Further classification under the Population Registration Act of 1950 caused many families to become divided, as relatives were re-classified into different race groups (OHS, 1995; Beinart, 1994) <sup>17</sup>.

Unlike Africans though, it was difficult to develop a discourse of separate nation-hood for the Cape 'coloureds', especially as many Afrikaner and 'coloureds' shared not only a common language but in some cases a common ancestry - although this was seldom admitted. Nevertheless, the Nationalists remained consumed with making race and nation congruent, and set out to intensify 'coloured' self-awareness (Beinart, 1994). The Group Areas Act (1950), allowing for setting up of separate geographical racial zones, came to exemplify such attempts. Its effects impacted most on 'coloured' and Indian people - an estimated 600,000 were removed over three decades as Cape Town and Durban were redefined along racial lines (Beinart, 1994; Smith, 1987)

Population removals under the Act were often justified by the South African government as slum clearance. District Six, at the foot of Table Mountain (named after the old sixth district of Cape Town) became symbolic of such apartheid oppression, when in 1966 it was re-defined by the NP, as a white zone. For many of the SAMWU workers interviewed, the area with a one time population of 60,000, was closely associated with the history and culture of the 'coloureds'. Old 'coloured' and Malay areas were destroyed and their population moved out of the city onto the Cape Flats. Most of the areas were subsequently cleared, houses were demolished, with only the historic Malay Quarter remaining. The quality of the housing into which the residents were moved may have been superior - as one brochure advertising the new town for 'coloureds' explained...

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<sup>17</sup> The Population Registration Act provided for compulsory classification on a national register. Documents would be issued to all stating their racial group; a Race Classification Board adjudicated on disputed cases. The race classification determined the public and private rights of any individual (Beinart, 1994, p141).

...The kind of people who are buying houses at Mitchells Plain are the kind of people you would be glad to have as friends and neighbours. They are all people just like yourself who want to live a clean decent life; taking a pride in your home and garden; bringing up your children to appreciate the better things in life; helping each other in a spirit of fellowship; getting together for discussions, entertainment, Church and Club activities, etc.

**Source: Smith, 1987, P.32.**

But human relationships, in places like the Cape Flats were considered more impersonal, social deprivation more evident, and personal safety less secure than in the traditional 'coloured' areas of Cape Town (Beinart, 1994; Smith, 1987). One 'coloured' student, interviewed in 1993 explained why...

You must understand that for many 'coloured' people in Cape Town, and that includes many of the SAMWU workers you're speaking to, District Six is part of their history, their struggle... District Six was a slum, very few of the properties belonged to the 'coloured' people, they were mostly Indian and white landlords. Many of the properties were overcrowded, rents were often collected by floor space, it was a way of making lots of money...yet the ultimate losers were still the 'coloured' working class families, many were simply torn from their roots and scattered across the Cape Flats. They still talk about it today, just go down to the shebeens that 'coloureds' frequent and its not long before they start talking about the District Six clearances.

**Angie 'Coloured' student from University of Cape Town (UCT),  
Interview 17/10/93.**

In the early 1990s, the demographic picture of the area in which SAMWU workers of the Western Cape resided, remained a reflection of the apartheid policies of the past. The legacy of upheaval and segregation was everywhere to be seen, but it was also an area undergoing substantial change. Up until the mid-1980s the composition of the population in the region had been affected by the influx controls of the 'coloured labour preference' policy. Africans could only be employed if there were no 'coloureds' suitable for the work. Later, the abolition of the policy reverberated into a much faster migration of Africans, primarily to Greater Cape Town but also to the fringe and periphery towns, and to a lesser extent the farming areas. The inflow of labour resulted in the mushrooming of informal settlements, initially near the African townships but later scattered around the metropolis. Estimates from the 1991 census and Bridgman *et al* (1992) predicted a rapid increase in the African population, from 14.7% in 1980 to

33.5% in 2010, whilst whites would decline from 29.8% in 1980 to 19.8% in 2010, and 'coloured' people from 55.5% to 46.7% over the same period (OHS, 1995; Bridgeman *et al*, 1992).

### 5.3.2 Human Development Index

During this period (1992-1994) the Western Cape enjoyed one of the highest human development indexes in the country - this is the representation of life expectancy, level of education and income. The following section considers these areas - although because of lack of data on incomes for Africans and 'coloureds' in this area during this period, employment trends and patterns have been substituted as a determinant of the quality of life.

#### LIFE EXPECTANCY

According to the CSS (OHS, 1995) the life expectancy for the Western Cape was 67.7 years, the highest expectancy of all the provinces, well above the national average of 62.8 and Gauteng's (Johannesburg area) average of 66. Yet such crude figures masked the racial differences - the whites in Western Cape had a 10-year longer life expectation than other group, there was a fairly rapid ageing of the 'coloured' population, yet interestingly the African age profile departed from the typical age pyramid of developing countries<sup>18</sup>.

The age profile of the Africans in the Western Cape was one of the peculiarities of the area. Unlike the rest of South Africa, the largest proportion of Africans were not among infants and young children, but amongst the 20-44 age group - males (49%) and females (48%) - with the proportion declining with increasing age. The reason was linked to the apartheid influx controls, traditionally imposed on Africans entering this area. While young African adults appeared to migrate to the Western Cape from the rural areas in search of work, their children remained at home for nurturing and education (CSS: OHS 1995). Likewise - in contrast to the rest of South Africa - more

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<sup>18</sup> The extent of underdevelopment that Africans endured more generally under apartheid is clear from the age distribution. The age-pyramid is typical of poorer countries - a large proportion of people are infants and young children, while among those aged 15 or more, the proportion of people in each age category steadily decreases

males than females were found in the 20-64 age group, which was a further indication that migration played a role.

By far the most surprising age expectancy profile in the Western Cape was that of the 'coloured' race group. The CSS figures revealed an interesting picture emerging, somewhere between developing and developed countries (CSS: OHS, 1993; OHS, 1995). The proportion of 'coloureds' found in all age groups was fairly consistent until the age of 35, when the proportion started to fall and finally decreased sharply after the age of 40 – with only 2% of 'coloured' males being found in the age category 60-64 years. Such statistics clearly indicated a declining number of 'coloureds' surviving to an older age (CSS:OHS, 1995).

The causes for this age anomaly were difficult to establish from the figures, but it is possible to speculate that the lower life expectancy was linked to the poorer standard of living and working conditions of 'coloureds', as compared to whites. One SAMWU member was clearly worried about this, and communicated his fear of dying young.

'Who knows if I can enjoy my old age, life is getting tougher at the council, why more and more 'coloured' workers are dying within a few years of retiring'

**Motaung, Interview, 17/11/93**

Overall, whites enjoyed the highest life expectancy of all the race groups in Western Cape (with 16% of white males and 19% of females being aged 60 years or more), followed by 'coloureds' and finally Africans. Nevertheless, since the Western Cape has one of the highest levels of life expectancy in South Africa, it may be possible to conclude that all race groups benefited to some extent ((Bridgeman *et al*, 1992; CSS: OHS, 1995).

## LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Another indication of the quality of life is education. This area demonstrated clear racial and gender differences. Whites enjoyed the best educational attainment in Western Cape, with males achieving the highest (73%) education to secondary level compared with the females (67%). Within the 'coloured' population, only half of the coloured females and males (50% and 53% respectively) had received some secondary

education. Whereas, Africans males and females - despite educational disadvantages, especially on the part of the women - attained 45% and 53% (respectively).

Racial variations were clearly evident in education. Amongst Africans in the Western Cape (aged 20 years or more), 9% of African males and 7% of females had received no education at all, whereas for 'coloureds' the figures were 7% (male and females), and whites 0% (male and female). The figures – in the case of Africans - contrasted well with the rest of South Africa where 20% of African women and 14% males had received no education at all. Once again the reasons appeared to be linked to migration - many literate Africans from the TBVC (homeland) states moved to the Western Cape for work. Racial variations could also be found in post-school education: 7% of African females and 6% of African males, have attained a post-school qualification, while only a small proportion of 'coloured' females and males (5% each) have attained an educational level higher than matric. The reasons for this may have been partly explained by the comments of one SAMWU worker interviewed..

...during the apartheid regime they (the 'coloured' workers) were more interested in material gains.... he took his child out of school put them in a factory in order to further those material gains that they wanted to make. What they find now is that black people are much more educated, much more professional.

**Frank, interview 20/12/93.**

Therefore, although whites obviously attained the highest standard of education, interestingly Africans - despite their material disadvantages - still managed to achieve higher levels of post-school education than 'coloureds' during this period.

## **PATTERNS AND TRENDS OF EMPLOYMENT<sup>19</sup>**

This section considers the influence of the 'coloured' labour policy, the sectors of employment, occupations and unemployment in the Western Cape.<sup>20</sup> According to the

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<sup>19</sup> Data on the structure and trends of employment and unemployment are unreliable in South Africa and guestimates are frequently used. The reliability of such data is discussed further in the methodology chapter

<sup>20</sup> Owing to lack of data on the breakdown of income in this area during the 1992-4 period, patterns and types of (un)employment, were substituted as a good indicator of the overall quality of life with which to measure the HDI.

CSS (OHS, 1995 - using 1991 census, 1993 OHS and 94 questionnaires) 64% of the 15 plus population were said to be economically active <sup>21</sup>. The figure was high in comparison to the entire country (55%). Of those economically active people in Western Cape, 81% indicated they were gainfully employed either in the formal or informal sector, whilst 19% said they were unemployed (using the expanded definition <sup>22</sup>). Once again such figures concealed the racial differences prevalent in the province.

#### The 'Coloured' Labour preference policy

As outlined, one of the distinguishing racial features of the Western Cape's labour market has been the apartheid government's use of the 'coloured labour preference policy' in this area from 1955 to 1984. Employers who wanted to employ Africans needed a certificate from the Department of Labour showing there were no suitably qualified 'coloured' workers available. Its purpose was to prevent the movement of Africans from the homelands to the Western Cape in order to protect 'coloured' labour from African competition; and to preserve the province as a numerically dominant white area. F.R. Thomlinson, chairman of the Tomlinson Commission of 1951 (whose mandate was to study ways of developing the homelands economically), recorded his shock at the extent to which Africans had taken up residence and employment in the area and recommended.

'The Western Cape must be declared a white area so that there is at least one region in the country where no point of friction can be created between Africans and White. This entails a slow repatriation of the natives from the Western Cape'

**Thomlinson F.R 'Toerverslag Wes-Kaapland',  
translated by Humphries, 1989.**

Further controls were increased in the 1960s to squeeze out 'illegal' Africans, with the government undertaking to reduce the African population in Cape Town by 5% annually

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<sup>21</sup> Economically active refers to those available for work either employed or unemployed

<sup>22</sup> At least two definitions of unemployment are used in South Africa - the strict (taken steps in the last 4 weeks to find work) and the expanded (desire for work) definition.

from 1966. The controls stratified the workforce into two distinct groups: a population qualified to live and work permanently in the Western Cape; and another group of African, temporary contract workers. Most of the temporary workers were forced into manual unskilled and more dangerous jobs. Since the 'coloured' labour preference policy was operative for almost thirty years until September, 1984, it was fairly evident that most SAMWU workers, would have benefited - to some degree - from the policy (Kraak, 1993).

Humphries (1989), however, doubts if the policy was truly effective for the whole of the period. Over time the policy became unworkable, the effects of natural population growth and the ability of Africans to circumvent the influx control machinery, meant that the policy became partially redundant. Moreover, economic expansion in the 1960s and 1970s meant more - not less - cheap labour was needed. This appears to have taken precedence over the goal of reducing the number of Africans in the area <sup>23</sup>. Consequently, since the 1970s the 'coloured preference policy' was usually upheld for its symbolic political value, rather than its effective labour market controls (Humphries, 1989).

### Sectors of employment

In the early 1990s, after Gauteng (37.7%) and KwaZulu-Natal (14.8%), the W.Cape (13.7%) was the largest contributor to South African GDP. Although it lacked a mining sector, it compensated with manufacturing, agriculture, property and financial services, as well as tourism and public-sector services (CSS: OHS, 1995). In 1990, the Developmental Bank of South Africa (DBSA) identified the following sectors operative in the Western Cape (see Table 5.3 )

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<sup>23</sup> Evidence to support this point, is provided by the reaction of Prime Minister Vorster in 1969 to a delegation of academics concerned about the effective implementation of the policy. Vorster appears to have given the delegation short shrift, stating it was 'difficult enough keeping industrialists in the region'(Humphries, 1989)

**Table 5.3**  
**THE SECTOR STRUCTURE IN THE WESTERN CAPE AND RSA (1990)**

Sector	Western Cape %	South Africa
Agriculture	7.8	5.6
Mining	0.2	12.9
Manufacturing	24.6	24.2
Electricity, gas & water	2.7	4.1
Construction	4.2	3.6
Trade & accommodation	15.7	12.8
Transport & communication	9.9	8.9
Finance, insurance etc.	15.1	11.1
Community/social services	19.8	16.8
<b>Total GDP (R million)</b>	<b>35 000</b>	<b>268 000</b>
Western Cape share of RSA	13.0 %	

Source: DBSA 1990 figures for Western Cape, Bridgman et al, 1992, p44.

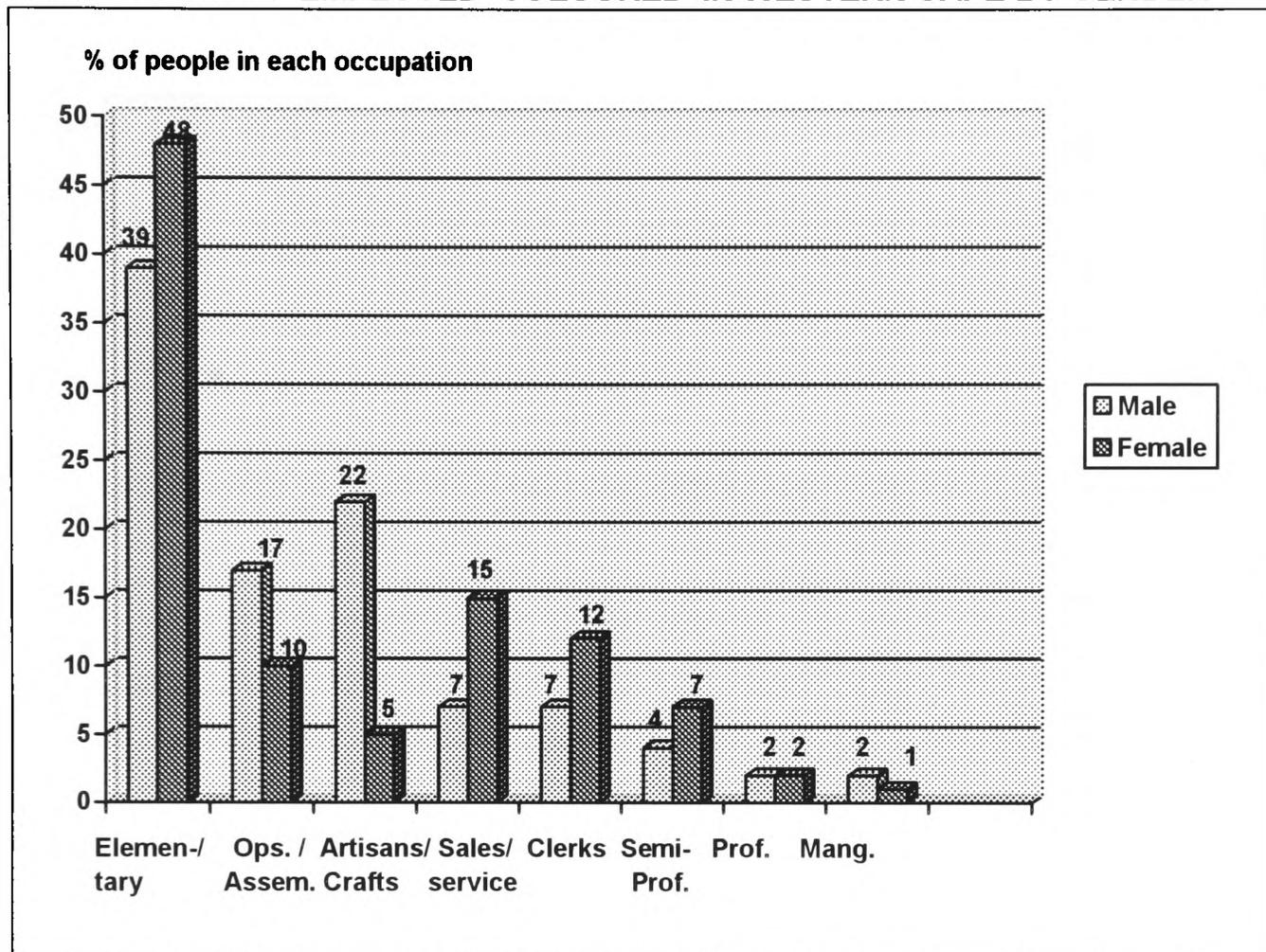
Because of the wide range of economic sectors, the labour market in the Western Cape had been less prone to the violent cyclical fluctuations, common to regions with a dominant mining industry. In particular, in the public sector - one of the largest employers in the Western Cape - employees historically benefited from its stable market environment. The community, social services sector (which included the public sector) had boosted this region during the recessionary years of the 1970s and 1980s, and although it was set to decline in 1990s, remained important. In contrast, however Cape Town's famous clothing industry (part of the manufacturing sector) and the construction sector, were habitually subject to fluctuations in market demand (Bridgman, et al 1992).

### Occupations

Nevertheless, the type of work within these sectors remained segregated along race and gender lines. A large proportion of both 'coloured' and African workers occupied elementary jobs such as cleaning, garbage collection and agricultural labour. However, in common with the rest of South Africa, a movement from unskilled to semi-skilled work, especially amongst the 'coloured' occupations was evident in the 1990s (CSS:OHS, 1995). Whereas, a large proportion of employed 'coloured' males (39%) and females (48%) still worked in elementary occupations, there was a movement among males to more skilled artisan and craft jobs (22%). This figure compared well with South Africa as a whole, where 23% of all coloureds males were found in artisan or craft jobs. A small proportion of 'coloured' workers of both genders (2% of males and 1% of females) were also to be found in managerial posts, which was slightly less than

the overall figures for South Africa - 3% of 'coloured' males and 1% of females. Nevertheless, this probably reflected the large numbers of 'coloureds' found in this area. Figure 5.1 shows the occupations of 'coloureds' in Cape Town.

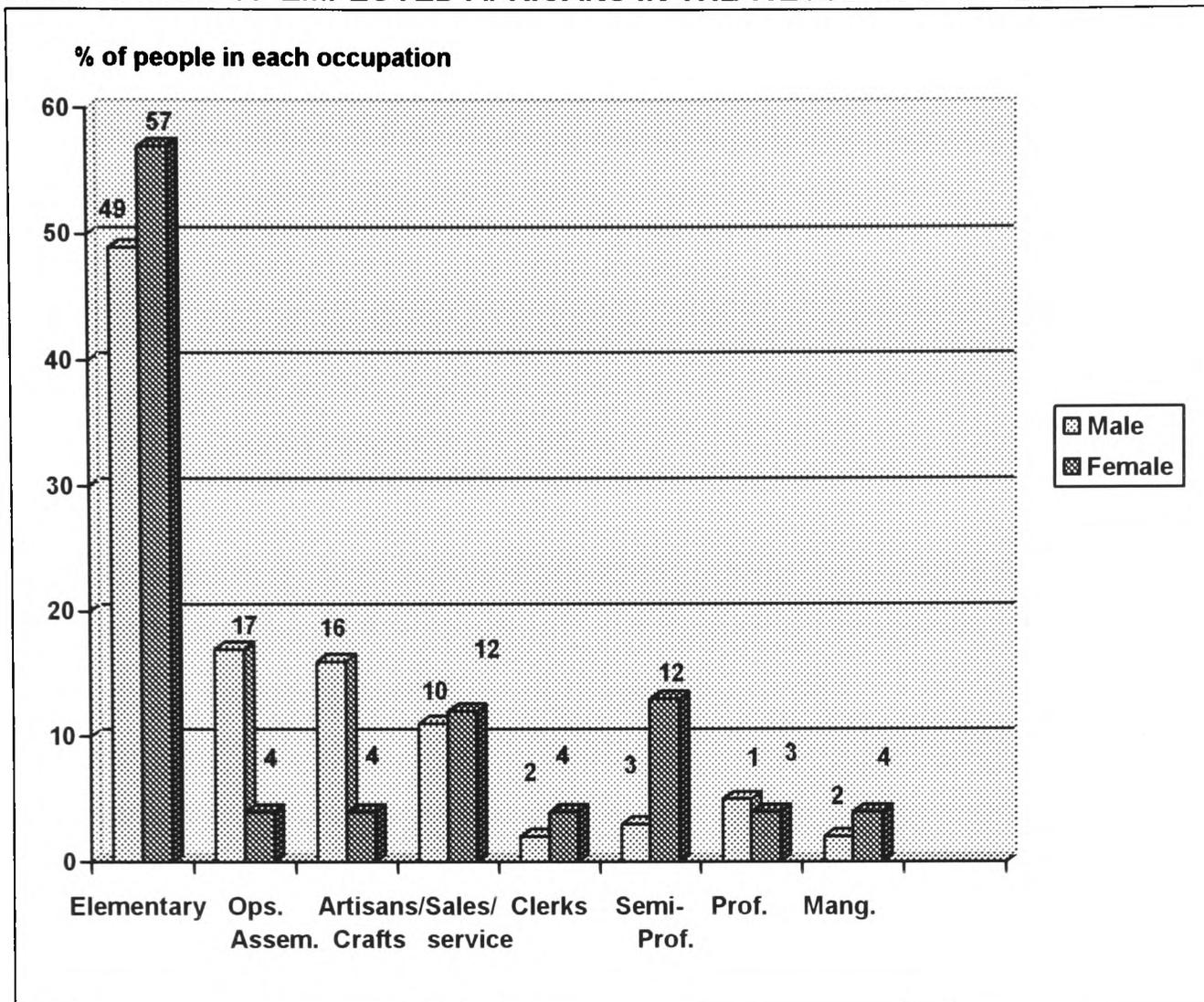
**Figure 5.1**  
**OCCUPATION OF EMPLOYED 'COLOURED' IN WESTERN CAPE BY GENDER**



Source: October Household Survey 1995 (data collected 1994)

In common with 'coloureds', a large proportion of Africans were to be found in elementary occupations, yet the percentage in the Western Cape - males (49%) and females (57%) - was higher than South Africa as a whole - 34% male and 50% female. This probably indicates the relative position of Africans in relation to 'coloureds' in the Western Cape labour market, a racial group absent in large numbers in the rest of South Africa. Figure 5.2 highlights the occupations of Africans in the Western Cape.

**Figure 5.2**  
**OCCUPATION OF EMPLOYED AFRICANS IN THE WESTERN CAPE BY GENDER**



Source: October Household Survey 1995 (data collected 1994)

Overwhelmingly though, whites dominated the high skilled and well paid occupations: in white-collar jobs, white males were usually found in managerial positions (22%), with those in blue-collar jobs occupying the top tier, requiring longer-term training (25%). A further large proportion of white males were present in semi-professional and technical positions (16%). White females predominantly occupied clerical positions (43%).

Overall, the breakdown of occupations in the Western Cape followed similar discriminatory patterns to the rest of South Africa, although it was further distorted by the 'coloured labour preference' policies. Still the limited and discriminatory data provided by apartheid gave very little information about the work and earnings of 'coloured' and African groups, in particular the quality of the labour inputs, the dynamics of the occupational structure and perhaps more significantly those un(der)employed in the labour market.

## Unemployment

The Western Cape's unemployment figure of 19% (using the expanded definition), is lower than elsewhere in the country and compared favourably with South Africa's overall figure of 29% (CSS, OHS, 1995) <sup>24</sup> Several reasons could be advanced for this. It may have indicated more work opportunities in the Western Cape than elsewhere in the country; that the levels of education and literacy were higher; or simply because a greater proportion of the population lived in urban areas, transport to work was cheaper and more accessible than other regions.

The figure is low for both unemployed males (14%) and females (24%) in the Western Cape compared with other provinces - the highest unemployment rates were to be found in the Eastern Cape (36% males) and the Northern Province (52% females). However, half the people (50%) who were unemployed in the Western Cape had never had a job, and 23% were previously employed in the already oversubscribed elementary occupations such as domestic work and gardening. Table 5.4 highlights the levels of unemployment by previous occupation.

**Table 5.4**  
**UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE WESTERN CAPE**  
**BY PREVIOUS OCCUPATION**

Previous occupation	%
Elementary	23%
Operators/Assemblers	4
Artisan, Craft	8
Professionals	1
Sales/Services	7
Managers	1
Clerks	4
Semi-professional	1
No previous occupation	50%
Other & unspecified	2

Source: OHS 1995

<sup>24</sup> Figures on unemployment differ greatly in South Africa, depending on whether the informal sector is included in the statistics. See Methodology chapter for further discussion.

Predictably, differences can be found between racial groups and gender. 45% of African women in Western Cape were unemployed compared with a figure of 23% for African men; 3% for 'coloured' females and 15% for 'coloured' males; and 14% unemployed white females compared with 3% white males.

During the late 1980s, the informal sector in Cape Town - along with many other cities in South Africa - was rumoured to have grown <sup>25</sup>. This was mainly due to the NP's change in policy, which allowed 'controlled deregulation' of the 'informal' section of the economy. The lifting of legal restrictions along with selective state support for black-owned small businesses were said by the government to have produced discernible results. According to a Human Sciences Research Council study (1992), an estimated six out of ten unemployed South Africans were now involved in informal-sector activities (Murray, 1994).

Free-market theorists hailed the growth in the informal sector as solving the escalating unemployment problem. Aspiring Blacks were encouraged to unleash their entrepreneurial skills and create new employment opportunities for the jobless masses. However, critics claimed that the soaring informal sector merely reflected a deeper structural crisis, with the multi-layered ranks largely filled with people driven by a desperation to survive, rather than a thirst for profits (Murray, 1994)

In reality dependable data on the structure and trends of unemployment, during the apartheid period (1992-4) were unavailable. In particular, the lack of official statistics about the informal-sector or the amount of 'second jobs' or moonlighting made it impossible for the apartheid government to assess the full extent of unemployment in the Western Cape. Nevertheless, finding a solution to the unemployment and underemployment represented the single greatest challenge to both the government and the council.

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<sup>25</sup> Informal sector is a term used to convey a range of work activities that are hard to regulate, typically irregular, low income, and often on the border of legality (Standing *et al*, 1996). Reliable data on the informal sector is traditionally difficult to find, and was especially so in South Africa during this period

Overall, opinions differed as to the Western Cape's growth potential during this period. Whereas some predicted a promising developmental path for the area, others saw a stagnant region, with the growth of the black population in the province rapidly outstripping the demographic resources and potential for job-creation (Bridgman *et al*, 1992).

At the beginning of the 1990s the Western Cape offered a modified variant of racial and gender disparities present elsewhere in the country - but to a lesser extent. The reasons were in part found in the higher rate of urbanisation, better access to facilities, education and employment. However, inequalities between the population groups remained central, with the single most significant characteristic of the Western Cape, being the atypical race composition - the majority of South Africa's 'coloureds' continued to reside in this region.

As a consequence, crucial to any real understanding of the economic and social status - and possible class consciousness - of the 'coloured' municipal workers in this region, remained the development of the 'coloured' identity. For over 80 years such an identity had not only influenced the material position of 'coloured' workers but had also been the prime focus for ideological and political division in the Western Cape, with the notion of 'coloured' changing over time as it concurred with the needs of the ruling elites (Luckhardt and Wall, 1980). In many ways it could be argued that the 'coloured' workers - and that included SAMWU members - had historically benefited from the apartheid policies of this region. Traditionally the National Party tried to divide 'coloureds' off from the rest of the South African working class by offering concessions - in Parliament the Tricameral System of 1984, gave Indians and 'coloureds' their own parliament' and in the workplace, they had higher wages and better terms and conditions - nevertheless, the life style of the majority of 'coloureds' was in no way affluent.

In truth, during the apartheid regime 'coloured' workers remained oppressed by racist policies, forced to accept their second-class life of scant privileges as rewards for having lighter skins, than those of third-class blacks. As a result the destruction of racially mixed communities, the segregation of housing, the enforcement of job reservations - and other apartheid measures - prejudiced the world of every 'coloured' worker in this region (Murray, 1994 ;The Economist, 1995). Moreover, these same policies governed the institutions of the Cape Town City Council (CCC), and needless

to add, had an equal potential to influence the class consciousness of the workers who were employed there. The next section - examining the Cape Town local authority - considers further the probable influences of the structure and ideology of the council, on the collective awareness of SAMWU members

## **5.4 THE CAPE TOWN CITY COUNCIL (CCC)**

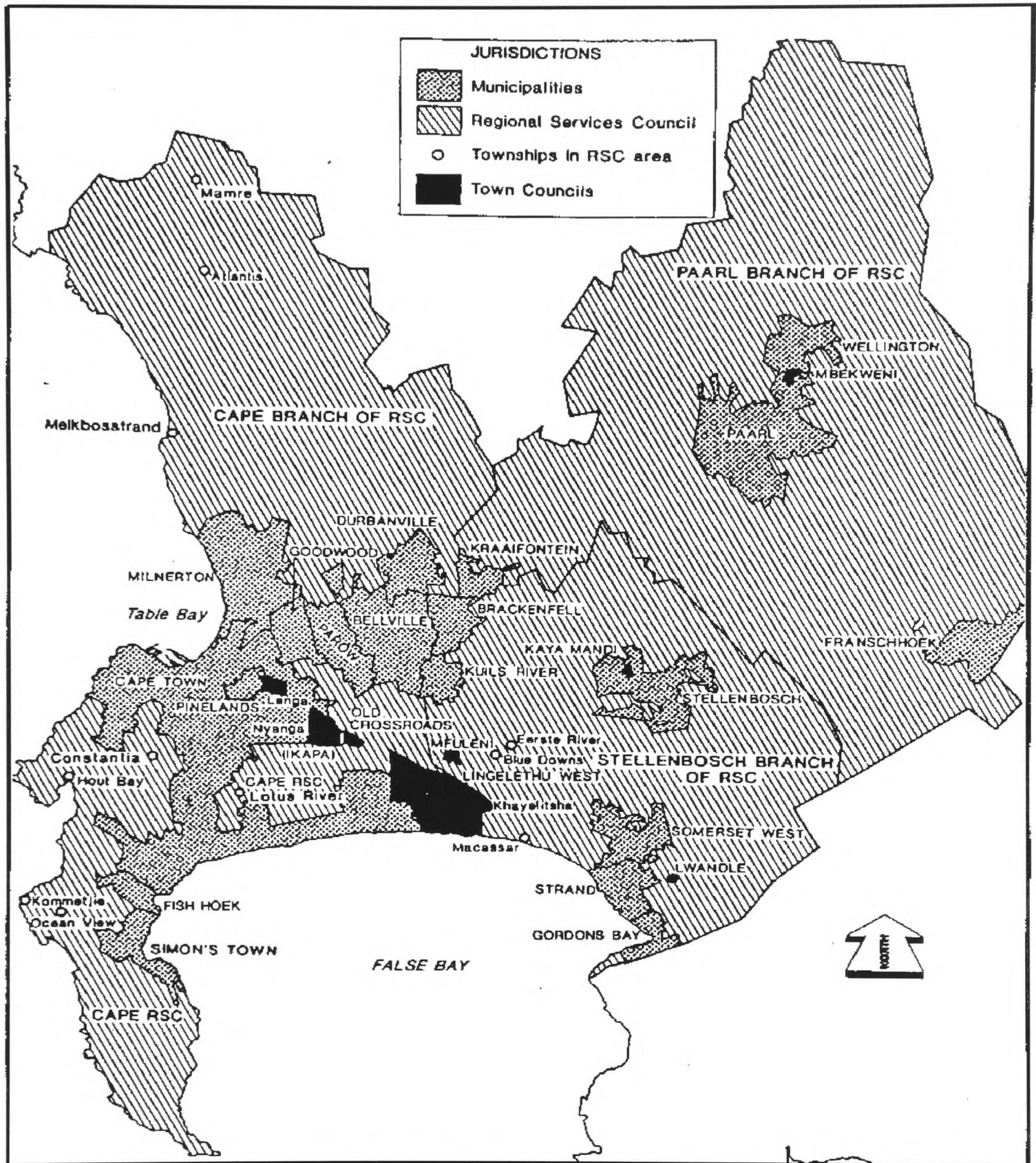
In 1992, the Cape Town City Council (CCC), was by any criterion, the most important local authority in the area of Greater Cape Town - with 62% of the total 'coloured' population of Greater Cape Town falling under its jurisdiction. It was the largest employer of labour in the area, with the majority of its staff (77%) being 'coloured'. The council was traditionally dominated by the Democratic Party and politically maintained a consistent - although not always unanimous - hostility towards both the central government and the NP controlled, second tier of government, the Cape Provincial Administration (CAP) (Terreblanche, 1993). The next section details the types of local authorities in the Western Cape and the structure and organisation of the Cape Town City Council (CCC).

### **5.4.1 Types of Local Authorities in the Western Cape**

The members of the Cape Town branch of SAMWU were employed by the Cape Town City Council (CCC). In 1993 the council was the largest and most important provider of services in the Province - but it was not the only provider. The Region had been divided into three main settlement segments: the metropolitan fringe which was administered by the Regional Services Council (RSC); the peripheral towns and rural areas covered by the RSC and a number of small town councils; and finally Greater Cape Town, serviced in the main by the CCC (Bridgman, et al 1992). Map 5.3 shows the different types of local authorities in the province

**Map 5.3**

**THE STRUCTURE OF THE METROPOLITAN AREAS WITH THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES**



Source: Bridgeman et al, 1992, p.14

The Apartheid system with its reformed tricameral parliamentary system<sup>26</sup>, had produced an extremely complex, and dysfunctional system of local government. The

<sup>26</sup> Parliament was reformed in 1984 and three Chambers (White, 'coloured' and Indian) were created under the control of a State President and his Ministers' Council

various tiers of government - central, the Cape Provincial Administration (CPA), the Western Cape Regional Services Council (RSC), Black local authorities (BLA`s), 'Coloured' management committees, White controlled local authorities - and the Civic Associations all contributed to a haphazard delivery of local services in the area (Bridgman *et al.* 1992).

Central government departments administered regional development incentives and prepared guide plans for the metropolitan area. White, 'coloured' and Indian councils and management committees were (in theory) responsible for their own separate race groups - although in practice there was a great deal of overlap. The Cape Provincial Administration (CPA) assumed responsibility for a number of African areas in the Western Cape. The whole network presented as a perplexing and bewildering structure (Bridgman *et al.* 1992).

#### Regional Services Councils (RSC`s)

Further attempts by central government in 1987 to rationalise and co-ordinate the provision of services by introducing Regional Services Council's (RSC`s) in selective parts of the country, only served to complicate the system even more. The Western Cape RSC, Overberg RSC, Breede River RSC, and the Western Coast RSC, all had responsibility for the areas falling within or across the boundaries of the Western Cape. With representatives from, the councils in the African townships, 'coloured' and Indian management committees, and white municipalities - and a chair person appointed by the provincial administrator - they had dual functions of an 'own affairs' (matters attaining to race groups) within local government, and a 'general affairs'(matters affecting all groups) function in providing services regionally. The overall aim was to increase direct state control over local authorities and expand the financial reserves available, partly through levies and partly by the Cape Provincial Administration. In reality they were fairly ineffectual (Bridgman *et al.*, 1992).

#### White - controlled Local Authorities

In truth the most powerful groups in the Western Cape were the white-controlled local authorities. All local authorities in RSA were graded 1-15 according to a prescribed formula developed by the national United Municipal Executive, and determined by 13 factors - for example the number of water and electricity meters and sewage

connections, housing, water and sewage purification, ambulance and even library books. There were 65 white local authorities in the Western Cape, 19 of whom were in Metropolitan Cape Town, but it was the CCC that was the core local authority and provided most of the regional services. In 1992, although Cape Town was the largest municipality in the country based on the population it served, its population had the lowest average income of all the large white-controlled local authorities in South Africa. This was because 70% of its population were 'poorer' coloured people (Bridgman *et al.*, 1992).

### 'Coloured' Management Committees

Another sphere of local government in the Metropolitan Cape Town area was the management committees for 'coloured' areas. They had very little political support, with no direct responsibility in the provision of services as these functions, since these functions were retained by the white local authorities or RSCs (Bridgman *et al.*, 1992). The management committees in Cape Town had a highly controversial history. For two decades the CCC had refused to acknowledge their authority. CCC declined to attend the Group Areas Board hearings, which were designed to sanction the mass removal of 'coloureds' to new racial areas, and establish new 'coloured' management committees to govern the regions. Such moves were not entirely egalitarian (Pinnock, 1989)

The City Council, renowned since the 1950s for its notable absence of Afrikaner professionals or workers, often comprised of professional people, landlords and small businessmen, whose party allegiance usually lay with the United Party - the official opposition to the NP. Many of these landlords and businessmen, were not only opposed to being told what to do by a government they did not support, but perhaps more pointedly, were opposed to the removal of 'coloureds' because of the exorbitant rents and cheap labour that the existing 'coloured' communities provided in the area. Local Afrikaners, for their part, were intent on achieving separate 'coloured' councils because they feared that the 'coloureds' - some of whom still retained their municipal voting rights<sup>27</sup> might gain control of strategic wards and councils and threaten the position of whites in the Cape (Pinnock, 1989).

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<sup>27</sup> Although, 'coloured' and Indian voters had been removed from the parliamentary roll in 1956, and the Provincial Council membership in 1961, those who were not weekly tenants still retained their municipal vote in the Cape until 1971.

Legislation in 1959 <sup>28</sup>, forced the council to partially concede to drawing up separate racial areas for 'coloureds'. By the mid-1960s more than 300,000 'coloured' people had been resettled in state housing schemes on the Cape Flats - leading to a massive fall in the number of 'coloured' people with the municipal vote, in the remaining white urban areas (Pinnock, 1989). Nevertheless, the management committees, governing the new areas remained little more than adjuncts to the CCC consulting with white councillors on most issues, although for housing and other social development they reported directly to the House of Representatives (part of the Tricameral system). By the 1990s, the whole arrangement had served only to introduce a further complicating factor in the administration of local government (Bridgman *et al.*, 1992).

#### Black Local Authorities (BLA`s)

Another tier of local government in the Western Cape was the Black Local Authorities (BLA`s). In 1982, the Black Local Authorities Act transferred administrative authority and financial responsibility for the African areas to the black local authorities (BLA). There were twelve BLA`s in the Western Cape province, but a number on the periphery had ceased to operate and were being governed by administrators appointed by the Cape Provincial Administration (CPA). (Bridgman *et al* 1992; Murray, 1994).

From the mid - 1980s, central government was increasingly forced to subsidise these areas on a massive scale. Finance was needed to transport millions of South Africans across large distances to work (Murray, 1994; Swilling and Boya, 1997). Further expenditure was also needed to restructure the water and sanitation systems. Often residents in the informal settlements had no choice but to deposit their waste in pit latrines which threatened to poison the underground water tables and rivers. It was clear that these, and many other problems would not be resolved without a major structural adjustment to local authorities (Swilling and Boya, 1997). As one black student interviewed explained...

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<sup>28</sup> Under the legislation the state could claim property from the council for worker housing and then hand it over to a management committee under the Coloured Affairs Department.

few white people visit the townships... they`ve no idea what it`s like. There are few paved roads, when the rain comes its impossible to walk ... because of the poor sewage system the smell can be unbearable in the Summer .... there is very little access to electricity ..I could go on but I`m sure you`ve seen the pictures'.

Tankeiso, Interview, 20/10/93

## Civics

As a consequence - and in the absence of a democratic local government in African and `coloured' suburbs - local civic associations, or `civics' as they became more popularly known, grew out of the need for proper representation. Table 5.5 identifies the most important ones in the area

**Table 5.5**  
**CIVIC ASSOCIATIONS IN THE WESTERN CAPE**

Western Cape United Civic Organisation (WECUCO) - an umbrella body representing ANC aligned civics
Federation of Cape Civic Associations (FCCA) - the umbrellas body for the New Unity Movement-aligned civics
Cape Areas Housing Action Committee (CAHAC) - a federation of civics located mostly in Coloured suburbs
Western Cape Civic Association (WCCA) - a federation of civics engaged mostly in African areas
Western Cape United Squatters Association (WCUSA) - a federation of squatter organisations
Western Cape Hostel Dwellers Association (WCHDA) - an organisation representing hostel dwellers

Source: Bridgman *et al*, 1992

Although the civics stood outside the official apartheid structure of local government, they became enormously powerful organisations which local councils - and eventually governments - were forced to recognise as a legitimate voice in the community. The aim of the civic movement was to build links with trade unions and other community groups to foster their own non-racial self-government at the local level. In 1992, the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO) was established to consolidate all the civic movements nationally. In March 1993, they played a strategic role in the launching of the Local Government Negotiating Forum (LGNF) - a body empowered to create a democratic, non-racial, non-sexist and financially viable local government system (Murray, 1994; Pycroft, 1997).

Overall though, what was evident by the early 1990s was local government in the Western Cape had grown into an immense network of increasingly impotent

administrations. Most of apartheid's local councils and committees in the area were seen as being wrecked by an urban crisis in housing, transport, economic development and environmental issues. The widespread duplication of services and resources - as a result of almost 70 local authorities operating in the area - was rapidly deteriorating into a waste of valuable manpower and resources. Consequently, local government in the region - and that included CCC - faced a crisis of confidence with, according to the deputy Mayor Clive Keegan of the Cape Town County Council (CCC).....

"a disturbing tendency towards the emergence of corrupt, violent, nepotism, inept and inarticulate elite, largely self-appointed and answerable to no democratic process"

Quoted in Maurice, 1993, p.3.

The next section considers the structure and control of CCC, plus the employment issues and relations within the council.

#### **5.4.2 Structure and organisation of the Cape Town City Council (CCC)**

Cape Town City Council (CCC), was the most important local authority in the region, in terms of the grading system it was the highest - with a grading of 15. It provided many regional services, including the operating of the water supply system for the metropolitan area, treating the wastewater from outside the boundaries, and playing a leading role in the transport planning of the area (Bridgeman *et al*, 1992). The Cape Town City Council (CCC) had long been seen as a liberal council displaying an internationally renowned opposition to apartheid for over 40 years and enjoying a status as an equal opportunities employer since 1946. As a supporter of the Democratic Party, the council had often identified with the English business community that dominated the area. The National Party, at central government level had habitually disparaged the council, perceiving it firstly to discriminate against Afrikaans-speakers, and secondly possessing a politically progressive reputation that was in need of control (Cameron, 1994). As Larry Palk of Andrew Levy Associates <sup>29</sup>, and Labour consultant for the CCC explained

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<sup>29</sup> A respected firm of Labour consultants in South African. Since 1997, they have published jointly with the U.K's Income Data Services (IDS) on South African industrial relations

..you must understand most of the people at the Council are Liberal Democrats which have an affinity with England, they identify with the English, you only have to look around the City.

Interview, 18/1/94

Yet, despite this reputation - and subsequent Mayors' attempts to distance themselves from the apartheid regime - the real power lay with a limited group of people: the executive committee (interesting, elected from the councillors) the town clerk and the heads of departments. Many of these people – although not always Afrikaners - continued to maintain a strict Afrikaner bureaucracy, which usually included 'whites only' control of senior positions.

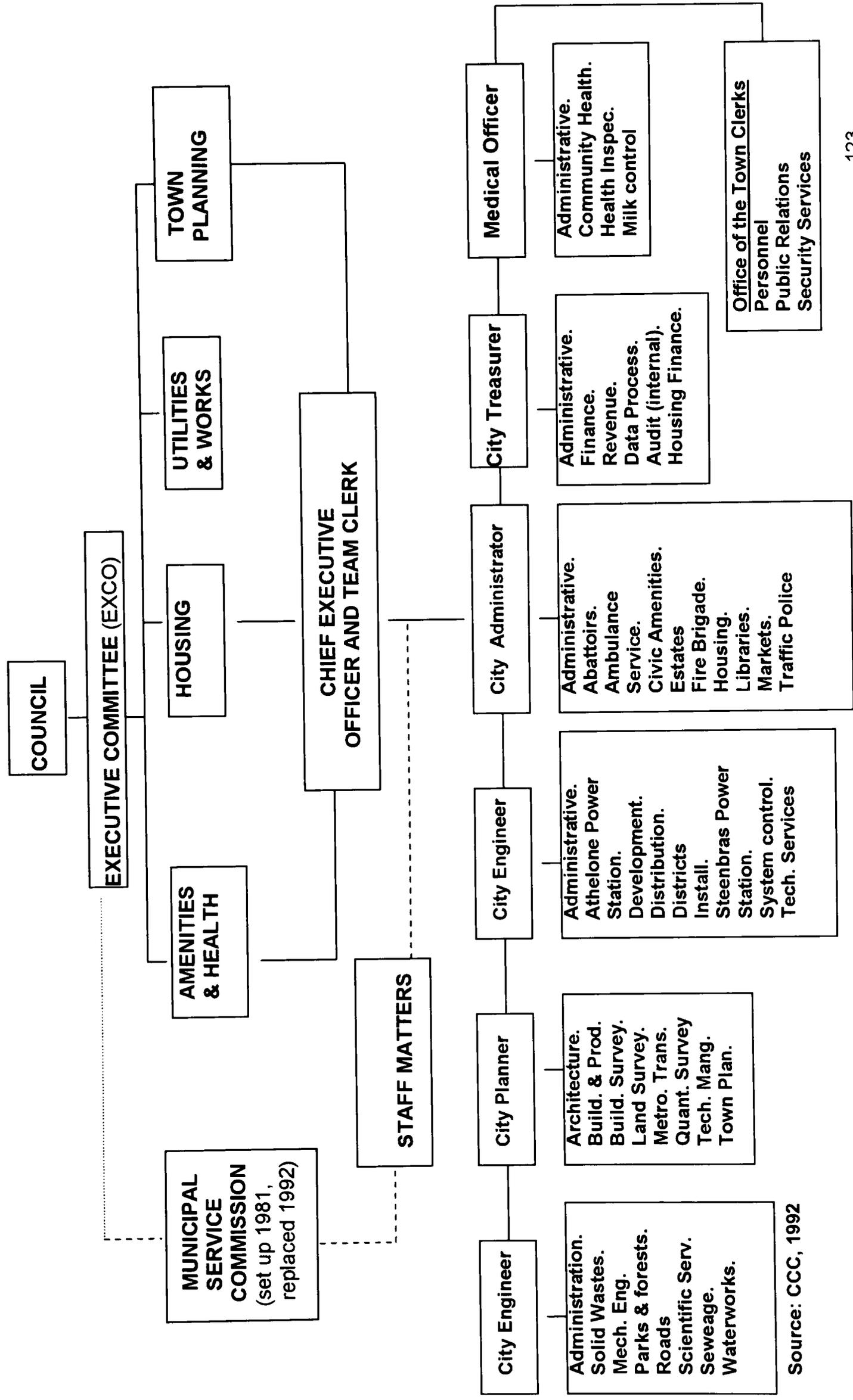
#### **5.4.3 Control of the organisation**

(See Figure 5.3 : ORGANISATIONAL CHART OF CAPE TOWN CITY COUNCIL p.123).

In 1992, the CCC operated a management committee system of control. This scheme provided for a cabinet-type structure with the authority concentrated in a single controlling executive (EXCO), rather than in the council as a whole. The position of the Chief administrative/executive official and the town clerk was particularly strong under this system, on account of being the main channel of communication between the officials of the council and the EXCO (Cameron, 1994).

Further evidence of this centralisation was found in the traditional local government administration, comprised of strong separate departments and committees, loosely co-ordinated by chief executive officers and/ or policy committees. This tended to concentrate power into the hands of heads of departments and their chairs. The result was a strong departmentalism with little interdepartmental co-ordination. Overall, the procedures, like the rest of South Africa were based on regulatory frameworks and scientific management practices which assumed that there was only one rational response to each issue. The result was a over-reliance on rigid regulatory frameworks which centralised power in the hands of senior management (Wooldridge and Cranko, 1997).

**Fig. 5.3 ORGANISATIONAL CHART: CAPE TOWN CITY COUNCIL**



Source: CCC, 1992

In 1992, the CCC, along with the rest of South Africa, had inherited a British-type separate personnel system. However, this had not always been the case. The type of system that characterised the CCC up until 1980 was a "hands on" provincial intervention, with a minority of councillors wielding tremendous power in the City Council. During this period the CCC operated a Multiple Committee Structure, with the council divided into a number of committees, each with responsibility for supervision within a particular function area. Officials reported directly to the relevant committee, although general control rested with the council as a whole (Cameron, 1994).

In the 1960s the council and the Multiple Committee Structure became the subject of government investigation after certain irregularities of staffing practices became apparent. These irregularities were mainly due to the blurring of executive and legislative functions under the Committee Structure, which meant the councillors were involved in the actual running of staff affairs of the CCC, and had the ability to influence staff appointments (Cameron, 1994). The Slater Commission - investigating the functioning of CCC organisational structure - found the system gave the council almost unfettered power over staff and allowed for some dubious staff practices. Following its recommendations in 1965, the Multiple Committee was replaced by the Management Committee system. The position of the Chief administrative/executive official of local authorities, and the town clerk was strengthened considerably under this system (see fig.5.3 above) - being the main channel of communication between the officials of the council and the management committee (Cameron, 1994).

It was not however, until 1981 that the CCC's autonomy was seriously affected. A full-time Municipal Service Commission (MSc) was set up in the CCC, by central government - with vested powers to make appointments and promotions up to a certain salary level. Provision was also made for representatives from the two recognised unions, SAAME (white union) and the 'coloured' municipal union, CTMWA to be consulted on the matter. The exclusive right to appoint and dismiss staff had been removed from the council. Senior promotions were however, to remain under the control of the CCC's executive committee (EXCO), and the town Clerk was appointed by the general council (Cameron, 1994).

The CCC never really accepted the legitimacy of this body and in 1990, the Town Clerk was eventually permitted to take over all the functions and powers of the MSc, and in 1992 a new Department, of Human Resources was created to manage the personnel

matters. Yet, Cape Town remained unique in that it was the only authority whose employer/employee relationships had been largely managed by a centrally controlled, administrator-appointed body. Furthermore, Cameron (1994) believed the government's chief motivation was not to prevent nepotism in recruiting senior staff, but to contain what it perceived as a dangerously "radical" local authority. Especially as, in 1980, only 6.9% of the top posts in the CCC were from Afrikaans-speaking people (Cameron, 1994).

Yet, further attempts were made by central government, in the early 1990s to change the council's structure. With approaches borrowed from the U.S and British private sector, central government prescribed that departments - not just in Cape Town, but the whole of local government - should become cost centres, with departmental heads being managers first and professionals second. Paper-based directives, rules and reports were replaced with financial accounting and zero-based budgeting. However, the management approach was never properly implemented, leaving a concoction of both the old professional and new corporate management models - and limited support for training managers. Moreover, the racial composition of the council, with its subsequent down-sizing and active employee resistance, further frustrated the implementation of any alternative management techniques (Cameron, 1994; Swilling and Boya, 1997).

#### **5.4.4 Employment issues within the CCC**

As the principal local authority in the region, with wide ranging responsibilities, CCC was also the largest employer of municipal labour in the area. From 1992-4 employment issues and relations in the council reflected the crisis of organisation that had emerged as a result of the apartheid structuring of local government and its inescapable racist labour market segmentation.

##### **Racial composition of the workforce**

In 1992, out of a workforce of approximately just over 15,000 employees -11,500 Cape Town City council employees were 'coloured', 3,500 were white and only 500 were black. Employment in the local government had generally been patterned on the basis of white male dominance in management, professional and technical occupations, with workers of other ethnic groups, especially women being confined to lower occupational

levels. In the CCC the implementation of the 'Coloured Labour Preference Policy' resulted in very few blacks employed at any level. 7% of management and supervisory posts were held by 'coloureds', well above the national average of about 1.7%. In terms of women, the Council's 11.5% in top posts was almost double the national average. However, Africans and Asians did not fare so well - only 0.6% of managerial positions were African and 0.6% Asian - this compared with the national average for companies of 2.5% for Africans and 2% for Asians (Terreblanche, 1993; Younge and Bendix, 1994; Robinson 1994a)

### Industrial relations

The industrial relations in Cape Town Council also epitomised the unequal racial configuration of its workforce. Although professing to be a liberal regime the city council had historically favoured its habitually white, conservative trade union as opposed to the more militant mainly 'coloured' union, who described itself as independent, non-racial trade union.

In 1992, the Council was an active member of its Employer's Association - the Municipal Employers' Organisation (MEO). The Association had been established in June 1968 to include all Transvaal employers (known then as Transvaal Municipal Employers). Later in 1985 its jurisdiction was extended to Natal, and by 1992 any local authority was entitled to become a member. Although, its origins had been conservative, in the 1990s the Municipal Employers' Organisation (MEO), claimed not to discriminate on grounds of race, colour or creed - and symbolically included an increasing number of black municipalities (South African Municipal Year Book, 1993).

Since the mid-forties the city council had operated a closed shop policy. As late as 1992, it only employed members of the traditionally white, South African Association of Municipal Employees (SAAME), and the mainly 'coloured', South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU). In effect, membership of one of the two trade unions was compulsory - it was a condition of employment. However, in 1994, the Council was forced to change its policy, and recognise a separate professional staff association. The agreement followed a three year battle by small number of senior staff, after an industrial court ruled the council's closed shop was unfair labour practice. Despite this small change, the two original unions continued to dominate employee relations in the council (Robinson, 1994b).

## SAAME

The South African Association of Municipal Employers (SAAME) was the second largest municipal union in the council (and in the local government sector). It had first been registered in 1924 under the Industrial Conciliation Act of that year, and was now included under the LRA (1956). It had members in all local authorities in South Africa, except Johannesburg and Durban, who had their own union. Its membership was approximately 3,500 in Cape Town, out of a national membership of 50,000 in 1993 (ALA, 1993). It was a member of the Federation of South African labour unions (FEDSAL), and participated in the Federation of Municipal trade unions - which included the Johannesburg and Durban Municipal Employees Association and the Cape Province Municipal undertaking (Official 1993 South African Municipal Year Book; Robinson, 1994b).

Although, in 1992 SAAME opened its membership to all municipal employees - other than subsidised labourers - it had long been considered a conservative, white municipal union. SAAME had for a long period played a crucial role in the process of "job reservation" in the council. It employed tactics such as vetoes on the employment of members of non-white ethnic groups. The union performed a limited role on the question of local government restructuring - with its first concern being to seek guarantees for its members (Younge and Bendix, 1994).

Its stated aim had always been to regulate relations between members and the employers and to provide legal assistance to its membership. At its Annual General Meetings it usually elected an executive committee of 30 members and an action committee of 5 members. As, a recognised union, it had access to bargaining rights on the industrial council and was entitled to have its disputes settled at industrial council conciliation boards. At the industrial councils it had equal representation to the employer's MEO, where most disputes were usually solved amicably (Official 1993 South African Municipal Year Book; Younge and Bendix, 1994).

However, with the emergence of stronger black unions, the overall picture was becoming less peaceful, and SAAME in an effort to retain members was being forced to take a more militant stance. Nevertheless, even with its traditional non-political identity (its full title being, SAAME [non-political]) it still succeeded in developing a highly

antagonistic relationship with the council's other major union, SAMWU - a union openly committed to linking political and economic issues (South African Municipal Year Book, 1993; Younge and Bendix, 1994).

## SAMWU

By far the largest union in the council was the South African Municipal Workers' union, launched on the 24/5 October 1987. It was one of the first progressive municipal unions. Although SAMWU was largely a 'coloured' union, the orientation of the union centred on its opposition to apartheid and its support for 'real' political change. Nevertheless, a prominent issue addressed by SAMWU in the CCC - even in the pre-1990 period - was the National Party's attempt to privatise local government services. The union was fervently opposed to such policies, perceiving them as undermining the levels of service, increasing the costs to the poor, and reducing the much needed jobs of members (Younge and Bendix, 1994). By 1992, SAMWU's main orientation continued to be its determination to achieve complete and absolute change in the apartheid structures of local government, and to fight privatisation.

From the beginning it was the acceptance of close links between economics and politics that was central to forming SAMWU's position on both privatisation and local government restructuring. It was concerned not only with economic issues, but with locating these within a broader political context. Such an ideology appeared to have influenced its whole approach, its way of organising and attitudes (Younge and Bendix, 1994). As Roger Ronnie (a senior SAMWU shop steward ) explained..

Clearly we also do not see ourselves being restricted to the question of working conditions. We also have a role to play as an organisation in the broader environment. We see local government as an area for advancing the policy of socialism. The people themselves should have access to control local government, although there is not the classic means of production in local government, there are certain elements which lend themselves towards socialised control

**Interview, 1992, quoted in Younge and Bendix, 1994, pps. 45-60**

From the beginning this ideology had the potential to bring the union into conflict with not only the Cape Town employers, but also the apartheid government. More

profoundly it was a policy that would later bring it into dispute with a future ANC government.

In sum, the Democratic Party (DP) which traditionally controlled the City Council, presided over a plethora of management committees, town councils and wards, and was said to be widely influenced by the unaccountable and outmoded business vote. Such fragmentation had made it impossible to manage local services effectively, and had led to the isolation of expanses like Table Mountain, and the stagnation of areas like District Six - now left empty and derelict after the evictions of the 'coloured' communities. More profoundly though, the lack of legitimate local government structures were seriously hampering, not only the economic development of the Western Cape, but more directly the individual material circumstances and quality of working life of SAMWU workers in the Cape Town Council (Maurice, 1993).

Considered historically, to be a liberal employer, the control of the city council remained in the hands of a relatively few senior officials, who consistently colluded with the apartheid system by discriminating against Africans employees, and favouring white trade unionists over 'coloureds'. Such an environment, characterised by an excess of bureaucratic management structures, unaccountable councillors, widespread corruption and financial crisis, impacted on the councils employee relations which continued to mirror the inequality and discrimination common to the rest of local government in apartheid South Africa (Maurice, 1993).

## **5.5 CONCLUSION**

The first section of the case study has attempted to provide an insight into the home and work environment of the SAMWU worker in the Cape Town from 1992-4. The aim was to glean an understanding of the social and material position that 'coloured' workers held during this period - and its possible influence on their thinking and class consciousness. The overall depiction was ambiguous in that, whereas the evidence on the one hand pointed to the influence of a conservative 'coloured' identity promoted and sustained over time by the apartheid system, this was contradicted on the other by the militant image of the 'coloured' SAMWU members in the workplace.

In general, the Western Cape was a region of prosperity, with a good infrastructure, high employment and strong economic activity. Yet this popular image tells us little of the material position of 'coloured' SAMWU workers. Whilst the Western Cape's 'coloured labour preference policy' may have initially benefited 'coloured' workers - giving them priority over the employment of Africans in this area - it served in the longer term, to engender economic and political division for this group, potentially dividing them off from the solidarity and support of other black workers

This ideology was especially evident in the employment relations at the Cape Town Council, which continued to typify the unequal racial position of its workforce. The response of the council's largest union - SAMWU - to this situation was to call for complete radical change, the total economic and political transformation of the whole of local government. In theory, SAMWU was only fulfilling its mandate as a COSATU union by concerning itself with both economic and broader political issues. In practice, such a resolute commitment to genuine change in the public sector was destined to put an enormous strain on any future relationship between the ANC government and the union.

More directly though, the success of union strategies would ultimately hinge on the support of its rank-and file membership. This in turn depended on the members being sufficiently class conscious, to link the organisation of the council and their individual regressive living and working conditions, with the wider task of reforming the whole of the public sector. To this end, it was still not clear in 1994 whether SAMWU workers would make the 'connections' between their own personal material circumstances in the Western Cape, and what was happening generally at workplace level, and across the country as a whole. However, all the indications were - evidenced by the continuing examples of racism in the area, and support for the NP in the 1994 elections - that the majority of 'coloured' workers were currently choosing to divorce their own personal ordeals, from the wider black working class struggles in South Africa.

Yet, it is the SAMWU branch that remains primarily of interest here. With their demand for a complete transformation of local government and a commitment to fight privatisation, the question of whether the union members could override the conservative image of the 'coloured' community and mount a successful challenge to privatisation, was paramount. Such a move would rest on the collective consciousness of its membership being developed enough to enable the links to be made between the

material events in the individual workplace and home, with broader political changes taking place amongst the working class and society as a whole. Whether SAMWU would have the organisation and leadership to articulate and guide this shift in consciousness - to successfully challenge the governments free market policies - was debatable. It would largely depend on the question of whether the black trade unions were still capable of expressing opposition to the power of capital, or had simply become just another means of incorporating working-class resistance. The following chapters of part 1 of the case study proceeds to explore these issues further by focusing directly on the Cape Town branch, within the general development of the union. The next chapter, firstly considers the historical growth of the branch, prior to 1992. The aim is to understand the immense difficulties surrounding the building of a national union, and the important role played by Cape Town in the maturing of the union.

# CHAPTER 6

## THE HISTORY AND GROWTH OF THE CAPE TOWN BRANCH

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### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

COSATU's decision in 1986 to organise local authority workers in the public sector, was to produce favourable growth in membership. Yet surprisingly - even by this date - little was known of the local authority workers' organisations, and their role in relation to the state, as an employer. It was SAMWU (South African Municipal workers Union), a union created to represent employees in local government, that was to change this scenario. Its formation had been onerous, but the old established Cape Town Municipal Workers Association (CTMWA), had managed to perform an essential role in the development of the new local government union. An understanding of the history and political maturing of CTMWA in Western Cape; its attempts to build a national union; the development of the SAMWU branch in Cape Town from 1987-90 - in particular the role played by its first major strike, gives a further indication of the character of the union, and the class-position of its members in Cape Town.

### 6.2 CAPE TOWN MUNICIPAL WORKERS ASSOCIATION (CTMWA)

The predecessor to the Cape Town branch - the Cape Town Municipal Workers' Association (CTMWA) - began in 1928 as a conservative, registered union, running a 'closed shop' for 'coloureds'. Yet despite these orthodox beginnings the union possessed a rich history of struggle, and by the early 1980s was one of only a few, progressive - yet established - unions in the public sector. The CTMWA had drawn its membership from the proletarianised 'coloured' workers in Cape Town. Whereas their origins could be traced back to the 'coloured' rural labour who had migrated to Cape Town in the early 1860s, the root of their political consciousness were to be found in the racial segregation, common to the area. In 1890, the 'coloureds' - or as they became

known 'Cape' Boys - had virtually been replaced by cheaper African labour in heavy manual work in the docks and quarries. In turn the number of 'coloureds' defined as 'Hottentot', 'mixed race' and 'Malay' increased in industrial and commercial occupations. Overall, the majority of 'coloureds' remained unskilled, domestic or industrial labourers, vulnerable to wage undercutting by Africans (Golden, 1987).

It was the 'coloured' artisans that became one of the first groups in this area to be subject to the historically notorious 'colour bar'. White stonemasons, many of whom were immigrant workers with an experience of craft unionism, instituted a closed shop in 1900, that excluded the 'coloured' worker. Yet interestingly, the increased attacks on the 'coloured' community - far from engendering notions of solidarity - served only to develop a distinct race identity, which aimed to exclude Africans from any of their unions or organisations (Luckhardt and Wall, 1980).

Nevertheless, despite early attempts on the part of 'coloured' workers to form separate unions, especially via the African Political Organisation (APO)<sup>30</sup>, a more successful political organisation superseded it in 1919 - the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU). The union embraced both 'coloured' and African workers, initially organising in the Cape Town Docks, but rapidly becoming a general, rather than a craft or industrial union (Beinart, 1994; Luckhardt and Wall, 1980). Yet this organisation was still not immune from segregation. By 1926, possibly as a result of the African leadership's black nationalist beliefs, the ICU had reversed its commitment to overcome race divisions and expelled the 'coloured' leadership. In short, even despite the ICU failure to survive the depression of the thirties, the 'coloured' radicals now found themselves excluded from African mass organisations (Goldin 1987; Finnermore and van der Merwe, 1990).

After 1948, the NP was completely committed to the ideology of apartheid and as a consequence began actively excluding 'coloureds' from the *Afrikaner volk*<sup>31</sup>. The position of most 'coloureds' was set to decline, although they were still to retain a social and material superiority over Africans. Moreover, any attempt on the part of the

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<sup>30</sup> The APO was a separate 'coloured' political organisation that attempted to mobilise and resist urban segregation. But despite its name it sought only to advance the interests of the Malay artisans and petty-bourgeois (Luckhardt and Wall, 1980).

<sup>31</sup> This ideology attempted to bind together the white, Christian Afrikaner both politically and economically

'coloureds' to identify with the disenfranchised and segregated people, defined as 'African' was to be met with oppression (Goldin, 1987). Almost certainly these attacks on Africans in the area led to the re-emergence of the 'coloured' identity amongst 'coloured' workers - with the passing for 'coloured' becoming even more essential than before. Nevertheless, some resistance to this ideology did occur amongst 'coloureds' under the leadership of the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) - and perhaps to a lesser extent, the sister organisation of the ANC, the South African Coloured Peoples Congress (SACPO)<sup>32</sup> (Golden, 1987; Fine and Davis, 1990).

The NEUM - tradition was particularly strong in the Cape Town Municipal Union (CTMWA). Politically, Cape Town had always been the stronghold of South African Trotskyism, and it was the Trotskyist Fourth International Organisation that played a leading role in the formation of the NEUM. The NEUM was important to 'coloured' resistance and organised vigorous protest against 'coloured' quangos like the notorious Native Representative Council (NRC) and the Coloured Affairs Council (CAC). Later in the sixties, it evolved into the 'Unity Movement' which mobilised resolute opposition to the apartheid regime in this area (Luckhardt and Wall, 1980).

Nevertheless, although sections of the CTMWA membership could be said to have demonstrated a commitment to the politics of the NEUM, the union itself was only really radicalised in the mid-60s, when a few NEUM aligned individuals, including John Emtzen (the General Secretary and later to be SAMWU's first General Secretary) took over the leadership<sup>33</sup> From 1964 to 1983, the CTMWA remained one of the unity movements most ardent supporters<sup>34</sup> (SALB 1984; Friedman 1987).

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<sup>32</sup> The SACPO met with strong opposition from 'coloured' radicals and Trotskyists in the Unity Movement who rejected the idea that 'coloureds' should be organised separately. SACPO also refused to boycott the election of a 'coloured' representative, who according to the terms of the Separate Representative of Voters Act of 1956 had to be white, although elected by 'coloureds'. The SACPO's support for the white candidate, communist member Piet Beyleveld, led to the NEUM campaign against the election. The NEUM's successful boycott was seen as a major defeat for SACPO and their politics (Fine and Davis, 1990)

<sup>33</sup> Previously there had been problems of worker democracy and control and it was only following a long and bitter struggle that the existing leadership was expelled and replaced.

<sup>34</sup> Although the Unity Movement was driven into exile, along with the ANC and the PAC it returned with the upsurge of struggle in the eighties. The organisation was publicly relaunched in Cape Town in April 1985.

Throughout the 1980s, the union continued to involve itself in anti-apartheid activities. In Cape Town attempts to introduce the tricameral parliamentary system and cement 'coloureds' into the apartheid system were unsuccessful. Moreover, responses to segregation in the 'coloured' areas were markedly different from those in the 1950s and 60s. 'Coloureds' were no longer keen to distance themselves from Africans, this group now actively supported the resistance to the system. And when the notorious 'Coloured labour preference policy' was finally abolished in 1984, it constituted a major political victory for all forces in the Western Cape - including the CTMWU - that had struggled to fight against racist segregation in the area (Golden, 1987)

However, by the early 1980s - despite the association with radical politics - the union itself was experiencing problems and emerged as organisationally weak. This may have been due in part, to the political influence of the Unity Movement politics. The NEUM had traditionally generalised from its experiences of peasant struggles - seeing the peasantry as the majority in South Africa and concentrating its energies on winning their support rather than that of urban workers<sup>35</sup>. Moreover, the number of faction fights, owing to the leadership encompassing a variety of political perspectives - including those of the ANC - made organising exhausting at times (Callinicos, 1988).

Nevertheless, the existence of political in-fighting did not seem to entirely distract the leadership from building a larger union. It was CTMWA along with the Municipal Workers of South Africa (MWUSA) – an black union - that was later to become the driving force behind the launch of a national municipal union (Friedman 1987). As the first general secretary, John Emtzen explained...

The need to organize the unorganized was one of the primary roles we had to play... the need to build structures nationally became important as well. Allied to that was the question of not just organizing the workforce, but gaining the recognition associated with that, from local authorities. This then led to the lifeblood of the union, through subscription.. it had been a painstaking process to build the union to where it is today

**Emtzen, 1992 (Interview with A Younge, 27th July, quoted in Younge and Bendix, 1994)**

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<sup>35</sup> It concentrated on the peasantry, to the point of denying, even as late as the 1970s, the existence of a stable black working class in South Africa

### 6.3 BUILDING A NATIONAL UNION

The attempts to build a national union in the 1980s were difficult from the beginning. Whereas, the Cape Town City Council had recognised the CTMWA - on the grounds of being a racially defined 'coloured' union - no such rights were extended to black workers. Many black trade unions in their fight for recognition found their progress blocked by closed-shop arrangements granted to usually, white 'sweet-heart' unions. Furthermore, each area of local government had its own unique system and structures, making the building of a national municipal union difficult (Swilling and Boya, 1997)

Yet, if the CTMWA was to grow into a national union - and distance itself from its narrow image of only organising Cape Town 'coloured' workers - it would need to focus on building links with African unions. But this would not be easy, especially as most black municipal workers were isolated and on temporary contracts. The migrant system had a long history in local authorities. The traditional pattern being for the workers to live in a compound or dormitory, returning home after the completion of his contract (usually one year), only to shortly leave again for another. Strict racial segregation, low-paid unskilled occupations, with few employment rights or benefits all made it difficult to organise unions in this group (Smith, 1987).

Johannesburg was the largest city, and therefore crucial to the development of any national union. But the nature of the workforce and the poor working conditions had made union organisation problematic for several decades. One migrant worker - living in the Newtown Hostel in Johannesburg - described how conditions in the 1960s had made life intolerable, and union solidarity difficult. Up to 36 workers would sleep in a small room with usually no mattresses and only wooden planks to sleep on, with no cupboards or stoves provided. Management control was strict, with compound security excluding all visitors, except council workers with special access cards. By the 1970s conditions in the hostel were little better, whereas only 13 workers now shared a room, there were still no cupboards and the men were not permitted to talk after ten, or allowed alcohol or visitors (Nkoenyane, 1993).

In the 1980s, no union recognition existed for black workers in the Johannesburg City Council (JCC) and Africans were excluded from Industrial councils (bargaining forums established by the LRA, 1954). The weaker 'liaison committees' - unrepresentative consultative bodies - were used for communication with black workers, but often

excluded unskilled and semi-skilled labour. (Markham, 1987). It was really only after the 1980 strike - organised by the independent Black Municipality Workers Union (BMWU)<sup>36</sup> - that events started to change. Although the strike was eventually lost and a thousand workers were forcibly deported back to the 'Homelands', it managed to highlight the major issues to be addressed if local government unions were to survive. Despite the employers' hostility to black unions and their ability to deport strikers, the most crucial weakness was the lack of organisational and material resources (Markham, 1987; Friedman, 1987).

The lessons learnt from the dispute was that far greater power was needed if the employers and the state were to be challenged effectively. In particular, they needed to extend their organisational and solidarity links beyond their own immediate council. It was this recognition of the need for unity - along with historical events in South Africa as a whole - that accounted for the rise of a national municipal union (Markham, 1987; Friedman, 1987)

### **6.3.1 Towards a national union (1987)**

The period post- 1980 saw a growing consolidation of independent progressive unions organising local authority workers. But in many senses it was lagging way behind the private sector unions, in terms of gaining recognition rights or negotiation around substantive issues. There were many reasons for this, not least the political significance of the public sector as a custodian of the apartheid system, and hence the need on the part of management to sustain and control a compliant workforce (Markham, 1986). The type of work carried out by unskilled local authority workers – with small gangs being employed on dispersed work sites - provided little scope for major technological advances to be used as a method of regulation. Therefore, a more overt system of direct management was needed relying on the presence of supervisors, tame unions, and a high level of repression at the black compounds. In all areas of the public sector, local and central, a divisive, disorganising and discriminatory employment strategy was applied with the aim of reducing labour costs and stifling any united action (Markham, 1987)

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<sup>36</sup> The BMWU later split into two factions, the breakaway group went to join South African Black Municipal and Allied Workers Union (SABMAWU), with those remaining eventually forming the Municipal and Transport Workers Union of South Africa (MGWUSA) and later merging with Natal based municipal union to form the Municipal Workers Union of South Africa (MUSA). The MUSA was to merge with the CTMWA and other unions to form the SAMWU.

Although management's divisive tactics did not go entirely unchallenged, other factors continued to impede the co-ordination of a progressive, national municipal union. Principally, municipal workers lacked a national identity, due partly to being organised with other workers in non-municipal unions - such as the Transport and General Workers Union. Another factor was the political disunity between those unions organising municipal workers - some adopted the programme and tactics of the ANC, others were aligned to the politics of the NEUM, while still others were committed to the strategies of black consciousness. Only with the launch of COSATU in 1985, did these issues receive attention (Markham, 1987; Younge and Bendix, 1994).

From the beginning the CTMWA had affiliated to COSATU. Politically the union - after fierce opposition - had moved from its NEUM orientation, towards the ANC politically aligned Congress movement. It was inevitable that affiliation to COSATU, would bring the union into greater contact with the Congress movement. Moreover, following increasing contact with newly emerging democratic unions the CTMWA's highly bureaucratic structure had been countered by building effective shop-floor structures. By the mid-eighties, it had managed to develop a strong shop steward's committee and - with up to three Shop stewards in each municipal department - it was poised to help launch a national local authority union (Markham, 1987; Baskin, 1991.)

The new local authorities union, SAMWU was established in 1987. The leader of the Cape Town Municipal Workers Association, John Ernstzen was to become SAMWU's first General Secretary. Other unions which formed part of the merger included the General & Allied Workers Union (GAWU), South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU), Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), and the Municipal Workers Union of South Africa (MWUSA). The union had been a long time in coming and represented an accumulation of struggles throughout the local authorities (Baskin, 1991). Most important was the role of the Cape Town union, CTMWA which - despite having to contend with another long established white trade union, the South African Association of Municipal Employees (SAAME) - was growing. With its 11,500 members, the Cape Town union had been COSATU's second largest affiliate in the Western Cape, and provided the bulk of the 15,000 national SAMWU membership (Pillay, 1990; Baskin, 1991).

## **6.4 DEVELOPMENT OF SAMWU'S CAPE TOWN BRANCH (1987-1990)**

The Cape Town branch of SAMWU had been the major mobilising force for the national union of SAMWU - with the majority membership coming from the Cape Town Municipal Workers Union. Yet, the membership in the Cape Town branch had not grown substantially since its merger in 1987 (11,500) - by 1994, it still had only had approximately 11,500 members in Cape Town City Council. Nevertheless, with its approximate density of over 76% in the council, it was one of the largest and most well organised of SAMWU branches (Interview, Roger Ronnie, 8/10/93).

In the late 1980s the branch had begun to develop and mature. There were still a number of challenges facing it, including: fragmented bargaining structures; problems of in-house unions; low wages; racist abuse, bad working conditions, and crucially casualisation and privatisation. However, it was the issue of privatisation and the members willingness to protest against it, that was to eventually alter the branch's reputation and prominence in the region (Markham, 1987).

In March 1990 - in Cape Town - SAMWU, joined thousands of other public sector workers from the COSATU's affiliated trade unions and marched to oppose the government's privatisation plans. POTWA (Post Office and Telecommunication Workers Association) NEHAWU (National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union) SARHWU (South African Railways and Harbours Workers Union) and SAMWU (South African Municipal Workers Union) were all part of an on-going national campaign to stop privatisation. This stand against privatisation on the part of SAMWU members in the Western Cape, was to herald the beginning of a consistent campaign of opposition to government plans to privatise and commercialise the public sector. It was in direct contrast to Cape Town's other municipal union, SAAME, whose highly publicised 'non-political' identity meant it traditionally distanced itself from such campaigns (Pillay, 1990).

### **6.4.1 The 1990 Cape Town strike**

The major turning point for the Cape Town branch was the strike in June 1990. Up until this point the 'coloured' working class - that made up over 90% of the branch - had a reputation for relative passivity, but the dispute in 1990 transformed this image, and in the process smashed the 'liberal' standing of the Cape Town Council (Pillay, 1990).

The strikers were demanding a 'living wage', better working conditions and an end to the councils plans to privatise services. It was Cape Town's first municipal workers' strike, the first ever in the branch's 62 year history. It lasted 13 days (13-26 June) and involved up to 10,000 council workers. The Cape Town strike followed previous protest in the public sector, and although illegal, forced the council to negotiate more seriously in the future (Pillay, 1990; Cape Times, 1990).

The SAMWU Cape Town strike took place amidst a national climate of heightened political consciousness and mobilisation. Coming after COSATU's anti-LRA, living wage and anti-privatisation campaigns, and other regional and national strikes it had - according to then Senior shop steward, Roger Ronnie - 'played a major role in raising workers' expectations of a real change in the council and society generally. The national LRA march in Aug 1989 had been particularly successful in Cape Town - and contrary to expectations, COSATU had managed to mobilise all affiliates in the region (Pillay, 1990).

On Wed. 13th June, the first day of the strike, 10,000 workers occupied the Civic Centre, whilst the union delegation met with council officials to resolve the strike. The effects of the strike were dramatic. 90% were absent from the traffic department, council nurseries, recreation, construction and maintenance departments, waterworks, the city abattoir, rent offices, sewerage plants, administration and the refuse and removal departments; and ambulance workers participated in a 'go-slow' The vast majority of the strikers were 'coloureds', including both blue and white collar workers, and even the usually conservative housing branch, city treasury and library. The union's 200 white members - mainly professional staff - were not immediately obvious but the, then Cape Town branch chairperson, Salie Manie believed many supported the strike (Pillay, 1990).

The occupation of the Civic Centre - which was later to emerge as a tradition during disputes - served to consolidate the strike. The 200 police were immediately apparent because they carried shotguns, tear gas, grenade launchers and batons. A water cannon and riot vehicles were parked nearby. Nevertheless, despite this formidable 'show of strength' the council, did eventually concede to a lot of the strikers' demands. The council moved only slightly on wages, increasing its offer to labourers, from R4.19 to R4.25 - which amounted to R845 (approximately £180) a month minimum, and to

non-labourers from 13.5% to 14%. But the union achieved much more on negotiations around conditions: the council agreed to reduce the hours of work, make casual workers permanent, give an additional days' leave, provide housing allowance, fill the vacant posts, not to victimise any of the striking workers, and finally pay the workers for the last day of the strike. On balance, the action was seen as a resounding victory, especially as this was Cape Town's first strike (Pillay, 1990).

The strike acquired a political significance in the area, with strong support from the various organisations in the black community - although a generally hostile reaction from the white population. The strike reflected a leap in the solidarity and collective consciousness of 'coloured' workers. This was expressed in their confidence to openly challenge their employers and the authority of apartheid. (Pillay, 1990). Moreover the changes were, according to Salie Mann (branch Chairperson), accompanied by a distancing from the influence of the New Unity Movement towards the more dominant political tradition of the ANC/SACP. For his part Roger Ronnie (senior shop steward), felt the politicisation came through the shop stewards and workers' participation in the marches and mass meetings. But perhaps of equal significance was the number of SAAME (the predominantly white union/staff association) members that had expressed a desire to join SAMWU. The branch was now strategically placed to organise local authority workers in the Western Cape (Pillay, 1990)

## **6.5 CONCLUSION**

The Cape Town branch of SAMWU had been the major mobilising force for a national municipal union, with the majority of the membership coming from the branch's predecessor - the Cape Town Municipal Workers Union (CTMWU). Despite its long-standing reputation as a 'coloured' conservative union, the CTMWU had by the 1980s, become a radical opponent of apartheid.

Although historically, the political consciousness of the CTMWU's membership had been influenced by racial segregation common to the area, the more politically progressive tradition of the NEUM had emerged as influential in the Cape Town Municipal Union (CTMWU), from the 1960s to the mid-eighties. Moreover, it was this union - along with the Municipal Workers of South Africa (MWUSA) - that recognised the need for solidarity with all black and 'coloured' municipal workers. And it was their

linking of struggles throughout councils nationally, that helped launch the national municipal union

It was only in the late 1980s however, that the branch truly began to mature and develop a progressive identity. More precisely, it was its militant opposition to issues like privatisation, that was to provide the union with a radical reputation. This image had been cemented during Cape Town's first municipal workers strike in 1990. The strike, although pushing for an improvement in pay and conditions, acquired a political significance, which according to the branch's leadership helped to develop a greater solidarity and collective consciousness amongst the 'coloured' workers (Pillay, 1990).

The 'coloured' workers in the CCC were now able and willing to use industrial action. Yet, this action was not only directed towards the employers, but also represented broader opposition to policies of privatisation in the public sector. In 1990, 'coloured' members appeared to be clawing back some modest control over their working lives, by linking their individual economic needs to the broader collective demands of the group and the wider community - in the way local government was to be financed and organised. The 1990 strike - according to reports from the branch leadership, Salie Manie and Roger Ronnie - had managed to engender an increase in class solidarity amongst their members, which in short had helped achieve a victory against the council (Pillay, 1990). The main point being, at this stage in the branch's development, rank-and file strike action had emerged as one of the most effective ways of wresting power from the employers, and challenging changes in the financing of local government.

The following chapters (7 and 8) explore this theme further, in the process of considering the internal structure and external activities of the union from 1992-4. The aim is to provide a narrative of the development of the branch within the national union, in order to assess whether the levels of organisation, leadership, and collective solidarity and action can facilitate, or impede the branch's opposition to privatisation.

# CHAPTER 7

## TRADE UNION INTERNAL STRUCTURE AND ORGANISATION

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### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

The following section surveys the internal organisation of the branch. Its growth and membership, internal structure and democracy (including the national, region and branch organisation), and the servicing of the members are all considered; along with the overall changes that were taking place during the 1992-4 period. The purpose of the chapter is to document the changing internal structure of the branch, and union; and to analyse its ability to develop an effective organisation and leadership, capable of challenging state policies of privatisation.

### 7.2 GROWTH AND MEMBERSHIP

SAMWU's growth in national membership figures had been impressive, especially given its membership had only been 15,406 at the founding Congress, and had reached 100,000 by 1994. Table 7.1 shows the increase in the national membership from 1987 to 1994.

**Table 7.1**  
**NATIONAL MEMBERSHIP OF SAMWU 1987-94**

Year	Membership Total
1987	15,406
1988	23,638
1989	29,529
1990	59,014
1991	67,178
1992	69,156
1993	73,342
1994	100,410

Source: SAMWU National Congress (1997a) - Organisational Issues

However, the membership of the Cape Town branch had remained fairly static since 1987. In 1993/4 there were approximately just over 11,500 SAMWU members in the Cape Town branch - the overwhelming majority of whom were 'coloured'. Membership and density was high in the council because Cape Town City Council (CCC), historically operated a closed shop agreement with its unions. Since 'coloureds' could form their own union, workers in the CCC were compelled to join the CTMWU, a 'coloured' union.

Yet, the density of members was also high for the whole of the province. In 1990 the national membership had increased to nearly 60,000, with approximately half of the membership coming from the Western Cape Region. After the Garment Workers union - SAMWU was the Province's second largest, COSATU affiliated union (Pillay, 1990). Overall, levels of unionisation in the Western Cape province continued to grow throughout this period, and by 1994 were only just below the national average of 31.3%. Table 7.2 shows the unionisation by province in 1994.

**Table 7.2**  
**UNIONISATION BY PROVINCE, 1994**

Province	Union Density
Gauteng	37.6
E.Cape	31.8
Mpumalanga	30.6
Northern	30.6
KZ/Natal	30.6
W Cape	29.7
Free State	27.0
North West	23.7
N. Cape	15.9
<b>Nat.Average</b>	<b>31.3</b>

Source: Baskin, 1996 - Calculated from the OHS, 1995

Although the closed shop agreement at the council had ensured that nearly all 'coloured' workers were union members, it did not automatically mean all the 'coloured' municipal workers identified with the union. The type of union membership, uneven and contradictory in nature, had more often than not reflected the conservative nature of the 'coloured' community in the region. In fact it was probably only after the branch's first strike in 1990 that an increasing number of members began to identify directly with the union as a whole (Pillay, 1990)

### **7.2.1 Changes**

During the 1980s the membership of SAMWU nationally, had grown rapidly, despite the severe economic conditions, and the repressive climate of harsh, conflictual industrial relations. In the early 1990s - and in sharp contrast to unions in the traditional industries of metal and mining - SAMWU, along with the other public sector union, NEHAWU, continued to grow dramatically. Moreover, in 1993 the much publicised single public sector union, actively encouraged by COSATU, was perceived as having the potential to attract even more members (Macun, 1993).

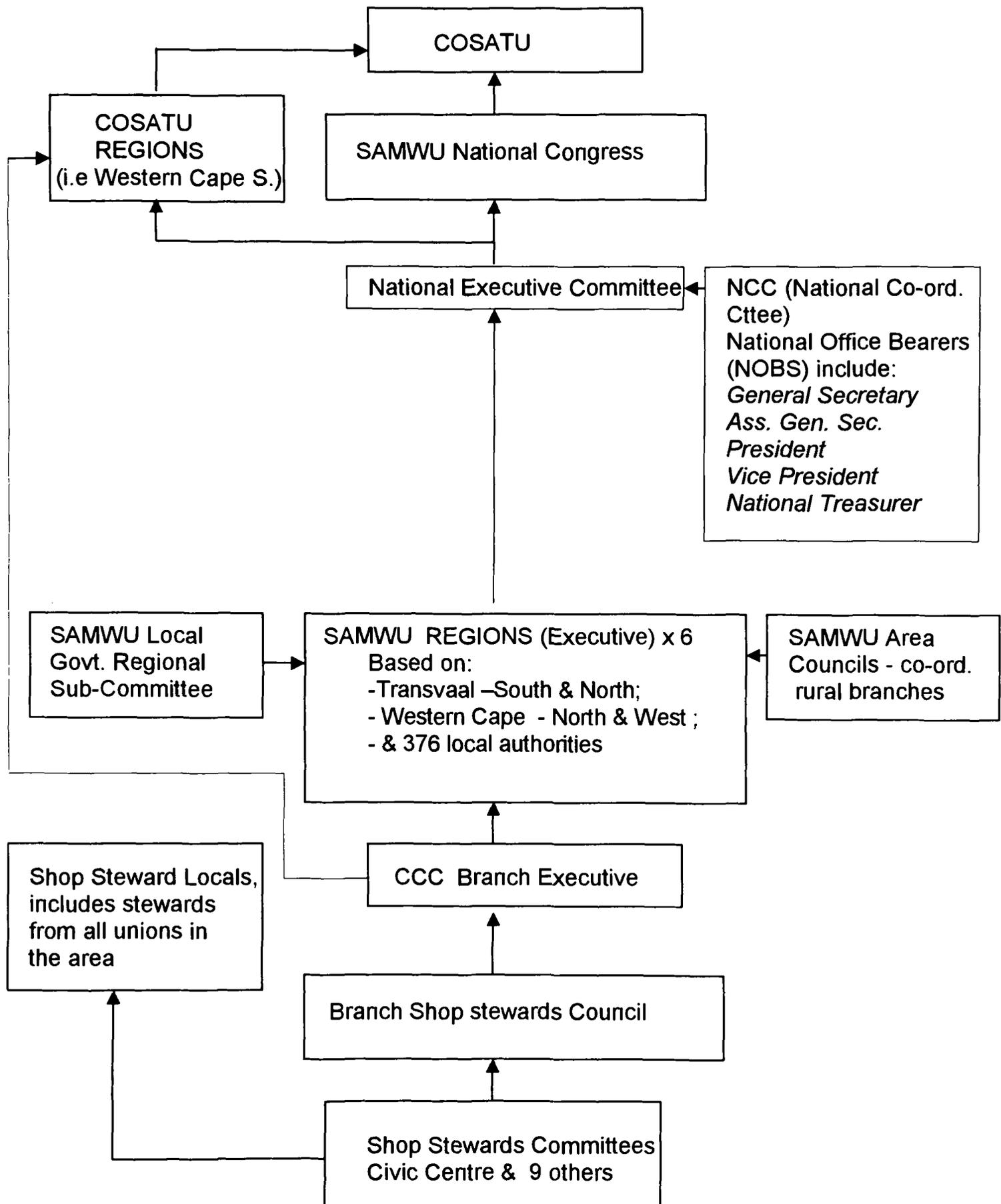
Such changes, it was hoped, would also have an effect on Cape Town. On the eve of the first democratic elections of 1994, the branch had organised predominantly 'coloured' blue collar, unskilled and semi-skilled workers. But stewards interviewed in 1993/4 predicted an increase in white membership, as their jobs became increasingly threatened by rationalisation in the public sector, and expansion outside of local government, due to the public sector union merger (Hennie, interview, 3/9/93).

## **7.3 INTERNAL STRUCTURE AND DEMOCRACY**

(See p.146 for figure 7.1: Diagram of the structure of the union with regions, branches and the relationship to COSATU, 1993)

Figure 7.1

DIAGRAM OF THE STRUCTURE OF THE UNION WITH REGIONS, BRANCHES, AND THE RELATIONSHIP TO COSATU, 1993



Source: adapted from Interview, Hennie, 1993 and SAMWU Organisational Issues, 1997

The culture and organisation of the Cape Town branch influenced the union as a whole. In 1992, it was sometimes difficult to distinguish between the branch and the national unions head-quarters. This was not simply because they occupied the same building - the same offices as the old CTMWA in Athlone, Cape Town - but mainly because the national union had partly grown out of, and initially relied heavily on the Cape Town branch to provide the resources and personnel for the future local government union (Interview, Hennie, 3/9/93).

The branch's political influence was particularly evident, and key figures including future General Secretaries - such as John Emtzen, Salie Manie and Roger Ronnie - emerged from the ranks of Cape Town. In keeping with the political convictions of the branch, and COSATU generally, there was a strong tradition of rank-and-file power and democratic accountability. This commitment to worker's control, dominated the organisation and structure of the union, but was none the less undergoing a re-organisation. In particular, the changing national, regional and branch structures – as a result of the transformation of the structure of post-apartheid local government - was an important part of this re-organisation.

### **7.3.1 National structure**

The highest policy making body of the union nationally, was the National Congress. At the beginning of the 1990s it was convened every three years. The national Congress was the supreme power in the union although, as with most unions, it elected a National Executive Committee (NEC) to carry out the policies of the union between congresses. The NEC met every three months to deal with administration and other urgent matters (Interview, Roger, 8/10/93; SAMWU National Congress (1997a): Organisational Issues).

Whereas, the union had 50 to 60 full-time union employees, the NEC itself was chiefly made up of shop stewards. The regional secretaries were included but had no vote. A National Co-ordinating Committee also met regularly with National Office Bearers (NOBs) (on occasions twice a month). The Constitution during this period, made provision for five National Office Bearers: General Secretary, Assistant General Secretary, President, Vice President and National Treasurer (South African Municipal Year Book 1993; Interview, Roger, 8/10/93; SAMWU National Congress: Organisational Issues, 1997a)

### 7.3.2 Region

In 1992, the national union had six regions based on Transvaal -South and North; Western Cape - North and West ; and 376 local authorities. During this period most regions were relatively weak, and only really developed as the structure and boundaries of the `new' South Africa changed. Most urban areas - with the majority of the membership - had strong and powerful branches, and usually dominated the weaker rural areas who were co-ordinated by Area Councils. In practice, in large municipal areas like Cape Town, branches were so large their powers were practically the same as those for regions. This kind of arrangement was already a source of problems, as the organisation grew and the country re-configured (Interview, Dennis Arendse, 5/11/93; SAMWU National Congress: Organisational Issues, 1997a).

### 7.3.3 Branches and their shop stewards

The backbone to the labour movement in SAMWU, was the branches with their democratic shop-stewards' movement, often painfully built by ordinary members. The hallmark of branches like Cape Town was their emphasis on worker control and strong shopfloor structures - directly answerable to the membership. By 1992, the branch had managed to develop a fairly militant shop-steward and executive system with a strong tradition of accountability and mandating. As Larry Palk, (Labour Consultant for the Cape Town City Council) explained, the large grassroots stewards' organisation had been the union`s strength which had enabled it to grow, even during periods of severe repression.

There`s a large shop stewards' infra-structure, who operate very much on worker control. They deliberately did this because in the past hundreds of leaders were simply arrested by the Police and they could render the organisation helpless simply by taking out the leadership. They learnt from this and developed a large cadre.

**Larry Palk, 18/1/94.**

Yet local accountability and power was not only distinctive to the Cape Town`s shop steward committees. Under the previous union federation – FOSATU - provision had been made for worker control of affiliate unions at all levels. In 1981, part of the

structure included the implementation of shop stewards' councils or 'locals', these were specifically formed to discuss local strategy. They brought together all shop stewards from various committees, depots, and plants in a particular area. The aim was to use the experiences of the stewards to strengthen the organisation and support each others' struggles in the workplace and the local community. Such worker control and co-operation later emerged as central to the COSATU's constitution. All affiliated unions - which included SAMWU - were expected to be active in their area 'locals' (Kraak, 1993;).

The shop stewards in the Cape Town branch were no exception and were particularly energetic. Not only were they accountable to their own shop-stewards' committees and members' meetings - but they participated in their area 'locals'. Such forums usually developed them politically by exposing them to wider arguments and theories which could be applied to their own activities in the workplace (Gabriels, 1992). There were ten shop stewards' committees in Cape Town, representing the different departments, i.e housing, electricity, construction and maintenance, cleansing, waterworks, ambulance, fire service, Parks and Forests, Abattoirs, and the civic centre. The civic centre was interesting because the stewards usually represented a floor - which could include workers from different departments (Jeremy, Steward, Treasury Dept. Interview, 10/9/93).

Local meetings of shop stewards committees and members were sometimes held in the civic centre, but many more took place at the individual depots. This was part of a general strategy, to improve links with the local members and grass roots of the union. As part of this drive for democracy at the beginning of the 1990s, all meetings were addressed in Afrikaans instead of English, making communication with its majority Afrikaans-speaking 'coloured' members much easier. The question of report backs and mandates remained central (Gabriels, 1992).

However, such structures did not mean that the branch was entirely immune from bureaucratic tendencies. Increasing amounts of authority and power - concentrated into the hands of a relatively few number of unions officials, with little accountability or recall from the membership - had already been noted, amongst even the most militant South African trade unions. Labour sociologist, Eddie Webster, reported in his famous study of the Metal Workers union...

There is evidence that decisions that go beyond the immediate concerns of the shop floor are made at leadership level with limited participation outside this group

**Eddie Webster, 1985 p.250**

Some of the SAMWU stewards interviewed in 1993, also expressed concerns over the development of a separate layer of full-time branch officials willing to accept concessions with management in return for time-off facilities. As one steward explained..

certain members have made an interesting compromise. The Chair and Vice-Chair are trading (100%) `time-off' facilities for agreeing to `contract' working in the council.

**Hennie, Steward in Electricity Dept. Interview, 3/9/93**

Another member was concerned about the council's attempts to `hive-off' competent shop stewards to future management positions. As one steward noted, the appraisal system appeared to be being used for this purpose

the `appraisal system' is for everyone, but it's a way of assessing the capabilities of the best shop stewards and draining them into management.

**Lance, Regional Education Officer, interview 10/11/93.**

More specifically the steward, Hennie, complained about the lack of democratic recall on the part of the steward system. The inadequacy of the re-election procedures meant a number of members obtained positions and remained there for excessively long periods.

Once comrades are elected to senior union positions they remain there. I tried to pass a motion to stop officials standing time after time, but although there are elections of a sort its a formality and people simply get re-elected. I wanted to stop people standing after 3 times, but on this I was very isolated.

**Hennie, Steward in Electricity Dept. Interview, 3/9/93**

Therefore, - even with independent unions like SAMWU - there was a possibility of power being centralised, with union leaders separated from their membership on account of receiving better working conditions and opportunities, or even higher pay. The dangers associated with such a trend became apparent in July 1994, when the Financial Mail reported a 'crisis of leadership' caused by the departure of hundreds of COSATU officials, 'not only to high offices of state, but to the private sector and academia' (Financial Mail, 1994a). Just how significant this was in SAMWU is difficult to ascertain - but concern was expressed in the local papers when Cape Town's own SAMWU leader, Salie Manie left the council to become an ANC M.P (Robinson, 1994a).

Nonetheless, despite a lack of evidence to support increasing bureaucratisation of the branch (with leadership increasingly separated from the membership), what was becoming increasingly evident by 1994 was both the branch - and the union nationally - were beginning to grow and develop into more formal, legitimate organisations. Although Cape Town, unlike many other branches of SAMWU, had been recognised since the 1926, it still largely remained outside the formal industrial relations structures, and deliberately set itself up, in opposition, against the apartheid state and its system. However, with the inevitable election of the ANC, SAMWU's role as anti-apartheid liberation organisation looked set to be replaced by a more traditional union structure - with an increasing focus on 'bread and butter' issues located within the workplace. An acceptance of such a shift in emphasis inescapably meant a greater importance being placed on the facilities and services, in order to attract and retain members.

#### **7.4 SERVICING THE MEMBERSHIP**

By 1994, SAMWU had managed to improve many of the services it offered. It was actively involved with projects set to track the membership and monitor finances, improve benefits and perhaps most important of all increase staff support for members. Cape Town inevitably benefited from all of these initiatives because of its close proximity to the head office (i.e it shared the same building).

#### **7.4.1 Membership unit**

The SAMWU Membership Unit was launched in May 1994. The original intention of the project co-ordinators, COSATU was to provide a generic membership tracking system common to all COSATU affiliates. SAMWU (along with NUM, TGWU, CWIU and NEHAWU) was one of the original pilot projects of the membership system. The motivation for adopting such a system included: the desire to ensure financial self-sufficiency through improved subscriptions collection; to provide the union with accurate membership listings to forestall strike ballot interdicts; to achieve greater cost efficiency through the economies of scale of a single system; and finally to boost political unity and co-operation by using a single membership system throughout the federation . At this stage the system was relatively new and so it was impossible to predict its long-term success or suitability (Interviews, 1993; SAMWU Organisation Reports 1997a).

#### **7.4.2 Finance**

One of the major concerns for SAMWU - and black trade unions generally - had been the need for financial self-sufficiency. Unable to cover all their expenses from members' subscriptions alone, the main trade unions remained dependent on outside funding - usually overseas. SAMWU had become troubled that such funding would not always be available, and began adopting measures aimed at increasing subscriptions. Subs in SAMWU were deducted by stop-order deduction, which were obtained via a facilities agreement with the different councils. Previously subs had been collected by hand, but this had led to inaccurate records and suspicion over allegedly corrupt activities (Dennis Ardenise, Organiser, Interview, 5/11/93)

In 1993 SAMWU's subs were 0.5% of a members salary - or 2R if less than R400 was earned. However, the changes included a move to increase them to 1%, with a ceiling of R3. As table 7.3 indicated this compared relatively well to other unions

**Table 7.3**

**SUBS AS A PERCENTAGE  
OF MEMBERS WAGES IN 1993**

<b>Union</b>	<b>SUBS</b>
NUM	1%
SARHWU	0.9%
SAMWU	0.5%
TGWU	R8 (a month)
NEHAWU	R5
POTWA	R5
COSATU	25c/member

Source: Buhlungu, 1993, p.12.

### **7.4.3 Benefits**

By the early 1990s benefits had become essential. The aim was purely and simply to attract and retain membership. For political reasons SAMWU was more reluctant than other unions to involve itself in many of the commercial ventures that were becoming increasingly popular during this period. However, the members expected at least a national provident fund and loan scheme - which meant SAMWU was forced to provide these benefits. Yet its involvement in these enterprises remained limited (Interview Frank Pontax, SAMWU Administrator, 4/1/94; SAMWU Report on organisation Issues, 1997a).

The Loan schemes existed in a selection of regions throughout the country, in particular the Western Cape used a local Unibank scheme, which adopted a low rate of interest. A national funeral benefit scheme operated from 1992, but although compulsory it usually failed to function because of the limited support for the scheme from the regions. Generally, the Cape Town branch appeared at the forefront of administering these schemes - but as previously explained, this was probably due to being housed at head quarters (Interview Roger Ronnie, 8/10/93; SAMWU Report on organisation Issues, 1997a).

### **7.4.4 Staffing**

Linked to the administration of these services was the issue of staffing. As Table 7.4 indicates, this had clearly grown during this period:

**Table 7.4****SAMWU STAFF PROFILE IN RELATION TO TOTAL MEMBERSHIP, 1988-1994**

Year	Total staff	Total members	Staff as a % of Members	Ratio of staff: members
1988	10	23638	0.04%	1:2364
1989	17	29529	0.06	1:1734
1990	38	59014	0.06%	1:1553
1991	54	67178	0.08%	1:1244
1992	76	69156	0.11	1:910
1993	81	73342	0.11	1:905
1994	103	100410	0.10%	1:975

Source: SAMWU Report on organisation Issues, 1997a.

In 1993, there were usually seven to eight people based permanently at the offices at Athelone. They included administrators, the occasional lay shop stewards and full-time officials. Lack of administrative support was the most common complaint on the part of both the branch and head office. It was therefore agreed that a full-time post of Administrative Secretary should be created. The position was to have overall managerial control of the office. It was hoped that such a role would eventually be extended to the Regional offices - with the aim of improving efficiency and accountability (Dennis, SAMWU Organiser, Interview, 5/11/93).

## **7.5 CHANGES 1992-4**

During this period the union began to experience a number of changes, many of which were related to the increased national membership. By 1992, the union leaders were complaining of being overburdened. Full-time officials and staff, both in the branch and head office, were servicing an expanding national membership (Interview, Lance, Education Officer, 10/11/93). The shop steward in the Treasury department in the Cape Town council, explained the difficulties associated with attempts to build an efficient union organisation, whilst continuing to fight the apartheid system.

.. it is extremely difficult from the point of view of the leadership, you see there`s just too few hands. Obviously, apartheid puts tremendous strains on the union organisation..... At the moment we see many serious issues such as the socio-economic problems of the country.  
**Jeremy, interview, 10/9/93**

The pressure to accommodate an expanding membership meant that the structure of the union was under review. Of greatest concern was the role of the branches, some of whom - including Cape Town - had outgrown the regions. The reason lay with the extra resources given to white urban authorities, making them in reality the largest employer of municipal labour in any particular area. The other small, mainly black local authorities, employed relatively few workers in comparison, making it inevitable that the branch with the largest membership should dominate the region (SAMWU Report on organisation Issues, 1997a).

In an attempt to consider branch demarcations and the definition and scope of shop steward constituencies and committees, a National Organising Forum under the chair of the President - Petrus Mashishi was launched in 1994. It was co-ordinated regionally by a Regional Organising Forum, its brief being to consider structural changes, although its chief focus was to address the power of the branches (SAMWU Report on organisation Issues, 1997a).

A further change during this period was the recognition of the need to elect women to leadership positions in the union - especially as relatively few stood as shop stewards, particularly in the rural areas. In 1990, there were 4 national office bearers of which none were women. Indeed of the 83 national office bearers in the whole of COSATU-affiliated unions only 8 were women (Baskin, 1991, p372).

In essence, these were new and exciting times with the probability of a black democratic government, bringing the prospect of a real transformation of society. Yet, this was also a period of uncertainty with the threats of workplace restructuring and rationalisation, looming large. The effects on the SAMWU, were at the same time both exhilarating and daunting. It was to be a period of adjustment as the independent unions shifted from a position of all out opposition, to one of inclusion and acceptance. As one member in the Cape Town planning department explained..

Trade unions will find it very difficult to adjust to the new era. They will have to acquire more skills..... as for the role of trade unions at the local authority level, perhaps things won't change much...but the expectations of members and the civics are still rising ... so the unions will have to respond to these

**Phaldie, Town Planner, 6/12/93.**

A full-time organiser also expressed ambivalence with regard to the future. He was concerned not only about the changes that were taking place in local authorities, but with the union itself, its structures, and even with his job in the union...

Perhaps our greatest fear at present is the changing structure of the Metropolitan system. The Council see themselves as being the major players, currently creating senior posts for themselves but at the end of the day we don't know how this will affect our members .... Or even how it will affect the union structures, it could mean that our jobs in the union could also go, especially as there are plans for a public sector union next May, which could include Health, Education, Railways, Telekom etc.

**Dennis, Full-time Organiser, 5/11/93.**

## **7.6 SUMMARY**

From 1992 to 1994, the Cape Town branch continued to organise mainly 'coloured' blue collar, local government workers. But with the large scale structural changes - both in the country and public sector unions - the branch expected to organise many more white-collar workers and other groups of public sector employees in the future.

Throughout this period the Cape Town branch continued to dominate both the region and the union as a whole. The reason for its influence, was not simply its size but its political ideology - which traditionally focused on a strong rank-and-file power and democratic accountability. The large grassroots stewards' organisation had been the branch's strength which had enabled it to grow, even during periods of severe repression.

Yet, although this commitment to workers control remained as strong as ever, it was acknowledged by those interviewed in 1993 and 1994, that the trade union organisation was undergoing a transformation. This change meant trade unions were no longer part of a national liberation movement - operating outside of the system - but were instead

rapidly being viewed as a socially acceptable participants in a new industrial relations structure. Such developments meant the Cape Town branch would be increasingly compelled to give greater attention to the (economic) `bread and butter' issues. In the process the provision of services to members, the structures of the union at local and region level would all need to be reviewed.

Whether the branch, indeed the union as a whole, would successfully make these changes was unclear at this stage. But what was certain, failure to address such issues could potentially threaten the development of an efficient internal structure - one strong enough to facilitate constructive resistance to the state's commercialisation of the public sector. Nonetheless, the union was more than its internal structure and organisation, in short a much fuller understanding of the power of the branch , could only really be grasped by considering, in parallel, the union's external activities and struggles. It is to this topic we now turn.

# CHAPTER 8

## UNION ACTIVITIES AND STRUGGLES

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### 8.1 INTRODUCTION

It was during the 1992-4 period that SAMWU began to solidate its external policies and activities. Its main demands, by 1994 included a commitment to secure a centralised bargaining council; a call to end apartheid discrimination in the public sector by securing a "living wage"; and finally a pledge to oppose all forms of privatisation. In order to secure these demands SAMWU - and its Cape Town branch - began engaging in more formal conciliatory relations, alongside its more traditional conflictual strike activities.

The shift to a more formalistic, conciliatory style of industrial relations, had become increasingly common - particularly in the private sector. At a national level, some of the leading trade unions (NUM, NUMSA) were gradually moving away from an old style 'militant abstentionism' to closer collaboration with management. Known as 'flexible accommodation', or 'strategic unionism' the approach was intended to secure a more legitimate role for the independent trade unions allowing them to negotiate individual reforms of the existing system. Since the move was increasingly being encouraged by the COSATU leadership - public sector unions like SAMWU were expected to participate (Baskin, 1996).

Yet, such partnership arrangements were in sharp contradiction to the privatisation and workplace changes increasingly imposed on black workers. The overall response from the trade union movement was one of militant opposition, tinged with confusion. If there was to be any effective resistance to privatisation in South Africa, it would have to be led from within trade unions. More especially, there appeared to be a strong belief,

particularly on the part of the members interviewed in Cape Town, that only strike action could prevent privatisation.

We threatened them with industrial action and so they backed down from complete privatisation.

**Andre, Muizenburg Depot, Interview 20/12/93.**

In an attempt to examine these issues further, the following chapter firstly explores the formal activities in Cape Town; followed by an account of the increasing levels of privatisation and deregulation being introduced in the council, and taking place within the context of the continuing levels of conflict and resistance. The purpose is to chart the changing activities and tactics of the branch, whilst assessing its overall power and ability to resist free-market policies.

## **8.2 FORMAL ACTIVITIES**

In 1992, SAMWU was only just beginning to frame many of its formal activities. Up until this point industrial relations remained largely conflictual, with most activities centring around local collective bargaining. Throughout the 1992-4 period, the union's main aim was to establish a national collective bargaining forum - otherwise there was very little evidence to support a shift towards new forms of consultation or partnership arrangements with management. The following section considers the collective bargaining and changes in pay and conditions during the 1992-4 period

### **8.2.1 Collective Bargaining**

As a general rule most industrial relations conducted in the councils were adversarial, with local bargaining dominating communications between black unions and managers. Access to such procedures had not been conceded freely. Most had been secured by strike action, during periods of extreme repression. From the 1970s the leading trade unions had pursued a strategy of steady expansion in the workplace, with the aim of increasing participation in centralised collective bargaining at the sectoral level. The policy, though time consuming, had achieved appreciable gains for organised workers and bolstered the self-confidence of the labour movement. As an

affiliate to COSATU, SAMWU was committed to such a strategy and pushed for involvement at both local and national level (Murray, 1994; Markham, 1987).

Recognition agreements varied between local authorities, with most local councils - prior to 1990 - engaging in perfunctory negotiations with the independent unions, preferring instead to negotiate with 'tame' staff associations (Murray, 1994; Markham, 1987). However, disputes like those in Cape Town in 1990 served to change this. In an effort to settle the - albeit illegal - strikes, many employers were forced to enter into genuine negotiations with the black trade unions (SALB, 1990a)

In SAMWU, the numbers of recognition agreements began to accelerate. Whereas, at its launch in 1987 the union had only achieved recognition with 22 municipalities, by 1993 the number had increased to 308 recognition agreements (South African Municipal Year Book, 1993). However, by 1994 the independent local authority unions still lacked the right to bargain centrally for local authority workers.

we're pushing for the establishment of the national industrial council and our involvement in it.

**Denis, Waterworks Dept, Interview, 5/2/94**

## **8.2. 2 Pay and conditions**

In Cape Town, collective bargaining had traditionally been dominated by demands for higher wages along with a shopping list of general demands - hours of work, public holidays overtime, bonuses, shift allowances etc. By the early 1990s, the national union - along with other major public sector unions - took a lead and began pushing its branches to concentrate on tabling demands for a "living wage". This focused on eradicating the apartheid wage gap between blacks and whites, and became one of SAMWU's chief demands (Andrew Levy and Associates (ALA), 1993/4).

Progress was initially slow, especially as such negotiations usually meant a call for a 35% to 100% pay rise. However, by 1992 the negotiating agenda for all public sector unions was beginning to shift. Bargaining strategies were becoming more sophisticated - encompassing broader macro-issues such as job creation, trade policies and job security (ALA, 1993/4)

Yet, historically the inequality and unevenness of pay and conditions - not only in Cape Town - but throughout the public sector prevailed. The legacy of apartheid in the local authorities meant complex grading structures were characterised by an extraordinary number of job categories with a correspondingly complex system of wages and wage differentials. The result was a stark differentiation in terms of pay and conditions of service between whites - in higher staff categories - and other racial groups, in the lower categories (Standing, Sender and Weeks, 1996).

Inequalities - especially in pay - existed not only between races but also between local authorities. As most bargaining took place in separate local Industrial councils - negotiation on a sector basis was impossible. Consequently, richer large cities like Cape Town tended to pay more, with wages further from the urban centres being much lower. In 1990 Cape Town had the highest minimum rate, R720 per month, but its poorer surrounding BLA`s often struggled to pay a minimum average of R300 (SALB, 1990b, p9)

Overall, though all black workers - whichever council they were employed by - started at an extremely low base, with most wages being below the living wage level.

`Coloureds' and Indians fared better, but were still strategically placed below those of whites. Although in 1990 improvements had been achieved, with between 16%-122% pay rises (the 122% being reserved for those earning R250), real progression was blocked, and the historical legacy of apartheid wages maintained. Table 8.1 shows the average salaries per month between the race groups in different sections of the public sector, in March 1994. Although 'coloured' workers employed in Cape Town - a city council - would have earned more on average than those `coloureds' working in local government as a whole, they still earned (on average) considerably less than Asians or whites.

**Table 8.1**  
**AVERAGE SALARIES AND WAGES PER MONTH, MARCH 1994**

Category	White	Coloured	Asians	Black	Unspecified	Total average
City Councils	4 573	1 914	2 870	1 279	2 611	2 442
Local Authorities	4 544	1 852	2 852	1 275	2 610	2 428
<b>Total pay in the public sector</b>	4 062	2 369	3 522	1 879	3 317	2 784

Source: adapted from CSS 1994a, P0251.

Wages were not the only area of discrimination, conditions of employment also varied substantially. Although, formally there was no discrimination in the Cape Town Council, most African and 'coloured' workers conditions were inferior to whites. Usually, Africans were employed as 'temporary' workers - and could in fact remain temporary for the whole of their working lives - with almost zero prospect of promotion. Their temporary status usually excluded them from benefits, such as pensions and housing.

In contrast, although 'coloured' workers were more likely to enjoy job security than blacks, they were still less likely to benefit from promotion than whites. In practice promotion and merit increases, were at the discretion of the management, who invariably made such decisions on the basis of race. Further discrimination in working conditions and facilities ranged from racially separate canteens, to being informed of rights in disciplinary hearings in an alien language (Terreblanche, 1993; interview, Archie, 4/1/94).

In 1993, SAMWU challenged the Cape Town City Council's (CCC) inconsistency and 'white only' control of senior positions. The council had declared itself committed to an 'affirmative action' policy designed to address racist and sexist recruitment and promotion in the council.. Yet in spite of such a commitment the council had still neglected by 1993, to introduce many of its programmes, opting instead for the less effective (and presumably cheaper) method of informal implementation (Terreblanche, 1993).

In reality, despite professing to be a liberal institution, nepotism had been prevalent in the CCC for years. Until the early 1990s, the City Council held an agreement with the previously 'whites-only' union South African association of municipal employees (SAAME), which allowed the union to veto any appointments they disliked - this usually meant people not classified as white. The Chairperson of SAMWU in Cape Town - Salie Manie - remained resolutely opposed to such tactics and argued instead for the setting up of a formal affirmative action board, with its activities overseen by the union.

Whites still hold nearly all senior positions and vacant senior positions still go mostly to whites. You cannot deal with affirmative action in an evolutionary way, it needs intervention and extraordinary steps to correct imbalances. SAMWU wants an affirmative action Board, and in light of the money shortage, a budget solely for affirmative action should be part of the deal. All appointments from then on should be done

against a definite affirmative action agreement and we want to oversee the process'

quoted in Terreblanche, 1993, p.7.

Interestingly, SAMWU's suggestions did not meet with the opposition it expected. The City Council agreed with the new policy and responded favourably to their ideas. The reasons are open to conjecture. The chair of SAMWU, Salie Manie, was rumoured to become a future ANC M.P, and this may have been a reason why the Democratic Party dominated council - with its newly established council caucus - appeared keen to embrace employee relations policies that were now more 'politically acceptable' (Terreblanche, 1993).

For many SAMWU members the existing system of pay in local government was inadequate, serving only to perpetuate the long established discriminatory apartheid reward structures. Furthermore, the existing methods of negotiation and consultation remained unworkable and incapable of eradicating the inequalities of the past. Consequently, many black and 'coloured' employees demanded real change in the formal structures that had long served the exclusive needs of the few. For that reason SAMWU workers in Cape Town - interviewed in the year leading up to the 1994 election - were calling for an entirely new formal system of industrial relations, one that could deliver rapid and decisive change. Most remained suspicious of the existing negotiating machinery and demanded a complete reconstruction of the system - one with 'new' people, skills, attitudes, ideologies and legislation (Interviews, 1993).

Unfortunately, apartheid government's view of change did not concur with those of the municipal workers. Since 1985, the National Party's vision of transforming the public sector employee relations - and local government as a whole - was to be achieved by using 'responsible fiscal housekeeping and efficiency' (Catchpole and Cooper, 1999). Such comments, inevitably meant the government was intent on privatisation as an engine for change - which was also rumoured to be accompanied by the radical downsizing of staff in the local authorities. The following section considers the changes in work organisation on account of the introduction of privatisation, commercialisation and deregulation - including a move to increase rationalisation of jobs and increase flexible-working.

## **8.3 CHANGES IN WORK ORGANISATION - PRIVATISATION, DEREGULATION AND COMMERCIALISATION**

### **8.3.1 Privatisation and commercialisation**

The economic and political crisis of the eighties had forced the apartheid government to consider the implementation of privatisation in the state sector. Initially - in the mid-80s - its main efforts had been to privatise parastatals - Transnet, SASOL, ESKOM, and ISCOR - but by the early 1990s other sections of the public sector were to be included. In February 1990, the Government pushed local councils harder to consider privatisation. In Cape Town, Larry Palk (labour consultant for CCC) explained how the local press focussed their attention on the council, the inefficiency of services was a major theme:

CCC has its own power station but it simply didn't run at all...It was often said the facilities at the beaches should be privatised because private companies can run them much more efficiently and make profits.

**Interview, 18/1/94**

From the beginning SAMWU, opposed such plans to privatise, on the grounds of protecting services and job security. On the 30th March 1990, thousands had marched in Cape Town to oppose the government's privatisation plans. Many SAMWU members directly equated privatisation with job cuts, and were prepared to protest in order to stop it..

The feelings in the workplace are strongly against privatisation, especially when it affects their job security .... the council can't give long-term guarantees that their jobs will be secure.

**Jeremy, steward, Treasury, interview, 10/9/93**

SAMWU members, were said by Larry Palk, to be so fearful of the jobs cuts that such a policy might bring, they refused even to discuss the issue of privatisation with management.

..unions in CCC just won't discuss privatisation as an option, it was really a parochial attitude, one of job security.

**Interview, 18/1/94.**

Yet, although job security was the prime motivation for opposing such policies, SAMWU members interviewed, also showed more general social and political concerns about the effects of privatisation. One worker explained the feelings amongst members ..

The general feeling among members is that privatisation is not on! For two reasons, one its a question of job security and so there is a general opposition to the private sector and what they see happening. Secondly, its a question of provision of services, the concept of services for profit in fact is not acceptable.

**Archie, interview 4/1/94**

Yet such views were not entirely uniform. One member interviewed, expressed the view that privatisation might genuinely lead to efficiency.

You see I'm not necessary against privatisation, especially if it is used as an efficiency model. Sometimes the selling of assets makes sense because the private sector can deliver more effectively. Often the council has been forced to use external labour because they don't have their own expertise. However, privatisation is not a universal panacea.

**Phaldie, Town Planner , interview 6/12/93.**

Still others saw the privatisation schemes as providing work for people who would otherwise be unemployed, and feared opposing such schemes in case jobs were cut.

Well, even in the Cape Town Civic Centre the cleaning is privatised, but people are reluctant to challenge it because it provides jobs for the poor.

**Kalk, CCC Administrator, interview, 7/1/94**

But ultimately, it was the issue of unemployment and insecurity that was more likely to drive SAMWU workers to oppose privatisation. Whereas, the formal sector of the labour market had experienced a gradual upgrading of skills in the early 1990s - with more secure employment and rising real wages for skilled workers - larger numbers of unskilled and semi-employed workers had suffered a steady decline in employment opportunities. This combination of growing unemployment for some workers and more stable, better-paid jobs for others, not only created new lines of division within the South African working class, but also instilled rational feelings of fear on the part of the unskilled and semi-employed (Murray, 1994).

In the case of SAMWU workers in Cape Town, the majority - with the exception of the new skilled, clerical and supervisory positions - continued to suffer poor pay, chronically inferior conditions and socio-economic deprivation (Interview, Roger Ronnie, 1993). And although, with approximately 40%- 50% unemployment in the country, secure work in the formal sector - however poor - amounted to a privileged status (Murray, 1994), most SAMWU members interviewed remained acutely aware of their precarious position in the labour market. Consequently, many were unwilling to consider any programme that might lead to rationalisation or a shift in their position, down towards that of the unemployed or casual.

### `Contracting-out'

Increasingly, though `contracting-out' of services to private companies - as opposed to wholesale privatisation of the council, was pushed as a solution to high labour costs. One union official in the waterworks department explained how the contracts could be used to implement privatisation piecemeal.

..the alternative is `contracting out' buying in alternative labour. In fact only recently has things changed and legislation been passed to allow gradual privatisation of more services, so there is a possibility that things could take an upturn....

**Lance, Regional Education Officer, Interview, 10/11/93.**

But others saw nothing new in these practices, and explained how the council had been using contracted labour for years.

.. the council has used private labour for many years upstairs in the Housing Development.

**Philadie Town Planner, 6/12/93**

Yet, other interviewees also saw contracting-out as a real threat, essentially associating it with insecurity and a deterioration in terms and conditions of working.

....it is important that members` jobs aren`t affected. The security guards at the civic centre are `contracted-out', they belong to the T&G and they have tremendous problems negotiating with their management

**Jeremy, Interview, 10/9/93.**

you find people who have been working for 20/30 years but still have no tenure

**Phaldie, Town Planner, Interview , 6/12/93**

Despite opposition to such moves, some members expressed a preference for such contracts if the alternative was to be rationalisation of jobs.

The extent of privatisation in CCC

The council still appeared - by 1992 - to be sluggish in their commitment to wholesale privatisation. In the CCC, it was never clear just how enthusiastic the Cape Town Councillors were towards privatisation - some SAMWU members argued that projects had really been forced on the council by the National Party

Abaco, a private company owns most of the abattoirs across the country and already the state is putting pressure on the City Council to sell. They are expected to comply with state requirements/standards otherwise they will be taken away from them. This will cost the council R1 mill so you can see its difficult

**Hennie, Steward, Electricity Dept, Interview , 3/9/93.**

One SAMWU organiser believed the council, and especially the senior management, were highly reluctant to privatise for their own personal reasons. The local authorities were financed according to a national grading of 1 to 15, in accordance with the number of services they ran, larger authorities would have higher grades and by implication more financial resources and higher wages.

What this has meant is the salaries of the town clerks and the next layer of senior managers have been linked to the grading of the local structures and other aspects such as the types and numbers of services run by the local authority. So you see privatisation never really got off the ground because town clerks had a vested interest in maintaining the provision of services....the outright sale of local authorities never really happened.

**Dennis Ardenise, Full-Time Organiser Interview, 5/11/93.**

But the Council's reluctance to privatise was also influenced by the forthcoming elections. The D.P controlled council was unlikely to want to make any major changes in the run up to the election. Larry Palk explained the dangers....

Local Government Negotiations Forum state that 50% of CCC could be transferred to another council, so it appears the present Cape Town Council days may be numbered. Therefore, the Council is reluctant to make any changes that could result in political suicide  
**Larry Palk, ALA, Interview, 18/1/94.**

Such electoral considerations appeared also to have influenced the National Party's privatisation policies in the public sector. There was little evidence to support the claim that reductions in personnel were taking place (see chapter 2). The Government's intention to maintain the state as a source of jobs and privilege for the white elite was still apparent from the fact that provincial and central state employment (where the majority of white employment was concentrated) remained relatively stable. Most of the jobs that were lost were in the parastatal enterprises, with education and health remaining desperately understaffed (CSS, Employment & Salaries & Wages, public sector releases, 1993 and 1994)

Nevertheless, the issues of privatisation were not about to disappear. Interestingly a number of senior stewards interviewed during this period believed privatisation would continue to be a threat, even after the election on April 27th. They based this assumption on the experiences of privatisation in the U.K

Privatisation will always be a problem. Spomet Services have been cut, tariffs have been increased. In Telekon services are worse, there is no job security. These are things we are learning from the U.K, there are certain areas we can't let go. We must remain autonomous as a labour movement if we are to fight it

**Lance, Regional Education, Officer, Interview ,10/11/93.**

### **8.3.2 Deregulation**

Nonetheless, although there appeared to be a reluctance to adopt wholesale privatisation in the public sector, the forthcoming election did not deter the council from reducing costs in other ways. Overall the council seemed to be actively pursuing changes in work organisation in order to save labour costs, many of which - including flexible working and evidence of some limited rationalisation - were viewed by SAMWU member's as just as threatening as privatisation.

## Rationalisation

On the surface, large scale retrenchments (redundancies) did not seem to be a issue, especially as there did not appear to be an attempt on the part of the council to cut substantial numbers of posts. One union organiser commented:

there has been few retrenchments at the council, no negotiations have ever been mentioned, and they`ve never brought documentation to the bargaining table. No its not a major problem.

**Lance, Regional Education Office, 10/11/93.**

However, the members' reluctance to push for higher wages, for fear of retrenchments, indicated - said Larry Palk (CCC Labour Consultant) - that workers felt insecure about their jobs, and harboured concerns that increased demands would threaten their security of employment

Many accepted lower wages in return for very few if any retrenchments.... the union has been anxious to preserve that.

**Interview, 18/1/94**

This insecurity was well founded. Ever increasing demands from municipal workers for higher wages were met with strong criticism from the local community. Moreover, it could be argued that such demands were diametrically opposed to the interests of many of the black and `coloured' communities the union was claiming to support (Younge and Bendix, 1994). And, although full-scale retrenchments (redundancies) were not taking place throughout the council, there was evidence of attempts to reduce labour costs by redeployment, freezing of posts, increasing the use of temporary workers, and even job cuts. For example in the electricity department, the steward reported...

jobs are being frozen for 2 years, and because people can`t cope, contract workers have been brought in. 300 jobs are about to be lost. With cutbacks in services, jobs are being streamlined - where there was 16 there are going to be 3. Redeployment is taking place...

**Hennie, Steward in Electricity Dept, interview 3/9/93**

Other members reported similar activities in their departments. An organiser in the waterworks department explained that job freezing, and the use of casual labour was

increasing. The introduction of new technology was reported, by another member in the treasury, as being employed to reduce staffing costs - the changes had also been accompanied by an increase in members' workloads

... in the treasury there has been a freezing of posts and the workloads have increased. Also we appear to be moving from manual labour to the introduction of new technology, more use of computers. For example, people will now be able to pay their water or rates debts at the Supermarket, PICK & PAY.

**Jeremy, Steward in Treasury Dept, 10/9/93.**

The steward in the Electricity Department also expressed fears over the introduction of pre-paid meters and computers. Such a move was viewed as replacing the jobs of meter-readers

... pre-paid meters will be installed in all the black areas and customers will buy their electricity in bulk. Householders will buy a card and there will no longer be a need for meter readers. Plus they are intending to automate the whole of the system. Instead of using a little black book they will use mini computers

**Hennie, Sept, 1993.**

### Flexible-working

Flexible working was intended to save labour costs. Cape Town's original document on privatisation described the need for job descriptions to promote greater flexibility (Cape Town Municipality Bulletin, 1988)<sup>37</sup>. Yet, their use remained uneven, and varied depending on the department. More especially, it was debatable whether such moves were fundamentally changing the organisation of work. Whereas one member working in the electricity department in the civic centre, reported that flexible working was increasingly being introduced along with three month contracts, other members argued that there was nothing new about flexible working. A member in the waterworks

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<sup>37</sup> South African policy-makers, academics and employers, have adopted some terms of the international debate on "labour market flexibility" enthusiasm, yet the term still remains ambiguous. Nevertheless, a conventional definition – and one used here - is the idea that employers would like to be able to change employment quickly and easily. A distinction is made between functional and numerical flexibility, the former hinging on flexibility of working practices, job structures etc, and the later to changes in the number of workers (Standing, 1996, p.6).

department explained that the council had been using flexible labour for many years - especially for 'coloured' and African workers.

Moreover, some members even believed that flexible working might be a good thing. Employers were now demanding that a larger portion of the annual wage increases be linked to productivity improvement, entailing different methods of working and changes in terms and conditions. Such changes were being sold as helping to close the apartheid wage gap, by allowing greater use of variable skills and scope for promotion. One SAMWU steward explained that in some cases members openly welcomed such flexibility

Flexibility? Well we adhere as much as possible to the existing job description and deal with problems via grievances or upscaling. However - often members want to do extra jobs to increase chances of promotion... if they do the same job for 5/6 years, they simply get passed over. Only in certain jobs do they get promotion

**Lance, Regional Education Officer, Interview, 10/11/93**

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Overall, the concerns of many SAMWU workers interviewed were consistent with the views expressed by unionists world-wide - former state owned enterprises would be sacking large sections of their workforces and introducing more temporary and "flexible working". Already in South Africa flexible methods of working were increasingly being tabled in negotiations with trade unions, with the possibility of the already vulnerable, low paid, workers being further exploited. In truth though, what was happening in the council - and South Africa as whole - was an attempt to deregulate what was viewed as a 'rigid' labour market, but as Guy Standing of the ILO pointed out, the notion that the South African labour market was rigid was beyond belief

'Most workers experience unemployment and income insecurity, with low wages and poor working conditions.. Those arguing that economic growth is impeded by an "inflexible labour market" are affluent and privileged and so before they advocate making the wages and working conditions of the poor more flexible, they should be very confident of their evidence'

**Interview, Summer 1996, quoted in Catchpole *et al.*, 1998.**

Nonetheless, Larry Palk (Andrew Levy Associates Ltd) believed such practices were set to increase in the 'new' South Africa

..this is certainly a thing of the future especially if the private sector is introduced.

The key point though, was in a country with a rumoured 50% 'real' unemployment, such changes were cause for serious concern, especially as economists were predicting that any economic 'upturn' would not be accompanied by increased employment. In sum the process of jobless growth witnessed elsewhere in the world was sure to be visited upon South Africa in 1990s (Catchpole *et al.*, 1998). What the response of the Cape Town branch would be to these changes - greater use of formal procedures or increasing strike action - was difficult to assess, although the public sector unions' increasing use of conflict to defend its interests was evident from 1993. The following section considers the types of resistance – in particular the levels of strike action - taking place in Cape Town Council during this period.

#### **8.4 CONFLICTUAL ACTIVITIES**

In 1992, crucial developments were taking place in public sector industrial relations - with many black and 'coloured' workers increasingly resorting to militancy in order to achieve their aims. As a result, by 1993, the state was forced to make concessions on wages, recognition of unions, right to strike, and even commitments not to privatise. What had become abundantly clear during this period was that public sector unions - like the private sector unions before them - were using industrial action in order to pose a direct challenge to the employers and government.

##### **Strike figures**

Although overall strike figures in South Africa in 1993 had fallen to 3.6 million days, from a figure of 4.2 million days in 1992 - a 14.3% decrease - the year had been marked by a series of large strikes concentrated in the public sector. The strikes were in notable contrast to the private sector, where strike days had fallen considerably (ALA, 1993).

With the passing of the Public Sector Labour Relations Act in August 1993 - which allowed for genuine collective bargaining in this sector - the government had anticipated that unions would resort more readily to strike action<sup>38</sup> in order to redress past injustices, but the scale was still unexpected. Most significant was the prolonged teachers' strike, which accounted for 895,000 days. The countrywide municipal wage strikes added a further 162,994 to this figure (ALA Annual Report on Labour Relations in South Africa 1993-4).

#### **8.4. 1 Resistance in Cape Town Branch**

SAMWU members in Cape Town also showed a willingness to take action. More especially since the 1990 strike, when the branch had managed to consolidate its reputation for militancy. Other forms of resistance during this period (1990) included Cape Town's participation in anti-privatisation marches and occupations. The effects of such action at the national level, were credited as forcing the state to temporarily retreat from the privatisation of many state enterprises such as ESKOM, Posts and Telecommunications and Transnet (SALB, 1990b). The branch also took action from 2-6 August, which included joining the four million strong national protest against apartheid on 3-4 August 1992, thereby convincing the National Party that the unions were determined to use mass action to defeat apartheid. Other local action, in 1992, meant the Cape Town abattoir was the last to be privatised in the country. As the SAMWU organiser explained, this was a resounding victory for SAMWU because the council had been forced to retreat from full-scale privatisation of the abattoir.

We threatened them (the CCC) with industrial action and so they backed down from complete privatisation. . . . they are now faced with 6 options, which are being put to the abattoir workers. What it will mean, if workers are not happy they can transfer, then if they're still not satisfied they are given the option of taking retrenchment

**Dennise, Full-time SAMWU Organiser, interview 5/11/93**

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<sup>38</sup> Public sector workers were permitted to strike, and could not be dismissed for 30 days unless the strike was conducted in a illegal or unfair manner. Where the strike was illegal strikers could be dismissed within 4 days. Although, workers involved in essential services were still prohibited from embarking on strike action.

Labour Consultant Larry Palk supported this statement...

The resistance has been great. Cape Town is the only Council in the country to have an Abattoir, every other one has been privatised. Last year they wanted to sell off the Abattoir, they guaranteed the unions no retrenchments and redeployment for anyone. But the union, SAMWU, still said no! There`s a compelling economic reason to sell off the Abattoir, it needs R60m spent on it in order to upgrade.

Interview, 18/1/94

Nevertheless, it was the strike from 2-6 August 1992 that provided solid evidence of increased levels of militancy in the Cape Town Branch. This strike was different from the 1990 strike (experienced earlier in Cape Town), because the management now seemed prepared to use greater force to defeat the union. Moreover, although not fully a national strike, it was viewed by many members in Cape Town as a test of their union`s ability to `pull off` such action, at a later date. The demands were for a 20% increase in pay and a right to central bargaining. Johannesburg - one of many other local authorities in negotiations - had reached deadlock. Workers there had been offered 10% (7.5% immediately and the rest later) - but Cape Town, who had direct negotiation with the City Council, had only been offered 6.5% (Interview, Hennie, 3/9/93).

Events quickly escalated, and despite the strike being illegal, 23,000 people in Western Cape and 70,000 across the country went on strike. Most major cities were at a standstill. The ANC gave their support. The strike was significant because divisions between the rank and file and leadership began to emerge. One shop steward, Hennie explained how circumstances led to divisions arising between the negotiating committee (which consisted of the executive members of the branch and one national full-time official) and the majority of the shopstewards.....

`In Cape Town there was agreement between the negotiating team and management, on the understanding that the workforce did not occupy the building later than 10 a.m in the morning, but the membership refused and wouldn`t leave the building. The leadership had to negotiate with management not to call in the Police. The occupation started to get out of control, people were drinking and the negotiating team agreed with management to send people home. This was their first major mistake. The 40 shop stewards remained and occupied the Executive Suite of the Council, they refused to move until they got a satisfactory answer, they were even prepared to go to jail. The Chairperson (of the

union side) then talked independently to the councillors which resulted in a tremendous division between the negotiating committee and the stewards.'

Interview, 3/9/93

The Chair later stopped the negotiations and tried to calm the situation. All shop stewards were then encouraged to attend a Branch Shop Stewards' Council Meeting in order to vote to end the strike. At the meeting they were instructed to go and tell the workers that the strike was over. As Hennie explained, the response of the workers to such news was one of anger and fury towards the negotiating team ....

'the workers were supposed to return to work. Some did go back to their depots, but others didn't know they were supposed to return and so came to the civic centre and so I called a meeting. I told them that the low paid were to get 6.5 % and 5% for the others. The workers were furious and demanded to see the leadership. The negotiating committee were brought down and the Chairperson warned me that if the workers didn't go back I would be held responsible. The leadership simply assumed that the workers didn't know what was happening!'

The strike was large, of the 11,500 members branch members 8,000 had struck, with many members arguing it was a workers' initiative as opposed to a union initiative. Many members throughout the Western Cape were furious with the union's compromise. In the rural areas riot squads were sent in when workers occupied the premises in disbelief. Many members in Cape Town blamed the subsequent job losses on the failure of the strike. Jobs were frozen, there were no early retirement or retrenchment packages, and more contract workers were brought in - 300 jobs were cut and most of the services streamlined. Members began to fear further job cuts and even privatisation (Hennie, interview, 3/9/93). Hennie, a local steward was particularly concerned about the proposed privatisation of the electricity Parastatal, Eskom, and how it would affect jobs in the council.

'The City Council has a debt to Eskom, if Eskom becomes privatised they may not tolerate this debt, already 28% of the energy is sub-let and they're getting ready for expansion in Africa. Many believe the Metropolitan Council will bring in many changes. I'm concerned about this and I've spoken out about it many times but there is very little fightback from the trade union bureaucracy.'

## Significance of the strike

This result of this strike contrasted sharply with the strike of the 1990. Then the council had appeared genuinely surprised at the 'coloured' workers growing confidence and willingness to engage in direct action, so much so that they agreed to many of the unions' demands. In 1992, the council had learnt several lessons and were more than prepared to resist the union's strikes. Nevertheless, there did also appear to be some unease amongst the membership, over the union leadership's willingness to concede more readily to management's threats than in 1990. However, this analysis needs to be considered within the context of the events that were taking place in Cape Town Council at that time.

In the year immediately prior to the dispute, the Executive Committee of the council, (the EXCO) which consisted of 5 to 6 people had been accused of being inefficient. The council was seen as overstuffed and were described by the local media as having weak labour relations and 'lacking the guts to take on the unions'. A pressure group had been formed to lobby the council, with the hope of forcing a resignation, as Larry Palk explained.

Arthur Wienburg was the leader of this pressure group and a councillor, and although now he's seen as yesterday's man, at that stage he had the media behind him and was therefore quite powerful. The rates were set to rise 300% (the council had made a complete 'balls up'), and so the pressure group began to lobby them.

**Interview, 18/1/94**

All this happened between August and November 1992 - during the period of the strike. As a consequence the EXCO were certainly under great political pressure not to concede to the strikers, so it was hardly surprising that the council stood firm. Nevertheless, such attempts at macho-management, eventually turned out to be fruitless, especially as the EXCO were shortly replaced by a more 'politically correct' leadership – very different from the pressure group formed to get rid of the original EXCO. As Larry Palk the Labour consultant for the CCC explained

...in the end because of all the pressure put on the EXCO by the media, all but one of the members resigned. They were replaced by the Mayor, Chris Keegan, who was elected the new Chair of EXCO - Chris Keegan has an history of struggle he's ex NUSAS and was retained during the repression years. Obviously, Wienberg had been trying to get into this position, but failed.

**Labour Consultant, Larry Palk - Interview , 18/1/94.**

Despite what appeared to be an eventual 'climb-down' on the part of the council, a number of members remained unhappy with the outcome of the strike. Many rank and file members expressed reservations over the level of success of the strike, especially the ability of management to learn new tactics.

People are angry, people are thinking of joining SAAME (South African Association of Municipal Employees)... Now Management are cutting jobs and dismissing people, they certainly learnt a lot from that strike!

**Hennie, Interview, 3/9/93**

The consultant from ALA supported this point

..local authorities unions are supposed not to strike but SAMWU went on strike for 5 to 6 days and did in fact have the power to bring the City to a halt. The council handled it well and in fact the council employees didn't gain much and lost a weeks' pay... the interesting fact is that every time the union goes on strike management become more and more experienced at handling them. There was a 3-day strike last year, once again the union didn't gain much economically although in their perception it was seen as successful. They were showing the council that they had the power and in the past the council would have been frightened and conceded to the unions, now I'm not so sure.

**Interview, 18/1/94**

A number of members also openly expressed their disgust at the rank and file being 'controlled' by the leadership, encouraging them to take strike action only when it suited their own aims. Larry Palk of ALA, commented on this issue.

This is an interesting point. If one looks at the labour movement in South Africa in the last 2 years there's been a tendency to use it simply as a tap, switching it on and off. During the VAT campaign members were urged to come out, they did, then they were urged to go back. There is a possibility that the leadership could be side tracked, in fact the line

taken by the leadership now at recent congresses is one of controlling unguided missiles...if we can utilise the rank and file we can stop this happening,

He also raised the possibility that unions in the future would be less likely to take strike action, especially if the COSATU leadership established itself as part of the new civil society. Although he did concede later that this was probably unlikely at this immediate point in time; Larry Palk, commented:

You see COSATU is a large organisation.... They have a history of 15 years of militant trade unionism, no one can take that away from them....there`s the unfilled aspirations of the lower classes,.... as long as there`s free enterprise, strikes will thrive. The biggest threat is the IMF, privatisation and the World Bank in South Africa.

His final analysis contained an element of truth. Following the strike in 1992, the branch appeared to develop a stronger degree of opposition to privatisation. The `coloured` members, in the CCC – despite expressing concerns over the leadership manipulation during the 1992 strike - declared an willingness (during interviews in 1993) to use industrial action to defend their interests, not only against their immediate employers, but also government policies of privatisation. The leadership too, declared a similar intention. By using the same tactics employed whilst attacking apartheid, the union began to adopt a policy of mass campaigning with links to the community , but did not rule out strike action. As one official explained

We`ve campaigned in terms of resolutions which give a clear position opposing privatisation, meetings with communities and getting fully involved in building up civic structures, creating an awareness via propaganda, either collectively via COSATU or via the public sector forum.....but in the end it may come to strike action

**Lance, Regional Education Officer , WaterWorks Dept.  
Interview, 10/11/93.**

Perhaps more significantly, what was beginning to distinguish this union from many other COSATU affiliates was its ability - even at this early stage - to recognise the long term threats of privatisation to their union and its members. However, simply

recognising the dangers did not necessarily mean the union would resist privatisation - or even if they did whether they would be capable of stopping state privatisation.

## **8.5 SUMMARY**

By 1994, SAMWU appeared to be developing into a different kind of organisation: On the one hand, its increasing focus on organisation, services and institutions, reflected a growing formalisation of the organisation. On the other, the linking of socio-economic and political debates, the insistence on 'core campaigns' and active rank-and-file struggles as the ultimate means of fighting issues like privatisation indicated the union's recognition of the importance of mass resistance - and its willingness to engage in open conflict - at this stage – with its employers.

In the early 1990s, militancy among all groups of public sector workers - not just in Cape Town - had been high, with considerable gains being achieved (SALB, May 1990a; Baskin, 1991; Callinicos, 1996). Industrial relations in the public sector, continued to be characterised by a high degree of mistrust between management and unions (Interview, Larry Palk (ALA))

Yet despite these increases in strike action, union organisation of disputes remained very fragile, with officials and workers sometimes lacking experience. Moreover, such a volatile climate of industrial relations seemed to contrast with events in the private sector, which had been experiencing a more peaceful industrial relations climate since 1992. This was due primarily to some of the larger unions in COSATU entering into more complex agreements with management, resulting in a trade-off of lower wage demands for economic restructuring (Murray, 1994).

This change was not accepted by all unions but restricted to a small number who were able to sell such offers to their members. For example in Mining, Steel and Engineering, and Automobile sectors, negotiations were being settled without resort to industrial action, and with what Andrew Levy Associates described as, 'a degree of restraint during particularly harsh economic climates in their respective industries' (ALA, 1995 p.30). The Labour consultant from Cape Town believed such a model of compromise was reminiscent of the German model of social partnership

At the moment the unions are trying to model themselves on the German system, it preparing to give up its militancy for a greater say. At the moment they`re mainly involved in wages and dismissal  
**Larry Palk ALA, Interview 18/1/94.**

However, a number of SAMWU leaders interviewed in 1994, remained wary of such initiatives, fearing that unions could well be subjecting themselves to the dangers of collaboration and binding agreements with employers. They stressed the need to remain separate from management if they were to hold on to the gains they had made

The role of the unions in participation, is the need to maintain our democratic and militant tradition. Once we lose that, the battle on all fronts will be difficult. We need to formulate specific demands, we have a history of being clear of who sits on either side of the table, never a blurred issue. We should not get away from this tradition. The capitalists who developed what is called the `round table working-group' were extremely shrewd, but unless we can dislocate ourselves from this we`ve got a problem.

**Lance, Regional Education Officer, Waterworks Depart.,  
Interview, 10/11/ 93.**

Furthermore, formal conciliatory arrangements between unions and management seemed to contradict the traditions of the South African workers' movement, which had developed a healthy climate of rank and file control and willingness to take industrial action if negotiations failed. The future General Secretary, Roger Ronnie expressed a need to retain this power of opposition, if workers jobs were to be protected

This is a personal opinion, we must get rid of the myth that engaging in opposition will threaten the security of jobs... that there is an inability to fight the changes, so we must enter into a separate agreement with the authorities and capital. This is not the case, there needs to be a clear, separate position developed by the union.

**Roger Ronnie Interview, Full-time Regional Negotiator, 8/10/93**

The following chapter (9), reviews and evaluates these and other issues - discussed throughout part 1 of the case study - more fully, with the aim of summarising the whole of the 1992-4 period, leading up to and including the end of apartheid.

# **CHAPTER 9**

## **ANALYSIS**

### **1992- 4 PERIOD REVIEWED**

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#### **9.1 INTRODUCTION**

The following chapter analyses and reviews the main elements of the 1992-4 period. The account perceives the 'coloured' identity, as a significant influence on the material and social conditions of the SAMWU membership in this area. The transformation of the Cape Town branch is also highlighted, with the shift from a radical anti-apartheid organisation, to an accepted position in the newly emerging South African civil society, forcing a change in the internal structure of the branch and its external activities. As a consequence, the branch and the union, in 1994 continued to present a contradictory picture, with on the one hand its increasing involvement with formal, conciliatory methods of trade unionism, being contrasted with its continuing strikes and potential conflicts around privatisation, drawing it ever closer to a future confrontation with the 'new' ANC government.

#### **9.2 'COLOURED' IDENTITY**

During the 1992-4 period, an important characteristic of the branch was its atypical race composition - the majority of South Africa's 'coloureds' resided in the Western Cape. Therefore, any analysis of the branch - or evaluation of its members' willingness to fight privatisation - must include an appreciation of the apartheid 'coloured' identity. Such an identity helped to shape the material and political ideology of the 'coloured' workers whilst producing a segregated home environment and prejudicing the world of every 'coloured' worker in this region (Murray, 1994; The Economist, 1996).

Apartheid had been more than restrictive legislation. It was a composite ideology, a set of practices which legitimised social and economic inequality in this region (Beinart and Dubow, 1995). Above all, radical interpretations (Wolpe, 1972; Leggasick, 1974) challenged the notion that twentieth century segregation was simply a survival of prior racial beliefs. Instead they offered an economic interpretation of apartheid as a product of rationalisation of economic imperatives, with the economic and political benefits of a cheap and controlled migrant labour force, common to mining industry, being extended to the growing manufacturing sector from the 1960s. The racial divisions in Cape Town could equally be said to have served such an economic purpose. By protecting the 'coloureds' from African competition in the labour market, it not only attempted to preserve the Western Cape as area where whites could be numerically and materially dominant, but more especially, enabled the government to justify the regulated, inferior position of 'coloured' labour in the market, in relation to whites (Humpheries, 1989).

This division was equally visible in the workplace. The CCC was the largest employer of 'coloured' labour in local government. Yet, despite having a liberal image, the council historically pandered to the National Party's racist policies of segregation, favouring the employment of 'coloureds' over blacks, and whites over 'coloureds'. In common with the rest of apartheid's public sector it presented, by 1992, a totally unaccountable, fragmented, apartheid institution - one in need of complete transformation (Maurice, 1993).

### **9.3 THE CAPE TOWN BRANCH**

It was the Cape Town branch of SAMWU that emerged as a mobilising force for change in this racist environment. Throughout this period, opposition to apartheid and its institutions continued to dominate the ideology and actions of the branch. As one shop steward in the treasury explained...

because Apartheid still divides it's difficult to take up other issues.  
**Jeremy, Treasury Shop steward, interview 10/9/93**

Despite, the branch's reputation as a 'coloured' conservative union, SAMWU, and its predecessor the CTMWU, had on account of its anti-apartheid activities in the 1980s and early 1990s, acquired a standing as a radical opponent of the apartheid. As one of the founding branches of SAMWU, Cape Town had managed to overcome the racism of apartheid by linking the struggles of 'coloured' workers with those of the oppressed black majority. On the 3-4 August 1992 - when COSATU launched its Mass Action Campaign against apartheid, the Cape Town branch was part of the millions of workers who joined the massive political general strike. After this demonstration the NP could no longer harbour any doubts that the unions would not use their power to bring an end to apartheid (Callinicos, 1996).

Nevertheless, with the inevitable demise of the apartheid regime, SAMWU's role was set to change. It would soon be accepted as an integral part of the newly emerging civil society, with its anti-apartheid stance likely to be replaced by a more traditional focus on terms and conditions in the workplace. An acceptance of such a shift meant a greater emphasis was being placed on the internal structure of the union and the services offered to its members.

### **9.3.1 Internal Structure and organisation**

What was becoming increasingly evident by 1994 was the fact that both the branch - and the union nationally were beginning to grow and develop into a more formal, legitimate organisation. But, such internal changes - although essential - brought the prospect of greater bureaucracy and dangers of power being centralised into the hands of union leaders. Already, some new black trade union leaders were beginning to demonstrate characteristics similar to Rosa Luxemburg's classic analysis of the labour bureaucracy. This group was said to exist in all mass workers' organisations and used to mediate between the two conflicting classes - the ruling class and the workers. In the South African context, the role of the trade union leadership was coming under closer scrutiny, especially as a number of the newly empowered COSATU leadership, had left to become MPs, senior government officials, and private sector managers in the months leading up to the election.

Just how common this was in SAMWU was difficult to ascertain, but was certainly cause for concern for at least two of the shop stewards interviewed in 1994. Despite such fears, it may be equally true to argue, that given the racially structured inequalities,

massive poverty, and inadequate public services, South African unions and their leaders, were probably unlikely to become 'normal' unions in a western European sense for some time yet.

### 9.3.2 External Activities

Overall the external activities and struggles of the branch remained contradictory. Despite the supposed shift to more formal conciliatory methods of communication between trade union leaders and employers, the public sector had experienced a sudden explosion of industrial action in 1993 - Cape Town was no exception. A local strike from the 2-6 August, 1992 had already secured the branch a reputation for militancy, subsequent disputes over the privatisation of the abattoirs had resulted in a 'climb down' from the council; and finally its highly publicised willingness to campaign and strike further against privatisation, had helped it to secure a radical identity in the area

Nevertheless, the end of apartheid inevitably provided opportunities to influence the 'new' labour friendly government, the ANC. The new industrial relations system meant the possibility of greater legitimacy and acceptability, but also posed the question of union commitment and obligations to the ANC. Not only SAMWU, but the whole of the previously disenfranchised trade union movement would be developing relations with the government. SAMWU collaborated with COSATU and its affiliates when formulating policy with the ANC. In particular, the branch leadership perceived the importance of campaigning with other unions over the threat of privatisation

.....We've tried to broaden the struggle by trying to link up with the privatisation in the South African railways, postal services, although we do see the municipal sector as slightly different..... we mustn't see it solely as a Cape Town issue, it should be a national campaign. At the moment it's too piecemeal. Our NEC argued to consider privatisation on a national basis. We need to get support from the community and the political alliances. The trade unions greatest support is COSATU  
**Dennis - SAMWU Organiser. Interview 5/11/93**

At this stage SAMWU saw little difference between their resolve to fight privatisation and that of other unions. Although they were critical of co-operation with privatisation when it occurred and, COSATU's lack of leadership

I don't think there's a difference..... However, the main problem is there is no common position, especially from the COSATU. Take the question of electricity privatisation, ESKOM. We agree that the reorganisation may help economies of scale but the major question is one of control, what kind of structure is important to ESKOM, who is going to control the vast monopoly, who will benefit from the large amounts of money that's generated. But in COSATU some of the other unions are going full steam ahead to accept ESKOM privatisation

**Dennis - SAMWU Organiser, interview 5/11/93.**

Another official interviewed, was also concerned that some of the unions appeared more concerned to recruit members in the newly privatised companies, than fight government privatisation

they see it in terms of a narrow union perspective, see themselves gaining thousands of members as workers transferred over, for example, NUMSA stands to gain many members. However, we see it in terms of the effect it will have on public sector, on the control of services

**Full-Time Official Roger Ronnie. Interview 8/10/93**

By 1994 SAMWU appeared to have become even more critical of the other public sector unions and openly expressed fear over the lack of solidarity ....

We tend to be going into our little cocoons, public-sector privatisation remaining a public sector issue, not seen as a real issue to others. NUMSA and the NUM conduct their own campaigns, the question of solidarity action is lacking with regard to privatisation

**Frank, SAMWU Administrator, interview 4/1/94.**

In reality, the problem was deeper than a lack of solidarity in campaigning against privatisation. There was evidence of COSATU unions already investing in the private companies themselves. SAMWU was opposed to such projects, but acknowledged that as the black unions achieved greater acceptance in the main stream economy, it would be difficult to stop these processes. Even the prospect of a public sector union merger was not seen as a guarantee that they could influence the actions of other public sector unions (Ronger Ronnie, Interview, 8/10/93).

## 9.4 RELATIONSHIP TO THE ANC

The key issue though - and of interest here - was SAMWU's potentially conflictual relationship with the 'new' state. SAMWU's commitment to industrial action in order to defend their interests was potentially a major problem for a future ANC government. Already, the ANC was emphasising institutionalised involvement of COSATU in 'tripartism' with employers and the state. In keeping with this, it urged unions to enter into equal co-operative arrangements with employers, particularly on issues like public sector reorganisation (Murray, 1994, Callinicos, 1992). For SAMWU, this was an anathema - being keen to maintain its independence - it saw the only reason for taking part in these talks in the first place, was to secure the greatest gains for the workers

Take our role in the local government negotiating forum we push the position of a two-sided table, the statutory side and the non-statutory . We had major uproar from the ANC on that, they said we needed a round table discussion, as inclusive as possible. We said you can be inclusive but we need to know who sits on either side of the table... we have now managed to devise clear processes to deal with the two sides... its only because of the activities of trade union members that we've managed to make such gains

**Lance, Regional Education Officer, interview 10/11/93**

SAMWU, equally saw a need to make such clear demands on the new reconstruction and development programmes - the ANC's electoral programme for change in South Africa. Unlike the 'new' government, the union did not see it as a jointly determined programme between the capitalists and unions, instead they saw it as a programme of negotiation - one on which trade union leaders had to be clearly mandated by their members

It must be a process of negotiation which we refer to our members. It will become more and more difficult to do but we must maintain it

**Roger Ronnie, Interview, 8/10/93**

However, despite being concerned about the ANC's tactics during the negotiations, the same trade union official did not think it necessary - when prompted - to make comparisons with the corporatist experiments in Britain in the 1970s. In particular, he seemed to see clear differences between the experiences of South African Trade unions and those experienced in Britain.

In South Africa its different, the material conditions are different to when the Labour Party came to power. There`s the concept of a liberation struggle having taken place, the prevailing consciousness of people being involved in a struggle.

**Roger Ronnie, interview 8/10/93**

This was partly correct: the trade unions in Britain in the 1970s had certainly not led a mass liberation movement that had succeeded in replacing an oppressive apartheid state, with a newly liberated black government. But equally comparisons could be made between the ANC, and the traditional reformist politics of the British Labour Party. From 1992 - 4, the use of mass action had allowed the ANC to show the regime how powerful they were, as well as allowing their increasingly angry and impatient supporters to `let off a bit of steam`. Yet, the closer the end of apartheid approached, the further the goal of nationalisation and government intervention receded from the rhetoric of the ANC leaders. As a consequence, even before they took office in May 1994, it was already clear that the ANC would introduce only limited changes in the social and economic structure of South Africa.

# CHAPTER 10

## SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT: BACKGROUND TO THE 1995-7 PERIOD

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### 10.1 INTRODUCTION

The post-apartheid period signalled a new relationship between the public sector unions and the state. The power and position of trade unions had changed significantly and the state not only recognised but sanctioned their legitimacy in South African civil society. Yet, such momentous changes were contradictory because they masked a more profound development - the state's changing ideology towards the public sector and its employees. The ANC government's declared intention to accept commercialisation and deregulation in the public sector served to reveal the dialectical relationship between the state and the trade unions; the nature of which was becoming increasingly conflictual as the state shifted its economic policies in order to accommodate the global changes taking place in production (Friedman and Reitzes, 1996).

The 'new' South African government seemed at first to recognise the prominence of the public sector by inscribing into their new constitution a commitment to the building of services to provide the benefits necessary to life, for all sections of the population - irrespective of race or class. By 1997 - just three years after the general election - these promises appeared to have been forgotten. For the Cape Town Branch of SAMWU the changes were especially striking, in that the predominant question was no longer the role it should play in the expansion of local government but ironically - as in 1992 - how it could stop local government privatisation and deregulation in the Western Cape.

Before, however returning directly to the case study, **Chapter 10** firstly provides a background to events in South Africa, subsequent to the 1994 election. The aim, as in Chapter 2, is to locate the black public sector trade unions within the changing historical, political and economic environment. As a consequence, the chapter considers the economic and political character of the 'new' South African state, in particular its shift in policy from the demand driven RDP (Redistribution and Development Programme) to the supply driven model of GEAR (Growth, Employment and Redistribution). It then proceeds to consider the effects of this ideological change on the public sector, especially given the ANC's pledge to reduce its commitment to public expenditure. Finally, it details the state's changing relationship with the trade unions in light of this transformation. Special emphasis is given to the effects of increasing formalisation and institutionalisation of the industrial relations system, alongside the government's increasing adherence to privatisation and deregulation. Overall, the purpose of the chapter is to provide a background to events during the 1995-7 period, in order help the reader better comprehend, why the ANC adopted the economics of free market, and how this transformation affected the public sector trade unions, and their aspirations for 'social partnership'

## **10.2 THE STATE**

Post-apartheid South Africa was being theorised as a 'new' type of state - one which operated within the current deregulated world market, whilst simultaneously employing the institutions of corporatism (Baskin, 1993; Shaw, 1994; Webster, 1995). Yet, at the root of this new model lay a series of severe economic problems, which threatened to consign the country to a permanent 'third world' status.

Five years after Mandela's release the ANC faced a challenge almost as formidable as the struggle to overthrow apartheid. Few countries, if any, had managed to achieve such a complex political transition, but it was the question of the macroeconomic balance - providing favourable economic conditions for international capital whilst satisfying the legitimate aspirations of the majority, who had suffered under apartheid - that went to the very core of the dilemma facing the new government of South Africa. Of all the statistics that illustrated the immensity of the task, few were as illuminating as the

unemployment figures. In 1995 there were 4.7 million South Africans without jobs, nearly 40% of the work force - with half of them under 30 (Holman, Matthews and Suzman 1995) .

To this must be added the high rate of inflation, which had risen to over 10 per cent; the unrelenting violence which discouraged investment; and the devastating lack of housing, welfare, and infrastructure. To redress the legacy of apartheid the government would have to achieve a growth rate of between 8 to 10 per cent, comparable to the so-called Asian tigers. For even the best structured economy this would be an ordeal, but for a country skewed by 40 years of racism and mismanagement, South Africa`s economy was ill-equipped for the task (Holman, Matthews and Suzman, 1995).

The contentious issue was how to forge a process of accelerated development that would raise the country to a higher status and relieve the socio-economic backlogs and imbalances acquired from the past. Failure to address this problem would result in an unstable economy and almost certainly affect the political stability of the country. The solutions which the ANC were likely to advocate would depend upon the way in which they chose to frame the problem. The *dominant* view at this stage seemed to be that *only* long-term fixed investment would suffice and for this South Africa needed foreign investors (Catchpowle and Cooper, 1999).

In the post apartheid era of democratic government there were at first expectations of a return of the much needed foreign investment. Instead, the economy produced capital outflows from mid 1994 until the end of 1995 and was estimated to have attracted *less than 1%* of the total of FDI, with most foreign firms establishing branch offices in South Africa only showing an anticipatory presence rather than a firm commitment to invest. The bulk of foreign interest was in the financial sector, where international investors appeared to be enthusiastically gearing up in anticipation of a lucrative privatisation bonanza. The *form* that this bonanza would take was, at this stage, highly contested - despite the privatisation programme in South Africa having already begun, the ANC government was mindful not only of its concern to keep business happy but also to continue, often in opposition to privatisation, its programme of black empowerment and redistribution (Catchpowle and Cooper, 1999).

### 10.2.1 Change in government policies - RDP AND GEAR

The ANC government's progressive Reconstruction and Development Programmes (RDP) had originally spelt out the need for the redistribution of wealth in the economy. Although somewhat vague on macro-economic strategy, it emphasised the centrality of basic needs in economic policy-making and the role of the public sector to facilitate the development and delivery of services to all citizens of South Africa (Financial Mail, 1994b) However, since the election the ANC had been steadily moving away from such developmental policies, and the RDP economics had been supplanted by the unequivocally market driven policies found in the government's 'Growth, Employment and Redistribution' (GEAR) strategy (Financial Mail, 1995b; Saul, 1999)

In March 1996, the RDP Office was closed down, and the RDP fund relocated within the Ministry of Finance. By assigning the RDP to an already overloaded department, the ANC was making clear its lack of long-term commitment to development programmes. Now if the basic needs of the community were to be met, it was more likely to occur as the result of the indirect trickle-down effects of a very different kind of economic strategy, one rooted in the dictates of the market (Saul, 1999)

It was privatisation that attracted the most controversy. Although it was now the policy of the South African government, there are still many active debates about what *type* of privatisation should take place, or even - in some circles - whether privatisation should take place at all. COSATU's opposition was especially problematic for the ANC government, not simply because it had pledged to fight privatisation, but in the sense that it had more direct power than the ANC's other national liberation partners - such as the SACP or the 'civics'. Although the ANC had travelled a huge distance in its attitude to privatisation, its image as a policy which led relentlessly to heavy job losses, plant closures and windfall capital gains for a minority of shareholders, meant that most politicians were reluctant to openly express their support for such policies. Instead they preferred to approach the issue - especially with the trade unions - using less highly charged terminology such as 'restructuring of state assets' or 'strategic partnership'. (Matthews, and Suzman, 1995; Catchpowle and Cooper, 1999)

In early May 1996, the rand suffered a severe crisis; this was followed by increased pressure from industry for the government to provide "firm direction on policy issues such as privatisation, exchange control, fiscal and monetary policy" (Dave Mohr, chief

economist at the Old Mutual<sup>39</sup>). As a response the government went out of its way to emphasise its commitment to the privatisation and reducing government debt (Financial Mail, 1996d).

Perhaps of greater significance was the ANC's declared intention to cut expenditure on the public sector. As part of the medium term expenditure framework, worked out in collaboration with the World Bank, the government pledged itself to reducing the public sector deficit to 3.5% of GDP by the year 2000 (Standing *et al.*, 1996; Dexter, 1996). By making fiscal restraint the watchword of its administration, the government effectively starved the public sector of funds and made it impossible to deliver on economic transformation. The ensuing crisis that inevitably materialised, simply made it easier to argue that the most efficient way to deliver services was to privatise the state sector (COSATU, 6<sup>th</sup> National Congress Report: 1997b).

Yet, two areas had emerged as problematic for the ANC and threatened to jeopardise their plans to successfully introduce free market policies - their partnership with the trade unions and the financing of the public sector. The government was well aware that the trade unions posed one of the greatest threats to the implementation of privatisation policies. Already, the special relationship between the ANC and COSATU had prevented the South African government from implementing a privatisation programme at the pace demanded by the interests of capital. The trade unions, had pledged to resist privatisation, and although the strength and form of this resistance was relatively unknown, the ANC was not (as yet) confident enough to abandon its one time national liberation partners. In particular, the trade unions' resolve to fight privatisation was especially strong in the public sector. By early 1996, the government could no longer escape the fact that their policies of tough fiscal discipline and retrenchments would - in the final analysis - contribute to the decline of the institutional capacity of the public sector to deliver first world services to all (COSATU, 6<sup>th</sup> National Congress Report, 1997b)

The solutions proposed to solve these two problems initially, seemed to indicate an eagerness on the part of the ANC to find the compromises which would allow it to avoid the hard choices between the politically desirable and what it viewed as economically necessary. In the case of the public sector it was slow in implementing the privatisation

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<sup>39</sup> Cited in Catchpole and Cooper, 1999, footnote 17

of services and the 'selling off' of the parastatals to the private sector. With regard to labour, the ANC seemed to be pinning its long-term hopes on compromises achieved through the conciliatory tactics contained within its new corporatist policies and labour legislation (Catchpowle and Cooper, 1999).

Whether in the final analysis, the level of corporatist initiatives adopted by the government would help the ANC escape the full spectrum of trade union challenges was - in 1995-7 - still open to supposition. Yet, such efforts to compromise with labour were becoming increasingly problematic as the government became ever more subject to the free-market pressures imposed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund; the snowballing advice from consulting accountants, stock-brokers and banks; and perhaps more importantly, the constraints of the economic system within which it now operated (Catchpowle and Cooper, 1999).

The following sections consider the implications of this deliberation on the trade unions and public sector .

### **10.3 THE POST-APARTHEID PUBLIC SECTOR**

In 1995 the public sector, with over 1.8 million employees, was an impressive organisation. Yet, the sector was experiencing major problems in all of its areas, with all sections being viewed - particularly by the government - as unrepresentative, unresponsive, inefficient and ineffective (Standing *et al.*, 1996; Alder, 1998).

Although, the faults had clearly developed out of the apartheid policies the government's aim to implement a programme of change was challenged by the sheer size and heterogeneity of the public sector. The whole structure was viewed as unmanageable, with its separate components having distinctive methods of wage determination, employment conditions and forms of regulation and ownership. Furthermore, the fact that such changes were taking place within the context of economic restructuring - which included the fiscal constraints set down by the government's free market policy, GEAR - provided an additional complication (Standing *et al.*, 1996; Alder, 1998).

By far the greatest cost identified by the ANC was that of labour. One factor set the public sector apart from the private sector, it was the largest single employer in the country: in March 1995, according to the CSS, one out of every four officially recognised as employed in South Africa was being paid with public funds or employed by the state. The public sector may have been perceived, by many previously disenfranchised groups, as the principle agent of transformation but the crippling cost of labour was rendering the process inoperable (Alder, 1998).

### Policy changes

In 1995 the government began to set out some broad policy guidelines to transform the public sector. A white paper on the 'Transformation of the Public Service' was published; a Presidential Review Commission on the Public Service was established with joint task teams to look into all issues of conditions of service, including the improvement of salaries and wages to be addressed within a three year plan. More specifically, the National Framework Agreement (NFA) was signed with COSATU, which enabled restructuring (including privatisation) of national public assets (excluding local government restructuring). A white paper on restructuring local government was published in 1997, for the local authorities. All initiatives were seen as establishing a broad vision for the future development of the sector as a whole. (Standing *et al.*, 1996; Dexter, 1996; White Paper on Local Government: Discussion Document, 1997).

On the 4 February 1997, the new constitution finally gave the local authorities the status of a distinct sphere of government along side national and Provincial Governments. This meant local government was no longer just a line function, but possessed land, assets and other human and material resources and most important of all held an independent tax base. The primary role of the new municipalities was to ensure the provision of essential municipal services - water, sanitation, electricity, etc. - to all South Africans. Its secondary role was to promote economic and social development, and to participate in national and provincial development programmes. Yet, despite its improved status many municipalities still continued to experience severe difficulties (White Paper on Local Government: Discussion Document, 1997).

By far the greatest obstacle to the development of effective local government, was financial weakness. Poor financial management and control, as well as unrealistic budgeting and weak credit control, were identified as causing many problems.

Despite the existence of independent tax bases, many municipalities simply did not have viable tax bases - especially in the rural municipalities. Overwhelmingly, the sheer poverty of the majority of black consumers of municipal services put impossible strains on finances. Furthermore, the flow of funds between the three spheres of government continued to be complex and confusing. Municipalities often experienced difficulties in accessing and understanding the transfer of funds from national and provincial government thus making inter-governmental fiscal relations difficult (White Paper on Local Government :Discussion Document, 1997 : Section 3.2).

The solutions posed to overcome the problems associated with financial constraints were varied but chiefly rested on attempts to reduce the costs of labour and to shift the burden of finance to the private sector. Despite an initial commitment on the part of the ANC to use all areas of the public sector to redistribute wealth, rationalisation of jobs was - by 1995 - being employed to reduce the national debt. Although the extent and effectiveness of these cuts were difficult to quantify accurately - due to long term reliable comparisons not being available - it was still possible for the CSS to conclude that a number of public sector and local government job cuts had taken place (CSS: PO251, 1995; Wooldridge and Cranko, 1997; Swilling and Boya, 1997).

The other solution to overcome the problems in the public sector was somewhat more complex and mainly included the use of private funds or Public Private Partnerships (PPPs). The local authorities were now advised to work more closely with the private sector in order to deliver services and a better infrastructure. Private sector finance and management resources were identified as a means of providing an efficient and cost-effective delivery of municipal services. It was seen as the municipality's responsibility to ensure that services were provided, and a range of private, public, NGOs or community organisations were used to actually deliver the services. The essential goal of the municipality was now to 'make sure that the best quality service would be provided at the lowest cost to the maximum number of residents'(White Paper on Local Government: Discussion document 1997: section 10:7).

Therefore, in the post-apartheid period, the South African state was pledged to reduce its commitment to public expenditure. In order to operate within the rules of global capital, the ANC government was being forced to remodel the public sector along the lines of the competitive market system - irrespective of the symbolic nature of the sector to many black South Africans. A crucial component in this operation was to be the

redressing of the power between labour and the market - transformation now almost entirely relied on containing the cost of labour ( White Paper on Local government: Discussion Document 1997: Wooldridge and Cranko, 1997). It is to the issue of the trade unions we now turn

#### **10.4 THE TRADE UNIONS**

By 1995 the trade unions had acquired a central role in South African civil society, as a major catalyst for change. Approximately 40% of the 8 million people with jobs in South Africa, and approximately 1-in-5 of the economically active population, belonged to a trade union of one description or another. Over a 10 year period, from 1985 to 1995, union membership has more than doubled and reached 3 million. South African union density was amongst the highest in the world and continued to have one of the most outstanding rates of any developing country, despite the high levels of unemployment (Baskin ,1996).

In post-apartheid South Africa, the union federation - COSATU - had been consistent in its demand for a new framework of labour law. Consequently, the Labour Relations Act (LRA) 1995, was seen as a decisive victory for the trade union movement, providing the membership with centralised bargaining, the right to join a union, to strike and to consultation in the workplace. The creation of an independent body the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) further aimed to provide a less legalistic framework to encourage speedier resolution of disputes. For those disputes which could not be resolved by CIMA, a new labour court - with supreme court status - was created (IDS, 1997). More fundamentally though, the legislation symbolised a willingness on the part of the government to legitimise and assimilate the trade unions into the `new' South African State.

Formalisation and institutionalisation - The new LRA

The Act took South Africa further down the corporatist route with `multi-layered institutionalised (collective) bargaining being a distinctive feature of post-apartheid. At a national level - the tri-partite forum for business, labour and government - NEDLAC (National Economic Development and Labour Council), concerned itself with economic and social planning. At a sectoral level collective bargaining was to be encouraged

through bargaining councils and at the grassroots workplace forums created a drive towards worker participation and local decision making. These were all attempts to restore stability to the system, firstly by recognising and reinforcing union strength, secondly by promoting industrial-level centralised bargaining, and thirdly by hinting at the necessity of national bargaining through NEDLAC. But the legislation also combined a commitment to 'regulated flexibility', seeing the necessity of a more flexible labour market whilst, according to its defenders, achieving this within a more structured and union-friendly context (Baskin, 1996; Webster 1995).

The Act was not without controversy and evoked a degree of criticism. When the Labour Relations Bill was first published (1995) concern was immediately expressed over management's right to 'lock-out' employees. The 'lock-out' was originally sold as the employers' equivalent to the workers' 'right to strike', this was contested by the unions on the grounds that such power was not equal, since the employer could continue operating his business with a 'scab' labour force during the lock out, whereas the striking workers had no alternative source of income (Etkind, 1995).

After threatening strike action, the trade unions managed to secure limitations to the clause: there was to be no constitutional right to lock out; 48 hours' written notice was to be given to any union who was party to the dispute; and there was to be a removal of the employers' right to use a 'lock out' to terminate the services of employees or restaff his plant (IDS, 1997, p.80). Nevertheless, the fact that such a clause lingered or had even been considered by a *supposed* radical government and militant trade union leadership remained worrying to some union activists (Interview, Victor, SAMWU Regional Secretary, 2/9/1997).

Perhaps of greater concern was the question of the effectiveness of the new formal institutions. Primarily, fear was expressed over the act's commitment to "voluntarism" - seeking to encourage the emergence of institutions rather than legislating them into existence. Such an approach led to a worry that those outside of the organised interest groups (i.e casual workers and the unemployed) would be left out of the distributional strategy, with large employers being able to find ways of bypassing the institutions. (The Shopsteward, 1995a; Standing *et al.*, 1996).

The process of institutionalisation had serious implications for trade unions at all levels. At local level, the 1995 Labour Relations Act (LRA) provided for a statutory right to be

consulted on a whole range of new issues, yet local stewards appeared to be overwhelmed by the sheer variety of issues leading to concern over whether they could cope with these changes (Business Day, 19/7/96). COSATU responded by developing a new structure, focusing on the regional level with the aim of equipping all its affiliate unions with the ability to deliver training. A newly founded National Education Committee (NEDCOM) was to initiate national planning and a new training college, DITSELA was to be opened (Catchpowle *et al.*, 1998).

By the end of 1995, COSATU was voicing a need for the local organisation to change. Trade union activists were being called upon to nurture a calmer industrial relations climate, one in which workers contributed to the decision-making process in order to produce a different model of productivity, completely devoid of industrial action or strikes. Previously, where education had been about political points scoring, there was now to be a move towards what was described as a more 'sophisticated steward', one decisively more competent in the 'new' formal industrial relations forum (Catchpowle *et al.*, Stanworth, 1998).

Yet, stewards were still finding such institutionalised activities overwhelming and confusing, and what is more completely at odds with employers local policies of 'lean' management and flexibility. Many of the formal institutions were only viewed as useful by business if they remained compatible with other aspects of government fiscal and industrial policy, which to a large extent remained de-regulationist. Therefore, for many stewards and members alike, the cost of concessions appeared to be too high (Matthews, 1995b).

At a national level links with government were equally problematic. Not only was COSATU faced with the pressure of replacing a generation of experienced labour leaders who now formed part of the government, but since 1995, the alliance with the ANC had proven a complication for COSATU. The unfolding free market policies of the ANC had forced them to reconsider their own ideological and political position. For example, when the Government announced the restructuring of state assets (1995), whereas business simply saw this as a culmination of their campaign for privatisation, the union movements' response - unlike in previous years when the government could be dismissed as racist and illegitimate - was mixed and confused. (Shilowa, 1995)

Consequently, COSATU leaders were now obliged to consider the formal relationship with the ANC, and what the alliance actually meant in practice. Many of the newly established bodies, at all levels, benefited workers only if organised labour remained strong in the workplace. Failure to do so would push the system to a feeble form of corporatism, with few incentives for employers to remain in centralised bargaining system with weak union partners (Baskin, 1996). Certainly the leading trade union officials now had a personal interest in maintaining their close links with government and would probably strive to avoid an all out confrontation. In that sense the trade union leadership needed the ANC and appeared willing to make concessions in order to maintain the relationship. Yet, concessions would not stop the government's intention to privatise and cut public spending. The vision for South Africa was now to include a commitment to competitiveness and market policies. Tight fiscal policies were to be a critical component of this process, even if that meant the same budget that used to service 4 million whites would be extended to almost 40 million blacks. (VM&G, 1997).

#### **10.4.1 Contradiction - the effects of privatisation and flexibility**

The picture of a tranquil industrial relations system with collective conflict withering away and being replaced by prescribed forms of dispute resolution and economic management, was in sharp contrast to the reality confronting the ANC in the mid-1990s. South African companies were now, more than ever, part of a much larger global system, the logic of which meant constantly adopting new methods of achieving profits and accumulation in order to survive. Large manufacturing corporate enterprises were embracing so-called 'post-Fordist' growth models complete with new technology and 'flexible accumulation' strategies. Moreover, most of these models were being accompanied by increases in subcontracting and casual working, especially in small businesses, where trade unions were weak and labour costs secure (Catchpole *et al.*, 1998).

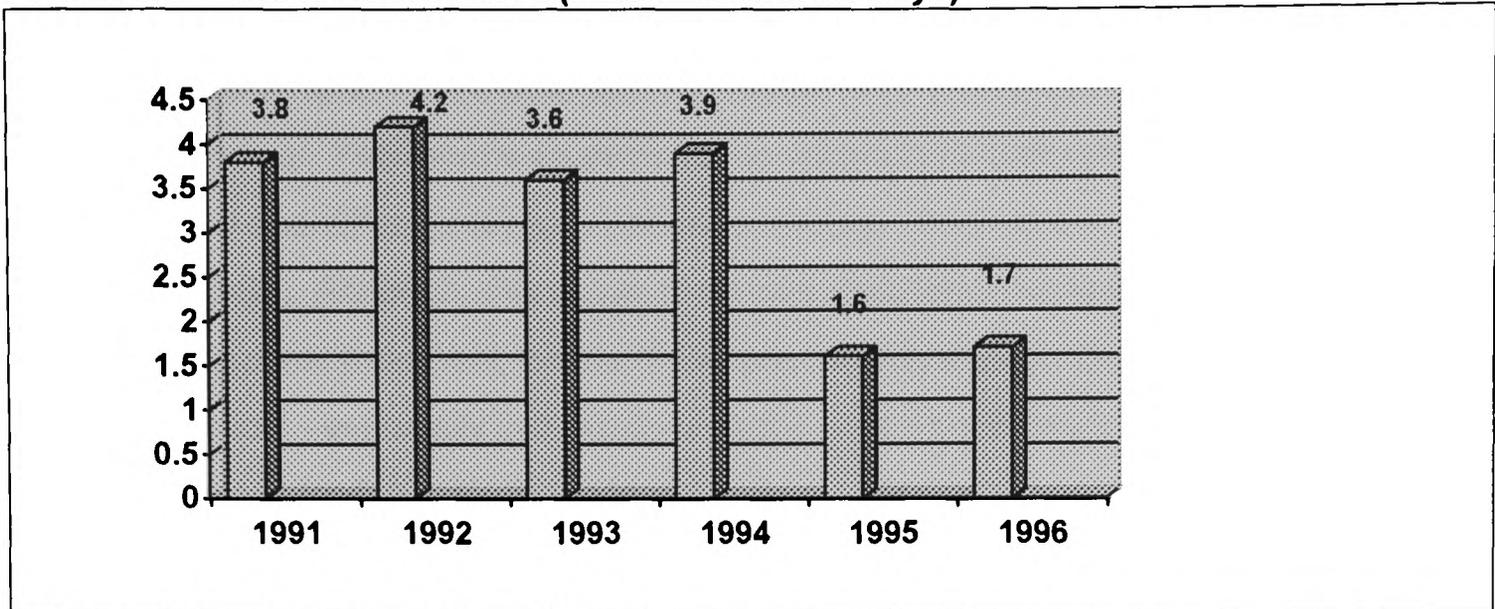
By 1996 - although, COSATU had originally rejected flexibility without guaranteed job security or negotiation - trade unions appeared to be accepting the inexorable movement towards flexibility, and had switched to attempts to regulate it rather than prevent it. One of the claimed benefits was improved productivity. Employers were now demanding a larger portion of annual wage increases be linked to productivity improvements, entailing different methods of working and changes in terms and

conditions. Hours of work and overtime were being linked to productivity, and already the demand for the 40-hour week was being dropped in the process of negotiation. In 1995 NUMSA (National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa) signed a 3-year wage deal with the auto industry on the condition they did not strike over wages for three years. The overall package was indicative of more flexible reward systems being linked to changes in methods of working, and were increasingly being tabled in negotiations with trade unions. (Grice, 1995).

Overall, the response of the trade unions to such changes was largely supportive of conciliation and peaceful industrial relations. Strike action during the first quarter of 1995 was down substantially (1.6 million worker days lost) over the corresponding period of the previous year (3.9 million in 1994). A contributory factor was the use of the new formal machinery, the major wage agreements were negotiated at centralised level and concluded without any strike action (IDS, 1997/8 p.85) According to consultants Andrew Levy and Associates, such settlements represented major concessions on the part of union negotiators, all agreements were within single digits, and no higher than inflation (Matthews, 1995b).

Yet, the downward trend in South Africa's strike figures, was not entirely consistent throughout the labour movement. The sudden surge in strike action in the public sector from July to September 1995 - with two especially bitter disputes involving Nurses and Municipal workers - was especially worrying for the new government. The public sector unions demonstrated high levels of militancy in 1995. A further sharp rise in strike activity was experienced - in all sectors - in the third quarter of 1996, giving a total of 1.7 million for the year. The overall number of worker days lost due to industrial action therefore exceeded the figure of 1995 (Patel, 1996;IDS,1997/8,p.85). Distressing as these figures were to the ANC, it still did not detract from the presumption that South Africans were largely adopting more formal, peaceful means of settling disputes - particularly as figures continued to be well down on the previous years: 1992 (4.2 million);1993 (3.6 million);and 1994 (3.9 million), when statistics had continued to fluctuate between three and four million (IDS, 1997/8, p.86). Figure 10.1 summarises the fall in industrial action annually, from 1991 to 1996.

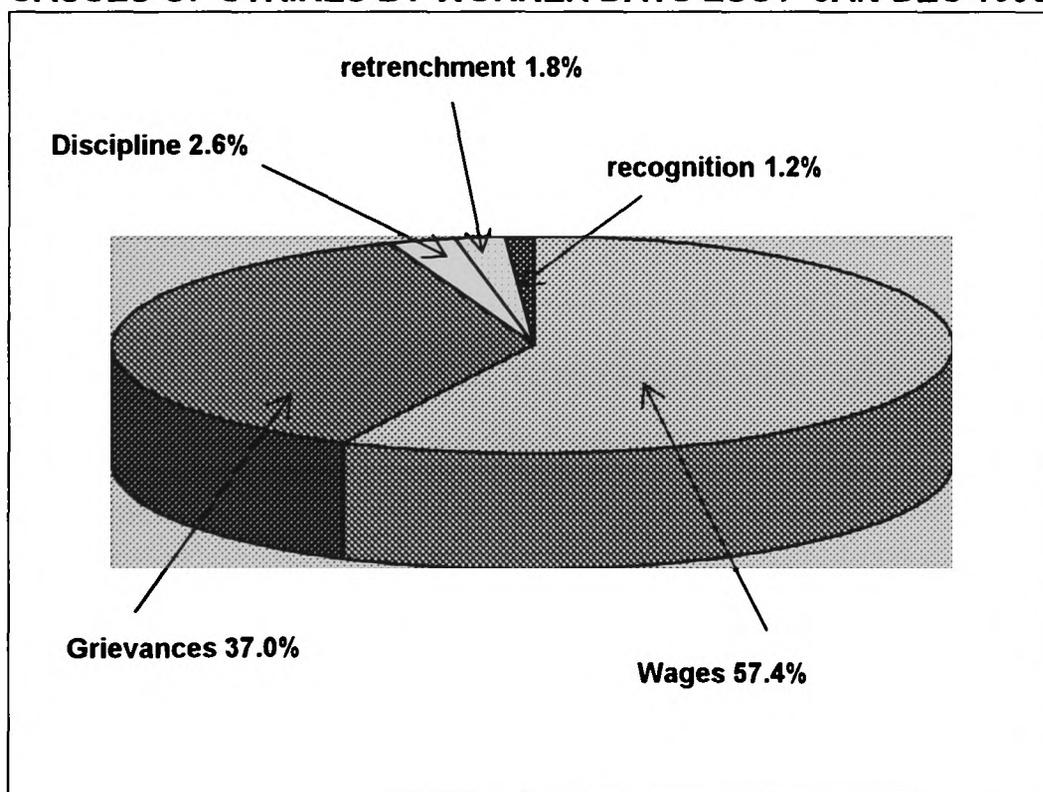
**Figure 10.1**  
**INDUSTRIAL ACTION 1991-1996 (millions of worker days)**



Source: adapted from IDS Report 1997, p85

Nevertheless, what was particularly interesting about the 1996 strike statistics, for example, was the atypical nature of the disputes - although pay issues dominated as usual (57.4%), grievances uncommonly contributed extensively to the overall figure (37%). Figure 10.1 shows the causes of strikes during 1996.

**Figure 10.2**  
**CAUSES OF STRIKES BY WORKER DAYS LOST JAN-DEC 1996 (%)**



source: IDS 1997, p.85.

The IDS Report 1997/8 attributed some of the causes to the loss of many able and effective union officials to the government, but a more significant factor was identified as the introduction of new work methods, perceived or real discrimination, and failure of

the union or government to deliver on expectations (IDS, 1997, pp. 86-7). Whether the strikes in 1995/6 were simply ad hoc reactions to change, or the beginnings of a more calculated generalised attempt to apply pressure on the employers and state, was at this point unclear. Yet, there was evidence to support the claim of increased resistance in many new and different areas of the labour force - much of it in the state sector (IDS, 1997 pp. 86-87). Although, this action in no way paralleled the scale and extent of resistance against apartheid, issues of low pay and changing working conditions linked to 'privatisation' - especially in the public sector - still threatened to become a major stumbling block for the ANC government.

## **10.5 CONCLUSION**

Between 1995 and 1997 the South African government's desire to encourage foreign investment, and its inability to find trading partners outside of the capitalist system, had forced Mandela to realign his thinking and frame the problem within a neo-classical economic framework. This shift in ideology was not entirely new, its origins could be traced back, prior to the election when he had already begun telling overseas audiences that the ANC would be "slow to deliver the goods". Nevertheless, the electoral and political sensitivity of such a change in policy meant that the ANC hesitated in taking the message immediately to the voters in Soweto, Khayelitsha or Cradock (Catchpole and Cooper, 1999).

Furthermore, despite an initial commitment to nationalisation on the part of the ANC, the policy of privatisation and 'commercialisation' gained momentum, with the state's declared intention to involve the free market in the planning and financing of the new public sector. The restructuring of both the public service and local authorities was identified as fundamentally a problem of finance - and the solution for the government was one of incorporating the ideals and practices of the private sector (White Paper on Local Government: Discussion Document, 1997).

State finance of the public sector was no longer to be a necessary precondition for the successful and sustainable economic development of South Africa. The government - whose relations are theorised as being not separate but tied up with capitalism - was being forced to adapt to the global system and accept its free market ideology. Such

policies would require the country to cut public spending on health, education and welfare, carry out trade liberalisation measures, and introduce a flexible labour market - especially in state employment. The public sector was now to be subject to the demands of the market and if that was to the detriment of the poor, black majority - so be it.

It is the response of the public sector trade unions which is of interest here. Whether this area of civil society was to become an arena of struggle, mainly rested on the responses of its workforce. Although privatisation was being presented during this period (1995-7) as a panacea for eradicating the slow growth in the economy, reducing the public-sector deficit, and releasing new profit centres for South Africa, most public sector trade unionists remained unconvinced. The experience of workers world-wide had led them to understand that the introduction of a commercial ethos in the sector would simply lead to massive cuts in personnel, a deterioration of conditions and pay, and the unresponsive delivery of services to the poor (Hemson, 1998).

In point of fact, the government's success would in the final analysis be measured by its ability to control labour, notably to convince the unions to abandon their traditional use of strikes in favour of co-operation with the employers. The task would not be easy, and was arguably beyond a solution. Not only had it to introduce corporatist policies whilst embracing privatisation and flexibility to encourage the flow of foreign investment into the country; but it also needed to encourage improvements in productivity without provoking a net loss of jobs. Moreover, it needed to reduce the racially-imposed inequality in pay and conditions, whilst keeping the overall wage increases and cost of labour below the level of inflation; and perhaps most markedly of all, persuade its political ally, COSATU, to restrain its members – many of whom were expecting modest rewards for the political struggles of the past decades. (Matthews and Suzman, 1995; IDS, 1997/8).

Therefore, in 1995 the solution to the ANC's problems largely relied on the government, through a combination of patronage and economic growth, being able to contain the union militancy by including union leaders into the forum of decision-making. But just how much freedom the ANC would ultimately have to continue using such tactics would really depend on the *ideology* currently dominant in capitalism. It is within the context of this discussion that SAMWU is once again examined as a means of analysing the transformation of the state's relationship with public sector trade unions.

## **PART 2**

# **SAMWU IN THE WESTERN CAPE**

**1995-7**

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Source: Photo taken by L. Catchpole: Johannesburg 1<sup>st</sup> Sept. 1997

## **INTRODUCTION**

The second section of the case study (1995-7) begins by reviewing and summarising the branch's aims and objectives during the post-apartheid period. This is followed by an outline of part 2, detailing the subsequent chapters and the reasons for their inclusion.

## **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

In the post apartheid period, the changes in local government were set to transform both SAMWU nationally, and the Cape Town branch locally. The prospect of engaging more fully and legitimately in the industrial relations systems, along with the freedom to recruit all races and groups within the sector, meant the union had an opportunity to expand, making it more viable financially, and better equipped to service its members and co-ordinate its activities. By 1995, it was hoped that such developments would not only increase the power of its membership but help it address what had become by the end of apartheid, its core challenges of establishing a 'living wage'; and campaigning to stop privatisation (SAMWU National Congress Report, 1997a). Inevitably, such changes brought with it both threats and opportunities - some of which were not necessarily new .

During the 1995-7 period , SAMWU, as in 1992, continued to declare its commitment to a socialist state. Yet, if such a major social change was to be in any way realised in the 'new' South Africa, the leadership recognised the need to move beyond political sloganeering and conference speeches, to a situation where they were contributing tangibly to meeting the basic needs of the vast majority of South Africans, denied services under apartheid rule. To this end, SAMWU, at its 1997 Congress, expressed a desire to commit its resources to fighting for local government reorganisation. This principle was said to flow easily from its pledge to change society and transform the sector (SAMWU Congress: Secretariat Report, 1997c).

More especially, the Congress saw it as essential for the union to adopt strategies that did not just end with defending its members' economic interests, but actively advanced its vision of socialism. SAMWU's main campaigns - the Anti-privatisation and Living Wage - reflected this intention, their overall strategy being to continue struggling, even

in the post apartheid era, for a radical transformation of the workplace and society (SAMWU Congress: Secretariat Report, 1997c). Nevertheless, related to such aims was the recognition on the part of the leadership, that effective union organisation would be needed to meet the challenge of the new threats and opportunities. Inevitably, as in 1992-4, the internal structure and external activities became, a further focus for debate.

## INTERNAL STRUCTURE

In 1997, activists in Cape Town were acutely aware that the *internal* structure and organisation of the union needed to change if it was to take advantage of its new legitimacy (Interviews, 1997). Several problems had emerged relating to, the increased levels of administration and bureaucracy, the provision of adequate services to its varied membership, and most worrying the unevenness and lack of communication between the national, regional and branch levels. As a consequence, most members and shop stewards supported the national leadership's efforts to write a new national constitution in an attempt to improve the organisation and democracy of the union. Such moves were recognised as a means of enabling the union to represent its growing membership better. It was hoped that different structures and organisation, would not only supply better facilities and benefits, but also promote the dynamism needed 'to mount a successful challenge against privatisation and respond to the challenges of restructuring the sector' (SAMWU Congress, 1997a 'Organisational Issues').

## UNION ACTIVITIES

In terms of its *external* union activities the Cape Town branch remained totally committed to the union's two key campaigns - the fight for a 'living wage' and the drive to stop privatisation. In many ways it was in the forefront of these initiatives and appeared - as in 1992 - willing to take industrial action to achieve these aims.

In 1995, the national union began to show signs of prioritising the use of formal channels by focusing on the establishment of a national bargaining council to negotiate pay and working conditions - but did not 'rule out' the possibility of strike action to achieve its goals. Although the bargaining council did not materialise until 1997, considerable progress was made in Cape Town towards achieving a minimum wage

and bringing all workers nearer to a 'living wage'. Stewards also used any formal meetings to convince the council not to privatise (SAMWU Worker's News, (1997a; 1997b; 1997i))

Yet, there still remained concerns about the overall area of formalisation. Whereas, increased recognition and greater incorporation into the formal industrial relations system by the union, was welcomed, some of those interviewed in Cape Town in 1997 remained fearful that the accompanying bureaucracy might threaten its long tradition of worker control and democracy. Many stewards, and even the leadership, were anxious that such formalisation, both in its external activities and union structure and organisation, should not displace democratic workers' control and rank-and file struggle. The power of such activity was seen, not only of achieving the end of apartheid, but being the only effective means of preventing government privatisation (Interviews, 1997).

Above all in the 1995-7 period, the branch perceived itself as being particularly vulnerable to the private sector's involvement in service delivery - and staunchly declared, as in 1992, its resolute opposition to such plans (interviews 1997). As a consequence, its involvement in anti-privatisation campaigns increased, as its resistance took the form of more strikes, marches and protests. Such activities were set to make the privatisation of local government services in Cape Town - and nationally - the subject of bitter political engagement, with the capacity to divide many municipal workers from the ANC government (Hemson, 1998).

Nonetheless, although from 1995 it had been fairly evident that the branch - indeed the union as a whole - would continue to resist such policies, it was not entirely clear what form this opposition would take. In 1992 the black trade unions' only real defence had been strike action, but in 1995 the ANC's new 'labour friendly' legislation (Labour Relations Act - LRA) legitimised the African unions and opened up to them, many new - previously inaccessible - industrial relations institutions. The government planned that the LRA (1995) should develop a more formal system of employee relations. The "framework for social partnership" - between unions, employers and the state - was to be used to create a peaceful industrial environment and overcome what many multi-national companies and international governments saw as unacceptably high levels of strike activity (Matthews, 1995b).

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## STRUCTURE OF PART 2

Such issues are explored within the framework of the further development of SAMWU and its most prominent branch - Cape Town. **Chapter 11** revisits the post-apartheid ambience within which Cape Town SAMWU members lived and worked from 1995-7. It reviews the living conditions in Western Cape, and analyses and details the political circumstances surrounding the setting up of the new local government, its new structure and workplace environment.

**Chapter 12** considers once again the Cape Town branch, within the general development of the union, its changing membership, and evolving internal structure. **Chapter 13** examines the external activities of the branch; its involvement with the new formal industrial relations institutions, its increased levels of campaigning in response to privatisation and deregulation and its continual engagement in protests and strikes. As ever the overall aim of these chapters is to assist in evaluating the many different influences on the SAMWU workers, and their willingness to resist state policies of privatisation.

Such a willingness to engage in resistance though, is linked to the levels of class consciousness or solidarity amongst this group. Such a consciousness is not static. In times of intense conflict (such as during the industrial action against apartheid), the level of class struggle and pressure from below can, as Mann (1973) explains, lead to an 'explosion of consciousness'. It is a frequently noted phenomenon, that during such periods workers come to question the usual blind acceptance of their role as wage labour, and in an abrupt transformation of their consciousness move on to reject their own individual aspirations, in favour of a collective goal that has the power to challenge the system. But equally such consciousness is not uniform, especially as most workers' understanding of the dominant ideology of capitalism remains limited. A number of factors influence the levels of solidarity and collectivism. Notably different experiences - both in the home environment, workplace and unions - produces a *contradictory consciousness* about the system. It is this uneven consciousness that forces workers on the one hand to conform to the ideas of the prevailing system, but at the same time partially reject them (Mann, 1973). In an attempt to understand this uneven consciousness better, the next chapter (11) considers, the home and work

environment of the SAMWU members in Cape Town from 1995-7, undoubtedly one of the main influences on the consciousness of any workforce.

# **CHAPTER 11**

## **THE CHANGING ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT OF THE SAMWU WORKER IN THE WESTERN CAPE**

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### **11.1 INTRODUCTION**

The historical development of the branch, continued as in 1992-4 to present a contradictory picture. On the one hand there were elements of breadth, unity, and solidarity; on the other there was parochialism, sectionalism and narrow lines of exclusivity - as a legacy of apartheid. This contradiction was equally apparent in the Western Cape province as a whole, where the racial and political complexities of the area continued to be reflected in the branch. The following section considers (once again) the economic, political and workplace environment in which the SAMWU branch and members are located: it highlights the changing economic and social location, the demographic profiles, and the political control and development of the council in Cape Town.

### **11.2 THE CHANGING ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL LOCATION OF SAMWU IN THE WESTERN CAPE**

The area, in 1997, remained unique, with a minority of blacks (less than a million) and a majority of 'coloureds' (over 2 million) residing in the area. Although, the long white beaches and luxurious housing still attracted a number of whites (3% increase in migrants) most of the growth in the area had come from the Xhosa (African) or 'coloured' migrants. In post-apartheid Cape Town, whites continued to enjoy the highest standard of living of any of the ethnic groups. But, whereas, the 'coloured' poor enjoyed marginally better conditions than the 'African' poor - the reality was that both

black and 'coloured' communities in the area continued to be plagued by poor housing, unemployment and lack of basic amenities (Wilhelm, 1997).

In 1996 (as in 1992) the Western Cape remained highly urbanised, with 88.9% of its population living in urban areas (CSS, Census, 1996). Yet there were changes, since the 1994 election, new - mainly black - squatter settlements had grown up in areas like Winelands and Overberg. Some of the inhabitants came from *other* overcrowded local settlements where squatter parents - and grandparents - had lived in destitution for decades. Others were African migrants, attracted to the area by promises of new job opportunities. Often as not such jobs failed to materialise and the squatters spent their time scavenging on nearby city dumps, collecting waste to sell to the 'new' middlemen, posing as aspiring black and 'coloured' entrepreneurs (Wilhelm, 1997).

Throughout this period housing remained a highly contentious issue. As early as 1995 a critical shortage of land suitable for low-income, medium-density housing was reported as seriously affecting the quality of life of Cape Town's poor (Financial Mail 1995d). Those that were built were often of an inferior standard and totally inappropriate for families. One resident of the black township, Crossroads explained the problem - but acknowledged that the 'coloured' community were equally effected.

'they started to build some homes in Crossroads last year but they're too small, not even a real room, just a kitchen ...the 'coloured' areas have got electricity but their houses are also too small. There're just too small for everyone'

*Interview, 6/9/97 - Jennifer Soghuwas  
resident of Crossroads township*

Despite the National Party's electoral claim to preserve the standard of living of the 'coloureds', they too experienced impoverished conditions. The assumption in 1992-4, that whites and 'coloureds' would make common cause together, had not prevented the 'coloured' community's socio-economic conditions from faring little better than the Africans. In 1997, poor 'coloureds' still suffered high levels of unemployment, resided in bleak townships, endured a rapidly deteriorating environment - with hijacking, rape and random murder dominating the crime figures (Waldmeir, 1992; Wilhelm, 1997).

More especially such poor living conditions were not confined to the poorer 'coloured' areas of the Cape Flats. The once "safe" mainly 'coloured' suburbs of Woodstock were

now also subject to greater levels of crime, indicating a deep malaise, especially amongst the unemployed disaffected 'coloured' youth. The city's seemingly prosperous 'coloured' suburbs were struggling to provide adequate accommodation and jobs for their inhabitants (Wlihelm, 1997).

It was the reality of these material conditions that appeared once again to be giving a voice to racism in the area. Although, 'coloureds' had lived in poor conditions and had suffered greatly under apartheid, the reality of being one rung above the Africans - they lived in better houses, went to better schools and received higher pensions - was enough to preserve their feelings of superiority and placate fears of poverty. In post-apartheid South Africa, no such security blanket existed and large sections of the 'coloured' community feared their meagre economic positions would be marginalised by the newly economically aspiring Africans (The Economist, 1995 )

Yet, behind the material conditions of this racism was also an inter-related political motive. The white-led National Party, who governed the Western Cape persisted in nurturing the 'coloureds' fear of black domination to good electoral effect; ironically now, providing a refuge for those coloureds who now claimed:

'Before we were too black to be white. Now we're too white to be black'  
*Hadija Majiet, quoted in 'Coloured & Trapped',  
The Economist, 13/4/96*

Such a view ensured a victory for the NP. Although the ANC had secured the major vote in the National Assembly, gaining seven out of nine provinces, the bulk of 'coloureds' in the Western Cape Province, voted for NP. Moreover, just two years into majority rule the spirit of racism appeared to be thriving in Cape Town. The different languages, cultures and traditions of the 'coloureds' were being used by the National Party to develop racial antagonisms among the two ethnic groups of workers - Africans and 'coloureds'. The continuing legacy of apartheid was offering 'coloured' workers the comfort of believing themselves part of a 'new' yet still superior group of Afrikaners; More directly, it provided a ready made scapegoat for the Nationalists' inability to deliver real economic growth to the area (Beresford, 1996; The Economist, 1996) Consequently, although the home of the 'coloured' SAMWU workers, the Western Cape, remained in 1997 a breathtakingly beautiful setting for a city, it could not mask - even in the 'new' South Africa - the reality of a population divided in terms of location,

economics, language, politics, and culture. The courageous battles against the apartheid government may have secured the electoral vote for all races but, as was glaringly obvious in Cape Town, economic apartheid was still very much alive (Wilhelm, 1997).

### **11.3 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE**

In 1996 the 'new' South Africa produced its first census which revealed some interesting, although not altogether surprising statistics about the life style and levels of poverty in the country as a whole - and the Western Cape in particular. Although the census statistics continued to show the Cape enjoying an above average standard of living - it had the country's highest human development index (a measure of life expectancy, level of education and income<sup>40</sup>) - the figures in themselves were misleading and failed, as in 1992-4, to reveal the full extent of the disparities between the racial groups. The following section considers the population and the Human Development Index (HDI) in the area.

#### **11.3.1 Population**

The population of the Western Cape was now the fifth largest province in South Africa (See Table 11.1) . It had grown from its 1994 figure of 3.7 million to population of 3,956,875 (9.7% of the whole country) with a population density of only 28 per km (CSS 1996 census).

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<sup>40</sup> Because reliable statistics on levels of income for 'coloureds' and blacks were unavailable for the 1992-4 period, patterns of (un)employment were substituted as a measure of quality of life- to maintain consistency the same measures were used for 1995-7

**Table 11.1**  
**SIZE OF THE POPULATION OF SOUTH AFRICA**  
**IN OCT 1996 (BY PROVINCE)**

Province	Pop. in 000s	Percentage %
<b>Total</b>	<b>40,583,573</b>	<b>100</b>
KwaZulu-Natal	8,417,021	20.7
Gauteng	7 348 423	18.1
Eastern Cape	6 302 525	15.5
Northern Province	4 929 368	12.0
<b>Western Cape</b>	3,956 875	9.7
North West	3 354 825	8.3
Mpumalanga	2 800 711	6.9
Free State	2 633 504	6.5
Northern Cape	840,321	2.1

Source: Census '96 Population of South Africa by gender and province

Such figures seemed to mirror the general increase in the population as a whole. The national census (published in Oct 1998) showed a population of 40.58 million with black people being by far the majority in South Africa (76.7%) followed by whites (10.9%); coloureds (8.9%) Indians (2.6%) and unspecified (0.9%) (CSS 1996 Census; Davis and Soggatt, 1997 - Weekly Mail and Guardian - 1998). The final figure was two million fewer people than statisticians had previously calculated - the blame for the discrepancy had been put on the previous model devised by Professor Sadie (Stellenbosch University) for the 1991 census. Predictably, even in the collection of government statistics, apartheid stereotyping had played a part, and distorted the true picture - the apartheid census had over-estimated the increase in population, by using a model for its 1991 census which exaggerated the fertility rates of black women and estimated a population of 42 million in 1996.

Unfortunately such racist stereotyping also meant the statistics for the Western Cape - especially the comparative figures over time - were totally unreliable. The October Household Survey of 1993 and 1995 (used in part one of the case study) not only employed different methodologies to the 1996 survey, but also utilised the dubious

1991 population estimates <sup>41</sup> (Davis and Soggot, 1997). Nevertheless, despite these limitations some general observations are possible.

## RACE AND GENDER

In the post-apartheid South Africa - although the gender figures were distinctive - it was the distribution of race within the province that continued, as in 1992, to emerge as significant by contrast with the rest of the country - shown in Table 11.2

**Table 11.2**  
**POPULATION BY PROVINCE, 1996**

	African	Coloured	Indian	White	Other	Male	Female	Total
Eastern Cape	5,448,495	468,532	19,356	330,294	35,849	2,908,056	3,394,469	6,302,525
Free State	2,223,940	79,038	2,805	316,459	11,262	1,298,348	1,335,156	2,633,504
Gauteng	5,147,444	278,692	161,289	1,702,343	58,654	3,750,845	3,597,578	7,348,423
Kwazulu Natal	6,880,652	117,951	790,813	558,182	69,423	3,950,527	4,466,493	8,417,020
Mpumalanga	2,497,834	20,283	13,083	253,392	16,120	1,362,028	1,438,683	840,320
Northern Cape	278,633	435,368	2,268	111,844	12,208	412,681	427,639	4,929,368
Northern Province	4,756,255	7,821	5,510	117,878	32,904	2,253,072	2,676,296	3,354,825
North West	3,058,686	46,652	10,097	222,755	16,635	1,649,835	1,704,990	3,956,875
Western Cape	826,691	2,146,109	40,376	821,551	122,148	1,935,494	2,021,381	3,956,875
South Africa	31,127,630	3,600,446	1,045,597	4,434,698	375,203	19,520,886	21,062,685	40,583,571

Source: Census 1996

In terms of gender, there were more females (2 million) than males (1.9 million) in the Western Cape. Part of the reason for the dominance of women in the area may have been - as in 1992-4 - linked to the type of industry in the town. The garment and textile factories had historically overshadowed the region with many of the plants traditionally

<sup>41</sup> Having no official data for black births, Professor Sadie had used the 1970 census to estimate the black South African birth rates (the largest part of the population), whilst for whites, 'coloureds' and Indians, statistics were based on 1980 figures. Yet, Professor Sadie refused to accept that the previous census officials were blinded by apartheid-era assumptions that black people were likely to produce more children. Instead he suggested that either 'population control programmes' had been more effective than envisaged or simply, as with all censuses, the central office could not guarantee that thousands of workers in the field had done their job properly (Davis and Soggot, 1997)

employing large numbers of women, especially 'coloured' garment workers. Many of whom were known to marry municipal workers (the other large group of coloured labour in the area) (Golden, 1987; CSS Census 1996).

Overall though, in the post-apartheid period (1995-7), it was the race figures that remained exceptional - the Western Cape continued to record the highest 'coloured' population in the country. There were 2.146 million 'coloureds' in the area and they constituted around 54% of the province - this compared with 21% Africans, 21% White people, and 1% Indian/Asian. Although, the percentage figures available in 1994 seemed to indicate a fall in the population of the whites and 'coloureds' (24% and 57% respectively) the comparisons were unreliable because of the different methodologies used by the census takers (CSS Census, 1996).

The reality of these figures - although not in themselves important - persisted in exercising a tremendous influence over the economic and social position of SAMWU workers. For over 80 years the dominance of 'coloureds' in the area had led to ideological and political conflicts. It was in the Western Cape that the Nationalist ruling party had deliberately used the 'coloured identity' to embellish its policy of apartheid. Although in the 1980s, the protests and actions of 'coloured' workers had helped to undermine the racists effects of apartheid, it was equally true that the survival of the apartheid 'coloured identity' in post-apartheid South Africa, depended on the continued support of many sections of the very same 'coloured' working-class (Golden 1987; The Economist, 1995). As one SAMWU member and Retreat ('coloured' area, next to the Cape Flats) resident explained, such a suggestion disturbed 'coloured' workers and many chose not to discuss its implications.

There's a lot of negativity amongst the community ...the disturbing thing is that you will not find any person who supported the apartheid regime. All of them suddenly say we never supported it ....but when you remind them of the past, you find they tell you that you must not remain in the past, or they say apartheid doesn't exist anymore and therefore don't talk about it.

**Hennie, Interview, 24/8/97,**

Nevertheless, the reality of the 'coloured' community's continued support for the National Party was significant. Whereas apartheid had previously offered the 'coloured' community a preferential lifestyle, it now - more alarmingly - had the potential to

frustrate the organisation's desire to incorporate 'coloureds' politically and economically into the 'new' South Africa (Hennie, Interview, 24/8/97)

### 11.3.2 Human Development Index

In 1995, the Western Cape continued to have the highest HDI in the country - life expectancy, education and data on types and patterns of (un)employment - used to measure the quality of life<sup>42</sup>.

#### LIFE EXPECTANCY

The age distribution of the Western Cape, like the rest of the South African population was starting to diverge from the pyramid structure typically associated with developing countries. Overall, there were proportionately fewer males (11%) and females (12%) in the age category 0-4 years than the age categories 5-9 or 10-13 years. There was also a relatively larger proportion, particularly of females in the age category 75 years or more. However, such figures remained misleading because the age pyramids varied greatly by population group, with African age distribution looking most like that of a developing nations, and the white age distribution looking most like that of a developed nation (CSS, Census, 1996).

#### EDUCATION

In terms of education the Western Cape - as in 1992-4 - appeared to fare well. Whereas in South Africa as a whole, almost 20% of South Africans aged 20 years and over had received no education (9.7 million men and 11.2 women); only 6.7% of the people in the Province aged 20 years and above had no schooling at all - the lowest figure of all the provinces. Furthermore, the Western Cape Province led the way in the education ratings with a total of 10.6% of people aged 20 years above having higher education qualifications. But, equally as in 1992-4, such figures were misleading, because the racial divide was evident with over 24% of blacks having received no education, as against 10% of 'coloureds', 7% of Indians and 1% Whites (CSS, 1996 Census).

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<sup>42</sup> As with chapter 5, types and patterns of employment has been substituted as a measure of the quality of life. This is due to adequate data being available for African and 'coloured' workers in this area during this period

Even in the area of education racial tensions were evident, with many African students articulating their feelings of marginalisation in a historically 'coloured' dominated area; whilst numerous 'coloured' students felt that the interests of African students were being unfairly prioritised. Yet, such very different ethnic perceptions of the education system in Cape Town need to be considered within the context of scarce resources, and the likelihood that competition for such a resource could all too easily be articulated as racial tensions (The Economist, 1996). The reality of the situation was brought home by the comments of one Crossroads resident interviewed, who declared:-

...they've tried to build better schools, but its useless because they don't give us any teachers.

*Jennifer, a Crossroads resident, Interview, 6/9/97*

## EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS IN THE WESTERN CAPE

Perhaps the most telling statistics that illustrated the continued economic divide in both South Africa and the Western Cape, were found in the labour market. The 1996 census, as did the figures of 1992-4, revealed a racially segregated society divided between the rich and poor. According to the 1996 census of the 40.58 million South Africans, 57.4% aged between 15-65 were economically active, yet the types and levels of employment varied considerably, and largely depended on the racial group the employee belonged to.

The distribution of skills in 'new' South Africa remained widely distorted. Whilst 4.6% of the working population were managers and 10.8% professionals, 30% operated as unskilled workers. In the Western Cape, the figures were slightly better with 29% being employed in unskilled elementary work; but only 9%, were employed as professionals. Nationally, it was the whites (nearly 50%) that continued to occupy management jobs - with only 11% of the working black population being managers or legislators. Overall, an enormous 73% of blacks continued to operate as unskilled or artisan workers, with 34% of 'coloured' men in elementary occupations. In terms of gender, women appeared to be under-represented in the more highly paid skilled professions, with African being most affected - 57% of African women and 41% of 'coloured' women

were in elementary occupations compared with 6% of Indian and 3% of white woman (CSS 1996 census: WM&G, 1998).

The skills shortage in the Western Cape concerned SAMWU workers, several bemoaned the fact that their low skills and lack of education were affecting their opportunities to earn extra money.

We didn't go to school we just went to work in the council...they could (CCC) provide more training or study leave but they just see education as a privilege. You've got to finance yourself, do extra jobs at the weekends. The problem is the government are not prepared to invest.

**Arthur Fillies, SAMWU member Maintenance Worker,  
Interview, 6/9/97.**

## Unemployment

The most worrying figure for South Africa as a whole was the unemployment rate. Although the statistics varied considerably, the official figure was 34% of the economically active. In comparison the Western Cape province had low unemployment rates of 17.9% - compared with much higher figure of the Eastern Cape (49%) and Northern Province (46%) (WM&G, 1998).

Yet, the relatively low unemployment rate in Western Cape did not necessarily mean the absence of poverty. As in 1992-4 unemployment was disproportionately represented across different racial groups. Nationally, the greatest unemployment existed amongst the African population with the figure being particularly high for both African women (52%) and men (34%). The jobless rate for 'coloureds' in South Africa as a whole was high - 21% in 1996 - but still lower than the overall black rate of 42.5% (CSS, 1996 Census).

One black resident from the township, Guguletu, complained that the new government had done very little to eliminate the massive unemployment in black townships - but was quick to add that the government had not been in power long, and he was content to wait.

Not much has changed really, especially not in Guguletu. Jobs are the top priority, then crime will go down...If you lose your job you only get unemployment relief for six months...But we must be patient the ANC have only just gained power.

**Dumi, Interview, 19/8/97.**

In the Western Cape, despite the *supposed* position of privilege throughout the apartheid years, the 'coloured' population was still incapable of escaping the threat of unemployment - of the economically active that were unemployed, 48.5% were 'coloureds', 43% were African, 0.6% were Indians and 5.2% were white. The jobless rate for 'coloureds' workers in Cape Town was high, 21% in 1996, but this was still preferable to the black rate of 38%. Overall, Africans were disproportionately represented in the unemployment figures, given only 21% African as opposed to 54% 'coloureds' and 21% whites resided in the province (CSS, 1996 census).

Yet, irrespective of such revealing statistics, the 'coloured' communities remained on the whole distrustful of the socio-economic position of the Africans. Dangerous stereotypes were reinforced by the Nationalist Party, who tended to distort the real issues of poverty and neglect in this extremely volatile society. One SAMWU member explained that the real basis of the racism was fear, especially as the perceived perception of blacks was one of being better educated than 'coloureds', and capable of obtaining jobs, once reserved for 'coloureds'.

Most 'coloureds' are frightened ...they know the blacks are under-privileged but they're seen as more qualified and capable of stealing the jobs we used to have.

**Peter September, Maintenance Worker, Interview, 5/9/97**

In 1995, some attempts were made by the new provincial government to encourage the decentralisation of job creation, by directing commercial and industrial activities away from the city bowl towards the 'coloured' area of the Cape Flats, and the poorer south-east sector. But this was still grossly inadequate, since less than half of the industrial land was located in the north/northwest region, where areas like Mitchell's Plain (mainly 'coloured' area), Khayelishsha ('Black' area), Mascassar, Blue Downs and Delft - with over 700,000 inhabitants - continued to suffer a shortage of employment opportunities (Financial Mail, 1995d).

The Western Cape may have emerged as one of the richest provinces - often described as a haven for the middle-class, a retreat from the rest of South Africa's tides of squalor, crime and insecurity - but for many it remained, a forbidding and desolate place. The region continued to be sharply divided along race lines with 'Africans' suffering the highest levels of poverty and deprivation, and 'coloureds' managing (just) to preserve their ranking in the ethnic scale given to them by apartheid. 'Coloureds', by most measures remained better-off than blacks - with lower unemployment levels, better housing and average yearly income more than twice that of Africans. Yet, despite the 'coloured' community's reputation for being upwardly mobile - with the city bowl area boasting a vibrant liberal community - the unemployment, crime rates, guns and narcotics had become common place in many traditional 'coloured' areas, with places like the Cape Flats suffering the most (The Economist, 1996).

The majority of SAMWU workers lived in the working-class areas of the Cape, and were affected by the poor economic and social conditions. The spread of tuberculosis<sup>43</sup>, in both black and 'coloured' communities; the increase in Aids, malnutrition and illegal abortions in the low-lying, once informal settlements; and the high levels of alcoholism and depression all continued to exist as a testament to the state's inability to redistribute a greater proportion of its wealth from the rich to the poor - whatever their colour (Wilhelm, 1997).

Moreover, it was within the satellite towns and centres of Cape Town that a unique racial twist of history was being played out between the Nationalist Party and the 'coloured' community. The one time party of apartheid now depended for its survival on nurturing the political ambitions - and some would suggest - nationalist aspirations of the 'coloured' people. In truth it was the material conditions of the area - the 'coloureds' concern that the Western Cape was lagging behind the rest of the country, and the fear that blacks would encroach on their housing and job security - that was really giving rise to the uneven and often politically confusing views of the 'coloured' communities. (Financial Mail, 1996d).

The next section explores the political events surrounding the first non-racial local government elections, and the changing structure and work environment of the CCC, in

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<sup>43</sup> The Western Cape had the highest incidence of the disease in the world and accounted for a quarter of all the country's cases in 1994 (Henri du Plessis (1994).

the immediate post-apartheid period (1995-7). The events are seen as significant, partly because it provides an understanding of the changing politics of local government in the area, but largely because it is a useful means of grasping, a further insight into the uneven political consciousness of the municipal workers

#### **11.4 POLITICAL CONTROL AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE WESTERN CAPE**

The political events surrounding the birth of the first non-racial council in Cape Town, threatened from the beginning to affect the working lives of SAMWU members. Although, the shock surrounding the National Party's victory in the provincial election had not waned, the battle for the old Cape Town City Council was for many 'coloured' SAMWU workers just as crucial as the national elections. The events leading up to these elections illuminated the political consciousness of the local 'coloured' population - which remained uneven and confused - with many SAMWU workers, interviewed in 1997, expressing total dismay at the 'coloured' community's continued support for the National Party

Plans to restructure the old apartheid local government in the Cape were fraught from the onset. The Cape Town Council had originally forwarded a plan that was designed to restructure local government and restore services to more than 700,000 residents of the Peninsula townships. The Plan was dubbed the "enhanced service delivery model" and proposed abolishing the Western Cape RSC and the "coloured" management committees. However, such ambitious plans were soon abandoned after services in the townships were rumoured to be a risk to public health. Others, were more ready to believe that the true reason lay with the new local government planners' willingness to bow to political pressure, leaving the black townships untouched whilst they squabbled over who should finance them. Consequently, until May 1996 the old Cape Town City Council remained virtually intact whilst the struggling Black Local Authorities were left to run the old apartheid townships as "homelands" (Esterhuysen, 1994; *Financial Mail*, 1996b).

By 1995, negotiations concerning the nature of the provinces' transitional local councils had reached deadlock, and it appeared unlikely that the November 1st local

government elections would go ahead as scheduled. Most of the delay was due to the political manoeuvring between the NP and the 'new' ANC government. In 1995 the Western Cape Legislature, regional finance minister Kobus Meiring, unveiled figures that showed the region would end the financial year with a deficit of more than R1bn, and perhaps the retrenchment of 5000 public sector workers. The National Party immediately blamed the central government's funding formula of the Financial and Fiscal Commission, which in 1995 had reduced the Cape's share of funding by 3.41% a year for the next 5 years. Meiring argued, that whereas other ANC dominated provinces had been allocated more funds (funding would grow by 1.05% in Eastern Cape and 8.16% in Gauteng) - the Western Cape would run out of money by the end of 1996 ('Financial Mail, 1995d). In the final analysis, the political tug-of-war over this and the financing of the black townships, rendered inoperative the provincial committee's attempts to ratify all boundaries and wards - which led in the end to the postponement of most of the local elections in the area (Financial Mail 1995a).

#### **11.4.1 Local government elections**

Originally, the ANC expected to control local government in the Western Cape. As a consequence of the agreement between the previous local government Minister, Tertius Delpont and the ANC - 30% of local government seats were to be elected in black wards, 30% in white, 'coloureds' and Indian wards, with the remaining 40% being elected by proportional representation. Race groups would as a consequence be represented in city councils disproportionate to their numbers. Therefore, even in the Western Cape where blacks (traditionally ANC voters) constituted little more than 20% of the local population, it was anticipated the ANC would win 30% plus its share of 40% of proportionally-elected seats, and any ward seats it could pick up from 'coloured' areas (Esterhuysen, 1994; Financial Mail, 1996b).

Although, 75% of the Western Cape was unable to vote in November 1995, of those that did vote (25%) all indications were that the ANC had made significant gains and had managed to turn around the 'coloured' vote in the Western Cape. For the May 1996, local elections (involving the other 75%), the ANC worked hard to win the 'coloured' vote. The ANC believed the 'coloured' voters were not committed to the NP, and began using its leading members, to win the 'hearts' of voters. Prior to the election Mandela visited the 'coloured' area of Athlone - promising voters a 'pot of gold at the end of the rainbow nation' (Financial Mail, 1996b).

## The result

There was a 57% turnout of metropolitan voters - high for local elections, but most probably due to the ANC-NP contest which was being projected as one of national importance. The overall result was not good for the ANC - the white voters remained mistrustful of the ANC and even in the black areas, administration and chaos lost them some valuable votes (Financial Mail, 1996b). Yet, equally the metropolitan and rural elections were not the overwhelming triumph for the National Party (NP) that its leaders claimed. Compared with the 1994 general election, the ANC appears to have raised its percentage of the vote by four points to 37.7%, while the National Party's share fell from 56% to 48.2%. Nonetheless, such comparisons were virtually irrelevant, because the rules of the election were very different. In the end it was the continuing allegiance of the 'coloured' community that ensured the National Party power - of the registered support 60% were 'coloureds' (Financial Mail, 1996c).

The real views of SAMWU workers were difficult to gauge during this period. Whereas, some SAMWU members interviewed in 1997, expressed sympathy with the National Party's position that Africans would be a threat to the lifestyle and culture of 'coloureds', they also demonstrated support for the ANC. Only days before the election, Cape Town braced itself for a strike and march of more than 18,000 municipal workers - SAMWU was protesting against local government re-organisation and supporting the ANC's claim, at the local government negotiating table, that it would jeopardise jobs (Financial Mail, 1996c).

For some SAMWU activists the possible assumptions were was too awful to contemplate. The party which had once deprived them of the vote, had now been provided with a substantial victory by the 'coloured' community. One SAMWU worker summed up the climate of suspicion and mistrust that surrounded the elections...

there is an undercurrent of fear and suspicion... if you speak to the workers you can pick it up. If you speak to those that voted N.P, they aren't seeing the N.P as the culprit that carried apartheid, but they see them as savours giving them a new opportunity because they see a reverse racism - because blacks are more important then what they are  
**Arthur Fillies, Maintenance Worker, Interview, 6/9/97.**

## The 'Coloured' Vote

Despite, the high-profile appearances by Mandela in 'coloured areas' like Mitchells Plain, it was apparent from the racist jibes that most coloured voters remained resentful of blacks. They perceived themselves as the achievers while the Cape blacks were viewed as economic refugees, mainly from Ciskei and Transkei - who live in squatter camps and sprawling, under-serviced townships (Financial Mail, 1996b).

Some regional leaders blamed the ANC's national leadership for the defeat. They complained there was little understanding among national leaders of the peculiarities of the region, and far too much interference in decision-making, particularly about who should lead the Western Cape ANC. One executive committee member said he noticed in the run-up to the election how little the leadership understood the local politics.

"nationally, voters may welcome redeployment of teachers and affirmative action in the workplace, but those messages have to be amended to find resonance here... some of our national leaders came to the Cape to address public meetings with quite crude and conservative viewpoints on coloured nationalism...it does nothing to help our cause to eliminate racism in the region".

*quoted in Rossouw, 1996*

Another ANC member reported a real fear on the part of the 'coloured' voters that the ANC were going to redress the racial imbalance in the area by redistributing homes and jobs from the 'coloureds' to 'Africans'

'Coloured' voters are incredibly conservative..... They really believe that their houses, jobs and schools are going to be taken away by the ANC and given to blacks. That's why we need leadership that can reassure them that the ANC is a party for them as well"

*quoted in Rossouw, 1996*

At the 1996 ANC Congress in the area, delegates attempted to analyse the reasons for the lack of support from the 'coloured' electorate. It was argued that while the N.P were allowed locally, to define the issues around which the local government campaign was to be fought, the ANC, nationally, remained defensive, unable to switch the debate to local issues and control. Moreover, the ANC did not forget that the Western Cape had

once been a 'coloured labour preference area'. This ignored the social ills, including gang violence, unemployment and lack of housing, and assumed, falsely, that because apartheid had been applied differentially, so should the solutions (Rossouw, 1996). The outgoing provincial leader Nissen attempted in his final address to set the tone for action

'Gone are the days when we talk about so-called 'coloureds'. They are not superior to anyone or inferior, they have a culture to be proud of. The ANC needs to recognise this and give them its full support. The ANC must play a role in bringing communities together.'

*quoted in Rossouw 1996*

In the post-apartheid South Africa, the SAMWU workers of Cape Town found themselves in the midst of a complex political battle being played out between the ANC and the National Party - firstly on account of being 'coloureds', but secondly as public sector workers. In 1995-7, the long-term survival of the National Party in the Western Cape, was largely dependent on the one-time party of apartheid appealing to the racism of the 'coloured' people. The fear that the ANC would reverse the privileged position and make them suffer, appeared to have ensured a vote for the N.P, who were seen as the party that would preserve their advantage.

A further reason for the distrust of the ANC, on the part of the 'coloured' community, emanated from the economic crisis in the province's public sector. Such a crisis increasingly came to be associated with government national policies, and the view that the ANC was intent on financially starving a province it didn't control. Whether the ANC would be ultimately blamed, when the rumoured retrenchments took place, was not clear. However, the local papers were already predicting one certainty - the newly established local authority of Cape City of Cape Town (CCC) could expect to see many more marches and demonstrations, as the militant branch of SAMWU became increasingly more fearful for their livelihoods (Financial Mail, 1995d).

Nevertheless, although it seemed unlikely that the National party would be able to successfully exploit any protests or demonstrations in the area - by using 'coloured' fears to engender inter-racial tensions - it was still not inconceivable given the desperate competition for jobs and houses in the area. For SAMWU members and leaders, who had fought during the 1980s and early 90s for a more equal society, the scenario was disturbing. Some members interviewed (1997), believed the solution lay

in workers continuing to struggle *collectively*, against such racism. One Regional full-timer explained that such a consciousness could only come from the workers themselves.

I believe I share the majority ideas of the leadership and membership of SAMWU on this. That the working class can only liberate themselves by using their own power and strength... the membership have got to make the connections ..we`ve got to build again the traditions of the struggle amongst the South African working class.

*Victor, Gauteng, Regional Secretary, Interview 2/9/97.*

The next section considers these views within the context of SAMWU`s changing work environment the Cape City of Cape Town (CCC). It details the overall structure of local authority in the region and summarises the organisation, structure and changing Human Resource Management style in the `new` council .

## **11.5 THE CAPE CITY OF CAPE TOWN (CCC)**

### **11.5.1 Introduction**

Cape Town was to have a new council - one more fitting with the ideology and politics of the democratic `new` South Africa. A more professional management style was envisaged within a transparent open systems model. In 1997, all councils within the new Cape Metropolitan Council - including the City of Cape Town (CCC) - were expected to formulate a 3-5 year comprehensive strategic management framework, aimed at meeting the needs of a wide range of stakeholders. Of particular interest to SAMWU members was the plan`s reference to a partnership with its employees and their organisations, as part of the council`s new *`human resources development programme`* (CCC : `Review of the 100 days Programme` May 1997).

Yet, ironically such developmental planning was taking place against the background of the Government's new neo-liberal economic policy, GEAR. This emphasised the need to reduce public spending by diminishing the role of the state in the productive sector of the economy, as well as provision of basic services (COSATU Information Digest, 1997). The government had proceeded to reinforce this message by urging local

governments to employ sound financial budgeting and ways of achieving equity in a responsible way so they did not incur unnecessary debt. In Cape Town this meant (since 1996) reducing its staff by 15%. The reduction, supposedly achieved through a process of natural attrition, had made substantial savings for the council, and as the Chair of the Executive Committee proudly declared, 'for the first time in many, many years, the salaries and wages as a proportion of the budget has dropped' (CCC: Cape Town Mid-term review 1998 ).

### **11. 5. 2 Structure of Local Government within the regions**

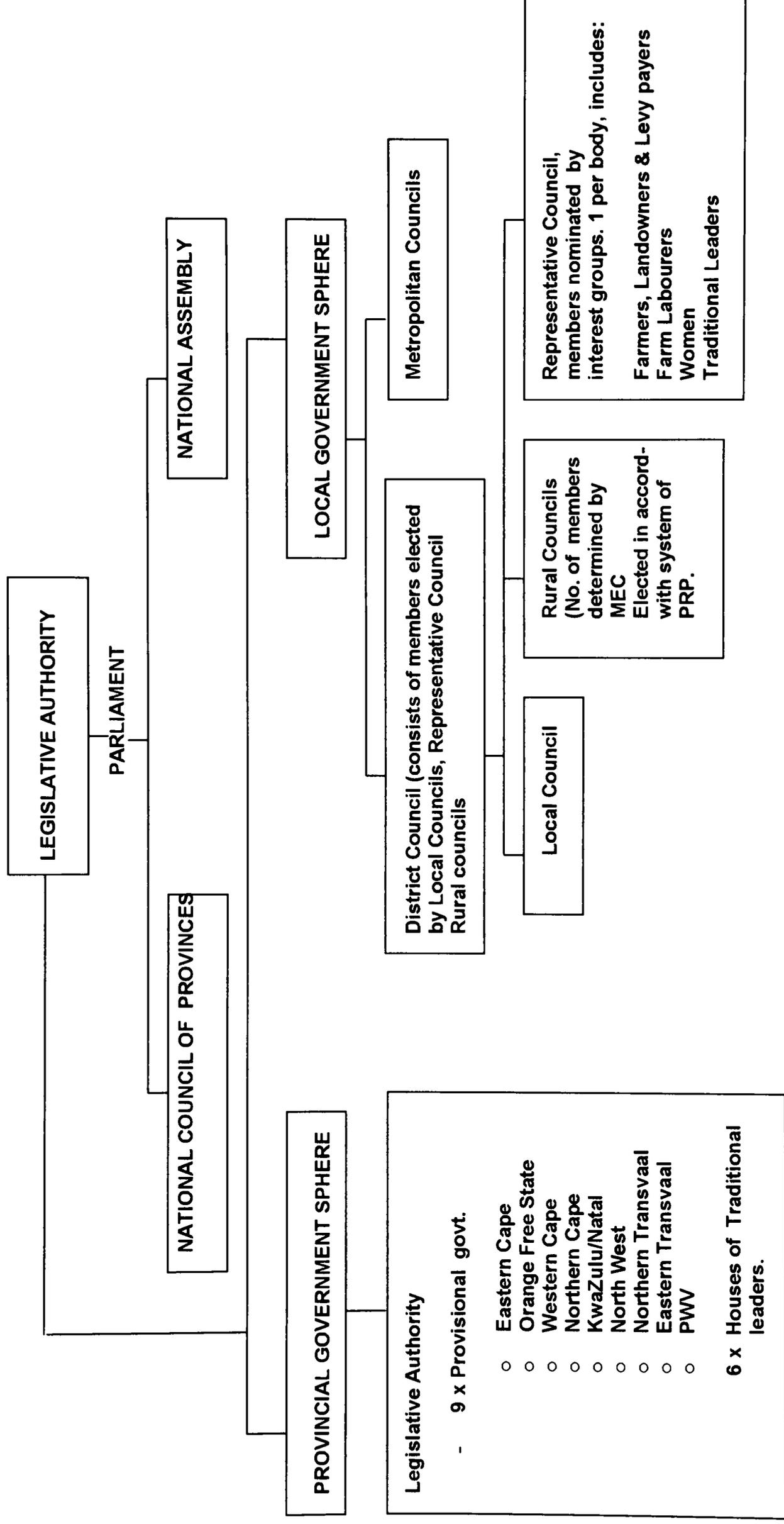
**(See Fig. 11.1: THE STRUCTURE OF THE 'NEW LOCAL GOVERNMENT SPHERE 1996, P229).**

In the post-apartheid period, 67% of all public sector workers were employed in the public service - teachers, health workers, prison personnel, police and workers employed in the defence force and intelligence agencies. State owned Enterprises (SOE`s) accounted for approximately 15.4%; and local authorities - which included city town councils, municipalities, local health committees, regional water corporations and development and services boards, employed approximately 12.5% of public sector workers; with the balance of the workforce being in universities and technikons (3.1%) agricultural marketing boards (less than 0.1%) and parastatals (1.3%) (CSS:PO251, March 1995; Standing, 1996; Alder 1998)

#### **The Cape Municipal Council (CMC)**

The Cape Municipal Council (CMC) established in 1995 remained in essence the successor in law to the former Western Cape Regional services Council (WRSC), (which in turn had been the successor to three Divisional Councils of Cape, Stellenbosch and Paarl). The WRSC had played a developmental role for the former marginal communities, but as a services provider it had been severely restricted. Initially, the role of the CMC remained largely unaltered to that of the WRSC, and it was not until 1996 that it emerged as a proper metropolitan services provider - with bulk water supply, transport, metropolitan planning and new functions of tourism promotion being part of its brief (South Africa 1996 Municipal Year Book).

**Figure 11.1: THE 'NEW' LOCAL GOVERNMENT SPHERE, 1996**



Source: Adapted from Constitution of RSA, 1996 System of Government (Act 108, 1996)

Although, the CMC - along with the rest of local government now had its own autonomy, it was constrained both by the national policies of the ANC (who controlled the National Assembly and Government), and the local policies of the National Party (who governed the Western Cape provincial and executive council). In particular, the constitution had given the provinces wide powers over local authorities many of which impinged on traditional municipal functions, including the abattoirs, health, housing, markets and ponds, public transport, regional planning, road traffic, roads and urban development. Since the Western Cape had emerged as a power base for the National Party it was unlikely to neglect these responsibilities (South Africa 1996 Municipal Year Book).

Yet, joint administration in the area was now shared with other Metropolitan Local Councils: Cape City of Cape Town (CCC), Oostenberg Municipal, City of Tygerberg, Helderberg, Blaauberg, S. Peninsula Municipal (see figure 11.3). In the process of rationalisation of local government in Cape Metropolitan area there had been a redistribution of powers and functions between the Cape Metropolitan Council and the other six metropolitan local councils, based on economic viability and political ability - the old apartheid Divisional Councils and Regional Services Council had at last been removed (Interview, ANC Councillor, Aug, 1997; South Africa Official year Book, 1996).

**Table 11.3**  
**METROPOLITAN LOCAL COUNCILS IN THE CMC**

<p><b>Blaauberg Municipal</b></p> <p>City Executive Officer O P.M Gerber</p> <p>Alantis, Belhar, 18-23 Blauberg-Strand,  Mamre Melk boss strand, Milnerton part of Brooklyn, Pella, Rugby, Sandrift, Tygerhof</p>	<p><b>Cape City of Cape Town</b></p> <p>City Manager A. Boraine</p> <p>Cape Town Ikapa Pinelands Cape Rural areas</p>	<p><b>City of Tygerburg</b></p> <p>City Executive Officer D.Wilken</p> <p>Belhar, Bellville Delft, Durbanville Goodwood, Khayelitsha Mfulesi, Parrow P/O Bothasig Richmond</p>
<p><b>Helderberg Municipal</b></p> <p>Gordons Bay, Lwandle, Macassar Sir Lowry's Pass, Somerset West Strand</p>	<p><b>Oostenberg Municipal</b></p> <p>Brakenfell Kraaufontein Kuijs River Melton Rose/Blue Downs Scottsclue</p>	<p><b>South Peninsula Municipal</b></p> <p>Constantia, Fish Hook, Simon's Town</p>

Source: South Africa Official Year Book 1996, p.6

Other, smaller councils in the CMC in 1995 included: the Transitional Local Councils (TEC) and the District and Rural areas. They included the following areas:-

**Table 11.4  
TRANSITIONAL LOCAL COUNCILS(TEC)**

<p><b><u>Western Cape</u></b>  Albertininaia (Trans Local Council)  Ashton (TLC)  Atlantis - Cape Metropolitan Council Blaauwberg Municipality  Aurora - TLC  Barrydale - TLC  Beaufort West - TLC  Belhar - C.M Council, City of Tygerberg  Bellville EState -TLC  Bitterfontein/Nuwerus - TLC  Blaubergstrand - CMC. Blaauwberg Munc.  Bonievale - TLC  Bot River - TLC  Brakenfell - CMC, Oostenberg Municipality  Breckasdorp - TLC  Brenton - TLC  Galedon - TLC</p> <p><b><u>District Councils</u></b>  Brede River  Klein Karoo  Overberg Sentrale Karvo  S.Cape W.Coast  Winelands</p> <p><b><u>Rural Authorities</u></b>  27 of these</p>
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**Source: South Africa Official Year Book 1996, p.7.**

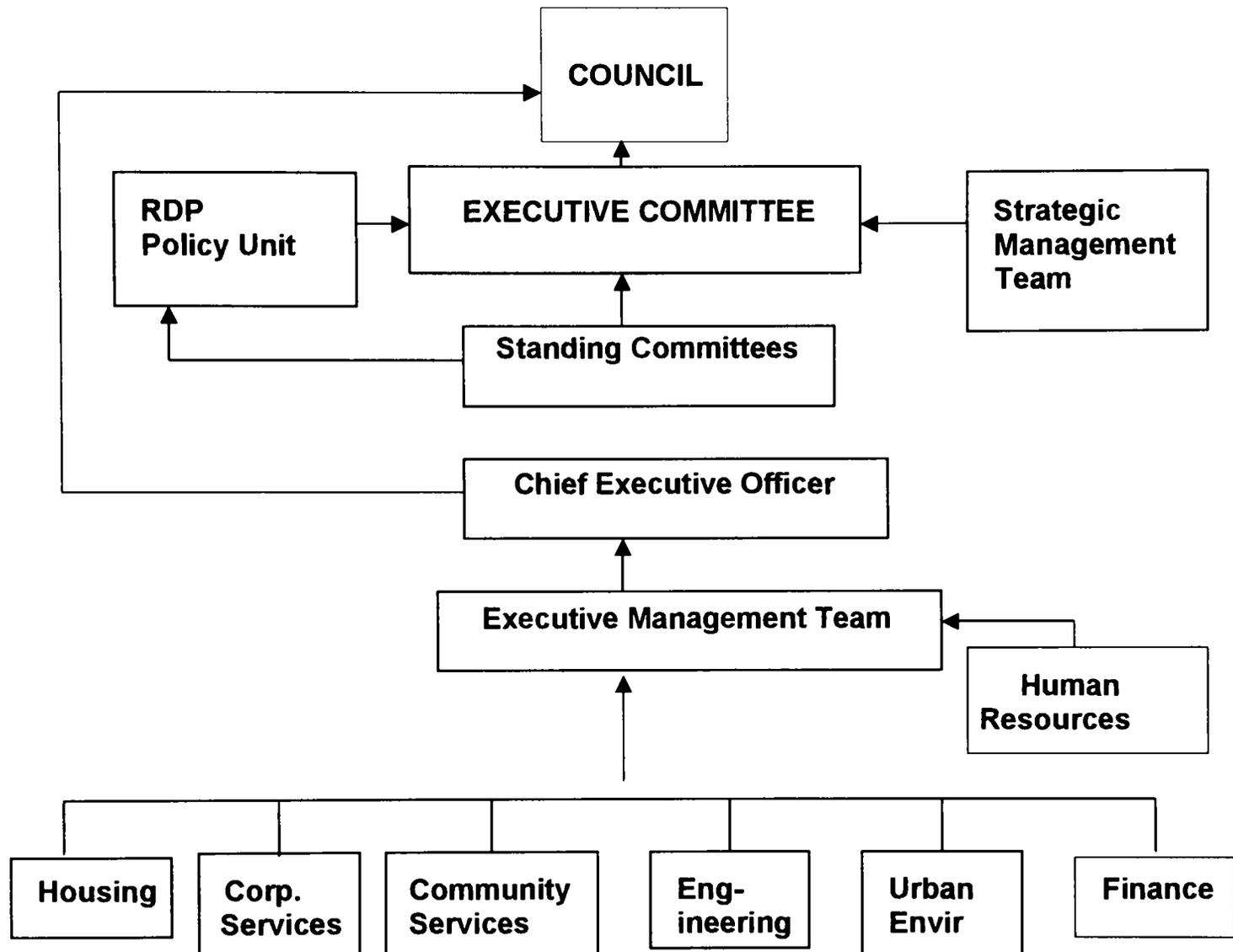
### 11.5.3 The 'New' Structure of the Cape City of Cape Town (CCC)

The SAMWU branch of Cape town was now situated in 'new' Cape City of Cape Town (CCC) (at Bergersentrain 2 Hertzog Boulevard, Cape Town) which had a status of a Metropolitan Local Council and was the largest of the seven local authority bodies (the CMC and 6 other Metropolitan Councils). The old Cape Town City Council (C.C.C) had been absorbed into the new metro council, and was virtually kept intact. The CCC covered most of the old Cape Town City Council, Ikapa, Pinelands, Crossroads, and the Cape Rural areas.

For most of the 1995-6 period the overall structure remained largely the same as the 1992-4, it was not until the first part of 1997 that the council finally managed to set up

and develop a macro organisation. Six departments were to exist: the Department of Housing, Corporate Services, Community services, Engineering, Urban and Environment, and Finance (see Fig. 11.2)

**Fig. 11.2**  
**STRUCTURE OF CCC :1997**



Source: adapted from CCC: Review of 100 days Programme, 1997

Under each department, clusters were created - for example housing services, had a cluster for development and maintenance, urbanisation and housing administration - the overall aim was to create a flatter more decentralised structure that would be less bureaucratic and more accessible to the general public (see table 11.5 below).

**Table 11.5**  
**THE MACRO-ORGANISATION OF CCC, 1996**

Housing Service	Corporate Services	Community Services	Engineering	Urban & Enviornment	Finance
Development & maintenance	City Admin.	Community health,	Water works management,	land use development	Financial, Revenue, expenditure
Urbanisation & housing admin.	Organisational development & Information services	communities and Library, Parks and Recreation	Roads & drainage	environ. management.	housing finance
	Internal audit.	Protecion services.	Technical support & engineering	spacial and transport,	
			Planning & projects.	Economic & tourism	

South Africa Official Municipal year Book, 1996.

A further objective of these new developments was to restructure departments into business units. Legally, the councils were to be more accountable with local authorities requiring to producing more strategic business plans as a means of justifying spending to the government and local people (White Paper on Local Government in South Africa - Discussion Document, 1997). As one newly elected ANC local councillor explained, all councils would have to commit themselves to developing a strategic management plan. The Redistribution and Development projects would dictate the budgets - but the local authority would still have to account for its spending and performance annually .

There is government legislation around an integrated development plan .. all local authorities must do that now. They must develop a business plan, community action agenda, and explain how it will affect the whole area within the municipality. This will become the strategic management plan for the principality. This is a legislative requirement and this will be the conscience of the local authority and it will also determine the budgets. It won't be that people develop the budget and then look for the projects, the projects and the problems will determine the budget, and it will also determine the priorities..... performances will be looked at every year ...the local authority will need to report back to the communities to check whether they are keeping to the plan of the RDP.

**Hennie, ANC councillor Interview , 24/8/97.**

## The 'New' Management

Central to such a process was the requirement to establish a strong innovative leadership, not just amongst the new ANC councillors but more importantly amongst the existing managers. The municipal administration, was to be headed by a chief executive officer (C.E.O) who was to assist in overseeing the whole process. The C.E.O would be the accounting officer of the municipality as well as the legal link between the local political structure (council) and the administration. He would be responsible for co-ordinating and supervising the six Executive Directors who managed each of the six departments, respectively (CCC 'Review of 100 days Programme', 1997).

Despite, what appeared to be a fairly traditional bureaucratic line of command, the aim was to design a more decentralised system of control. Although staff would ultimately be answerable to individual Executive Directors via their line managers, it was hoped that the clusters - in each of the departments - would allow the employees a certain amount of autonomy and control (CCC: Review 100 days Programme, 1997).

Yet, such changes were fraught with difficulties. The high profile given to the public sector by the ANC in post-apartheid South Africa, meant that Cape Town required an adequate management structure designed to ensure accountability to all its stakeholders. However there were questions about how effective this was in practice. One Cape Town resident and SAMWU member remained unconvinced about the business level autonomy,

The structure has been reorganised, its like a pyramid with the top flattened which means there will be more top management, mostly white managers. They are arguing there is not 'value for money', that there is inefficiency of administration and processing of work - we just see it as a complete 'shack-up'

**Peter September, Maintenance Worker, Interview 5/9/97**

Even the ANC councillor (interviewed 1997)- who was highly supportive of the new organisation, acknowledged the system did involve changes that might be problematic for staffing.

we've built the organisation from out of the ground, and its got a lot of pitfalls because we're offering new conditions of service... you need to create stability, with a new labour force, you need to make sure that you are not adversely affecting the unions, or they will take industrial action ...but you also need to ensure that you have a very good service in place.. and not antagonise your rate payers.

**Hennie, ANC Counsellor, interview, 24/8/97.**

The effectiveness of the 'new' managerial structures was open to question. Although there was a desperate need for management to change, the lack of leadership and experience of the new political-administrative model made it difficult for most managers to be effective. Moreover, the absence of policies to remove or replace white senior managers, meant most of the top management came from the same personnel that had previously administered the old apartheid system; which no doubt contributed to the inability of local government to achieve any real change in its political and racial personnel or policies. Therefore, despite the initial optimism displayed by the new ANC councillor, he remained despondent over the failure of the administration to change in line with the political developments. ...

but you know I have been sitting for a year in this council, and I tell you it's the most frustrating exercise I've had in my life because you have legitimised a structure that has still got the same old order in place. Politically it's changed but the administration is basically the same. My observation is that it creates major problems because there is not a true commitment to deliver the products. So the end product is not what the politicians say it will be.... when the delivery comes it has a negative impact on the people at large.

#### Human Resource Management

Perhaps one of the most perplexing tasks for the new management was the reorganisation of human resources. The transfer of employees between different levels of the public sector and the re-organisation of labour within the council was flawed from the start (Ryan, 1994). It was not until July 1997 that negotiations around staff and budgets were eventually put into place - part of the problem surrounded the complexity of the terms and conditions of the various staff who had to be physically moved and integrated. As the ANC counsellor outlined

You must understand there are different salaries, different structures, all those need to be rationalised, we can't fund them all.

**Hennie, ANC Counsellor, interview, 24/8/97.**

Furthermore, despite attempts to create a decentralised and broad based system - built around clusters or teams - the Council like most municipal administrations remained horizontally divided with a range of job levels - sometimes up to twenty or more levels - complicating the overall process. Such large numbers made the process of job evaluation, grading, and initiation of pay systems extremely time consuming (White Paper on Local Government: Discussion Paper, 1997).

The major obstacle was one of resourcing, especially as there was a reluctance on the part of local or provincial government to take financial responsibility for the staffing of many of the major utilities in the area. One SAMWU worker, explained the problems associated with the reorganisation.....

The ambulance service, which the City Council operated is very much in the balance because no one wants to take responsibility... the province doesn't want to take responsibility and the local authority doesn't want it.. The other area that is of major concern is the fire department .....the whole fire department in the metro is very fragmented every municipality has its own fire department. We are now 6 municipalities each with their own service and staff....its crazy.

**James, 15/8/97.**

The police service experienced similar problems, there appeared to be numerous police personnel inherited from different areas - but very little co-ordinated direction from the local councils. An ANC councillor highlighted...

What you find is that we have a lot of law enforcers who do work in various areas,.... but there is no connection between the police and the local authority. We have a lot of problems with Shebeens (unregulated South African drinking dens), but the staff inherited from the City of Cape Town, from CMC Simons Town, and Fishoek tackle the problem in very different ways

**Hennie, ANC Counsellor, interview, 24/8/97.**

## Change and consistency

Yet, such difficulties were to be overcome by creating a new and innovative type of Human Resource manager. Developmental local government was said to require managers with additional skills and different attitudes. This would mean actively training managers to take positive steps to remedy the inequalities and injustices of the past. Managers would now be required to implement and drive through re-organisation programmes - they were to instigate affirmative action programmes, re-evaluate all standards, attitudes and practices in recruitment, training, development, qualifications and promotions. Overall, there was to be an effort to transform the management of human resources in local government by taking measures to equip all staff managers for their new role. This role was to be governed by the democratic values and principles contained in the Constitution, specifically the equality clause in the Bill of Rights (McLennan, 1997; White Paper on Local Government :Discussion Document, 1997).

In actual fact, such radical changes - at least in South African terms - were slow to permeate the ranks of managers, not only in Cape Town but in all local authorities. The problem remained that, although a number of the councillors had changed, most of the managers had not. They continued to perceive their role as one of controlling the workforce. As one SAMWU member explained..

Just before the 1994 elections there was quite a nice atmosphere in the council. The white managers were very friendly..but now we find the old racism coming to the fore .....they don't want to consult with you they just want to control you.

**Peter September, Maintenance worker, Interview,5/9/97**

Unfortunately, many officials had been trained for the old style of local government - for service provision, control and regulation - and remained rigidly committed to such a system (McLennan, 1997). A major weakness lay with the vast majority of top management positions still being occupied by the same white males (Abrahams and Adair, 1997), and the re-establishment of a degree of NP stability and influence.

In reality though it must have been difficult for these managers to conceive of their role as being anything different to that of traditional control. Strategic Plans from the council

may have declared a process of planned communication and consultation (Review of 100 day Programme - 7.2.5, 1997) but local government was equally committed towards 'developing a performance review process aimed at measuring results achieved, and correction of unsatisfactory performance' (Review of 100 day Programme -7.2.4, 1997). Moreover, the government's intention to introduce a tight fiscal spending policy in the public sector - including working 'with local authorities and government parastatals to find new ways of organising projects to give the private sector a role in the different stages of planning, implementation, financing and management'- all seem to indicate a need on the part of the management to exercise greater, not less control over the behaviours and costs of labour (CCC, 'Review of 100 days Programme' May 1997).

In essence, developments in Human Resource managerial practices and training in 1995-7, were taking place within the context of an uneven process of institutional reform at the national, regional and local levels - driven sectorially or through the various levels of government. Support systems for management were fragmented, with financial, administrative, personnel, salary payments, planning information and performance appraisal often incompatible. On the whole, managers - usually white - remained generally distrustful of black workers and unions, and uncomfortable with the 'new' consultation, and mediation and facilitation processes, which they perceived as foreign to the public sector environment (McLennan, 1997; Abrahams and Adair, 1997).

The new Cape Town Council had expressed a desire in its strategic Plan (1997) to move away from its traditional regulatory role to that of a developmental one. The shift included expanding the existing services and infrastructure and building strong partnerships with all stakeholders in the local government arena, especially employees. Yet, despite such a commitment, the truth was the current council's employee relations policies had little to do with developing human resources and addressing questions of consultation and participation - but more with controlling the spiralling costs of labour.

In the post-apartheid local government, municipalities were actively being encouraged by central government to pursue a variety of alternative partnership arrangements with the private sector, including management contracts, concessions, leases and privatisation. Cape Town Council was extremely pro-active in this area, involving itself in Public-private partnership projects (PPPs) and launching a private company - *the Cape Town Community Housing Company (Pty) Ltd* - to help introduce innovative plans

in housing (CCC Mid-term Report - The Executive Committee - view from the Chairperson, 1998). Although, these initiatives were said to be aimed at improving service delivery and quality of life, many of the projects and contracts were equally useful in regulating and reducing the burden of costs - particularly those of labour - in local government (McLennan, 1997; White Paper on Local Government: Discussion Document, 1997).

More to the point, the fact that the government now expected the new post-apartheid managers - whatever their colour - to secure efficient and cost-effective delivery of municipal services, provided an additional incentive to curtail not only the costs of labour, but also its activities and power (McLennan, 1997; Abrahams and Adair, 1997). In the Cape Town Council, the increased economic and organizational strength of SAMWU, with its highly publicised commitment to fight all types of privatisation, had almost certainly brought it to the notice of those managers anxious to control the power of labour in the council.

## **11.6 CONCLUSION**

The ability of SAMWU workers to overcome the controls of management and resist government policies of privatisation depended not only on the organisation and leadership of the union, but the members' ability to recognise and utilise their collective strength. This entailed making the connections between the economic events in the workplace and those in their wider political and social environment.

The precise nature of a worker's class consciousness, encapsulates the concepts of productive forces and relations - which include labour, capital and their inter-relationship with all institutional forms (Clements, 1977). Therefore, to truly understand the development of such consciousness is in many ways beyond the scope of this theses, and entails reflecting on *all* elements of the municipal worker's life - within a historical framework. Nevertheless, in the absence of being able to deliberate fully on the totality of all factors in the Municipal worker's life, part one of this section of the case study has attempted to consider briefly the social, economic, political and workplace influences on the SAMWU worker. The aim being to secure a perception of the levels of class consciousness amongst this group in the immediate post-apartheid period.

The province within which the SAMWU worker lived may have offered an affluent lifestyle for whites, but many 'coloured' workers continued to receive only scant rewards for long hours of labour. The material circumstances of most SAMWU workers meant that the majority experienced an inferior standard of living, with many struggling to adequately feed and house their families. Yet, such hardships do not necessarily lead to a coherent working-class ideology (Clements, 1977). In the case of the 'coloured' worker, internalization and institutionalization of racism in the area continued to be an effective deterrent to united class action in the province.

More especially, the political aspirations of the 'coloured' community in the Western Cape were confusing - with the possible assumption that the one-time party of apartheid had been able to secure the support of many SAMWU members. If such an hegemony - on the part of the N.P - did exist, it emanated from the 'coloured' worker's fear of losing their meagre advantage in the labour market. This anxiety was made all the more real by the ANC's intention to pursue free market policies in the public sector, a major source of 'coloured' employment in the area. Whether, this racism would be used in the Cape Town Council to render any radical elements of the workforce impotent, was largely dependent on the strength of their - shifting and uncertain - ideology. Nevertheless, although the 'coloured' worker was said to be conservative, SAMWU workers had managed to expand their frames of reference in terms of class action in previous historical periods, and there was no reason why they should not do so again.

A development of a radical consciousness would also - almost certainly - be linked to the nature of the trade union organisation. Trade unions, however radical their origins, are constrained by their very role within capitalism, but this does not preclude the potential for working-class radicalism from developing within their ranks (Boggs, 1975). Class-consciousness can - as Marx theorised - be encouraged by trade union activity and struggle. The relationship is not a mechanical one, but rather a dialectical process in which consciousness becomes realised in the practice of struggle (praxis) (Clements, 1977). Consequently, municipal workers in the process of wresting control from management in the council - as they struggle to fight privatisation - may well yet find a stronger class-consciousness developing, as their frames of references and activities expand.

Chapters 12 and 13 proceeds to consider the further development of this consciousness within the organisation and activities of SAMWU.

# CHAPTER 12

## TRADE UNION STRUCTURE AND ORGANISATION (1995-7)

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### 12.1 INTRODUCTION

The National Executive Committee (NEC) had recognised as early as 1995 that their power to resist privatisation - and ensure the future survival and growth of the union would be effected by an efficient organisation and structure. By 1997, the character and identity of the union, and its membership were becoming more discernible. The tenets that supported the criteria of inclusion and exclusion, the power and control of leadership and rank-and-file members, and the lines of demarcation between the head office, regions and large branches (such as Cape Town), were all gradually becoming clearer.

The following section examines the changing internal organisation, the growth and change in membership, and changes in the structure and democracy of the union. A review of the national structure - including the services being supplied to the membership is included, highlighting the continuing tensions between the national, regional and branch levels. The aim is to show the further development of the internal structure of the organisation, whilst acknowledging that the union's overall growth and structural evolution had never really been planned or co-ordinated. In fact the development of the union throughout the whole 1992-97 period, was only truly discernible when viewed from a historical perspective, reaching back to its origins as a 'coloured' union in Cape Town.

### 12.2 GROWTH AND MEMBERSHIP

The size of the national union and the growth in its membership all carried the imprint of the historical development of unionism in South Africa. A constant struggle to recruit

members and become established in the face of often brutal and relentless obstacles, characterised the union's growth. The principles that underlay its recruitment strategies, continued as in 1992 to be based on open access - all municipal workers irrespective of race, class, sex or occupation were welcome to join the union. Such a principle helped explain why the union enjoyed a position of numerical and organizational strength in the local government sector in 1997.

**Table 12.1**  
**SAMWU'S TOTAL 'PAID-UP' MEMBERS (1987-1997)**

1987	Launch	15 406
1989	Congress	29 529
1991	Congress	67 176
1995	Congress	110 032
1997	Congress	116 524

Source: SAMWU Congress 1997

SAMWU was now COSATU's sixth largest union organising all workers in the municipal sector. Yet, such dramatic growth should not be viewed as unique, all public sector membership had increased in the 1990s. In 1995, slightly over 50% belonged to a trade union - with public sector workers accounting for 19% of COSATU's membership. By 1997 - whereas other sectors, such as manufacturing and services were stagnating - the public sector figure had increased to 27% (before the Institute for Public Servants (ISP) affiliated). Overall, the membership had increased from 223 669 in 1994 to 484 371 in 1997 (*COSATU 6th National Congress Report, 1997d*).

**Table 12.2**  
**MEMBERSHIP BY SECTOR :1994 & 1997**

Sector	Membership by sector- 1994	% of membership by sector - 1994	Membership by sector - 1997	% of membership by sector
Public sector	223 669	17%	484 371	27%
Manufacturing	519 203	40%	604 232	35%
Service sector	224 344	17%	303 750	17%
Primary industry	336 057	26%	371 202	21%
<b>Total</b>	1 303 273		1 763 555	

Source: COSATU 6<sup>th</sup> Congress Report, 1997d.

There were several reasons for the rapid unionisation of the public sector. The recognition of public service unions in the early 1990s obviously played a part. So too did the increased insecurity felt by public servants (black, and white) during the democratic transition period (Mokgalo, 1995). Yet, interestingly, despite overall growth, SAMWU's membership, since 1995 had remained fairly constant, and had not mirrored the dramatic growth found elsewhere in the public sector. Although, direct reference to this fact was not openly acknowledged - and only alluded to in union documents - the General Secretary of the union admitted in 1997 that the figures remained fairly static.

It was hoped that the end of apartheid might bring an increase in the number of white-members. But the preferential treatment given to white and higher category employees by local government employers (and their staff associations) meant that large numbers of employees within the sector remained unorganised. In 1997, the racial and class character of the SAMWU remained largely the same. As in 1992, the union continued to organise predominately black or - in the case of Cape Town - 'coloured' workers, concentrated largely in unskilled and semi-skilled, blue collar jobs (SAMWU Congress Report: Organisational Issues, 1997b).

Furthermore, there was even concern that the membership might decline, partly because many previously 'tame' staff associations were recreating themselves as liberal unions and attempting to recruit SAMWU's members - but also because the government had indicated its commitment to reduce the public sector jobs. The immediate solution to the stagnation in membership appeared to lie in establishing a national Public sector industrial union with NEHAWU, IPS, SAPSA, POPCRU, SADTU, and SAMWU.

**Table 12.3**  
**MEMBERSHIP IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR UNIONS (1994-7).**

Union	Sector organised	1994	1997	% change since 1994
IPS	Institute for Public Servants	-	13 055	n/a
NEHAWU	Ed. Health & Welfare	63 335	162 530	+155%
POPCRU	Police & Prison (admitted 1995)	-	49 999	n/a
SADTU	Teaching	59 427	146 000	+146%
SAMWU	Municipal workers	100 000	116 524	+16%
SAPSA	Public servants	-	14 318	n/a

**Source: COSATU Activities Report, September Commission Report, COSATU 6<sup>th</sup> National Congress, Sept. 1997d.**

Although, growth has been most evident in NEHAWU and SADTU, and to a lesser extent SAMWU it was still felt by COSATU that all unions would benefit from the merger. Yet, plans to establish a single public sector union failed to materialise - and by 1997 - seemed unlikely to happen for some considerable period. The reasons were complicated, with in the short term, the prospect of amalgamation not solving SAMWU's problems of stagnating membership, but simply adding a further complexity to the issue. Although the merger decision flowed logically from the pattern of SAMWU's existing membership - with other public sector unions being industrially and occupationally complementary - the internal policies of (and perhaps even politics) of the unions failed to concur. Consequently, the much publicised merger between NEHAWU and SAMWU eventually broke down over demarcation issues, sizes of the branches and constitutional issues related to the structures, financial statements and budgets (Mokgalo, 1995; COSATU 6th National Congress Report: Activities Report, 1997d).

Whilst both unions still agreed on the need to amalgamate in the long term, both had resolved by 1997 to postpone the process indefinitely, while at the same time attempting to enter into unity talks with other unions operating in their sectors.

Consequently in terms of membership, and the external image, SAMWU was seen as the union that continued to organised mainly black and `coloured', male and female, unskilled or semi-skilled blue collar municipal workers (COSATU 6th National Congress Report: Activities Report. 1997d).

### **12.2.1 Cape Town Branch membership**

By 1995 the broader changes within the wider environment in the country was also forcing a transformation of the Cape Town branch. A number of members had already been lost to other branches following the reorganisation of local government in the area - but the union had still managed to maintain its membership. Overall levels of unionisation in C.C.C were outlined by one SAMWU organiser...

The sector is well-organised between ourselves and the other union IMATU. I think the last time you were here it was called SAAME, they subsequently merged with another independent union. So the unions organise upwards in excess of 90%

**Dennis Ardense, SAMWU Organiser, Interview Aug 1997**

The branch`s membership was almost 10,000 members by 1997, yet its scope for growth was limited as the council was already well organised with over 90% of council employees now in a union of some kind. As was the norm throughout the country many old, predominantly white staff associations was reconstituting themselves as liberal unions - SAAME was no exception, it had recreated itself as the Independent Municipal and Allied Trade Union (IMATU) and now organised approximately 4,000 members (Dennis Arendise, Interview, Aug. 1997).

Cape Town - like the national union - had obviously looked to other groups to organise and as a consequence had managed to recruit a few white members - but scope for such expansion was limited, with the differentiation in wage levels cited as the main reason for not joining. One steward expressed the concern that if white workers were joining it was solely as a means of restoring their previous status - and the extent to which such members would adopt a militant proletarian orientation remained doubtful . Therefore, in 1997 the branch remained a predominantly `coloured' unions with limited scope for growth (Dennis Arendise, Aug.Interview 1997).

These factors meant that even in the post-apartheid era of 1995 -97, the branch membership remained unique - yet this uniqueness brought with it dangers. With the membership being concentrated in such a clearly defined race group (overwhelmingly coloured), there was a risk of parochialism developing, which might serve to engender the exclusivity and sectional privilege, SAMWU had historically fought so hard to eradicate (SAMWU Congress Report 1997). More importantly, such a small restricted membership would be incapable of meeting the generalised threat posed by free market government policies. One member highlighted the problems....

The private contractors are everywhere. We should all be in one union. Many whites are thinking of joining the union but I don't think they will.... many 'coloureds' are frightened of affirmative action and are not linking up with the blacks - most of these (blacks) are under-privileged but they are the more qualified, they ('coloureds') are afraid that they'll get all the jobs.

**Peter September, Interview, Sept. 1997.**

Such sectionalism in trade unions can have divisive influence on the organisation, stifling the development of a radical perspective and permitting management to implement lay-offs and wage restrictions. In addition, sectional claims are more readily contained than generalised claims, because they tend not to challenge the institutional form in which such demands develop (Clements, 1977). Consequently, whereas the branch, with its dominant 'coloured' membership might - on its own - be able to achieve a modest local pay rise, it was unlikely, without the solidarity of other black workers to be able to stop the long-term, more universal threat of state privatisation and job losses

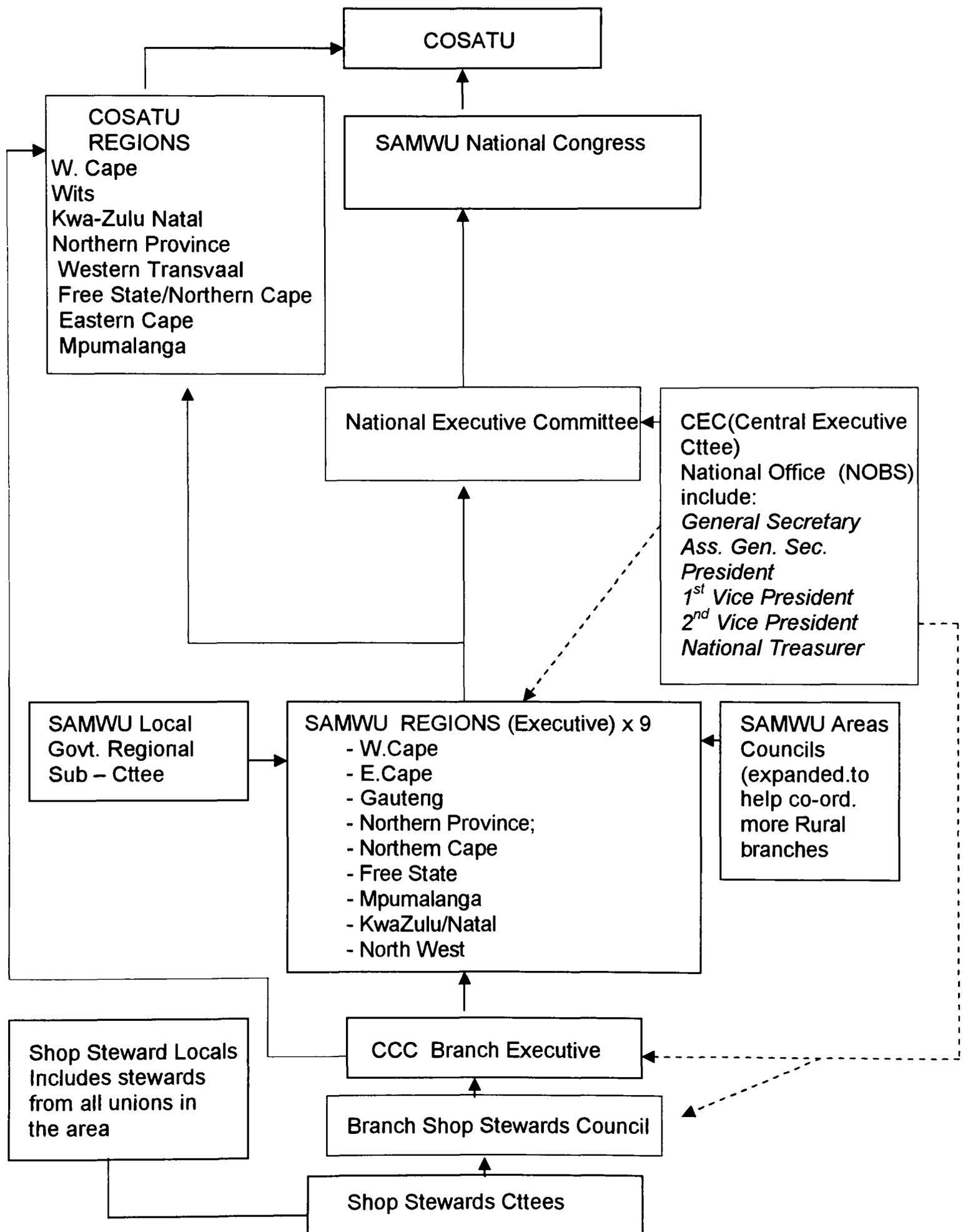
In the post-apartheid period of 1995-7 SAMWU nationally had become a powerful trade union, yet concern was expressed in 1996 that the union was stagnating and failing to take advantage of the expansion in public sector union membership. Despite efforts to locate further potential areas of recruitment - which included attempts to merge with other public sector unions, and recruit white members - SAMWU, nationally, remained a predominately black, municipal workers union. This tendency towards sectionalism was even more ingrained in Cape Town which continued to retain an image of a 'coloured' municipal union, organising principally in the CCC.

### **12.3 STRUCTURE AND DEMOCRACY**

The branch's ability to cope with changes in state policy was not solely dependent on the size and type of membership, but was also closely linked to the internal structure of the union as a whole. Achieving the correct internal organisation, control and levels of democracy within the union was important, especially if it was to be used to assist in mobilising disciplined collective action on the part of the members. The engendering of such a group consciousness can then result in members subordinating their own immediate interests to those of the more powerful common collective (Clarke and Clements, 1977). In the case of SAMWU, it was argued a more effective internal organisation might encourage a stronger collective identity, and render the union better able to mount a successful challenge to government's free market policies. Figure 12.1 shows the new union structure in 1997.

Figure 12.1

DIAGRAM OF THE STRUCTURE OF THE UNION WITH REGIONS AND BRANCHES, AND THE RELATIONSHIP TO COSATU, 1997



Source: adapted from Interview, Hennie, 1993 and SAMWU Organisational Issues, 1997

The leadership took this view in 1994, when a National Organising Forum had been launched to write a new constitution for the union. The main aim was to improve the organisation and democracy of the union, which would not only facilitate greater recruitment and service its existing membership more efficiently, but also engender a strong collective awareness which could be employed to fight its two chief campaigns - securing a 'living wage' and stopping privatisation (SAMWU Congress: Organisational Report, 1997a).

However, the Forum discovered a number of weaknesses, many of which, in common with the 1992-4 period, centred around the internal structure and control of the union. They were identified as increased levels of administration and bureaucracy; the problems of servicing its expanding membership adequately; and the broadening of divisions and accountability between the national, regional and branch levels (SAMWU Congress: Organisational Report, 1997a).

In essence, the leadership found the widening of gaps and uneven control and resources within different levels of the union, most worrying. The union's strategy of workplace control and increased participation in centralised collective bargaining at the national and sectoral level had achieved substantial gains and strengthened the self-confidence of leadership. However, by 1997 there was serious concern over the relationship between the branch, region and head office. These changes particularly affected the Cape Town branch ((SAMWU Congress: Organisational Report, 1997a).

## **12.4 CHANGES IN THE NATIONAL UNION (1995-7)**

During the post-apartheid period the national structure and organisation of the union became increasingly important - especially as it was now clearly differentiated from the Cape Town branch and origins. Any re-organisation at the national level was still sure to have a fundamental impact on the Cape Town branch.

Since the 1996 Policy Conference in Bloemfontein the impression had been created that the membership was on the decline and the national structures were in need of attention. The leadership had sought to deal with this problem by considering whether

the union's overall national structures and services had been unresponsive to the needs of the membership. Chiefly, it questioned whether the union - under the old constitution - was still capable of meeting the challenges now confronting it (SAMWU Congress Report: Organisational Issues, 1997a) The next part of this section considers the changing leadership and support structures and services at a national level

#### 12.4.1 Leadership

As a result of these concerns discussion focussed on the role of the national leadership. The changing union appeared to be creating a centralised bureaucracy with an entrenched leadership. There were fears that, left unchecked, the union would adopt a rigid bureaucratic form of organisation at the expense of worker autonomy and 'self-government' (SAMWU Congress Report: Organisational Issues, 1997a).

In 1995 the union leadership consisted of 5 national office bearers based at Head Office - they included the General Secretary, Assistant General Secretary, National Treasurer, President and Vice President. Both Roger Ronnie (General Secretary) and Jimmy Mohajane (Assistant General Secretary) had been elected unopposed. In 1996 the position of Assistant General Secretary became vacant when Jimmy Mohajane left to take up employment with the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council - as an Affirmative Action Officer. The departure of an eminent full-time officer was a loss to the union, but was not untypical of a general tendency, common amongst COSATU affiliated trade unions (Catchpole *et al.*, 1998; SAMWU Congress Report: Organisational Issues, 1997a).

The de-racialisation of society meant more and more experienced full-time black trade unionist were now taking advantage of new employment opportunities in other fields. The dire effects of this 'brain-drain' on the trade unions generally highlighted the tendency for power to be concentrated into the hands of a few, many of whom had managed to make themselves invaluable to the organisation. SAMWU's unopposed leadership elections and the void created by the loss of its Assistant General Secretary, meant the union - although fired by the political doctrine of socialism - was not totally immune from the drift towards entrenched bureaucratic authority on the part of the leadership (Buhlangu, 1999).

The post of the Assistant General Secretary was eventually filled by Comrade Nontsele (acting), from Port Elizabeth - but this immediately created problems for the organisation and served to underscore the over-centralisation of personnel and resources. The Secretariat now had two centres of operation both in Cape Town and Port Elizabeth, the problem was compounded by the fact that the Port Elizabeth Office had no support staff, and the Assistant General Secretary was left to cope almost single-handed. The issue raised further questions about control being concentrated in the Western Cape, and led to calls for greater decentralisation in the union and a shift away from Cape Town as the main focus (SAMWU Congress Report: Organisational Issues, 1997a).

Further evidence of increased bureaucracy and centralised control was also apparent in the leadership's claims to be overburdened by the sheer volume of the work (Interviews 1997). Although similar complaints were also expressed in 1993 (Interviews 1993), many of the tasks being undertaken by the Secretariat in the post-apartheid period was of a more administrative nature - which was reported as restricting their ability to engage in political debate or develop policies (Interviews, 1997 : SAMWU Report on Organisational Issues, 1997a). The Gauteng Regional Secretary believed this frustrated the leadership as both the General Secretary and the Assistant were committed to the principle of worker control and saw the importance of engaging in struggle.

Unfortunately, the problem that we have is that many of our secretaries in their day-to-day work are more like administrators than people who can sit down, debate, do research and develop policy papers for discussion - which then can be policy for the union. I think that is the weakness that we have in SAMWU. I don't think that Roger enjoys being the General Secretary of SAMWU... I don't think the other Secretary enjoys it. They are more involved in administration, they never have time to concentrate on developing policy . There is never the time. .... still we are fortunate that we have comrades that are committed to the rank and file struggles and day-to-day service.

**Victor, Gauteng Regional Secretary, Interview, 2/9/97**

The analysis was extremely problematic for SAMWU. Although the full-time officials constituted a distinct stratum of union leadership, whose job it was to ensure proper co-ordination and efficient administration, in South Africa their's had always been an overtly political role. Not only had this role been associated with leading the struggles

against management, but also included expounding the opposition to the apartheid system. In the process, it was widely acknowledged that the leadership should be personally accountable to the rank-and-file membership, and their activities conducted within the principles of democracy and accountability (Baskin, 1991).

Yet, in 1997 the increasing complexities of the new issues confronting SAMWU appeared to be putting a strain on the leadership. In particular, the determined attempt on the part of government to incorporate trade union leaders - via the LRA (1995) - into the state structure, was forcing those interviewed in 1997 to question the new objective of the SAMWU leadership. One full-time official who was re-evaluating his role in the new South Africa, explained...

Our role has changed with the local government transition.... but can we honestly say we still represent the members on the ground?

**Dennis Ardendise, Full-time Organiser Interview, 21/8/1997**

What the point illustrated was that general aspects of the leadership's work had changed. Union work was no longer simply about membership recruitment, political education and negotiating. Inclusion in the formal institutions of South African industrial relations, now required basic research skills, preparation of detailed proposals, use of computers, and reading of company and government information. Such activities brought risks as well as opportunities - in particular the potential development of a highly skilled and sophisticated official needed to be tempered by the discipline of worker control and clear mandating, especially if the union was to avoid even greater divisions between the leadership and their members (Buhlungu, 1999).

#### Immediate solutions

The leadership were aware of the dangers of increased bureaucracy and concentration of power. Consequently - as result of the work of the 1994 Forum - SAMWU adopted a new constitution in 1997. The document replaced the National Executive by a Central Executive Committee (CEC). This was a new body whose aim was to reduce the bureaucracy of the leadership's meetings and activities and provide a platform for more open and vigorous debates. The National Co-ordinating Committees which originally co-ordinated much of this work was disbanded in an attempt to reduce administration. The work was to be now carried out by the National Office Bearers (NOBs) who were to

continue meeting on a regular basis, but take time to visit the regions and branches (SAMWU Congress Report: Organisational Issues, 1997a).

In order to reduce the administrative burden on the leadership further it was decided to re-introduce the post of an Administrative Secretary - a position that had previously been approved but never filled. In addition, to prevent the concentration of power into the hands of a few, the role of Assistant General Secretary was to be shared. Consequently, the new Constitution made provision for six and not five (as was previously the case) National Office Bearers (NOBs), two of whom were to now be called first and second vice-presidents (SAMWU Congress Report: Organisational Issues, 1997a; SAMWU Workers News, 1997g)

It was questionable whether this new constitution could stem the drift towards fixed bureaucratic control and authority. - especially as such changes appeared to increase, not lessen the number of leaders at the national level. Nevertheless the full-time officers and some shop stewards expressed confidence in the constitution's ability to tackle this problem and supported - as part of this process - the leadership's attempts to review the union's national support structures and services (SAMWU Congress, Report: Organisational Issues, 1997a).

## **12.5 NATIONAL STRUCTURE AND SERVICES**

From 1995-1997 a question mark also hung over the union's actual internal capacity to deliver many of its highly publicised initiatives. There was a fear that lack of resources and inefficient support structures from the centre may be leading to membership dissatisfaction and decline. This point was made by a former Cape Town shop steward, who felt the union had to change if it was to continue meeting the needs of its members - however, he saw its capacity to do so, being seriously hampered by a lack of resources and services.

a real adjustment must happen....because of the capacity and the resources that they have they find it very difficult to interact with the workers in the way they used to. I think that the trade union situation is changing very rapidly

**Hennie, ex-shopsteward and ANC Counsellor, Interview, 24/8/97**

At the 1997 SAMWU congress, the issue of adequate services for members was discussed. The debate centred on the need for the national union to respond more efficiently to membership demands, with the 'services' described by a number of delegates as an essential backbone to the union - one that retained members.

In fairness to the leadership, a review of the services available to members, even before the national congress, had already been taking place at the national level (Roger Ronnie -Interview, 20/8/97). Several areas were identified as needing attention. They included: the staffing of the union; the organisation of the national finances, the education of members and stewards, publicity and communication, and the general benefits for members.

### 12.5.1 Staffing of the union:

Although, full-time staff (this includes general secretaries, regional secretaries, organisers - plus the support staff such as clerks administrations, researchers and legal officers etc.) had continued to grow throughout this period, the national union was still said to be under-resourced and not really meeting the needs of the members.

**Table 12.4**  
**SAMWU STAFF PROFILE IN RELATION TO TOTAL MEMBERSHIP**

Year	Total staff	Total members	Staff as a % of Members	Ratio of staff :members
1988	10	23638	0.04%	1:2364
1989	17	29529	0.06	1:1734
1990	38	59014	0.06%	1:1553
1991	54	67178	0.08%	1:1244
1992	76	69156	0.11	1:910
1993	81	73342	0.11	1:905
1994	103	100410	0.10%	1:975(1994 onwards is uneven)
1995	107	110032	0.10	1:1028
1996	129	113056	0.11	1:876
1997	131	120109	0.11	1:917

Source: SAMWU Congress Report: Organisational Issues, 1997a

This perception was not an illusion, in reality the complement of staff had not really increased as a percentage of the membership for several years: in 1997 it remained, as

in 1992 at 0.11% . Some of the posts were proving extremely difficult to fill with remuneration being identified as the key factor. It was therefore little wonder that staff morale and working conditions had been identified as an area of discontent (SAMWU Congress Report: Organisational Issues, 1997a).

The leadership also identified a definite distinction between those full-timers who were associated with - what was described as - `real' trade union work, and those designated as administrative or support roles.

**Table 12.5**  
**STAFF DESIGNATIONS AS AT SEPT. 1997**

Designation:	Total
General Regional & Branch Secretary.	18
Administrators	41
Organisers	46
Specialist Posts(including Education Officers)	17
Maintenance/Security	6

Source: SAMWU Congress Report: Organisational Issues, 1997a

A review of the staff complement revealed that the bulk of women were employed in administrative positions. Consequently, it was suggested that a quota system be adopted with adequate monitoring mechanisms set up to ensure the employment of a greater number of women as organisers. The move was associated with the fact that the work of administration was now to be viewed as equally important as the work of trade union organisers. It was recommended that the administrative staff - the majority of whom were women - should be integrated into broader trade union work and be treated on an equal footing with organisers (SAMWU Congress Report: Organisation Issues Report, 1997a; SAMWU Worker News, 1997f).

The lack of administration skills throughout the union offices was identified as a further problem - the fact that it could sometimes take a day to locate a document was identified as an area of great concern. Here the Secretariat proposed that all responsibilities relating to the internal administration now be delegated to a newly designed administrator post. The administrator would have the responsibility for all internal administrative issues including functioning of the office and responsibility over

all administrative staff. This post was to be duplicated in the Regional offices. The administrative problems especially highlighted the need to upgrade the skill of the existing staff. Training and the use of the COSATU's national training centre, DITSELA was recommended (SAMWU Congress Report: Organizational Issues, 1997a).

The Union also reviewed the employment practices overall - a task that had not be carried out since the launching of the Union in 1987. There was a recommendation to move towards a more flexible approach to appointments in an effort to attract skilled labour. The process included proposals for skills development and a re-grading of staff to allow them to specialise in various fields. In conclusion the leadership recognised that they needed to equip their officers and employees better to meet the new challenges. It was suggested that sufficient funds be set aside for such purpose and the education department take a more proactive role (Congress Report: Organisation Issues, 1997a).

### **12.5.2 Finance**

The finances of the union also came under closer scrutiny during this period. The union had changed considerably since 1992, when most of the work had been devolved down to the individual branches and carried out by the local full-time organisers and branch secretaries. During the apartheid era the main pre-occupation had been raising money from overseas organisations to help build the union and the fight against apartheid. The nature of their activities - which usually encompassed some form of industrial action - meant it was not uncommon for local branches to exhaust their funds, making the accumulation of sufficient monies to support long-term strategies, impossible (SAMWU Congress Report: Organizational Issues, 1997a).

Now with the end of apartheid and luxury of increased membership and subscriptions financial solvency had become an organizational objective. Consequently, there was an inexorable trend towards centralisation of financial control, which extended to central co-ordination and policy. The area of responsibility now covered such aspects as the preparation of financial statements, staff issues, disbursements to regions, managing equipment and office leases and the settlement of accounts. Although, the department now had a permanent staff complement of three - inclusive of the Departmental Head - the work was still described as arduous, but increasingly important. (SAMWU Congress Report: Organizational Issues, 1997a).

However, there was always the probability - as with any expanding trade union - that the pursuit of financial solvency and strength would become a fixation, an end in itself. Consequently, in an attempt to co-ordinate, yet disseminate some of its power, the department under the guidance of the national treasurer, held workshops in the regions. The aim was two-fold - to develop financial expertise within the regions and also ensure compatible systems were being used throughout the union. The task was crucial because despite the centralisation of its finances, the national union still relied heavily on information received from the regions. Unfortunately the lack of co-ordination meant the information - even after the workshops - were still not forthcoming (SAMWU Congress Report: Organisational Issues, 1997a). Whether, the regions were incapable of administering these systems or simply wanted to retain some of its control, is open to speculation.

### **12.5.3 Education**

Education was a further area of concern. Education was pivotal in the development of the union and with the expansion of employment rights - courtesy of the LRA - its function was set to increase. The department in 1997 was headed by the National Education Officer and now had a staff of four - including an administrator and Media Officer. This department had been seen by the leadership as responding to many of the challenges effecting the union. The fact that the Union has been able to mount effective responses on a number of fronts - such as the establishment of a national bargaining council, staffing proposals and local government restructuring, and co-ordinating the training of Shop stewards around the LRA - was seen as evidence of this (SAMWU Congress Report: Secretariats Report, 1997c).

But, despite such praise, problems were noted with regard - once again - to the centralised nature of the department and its inability to service the regions. It was suggested by the leadership that much greater thought was needed to develop a more structured link between education and the overall organising strategy of the union. The solution was to decentralise some of the work and resources of this department to the regions, so they would have the capacity to deliver their own training more efficiently (SAMWU Congress: Organisational Report, SAMWU 1997a).

#### 12.5.4 Media Unit

One area the leadership did express satisfaction with was the new Media Unit. Increased publicity and communication was seen as one of the greatest accomplishments during 1996, . The setting up of a media unit - one of the long term objective of the union - was finally achieved. The union had initially received donor funding to establish the department, and following the appointment of a new Media Officer two initiatives were implemented, the union magazine and the SAMWU website. Not only were these projects designed to keep the members better informed, but more importantly were to become a focus for the unions' anti-privatisation work, providing them with both national and international recognition in this area (SAMWU Congress Report: Organisational Issues, 1997a).

#### 12.5.5 Servicing Department

Ultimately though, it was the servicing department which caused most concern. During this period, it was reorganised and sub-divided into three units: the Legal Unit, Membership Unit, Health, Safety and Environment Unit and the Collective Bargaining Unit. Each unit has a co-ordinator who was responsible for researching, co-ordinating, planning and implementing agreed programmes. The overall co-ordinator, both administratively and politically of this department, was initially the Assistant General Secretary (soon to be renamed Vice President), but in May 1997 after the appointment of an administrative co-ordinator, only the political side remained with the Assistant General Secretary. In 1997 there were three unit co-ordinators and two administrators, but the post for collective bargaining unit proved difficult to fill (SAMWU Congress Report: Organisational Issues, 1997a).

Changes were instigated within all the units. But co-ordination between the national and regional co-ordination levels remained problematic. *The legal Unit* had been reported as failing to play a proactive role in integrating legal matters in the organisational activities of the union. The leadership had previously suggested in 1995, that the unit should develop a framework to integrate the work at regional and national level. But by September 1997 the system was still not working properly. The unit was allowing itself to be drawn into local disputes and problems without really having an intimate understanding of the issues involved (SAMWU Congress Report: Organisational Issues, 1997a).

The *Collective Bargaining Unit* presented a further problem. In 1995, the main campaign unit was challenging the employers to comply with the provisions of the LRA in respect of the disclosure of information by employers. Progress overall, was slow - partly because a vacancy existed to co-ordinate this department, but mainly because the employers despite the provisions of the LRA, remained reluctant to provide information to the unions.

With regard to the *membership unit*, SAMWU had been participating in a pilot project with COSATU since 1994. The original intention of the project, was to provide a generic Membership Tracking System common to all COSATU affiliates. However, the scheme was eventually abandoned leaving SAMWU as the only participant. Consequently, the entire membership system was re-located from the COSATU Head Office in Johannesburg to the SAMWU Head Office. But, although this included a Computer Programmer (a post secured through donor funding from Germany), the union still had difficulties securing reliable data, from its regions and branches.

A particularly important campaign was launched during this period - 'the Total Workforce Campaign' - the aim was to monitor the number of SAMWU members in relation to the total workforce within Local Government. This was to give some indication as to the thresholds of representation per workplace as contained in the Labour Relations Act. The priority goal of this campaign was to ensure that SAMWU secured the majority membership in all Local Authorities. However once again problems were experienced at the regional level, with many failing to provide the necessary information (SAMWU Congress Report: Organisational Issues, 1997a).

Between 1995-7 the union had - in contrast to the 1992-4 period - developed a more sophisticated national structure. The embryo of a truly national union was - although somewhat haphazardly - beginning to evolve, with clear evidence to support the existence of a macro trade union structure, capable of providing services and support to its members throughout South Africa. Yet, although the national union was developing - and attempts were actively being made to distance it from the purely sectoral interests of the 'coloured' community in Cape Town - the national leadership was still experiencing problems. As, the union expanded in strength and status, difficulties continued to emerge around issues of increased centralisation, professionalization of

leadership functions - and the inability of national services and functions to meet the local needs of its members. As in 1992, the lack of communication and co-ordination between the national, regional and branch levels remained problematic. The next section considers the changing regions and their tensions with the centre.

## 12.6 THE CHANGING REGIONS

By 1997, the role and function of the regions were identified as in need of urgent intervention on the part of the national union. Since 1992, the power of the regions had been uneven, with those located within industrialised areas being stronger than those in the semi-rural areas. Moreover, large branches like Cape Town remained better resourced than most regions. There were now to be nine regions each with full constitutional status - they were to reflect the geographical changes in the country and roughly correspond to the nine provinces (Victor Mhlonga - Gauteng Regional Secretary, Interview Sept, 1997).

Although the national leadership believed the regions had responded well to the programmes of action, especially the anti-privatisation and living wage campaigns, it remained dissatisfied with the levels of accountability to the leadership. The SAMWU Secretariat Report 1997c reported that '(we are) ...at the mercy of regions as they decide what suits them to report and what not to report'.

All areas had experienced some problems and in the case of two regions – KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape - some form of investigation into their activities were necessary. The national leadership claimed that the intervention had been purely as a result of their failure to properly discharge their duties - although it was unfortunate that these actions had been viewed as some sort of witch-hunt against certain individuals (SAMWU Congress Report, Organisational Issues, 1997a).

The main problem was one of co-ordination of systems between the national and regional levels. There was mainly a concern over the activities of the regions especially with their reluctance - or even ability - to use the same systems as the Head Office. The membership and financial units were experiencing particular problems over obtaining information from Regions - many of whom had been charged with the responsibility of obtaining information about members from the employers. Although such information

was difficult to obtain - mainly because the employers lacked reliable information about their own black employees - inefficiency and reluctance to be accountable to head office appeared to be frustrating the problem.

It was hoped that the reorganisation of the central administration would be capable of changing the face of regional offices, especially as the system was to be duplicated in the Provinces. The administrative staff at the regional offices, would now compose of an office administrator, financial administrator, receptionist and loans/benefits administrator. However, problems still prevailed and the centre continued to report that many regions were failing to co-operate enough to make the activity a success (SAMWU Congress Report: Organisational Issues, 1997a).

Part of the problem was clearly linked to resources, in particular, the regions experienced problems in attracting and retaining suitably skilled persons. Remuneration was a key factor - especially as educated black workers could now find work in the more highly paid government or private sector. As one union official explained

In the past people worked for 'the struggle' now they want a profession  
**Victor, Gauteng Regional Secretary, Interview, 2/9/97**

It was indeed true that the end of apartheid meant that many black activists were now free to consider a 'career' rather than a life as an overworked, poorly paid union official. For the first time ever full-time officials were calling for a level of permanence and security in their work. This needed to be accompanied by high wages and fringe benefits if it was to continue attracting the best cadre from the black working classes - a demand the regions were ill-resourced to provide (Interview, Regional Secretary, 2/9/97).

It was also equally true that a number of regions - and even branches - were better resourced than others. Some regions were able to employ more staff - with the Western Cape enjoying the highest number. Yet, this was not necessarily linked to higher levels of efficiency. Gauteng with the lowest ratio of staff to members (1:1,742) was reported as being amongst the most responsive to efforts to achieve national co-ordination and policy. Geographical location was obviously a further consideration, with isolated regions like Northern Province experiencing a number of communication problems.

**Table 12.6**  
**NUMBER OF STAFF TO MEMBERS IN EACH REGION**

Region:	Total staff	Total Members	Ratio of staff to members
Northern Province	5	2732	546
Mpumalanga	5	5398	1,080
North West	5	5231	1,046
Northern Cape	7	3908	558
Free State	7	9861	1,409
Eastern Cape	11	10968	997
Head Office	16		
Kwa Zulu-Natal	18	18110	1,006
Gauteng	22	38334	1,742
W.Cape	27	25567	947

Source: SAMWU Congress Report, Organisational Issues (1997a)

Poor communications meant that in isolated regions, members reported inferior servicing - with their Regional Office Bearers (ROB`s) remaining completely unknown to large numbers of members. Some regions were undoubtedly failing to operate as a collective and were disintegrating into blocks. This meant they were incapable of taking advantage of the benefits of economies of scale, and failed to fully utilise the existing limited resources. Overall all regions were reported as having internal problems that required attention (SAMWU National Congress Report: Organisational Issues, 1997a).

In an attempt to address some of these issues, almost all regional offices were given more resources which included basic office equipment, with at least one computer. It was hoped this would help the regions monitor and measure their own performance. Yet, there still remained a need for regions to be made to comply with existing constitutional requirements, especially those relating to the submission of minutes of Regional Executive Council (REC) meetings, to the General Secretary. Failure to adhere to such requirements was to meet with some form of sanction - perhaps even disciplinary steps against the responsible Regional Office Bearers (ROBs) (SAMWU Congress Report: :Organisation Issues, 1997a).

In general, there appeared a requirement on the part of regions to become much more responsive to the changing union structure and democracy. It was clear that the expansion of the union, coupled with the geographical re-organisation of the country with its emphasis on provinces, was having an effect on the regions. But so too was the gradual centralisation of the union and pressure from the leadership to achieve higher levels of administrative efficiency. The result was their modes of operation, governance and lines of communication needed to undergo a rapid change - but in both cases the regions were either incapable or reluctant to conform to such changes.

Yet, these issues needed to be addressed if the union was to function effectively - it was highly essential to the growth and stability of the union. If the union was going to be able to defeat state policies of privatisation there needed to be a strong feeling of common identity, not just at the centre but at all levels. Failure to win over the support of the regions may well impede any future action taken by the union. Therefore, the task for the union leadership with regard to the regions - was to achieve the goal of efficient organization, whilst ensuring an adequate spread of control and power was operating at all levels. Unfortunately such problems were not solely confined to the regions, the role of the constituent branch - of which Cape Town was a typical example - was also in need of attention.

## **12.7 THE BRANCH - CAPE TOWN**

During this period the Cape Town branch of SAMWU, experienced many changes. Some were linked to the changing role of the branch within the national union - but still others were concerned with the increasing bureaucratisation of its' shop-stewards - the transformation of their skills and duties - and their changing relationship with the rank-and-file membership.

In 1997, the SAMWU leadership recognised a need to change the role and function of the branches within the national structure. In the earlier constitution branches had been practically the same as regions - with city branches like Cape Town being larger than most regions. For historical reasons the Cape Town branch had 'grown up' as an integral part of the union, it had often dominated the structures and policies of the local region and union as a whole. The new constitution was designed to redress this

imbalance - with the Head Office being especially keen to liberate itself from its parochial image of a 'coloured' Cape Town union, the effects of which it feared was threatening national recruitment (SAMWU Congress Report: Organizational Issues, 1997a; SAMWU Workers News, Sept.1997g).

Yet, the branches - not just in Cape Town, but throughout the union - had always played a central role in the development of SAMWU. The branch had traditionally been the formal link between the ordinary members and their union, it had generated and nurtured the rank-and-file democratic movement that had helped defeat the apartheid system. It was the power of this group that had continued to resist the pressures of bureaucratic rationality and collaboration - and it would be the rank-and-file movement, that would be capable of initiating and carrying through strike action against privatisation. (Hinton, 1973; Murray, 1994).

The leadership recognised this fact, and whilst wishing to change the internal structure of the union, wanted still to preserve the valuable function of the branch. As a consequence, the new constitution set up more branches in many new areas - especially the rural areas. There was no longer to be a minimum membership requirement - simply a condition that the branch was close enough for members to travel to and meet easily (SAMWU Congress Report Organizational Report, 1997a; SAMWU Worker's News June,1997g)

This was also to be an attempt to improve the status of rural areas. Where there were too many small branches, more smaller Area Councils - whose job had always been to co-ordinate the work of rural branches - would be created to funnel representation from smaller groups. The overall aim was build on the strength of the branch to 'reach out' and recruit from what was considered the neglected rural areas. More importantly, the democratic functions of the union was to be embellished, with meetings being made more accessible, with more debate and discussion being encouraged at a lower level (SAMWU Congress Report Organizational Report, 1997a; SAMWU Worker's News June,1997g)

### 12.7.1 Branch Shop Stewards

Closely aligned to the democratic role of the branch in SAMWU was the shop stewards' movement. Pityana and Orkin, 1992 claimed there were over twenty-five thousand shop-stewards in COSATU at the beginning of the nineties, despite their numbers having fallen since the election. The involvement of shop-stewards in issues beyond the workplace had always marked the South African steward as distinctive from his or her European counterpart. The movement was also distinguishable from the rest of Africa, in that its struggle against colonial rule involved the mobilisation of grass roots working class movement with a distinct class politics. South African shop stewards were characterised by their power and position, rooted in the workplace and dependent on the continuing support of their members - for many rank-and-file members, especially in the rural areas, their first and only contact with the union was the shop steward (Pityana and Orkin, 1992; Baskin , 1996).

#### Increasing bureaucratisation

As with most shop stewards in South Africa, those in the Cape Town branch still appeared to hold a commitment to worker control and accountability (Interviews, 1997; SAMWU Congress Report, 1997). The role of the steward was essential to this process - but in common with many other unions was changing. The tradition of worker control had been created precisely to diminish the power of full-time officials and prevent them from dominating COSATU structures, but whether this culture would endure, depended on the changes taking place during the period of transformation (Baskin, 1991).

In 1995-7, the democratic accountability of the stewards in the branch appeared to be holding. Cape Town was described by one ex- steward as being more directly democratic than most other unions - especially the other employee organisation in the council - IMATU. There continued to be a tradition of stewards being mandated from the branch and a belief that the union should be controlled by the rank and file membership.

Yes we still have the process of holding meetings which the other union (IMATU) does not... they only circulate people with memos. We have a constitution, meetings where shop stewards have to report back to their constituencies - they have mandated positions. We have our regional executives our branch executives, all those accountability meetings. Our

focus is our organisation should be run by workers and is worker controlled

**Ex- SAMWU Shop Steward, Electrical Dept., 4/9/97**

Yet, despite the evidence of democratic control and procedures, there was still a danger - even in Cape Town - of bureaucrats<sup>44</sup> dominating the branch. Shop-steward organisations are capable of displaying considerable levels of bureaucratisation, especially as management will often permit one or more chief stewards to act as full-time union representatives. As a consequence, the shop stewards are subject to the same institutional pressures - in microcosm - as affects national union officers. Moreover, as there is rarely competition for stewards positions, most are elected unopposed and can begin to enjoy an entrenched position of power which in turn can develop into a highly-bureaucratic shop stewards' organisation (Hyman and Fryer, 1975).

Because of the history and size of the Cape Town branch a number of stewards had consistently been full-time officials, either paid by the employer or the union itself. The Council had for a many years given shop stewards time-off facilities. Most of these stewards obviously came from the ranks of the active membership. It was often common practice for aspiring unionists to volunteer their services free of charge and then, when a vacancy appeared (with the endorsement of the branch), move into paid employment. Yet, there was a concern on the part of one retired member, that such a tendency would intensify in the post-apartheid period and would be accompanied by greater levels of bureaucracy and formalisation.

Now the stewards have moved into a much higher level... it's more professional than it used to be..I mean most of these shop stewards are daily in meetings It never used to be like this.

**Hennie, ex-Cape Town shop steward, 24/8/97.**

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<sup>44</sup> In this case, the bureaucrat is defined as a full-time official, often separated in life-style from those they represent. As trade union organizations grow, the leadership and authority of bureaucrats becomes increasingly centralised, enabling them to initiate actions not approved of by the majority of members. Equally, Michels (1962) commented on the conservative tendencies of bureaucratic organisations: administrations that tended to become ends in themselves rather than means to achieve the known ends of the membership

Yet, this did not mean that stewards could be entirely complacent in their new positions. In 1997, the branch had experienced problems with time-off arrangements, with the council claiming that all stewards should henceforth apply on a month-to month basis for time-off facilities. The union threatened to withdraw from all negotiations and called on its members to demonstrate on the night of the celebrations, for the bid for the Olympics in Cape Town. The council finally backed down and reinstated their rights for time-off facilities.

'We said we would withdraw from negotiations in the council..they can't operate without us...we also threatened to march on Friday, on eve of the Olympics bid. They immediately phoned the top people and met with us at 4 p.m that day. They gave us time-off rights on the same basis until we can agree proper time-off agreements

**Arthur Fillies, Maintenance Worker, 6/9/97**

Crucially, what the whole episode did serve to show was the stewards time-off facilities was not simply a product of management's goodwill. Moreover, the stewards' confidence that their members would support them in their fight to retain such facilities, indicated an active level of association with their members in the workplace.

However, the leadership nationally continued to express concern over the number of full-time posts being created, and in 1997, there was a general question over whether office bearers at all levels needed to be full-time. There was a suggestion that there should be a cut-off point, with only the chairperson and treasurer of all branches and regions being considered for full time shop stewards status (SAMWU Congress Report :Organisational Issues, 1997a).

#### Changing role of the branch shopsteward

In the post-apartheid era the role of the branch shopsteward appeared to be changing. Many branch stewards had been politicised by their involvement in the liberation struggle in a white dominated economy. Unlike their counterparts elsewhere, they had political roles imposed on them by the specific historical circumstances in South Africa. Because of their strong shop-floor base and their active community involvement, shop-stewards were the most organised cadres of the liberation movement (Piriyana and Orkin, 1992). Yet, it was equally true that the increasing formalisation of the industrial relations system in the 1995-7 period was putting strains on their role.

With the advent of a new legislation, conciliation rather than conflict appeared to be what the new black government and trade union leadership wanted. Thus the position facing many shop stewards at the branch level was highly strained. The role model now being 'handed down' by their federation COSATU was a new type of workplace representative, more sophisticated, highly trained and equipped to cope with negotiating new management practices whilst meeting the needs of a potentially changing workforce (Catchpowle *et al*, 1998).

Whether this sophistication and training had reached down to the level of the branches, was open to debate. In contrast to full-time officials, shop stewards in SAMWU spent most of their time on the shopfloor with the result that they had very little time to devote their attention to union business and administration. In addition, most of them had neither the specialist skills, knowledge nor public profile to match the full-time union official. Training and education was obviously desperately needed - especially around the 1995 Labour Relations Act - but as one organiser stressed the lack of funding meant the whole exercise was inadequate.

We've gone through and emphasised just how important the LRA is...we get outside speakers...but the follow-up is difficult..funding is a problem...we need to empower people on a regular basis  
**Dennis, Organiser, interview 21/8/97**

The actual organisation of training courses was also problematic for the Cape Town branch. Although all stewards had a right to time-off under the LRA, it was the cost of travel to the workshops that was particularly restrictive - especially for stewards from the rural areas, covered by the branch<sup>45</sup>. The lack of transport made organising one-day workshops during the week too expensive, far better to organise a more cost-effective weekend workshops, where the taxi's (mini-buses used as the main mode of transport in Africa) could be hired and the cost of travel shared and halved. The full-time organiser (Dennis) explained....

the problem we have encountered with training is money. The time-off is not a problem, but we still need money for transport, especially with people travelling from the rural areas. As I say, loss of pay is not a problem because we negotiate time-off for people but really we have to take a weekend, a Saturday or Sunday ....if we take it in the working

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<sup>45</sup> C.C.C - new structure left the old CCC virtually in tact and continued to cover some rural areas

five day period, it has to be done for one day on a continuous basis, and that makes travel expensive.

**Interview, 21/8/97**

Despite the time-off arrangements the work remained arduous, mainly because the stewards were traditionally active in both their branch in Cape Town, and the union generally - one SAMWU organiser reported being over-burdened and possibly having to resign in a few years time because of the pressure of work.

I'm full time now, paid by the union, 10 years now with SAMWU I used to work for council for 16 and half years To be quite honest I gave myself another 7 years in the trade union movement....it is the strain of being full-time

**Dennis, full-time organiser, 21/8/97**

What had become abundantly clear, was many of the branch stewards were becoming overwhelmed by the sheer variety of issues they had to address in the 'New' South Africa. Whereas, the previous trade union education had concentrated on socialism and the struggle for black power, there was now a shift to a need for more basic skills training with a legalistic underpinning. In actual fact, the Labour Relations Act (LRA) provided for a statutory right to be consulted on a whole range of issues, and there was a general union concern over whether most stewards could cope (Catchpole *et al.*, 1998). Of even greater distress to the branch was the realisation that the stewards inability to manage was possibly having an adverse affect on the branch's relationship with its membership (Cape Town, steward - Arthur Fillies Interview, 16/9/97).

### **12.7.2 Servicing the local membership**

For many members, the local shop steward is the union. By definition the steward is chosen by his or her fellow-workers because s/he is trusted and perceived to be the best person to represent their interests in negotiation with management (Hyman & Fryer, 1975). However, concerns expressed by stewards and members interviewed in 1997, seemed to indicate a level of dissatisfaction with the service the membership were receiving from their representatives. Lack of communication appeared to be the main factor that was affecting the branch, especially as council officials were known to **deliberately** misreport information, one steward explained.....

It is a worrying factor... we must just inform our members of every development because there are so many rumours of packages..there is a lot of mis-information to workers and deliberate confusion, especially from the council officials.. they`re trying to make our people despondent. In some incidents they tell the members .... `no your steward has made the deal, no your steward has made certain agreements' ....they lie there is no agreement....

**Arthur, interview, 6/9/97.**

Some members complained that the union was no longer defending their interests. Whereas, the employers were seen as being ready to employ aggressive tactics in order to control and reduce the number of workers, the branch was described as becoming weak and neglecting the membership....

During apartheid when the country was N.P controlled, the union was very strong, they cared very much for us and defended us, but now they don`t defend us . People are being disciplined and they do nothing. They just get sacked.... this is the way they reduce the labour.

**Marcel, Interview, 5/9/97**

The issue was particularly crucial in Cape Town, where the union, IMATU (previously, a `whites only' staff Association -SAAME) had reconstituted itself as an `open' union, and was attempting to poach existing SAMWU workers, with offers of a better service and representation. One full-time Organiser, explained how the Cape Town branch was finding this extremely difficult....

To us it is a problem. It is power-playing with other unions now in a local government. Specifically with IMATU - that used to be SAAME - they used to only recruit members from certain categories but since they have been `open', they recruit people from the labour category. They offer financial benefits and loans....

**Dennis, SAMWU organiser, 12/8/97**

This problem did not appear to be solely confined to Cape Town - throughout the labour movement, trade unions were being compelled by their membership to deliver more and better individual services and benefits - with financial services being seen as essential. Whether, this represented a shift towards a more business style of unionism in South Africa, seemed unlikely - especially given the complex issues surrounding the

provision of such benefits. In general, because of the lack of welfare support provided by the state to black workers, the members had always relied heavily on the financial support provided by the union, and had traditionally seen it as part of its role. The General Secretary Roger Ronnie supported this point...

Research has shown that some of the workers focus on financial aspects, benefits, loans, any fringe benefits. The perception of the members is that unions should look after them in terms of benefits.

**Interview, 20/8/97**

In 1996, as part of its drive to attract members the branches were instructed to publicize this role. By mid-1997 Cape Town was able to provide a number of benefits for their members, chief amongst these was the national loan scheme, now initiated through an agreement with the South African bank, Unibank. Other benefits included the funeral scheme and the National Provident Fund - which was seen as filling a large gap in the retirement needs of members. Benefits, such as the credit unions, medical benefits and short term Insurance were also being considered for the future (SAMWU Congress Report, 1997a).

Nonetheless, as in 1992-4, such schemes were not without their problems, they continued to be fraught with difficulties, due to the lack of administration and experience within the branches to manage such ventures and deals with commercial bodies. Further problems focused on the lack of centralised co-ordination and the poor monitoring of the accounting systems, payment of claims and limiting of fraud cases. But perhaps the greatest dilemma concerned the ethics of SAMWU's involvement in the management of commercial ventures (SAMWU Congress Report, Organisational Issues, 1997a).

At the 1997 Congress, despite a recognition of the need to provide benefits, some of the delegates expressed unease at the direction in which the union was progressing. Generally they believed there was a potential for a conflict of interests, between the union's stated vision of socialism and the active promotion of schemes - which in the case of some financial loan companies used - prioritised the opposite. Although acknowledging the point the General Secretary, Roger Ronnie (Interview, 20/8/97), saw very little alternative - many of the members were poor and relied on such benefits, particularly loans. Moreover, since other unions were actively using these benefits to recruit members, SAMWU, whatever its political views, was forced to do likewise

The hallmark of Black South African unions was their emphasis on strong local structures directly accountable to the rank-and-file membership. Such forums had become powerful forces for worker organisation and discussion and had helped to bring about change in the political and economic complexion of country (Kraak, 1993). The SAMWU leadership had recognised the importance of these forums and had - from the beginning - made constitutional provision for this tier of democracy, by emphasising the right of decision-making at a local level. However, the general growth and legitimisation of the union, appeared to be necessitating a need for change in the structure and role of the branches. Consequently, the national leadership - although anxious to preserve the effectiveness of existing city branches, like Cape Town - had instigated a change in the constitution of the union aimed at increasing the number, size and strength of the rural branches.

Traditionally, the shop-stewards were an integral part of the branch and local democracy. The scope for direct participation and control by the rank-and-file depended for a large part on the effectiveness of the shopstewards - their experience of the organisation and the structures which they had painstakingly built at a local level placed them in a strong position (Kraak, 1993). But, such a history did not prevent the leadership from expressing concern over union's increasing levels of bureaucratisation, and its' failure to cope with the demands of the new Labour Relations Act (1995).

Closely aligned to this concern was the possible changing needs of the rank-and-file membership, and the accusation that the branch and its steward's - in Cape Town at least - were failing to fully represent the member's interests. Yet, where it may be true that members increasingly expected - in the absence of state support - their unions to provide individual services and benefits, this demand was not new and could not entirely account for levels of dissatisfaction expressed by members in the branch (interviews 1997). Perhaps a more convincing explanation for member's discontent and apathy could be found in the increasingly levels of formalisation in South African industrial relations, and the development of a more bureaucratic shop-stewards organisation in branches like Cape Town. Especially as the expanding workload was generating very little competition for steward's positions.

## 12.8 CONCLUSION

By 1997, despite tremendous progress, several internal organisational problems existed - some linked to the inability to recruit further from an already exhausted section of the local government labour market - but others due to a lack of cohesion between the Head Office, its regions and branches. Many of the difficulties were clearly the result of changes in the local government structure, where local provinces and authorities had changed suddenly. Other problems stemmed from the increased bureaucracy and formalisation of the South African Industrial Relations system.

### Size and membership

SAMWU remained a predominately black, municipal workers union, and as a consequence was unlikely to grow in the immediate future. The tendency towards sectionalism was even more pronounced in Cape Town, where 'coloured' workers were in danger of defining their interests primarily in narrow sectional terms, within the council. This issue was in urgent need of attention. Failure to recruit different groups, or even build closer alliances with other unions, would mean the branch may succeed in obtaining improvements in relation to other groups, but the division and disunity at a broader collective level could weaken its power to stop state privatisation of local government (Hyman and Fryer, 1975).

Whether such sectionalism could be overcome, was at this stage debatable. If the branch could manage - as it had done in the past - to rise above its own sectional interests and make the links with the rest of the union and black workers nationally, it might be possible to undermine the divisive elements of the existing labour market. As a consequence it might then be plausible to continue - even after apartheid - to generate a working class consciousness and solidarity, sensitive to the broader interests and problems of the class as a whole (Hyman and Fryer, 1975). Such a stronghold of unionism isolated from the divisions of the broader labour market may well then have the power to frustrate the state's overall plans to privatise the public sector.

## Lack of cohesion between national, region and branch levels

Yet, the lack of cohesion between the different levels of the union, had the potential to hinder these efforts. The problem was partly a result of the union's increased growth and maturity - with its inevitable centralisation and formality threatening to undermine local control and democracy. An immediate solution - other than a new constitution and more decentralised power, was not really forthcoming, partly as Hyman and Fryer(1975) explains, there can be no satisfactory solution to the perennial problem of combining participatory democracy with large-scale and efficient trade union organisation.

Nevertheless, some solutions needed to be found - especially at the regional level where the pressure from the leadership to achieve higher levels of administrative proficiency was causing dissent. Many of the problems were associated with their changing focus, increased responsibility, and lack of administrative efficiency - with most Regional offices simply not equipped to respond fully to the expanding needs of members. The delegation of responsibilities was a major problem, with the regional secretary being given all responsibilities, including political oversight of the region. At the centre of this issue was the demand for more decentralisation and the need to ensure that regions were better able to service the branches and deal with problems on their own (SAMWU Congress Report, Organisational Issues:1997a).

The solution to this problem was even more critical at the branch level, where accusations of increased bureaucracy, lack of competency and failure to represent members' interests, were gaining momentum in Cape Town. With government encouragement, the branch and its shopfloor representatives had been incorporated into the bargaining structure by the development of formal industrial procedures, contained within the LRA (1996). The changes were designed to bring about a more direct, yet legitimate participation of local membership in central decision-making. In reality, there was a greater possibility that the institutionalisation of the shopsteward's system would simply result in the integration of labour into the existing formal structure of industrial relations, at the expense of taking action. As a consequence, the branch's exclusive focus on the immediate institutions and processes of industrial relations might ultimately serve to neglect the wider concerns of its members - especially those centred around privatisation and deregulation of local services and labour (Goldthorpe, 1974)

Therefore, in 1995-7 the size, membership and internal organisation of SAMWU was in a state of transformation. It was a transformation that needed careful monitoring, if the union was to resist detracting from its prime goal of fighting privatisation, and even longer-term goal of struggling for a socialist society. A clear indication of the likelihood of SAMWU abandoning these goals was impossible at this stage, especially as the relative strength of conservative tendencies and the opposing pressures that govern such decisions, tends to vary between unions, and are usually circumstantially determined. But, what was equally meaningless was to study - at any stage - SAMWU's internal organisation in isolation of other environmental factors, especially as such an approach tends to tear the analysis of the 'formal organization' from its social context. In truth, to provide any real understanding of the union's future strategies and ideologies, it was essential to examine the totality of its activities and institutions, within which its` collective forces interact. It is for that reason that chapter 13 concentrates on the external activities of the branch

# CHAPTER 13

## UNION ACTIVITIES

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### 13.1 INTRODUCTION

In 1997 SAMWU had two stated objectives, to eradicate the low wages and poor working conditions of its members, and to prevent public sector privatisation. The success of such campaigns rested not only, on the union leaderships ability to develop a more effective internal organisation, but also on the types of external activities it chose to engage in. As a consequence the utilisation of the `new' formal industrial relations machinery and the continued use of industrial resistance was of interest..

The types of activities that trade unions generally adopt, largely reflects their ambiguous position in bourgeois civil society. As an organisation they function to preserve the existing system, whilst concurrently providing an arena for struggle and the growth of class-consciousness (Boggs, 1975) - in this SAMWU was no exception. It may have increased its institutionalisation and incorporation into the new industrial relation system by employing tactics of compromise and conciliation, but simultaneously it exhibited characteristics of strife and conflict by leading the call for industrial action against privatisation. However, the activities which the union would eventually prioritise would largely be influenced by the attitudes and experiences of its membership - which in turn would be a reflection of the workers` ideology and levels of class consciousness. In the case of the municipal workers in Cape Town, the types of action the membership would engage in, would be directly linked to their leadership, levels of organisation and the extent of collective solidarity.

The next section explores these issues further. It examines the formal conciliatory activities of SAMWU, the deregulation and privatisation of local government and Cape Town, and finally the conflictual activities employed during this period to improve pay and conditions, and resist free market changes. The aim is to consider the contradictory role of trade unions in bourgeois civil society, and its part in achieving

what had transpired as SAMWU's twin goals of eradicating the apartheid wage gap, and fighting privatisation

## **13.2 FORMAL CONCILIATORY ACTIVITIES**

In the post-apartheid era, the ANC government had assumed a policy of collaboration with trade unions leaders, as a means of procuring their voluntary compliance. In 1995 - partly as an incentive for further co-operation - the government passed a substantial body of legislation supportive of trade unionism, generally. The changes had a significant impact on the public sector, where unions like SAMWU found their new rights in the workplace broadened extensively their presence in industrial relations.

The aim of the Labour Relations Act (1995) - which became law in 1996 - was to stimulate the development of formal trade union structures, with union officialdom assuming an increasingly collaborative role with government and employers at a central level. The Act legitimised the trade union position in the workplace and provided for trade union representatives to enter employer premises for the purposes of recruiting, communicating with, and giving support to their members. Employers were encouraged - although not ultimately required - to engage in collective bargaining where unions were registered, and could demonstrate they were "representative" of the workforce. Shop stewards were given a right of representation and subject to 'reasonable conditions', time off work with pay in order to fulfil responsibilities and to receive training. The number of shop stewards were not to be left to employer discretion but set out in accordance to a scale ranging from one representative for a workplace with ten employees, to 12 shop stewards for a workplace with one thousand employees - and one additional representative for every extra 500 employees, with a maximum of 20 stewards. The Act further provided for disclosure of information to shop stewards and to trade union officials, where the union had majority representation within a workplace (IDS, 1997, pp. 42-85.)

The 1995 Labour Relations Act also gave trade union representatives the power to trigger the creation of a workplace forum. This body was intended to democratise the workplace and to encourage co-operative and participation rather than adversarial workplace relations, an ambitious proposition in light of the historical legacy of

apartheid. The forums were an addition rather than an alternative to collective bargaining. Where a forum was established an employer had a statutory obligation to consult on a wide range of non-wage issues ranging from workplace restructuring, through to issues such as work organisation, plant closures, transfer of ownership, redundancies, job grading and affirmative actions (IDS, 1997 pp. 6-69).

Such rights obviously increased the extent of SAMWU's formal activities and power, whilst providing it with the potential to contribute to the re-design and management of work. But, conversely it also raised the question of whether the union's leaders would be incorporated into the control structure, and - in the process - used to contain any working-class resistance to government's policies, like privatisation. This question is explored further within the context of SAMWU's and Cape Town's involvement in the formal industrial relations system. Particular attention is given to its use of NEDLAC (tri-partite body for negotiation and consultation between the unions, employers and government, at a national level), the local works forums, and collective bargaining structures - the main conciliatory platforms available to SAMWU, during this period.

### **13.2.1 NEDLAC and Works Forums**

As an affiliate of COSATU, SAMWU now enjoyed representation at the national level via NEDLAC. The National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC), launched on 18/2/95, was a multi-partite body, combining representatives from organised business, labour, government and development bodies. NEDLAC contained four chambers: Trade and Industry, Development, Public Finance and Monetary Policy, and Labour Market. Its purpose was to seek consensus and make agreements on broad issues of economic policy (IDS, 1997, p48).

SAMWU's attitude to this level of representation was unclear. Although, it appeared to be cautious about NEDLAC, choosing to view it as a mere extension of the collective bargaining process and opposing any process towards institutionalised co-determination - it took a decision during the 1996-7 period to become more meaningfully involved in its proceedings. Nevertheless, its participation continued to be largely erratic, with no official being identified or integrated into the mechanism. The lack of clarity of the link between NEDLAC and the union's general bargaining strategy was identified as a reason, with SAMWU calling upon COSATU to see it only as terrain

of struggle. Overall, there appeared to be a confusion in SAMWU - and also many of the unions - over whether its function was for 'real' constitutionalisation of labour, or to be intended as an advisory forum. The union's main view was that COSATU should not take co-responsibility for managing a capitalist economy in crisis (Barchicesi, 1999; SAMWU Congress Report: Socio-economic Issues, 1997b)

SAMWU also demonstrated similar misgivings about the local workplace forums. South Africa's forums were partially inspired by the German and Swedish experiences. The forums attempted to institutionalise a consultative role at the workplace, making provision for the representative trade union, whilst remaining alongside a centralised bargaining structure (Matthews, 1995a; Wood and Mahabir, 2001). In 1996, there was a major shift in SAMWU policy - when the union conceded that most of the bargaining, outside of formal pay and conditions, might conceivably take place in the workplace forums. Nevertheless, the union continued to express concern over the dangers of taking joint responsibility for management decision-making. Further fears centred around the threat of co-option of worker leaders and the possibility of deflecting the militancy of workers. In the end, SAMWU's position on workplace forums was that they wanted a thorough review of how these bodies could be effectively used with management - but in the meantime would not be initiating them in workplaces where the union enjoyed the majority membership (SAMWU: Policy Conference, 1996).

Overall, SAMWU appeared to demonstrate a element of caution towards the institutions of NEDLAC and the Workers Forums. In particular, the General Secretary expressed a lack of confidence in the nature of the reforms and the people involved. With regard to NEDLAC, he remained troubled that labour might be forced to accept responsibility for a system they did not control. Moreover, such ambivalence was made worse by his general mistrust of the government ministers involved

Its quite frightening, the arrogance of some ministers , and how rapidly they've swung. Take Vali Wosa who came up through the ranks of the UDF, totally familiar with the struggle but now takes a completely pragmatic approach to the politics. Its frightening.

**Roger Ronnie, General Secretary, Interview , 20/8/97.**

In Cape Town too, there appeared to be very little direct evidence of enthusiasm for the new partnership initiatives of NEDLAC or the Workers Forums. Stewards interviewed

saw little possibility of conciliatory relations developing in the council, and continued to express contempt for management (interview, 1997) - although one member was adamant that the fault lay with the council officials and not the new government..

this game playing is still going on and once again as I say its not the politicians, its the council officials in those senior positions that are the stumbling blocks

**Marcel, Electrical Depart. Interview 5/9/97.**

Overall, most lay members interviewed were uncertain about the new changes, particularly those concerning the setting up of works forums. One member's reaction - when asked about the new partnership initiatives - was fairly typical..

Well I suppose so, but I don't really know. The Stewards get the training and explain it to us.

**Peter September, Maintenance Worker, interview, 5/9/97**

These views appeared to concur with those held nationally. Throughout the whole of the union movement forums were only operational in a small minority of workplaces - reaching its height in 1998 with only eight forums adopted. Overall there remained a deeply entrenched culture of non-collaboration within the union movement (Wood and Mahabir, 2001). In SAMWU, the use of co-determination institutions was minimal and tended to reflect the concern that such bodies may serve to erode the union's traditional role (Victor, Regional Secretary, interview, 2/9/97).

### **13.2.2 Collective Bargaining**

As a consequence, it was the national and local collective bargaining - incorporated into the formal negotiation process - that attracted SAMWU the most. Such activities presented the union with some of its greatest opportunities, yet equally posed a number of difficulties. The new LRA encouraged collective bargaining in all sections of the public sector by transforming the old industrial councils into bargaining councils. With the proposed reconstitution of the state, the new LRA was to utilise the bargaining council to harmonise and formalise negotiations in all sections. In the public service it

was through the creation of the Central Bargaining Council (CBC), and in local government the National Bargaining Council (NBC).

In September 1997, a national Bargaining Council was concluded at local government level. Unions, represented by SAMWU, NEHAWU, POPCRU and IMATU, and employers, represented by SALGA (South Africa Local government Association), had at last reached an agreement on the constitution for South African Bargaining Council. The agreement provided the union with formal legitimacy, and was viewed by SAMWU as a tremendous victory, especially since it had been one of its long-standing demands. Whereas, the union had previously been forced to struggle for recognition, SAMWU now has a right to negotiate at both local and national levels. One union organiser saw this as signalling a move towards a much higher level of unionisation.

SAMWU was instrumental in that... as far as the local government is concerned we negotiate at all levels; national, local, metropolitan, regional, at all levels...with the national bargaining forum we have moved into a much higher level, a much more professional level than it used to be.

**Dennis, SAMWU organiser, 21/8/97).**

Yet, despite such achievements, the union still reported difficulties, especially as the national bargaining council was only concluded in September 1997. The first challenge to the members of the bargaining council, would be to agree on standard conditions of service for all municipal workers. The main complication lay in deciding a common set of proposals which would incorporate workers employed at all levels - national, provincial, and local. This task was especially difficult for SAMWU, who had never been party to many of previous negotiations which now governed the conditions of service at provincial and national level (SAMWU Congress Report: socio-economic Issues, 1997b).

Collective bargaining was further complicated by the fact that the public sector was in the process of being totally reorganised. As a consequence sections remained fragmented, with the mergers of the public sector unions lagging behind much of the legislation. Already at SAMWU's 1997 national conference, it was reported that there was an element of confusion amongst most of the members and officials. One of the main problems was the fact that SAMWU continued to organise in other sectors which

did not form part of the formal local government sector. This prompted a call for centralised bargaining arrangements to extend to those sectors currently falling outside the jurisdiction of the bargaining council. This was seen as especially crucial for members who were now employed by new water boards where services to local government were being contracted-out or privatised (SAMWU, Congress, Report: Socio-economic Issues, 1997b).

Although the intention was still to merge SAMWU and NEHAWU, and to include POPCRU and SADTU, the rapid growth of public sector trade unionism along with increased collective bargaining rights had increased the complexity of membership for many unions. Consequently, branches were now under pressure to bargain on behalf of a considerably more diverse set of members. Possible solutions have been suggested by NEHAWU, which included unions being responsible at provincial level for organising and transforming all groups, with the responsibility for bargaining being co-ordinated through a newly created Provincial Sector Shopstewards Councils (PSSCs). Central to this structure would be the establishment of provincial sector branches and regions - linked to 'compatible clusters' of industries, which would collapse into broadly defined sectors across the economy (Ray and Adair 1998)

The proposed NEHAWU structure remained confusing and far from satisfactory, with concern over whether the new system would weaken or strengthen the representation. In actual fact, unions with multi-layered constituencies, such as SAMWU and NEHAWU, stood to benefit from such demarcations, whilst unions with craft identities - like SADTU - were disadvantaged (Ray and Adair, 1998)

Wage bargaining - eradication of the apartheid wage gap

Although, SAMWU had managed to secure a centralised bargaining forum, work still remained to be done over job and local government grading. Despite an increase in 'African' employment figures in local government (CSS: PO251, 1994-97), the ethnic, gender and racial composition of staff in local government, still indicated a considerable need for further affirmative action to redress the imbalances created by apartheid. In reality - the previous entrenched divisions within the apartheid labour market made it extremely difficult to ensure that the structural deficiencies would be corrected without a clearly regulated programme of affirmative action (White Paper on Local Government : Discussion Document 1997).

Linked to the racial inequality in employment was the wage gap between different ethnic groups employed in local government. The eradication of the so called 'apartheid wage-gap' continued to be the major battle waged by black public sector unions within this period. For SAMWU, equalising the pay systems became a top priority, with the union concentrating its efforts not only on the wage gap between black and white employees - but also between urban and rural areas .

SAMWU's solution was to devise a long term wage strategy, aimed at eradicating the gap between grades and achieving a 'social' wage. Pay for most manual and clerical workers in the public sector was now to be tightly monitored by regulating collective bargaining at workplace or industry level - via the newly established bargaining councils. The main aim in the post 1994 era was the nation-wide call to bridge the wage disparities between mainly black unskilled and semi-skilled workers, and their white colleagues further up the pay ladder. SAMWU workers constituted more than 70% of the labour force in local authorities, but only made up 30% of the wage bill (SAMWU Worker's News, 1997J; SAMWU Congress Report: Socio-economic issues, 1997b).

In 1995, part of the national strategy was to ensure parity across local authorities. In small municipalities minimum wage was R550 a month compared with R1500 in greater Johannesburg. SAMWU saw the problem as being related to the local government national grading system, which determined local authorities economic status and funding, and consequently its ability to remunerate workers. SAMWU, attempted to utilise the official bargaining machinery at the national level, to push for a review of this procedure.

By 1996, significant improvements had been achieved. SAMWU's involvement in formal negotiations had assisted in achieving a substantial improvement in the minimum wages of municipal workers - a national 'living wage' of R1000 per month was established. Yet the struggle for an acceptable wage was far from over, especially as its application throughout the country was in no way uniform. In some local authorities the minimum wage had not been implemented due to lack of funds, in others - workers were receiving well over R1,500. Moreover, the wage differentials in the public sector continued to remain substantial, with SAMWU workers expressing a general discontent with their overall levels of pay. The source of this displeasure was obvious, especially as the average monthly wage of an unskilled - usually black or 'coloured' - general

assistant was R1,167 (just over £100), while the average senior manager - usually white - earned ten times as much (SAMWU Worker's News 1997h; Standing *et al*, 1996).

In 1997, the struggle for a 'living wage' still continued. Some regions failed to achieve any substantial increases, for example in the Eastern Cape, management were only prepared to offer 2% - which gave workers on the minimum wage a mere R20 (or £2) a month increase. The union's demand had always been that workers who did the same work should receive the same pay, yet there was clear discrimination between, as well as within regions - with those in the rural areas being adversely affected. Nevertheless, despite such weaknesses, SAMWU's involvement in the formal bargaining machinery continued to achieve a general increase in the minimum wage - which was seen as providing a solid base for advancing the campaign to narrow the wage gap and secure a 'living wage' for all municipal workers (SAMWU Worker's News, 1997j).

### **13.2.3 Collective bargaining in Cape Town**

As with the union nationally - the main formal means of communication between management and the unions in Cape Town appeared to be the extension of formal collective bargaining - very little mention was made of workplace forums or other partnership arrangements with management. However, the need to equip stewards to take advantage of the new rights to collective bargaining was voiced as being essential (Interview, Dennis Ardense, SAMWU Organiser, 28/8/97).

Training courses known as 'capacity building programme for negotiators' were introduced to address issues around conditions of service, wage gaps between grades, levels of bargaining, issues to bargain and the newly emerging Agency Shop. Moreover, such training appeared to be achieving results, especially as Cape Town had managed to negotiate one of the highest minimum wages - the new metro minimum was R1850 in 1997. This compared well to many other areas such as KwaZulu-Natal - which achieved only R1,195; and even its own provincial (Western Cape) minimum - which incorporated many of the rural areas - which was R1257 (SAMWU Worker's News, 1997j).

Yet, despite these advances, overall concern was still voiced over the 'difficulties' of negotiating with management locally. One steward explained that, although there had

been improvements in relations, they were - on balance - still experiencing many problems. Chief amongst these was the council officials supposed' lack of authority to make decisions during the negotiating process. One steward replied, when asked whether bargaining relations had improved in the council...

No not really.. there is movement now ... but we still encounter the same problems when we deal with officials. They say they do not have a mandate to negotiate with us ...yet the policy-makers - the councillors - are not attending these meetings. Yet we can only deal with the council officials who don't have any mandated positions ..... its a total waste of tax-payers money and a loss of man hours...The trade union movement have to take a delegation, and the management have to withdraw from their duties - you sit in a meeting for 3 hours and achieve absolutely nothing.

**Arthur, interview 5/9/97**

The stewards also experienced a total disregard on management's part for the provisions of the LRA in respect of the disclosure of information by employers. For example, the local branch was particularly keen to obtain information about private sector involvement in council activities - they believed that private companies were being used to carry out some of the activities previously provided by the public sector, but were unsure.

The problem is the municipalities are not being honest they will not disclose any information about what they are using... you see (we believe) the private companies are just taking over the role of the existing principalities.... we don't know. From a union perspective we are encountering tremendous problems - there are no openers

**Dennis, SAMWU organiser, interview, 21/8/97**

SAMWU's national leadership acknowledged that they would have to take steps to correct this situation - both in Cape Town and elsewhere, generally (Denise Ardense, SAMWU Organiser, Interview, 21/8/97). A campaign to ensure that employers complied with the LRA provisions in respect of the disclosure of information, was viewed as crucial to the union, especially if they were to obtain information to fight privatisation (SAMWU Congress, Report: Secretariat Report, 1997c).

## Pay and conditions 1995 -1997

In Cape Town - the branch achieved a higher than average minimum wage (R1850) in 1997 - but it was still struggling to eliminate the apartheid wage gap in its annual pay claims. Progress was slow with many black and 'coloured' members continuing to do the same work as whites, but receiving less pay. The problem had been made especially difficult by the reorganisation of local government in the area, and the transfer of workers from different authorities - in particular from the black authorities, and the rural workers from the previous Western Cape RSC.

our major problem with the restructuring is comparability. There is different pay where people are performing the same function.... certain municipalities and certain grades are different, that has caused so many problems with members from other local authorities

**Arthur, SAMWU steward, interview 6/9/97.**

In most cases the legacy of apartheid meant that black and 'coloured' employees in Cape Town were performing higher skills but failing to be paid at the higher rate. Other workers had actually been trained but - because of the existing structure of the council - were being prohibited from doing the work. Consequently, the branch was now calling for a proper skills audit. Although, the full-time organiser acknowledged the complexities of such an exercise, he still continued to reiterate its importance in addressing the needs of the low paid.

Our emphasis to the municipality is, why don't you people do a proper skills audit? Do a proper assessment, because we find people have got certain skills and are not being credited for it .... or people have certain trades - gone through the training - but because of the set-up in municipalities cannot be made a tradesmen. We know they cannot do it overnight - we in the organisation are reasonable - its a phasing out period. But lets bring people on, specifically the lower down people, lets bring them all together

**Dennis, SAMWU Organiser, interview 21/8/97**

It was amongst the low paid that the inequalities of the apartheid wage gap was most evident. Consequently, the branch had concentrated on achieving an 'across the board' flat rate pay agreement with the council in order to benefit the low paid, and by 1997 was able to register some success.

our focus this year is that - we fight for across the board....The grading system that this council is operating is done on a basis of the percentage but we want the flat rate. Basically what we have achieved this year is R280 across the board and 8% whatever is the greatest.

**Arthur, SAMWU Steward, Interview 6/9/97)**

On balance, - despite the problems highlighted - the branch's involvement in the 'new' collective bargaining forums appeared to be yielding some successes. The official union's focus on formal wage negotiations appeared to show that SAMWU might be able to secure 'some' control over wages and conditions. The introduction of employment legislation - aimed at achieving peaceful, legitimate industrial relations - could be argued to have benefited workers in Cape Town. Moreover, it might be contended that the new employee relations climate symbolised - at the very least - a step away from the adversarial relations common to the 1992-4 period.

None the less, although collective bargaining can just as easily be associated with industrial confrontation it can - like other industrial democratic initiatives, such as NEDLAC and Works forums - serve to bring the union representatives closer to the realities of the market and force them to take joint responsibility with management for its effects. As a consequence even the most radical trade unions can be obliged to assume more managerial functions, and temper the actions of their members, in return for negotiated settlements. Plainly, collective bargaining, although a very different form of conciliation from co-determination initiatives like NEDLAC, can still yield co-operative relations (Clarke, T. ,1977).

It could also equally be asserted, that such forums were simply 'useful' means of controlling the power and militancy of SAMWU. In practice, collective bargaining can clearly perform a conjunctive function - where conflict can be channelled into institutions where it may be more effectively controlled (Clarke, T, 1977). As Hyman points out - when commenting on general legislation governing trade unions, 'The legislation of unions may in itself mute some of the radicalism associated with their former "outlaw" status'. Conceding terms - which allow for the consolidation of the union's membership and reinforces its organisational security - may involve little direct cost to the employer; especially if such concessions can be traded against 'real' material

improvements in worker`s conditions, and the adoption of conciliatory and accommodative policies on the part of the union ( Hyman, 1975, pp. 89-90).

In the case of Cape Town, municipal workers may have appeared to have achieved legitimate representation in the workplace - the extension of collective bargaining into areas from which they had been previously excluded and the establishment of institutional innovations like workers forums and NEDLAC - but many still remained in a position of political and economic subjection in their working lives. As Clarke and Clements (1977, pp. 225-8) observed, the main union focus on formal wage negotiation frequently forces the workforce to endure harsh working conditions alone, especially since formal wage bargaining concedes that the control of such processes remain firmly within the `managerial prerogative. In reality, such initiatives - whilst welcomed by many public sector trade unionists - had singularly failed to prevent the onslaught of deteriorating terms and conditions associated with privatisation and deregulation. The next section explores the acceleration of free market policies in Cape Town - and local government generally - within the context of an increasingly formal conciliatory industrial relations climate, supposedly designed to increase an employee`s stake in the organisation .

### **13.3 THE DEREGULATION OF THE WORKPLACE**

From 1995-7, alongside the fervour for greater partnership initiatives and the incorporation of trade unions in the workplace, there appeared to be a renewed enthusiasm, on the part of the government for outsourcing and privatisation. The eagerness was associated with the idea that the public sector was incapable of delivering services alone, and that government would need to look to the private sector. In local government a series of projects were presented as a panacea, they varied from the granting of contracts to multi-national companies to manage public utilities like water and electricity, to the introduction of public private partnerships (PPPs) - complex financial agreements with business partners, designed to release resources from the private sector to finance major public developments. In addition, black empowerment - where small black businesses tendered for local government services - was encouraged as a means of procuring a stake for Africans in the `new' economy (Hemson, 1998).

Such schemes were promoted as improving service delivery and offering greater efficiency and productivity in the public sector. Yet, in reality, the increased productivity or savings were to be achieved by the expansion of temporary and casual workers - along with the downsizing and flexible use of existing local government workers, generally (Martin 1995: Hemson, 1998). Re-organisation along these lines - particularly the use of casual and temporary labour - threatened to undermine the power of the unions and to produce new divisions within the workforce. SAMWU remained committed to fighting all such changes - although the true extent of the problem was difficult to ascertain, largely due to the lack of detailed, comparative local figures in South Africa. The next section highlights the effects of such policies in local government generally, and Cape Town in particular.

### **13.3.1 Changes in Local Government employment (1995-7)**

Statistics for local government were particularly misleading and revealed very little evidence of downsizing, especially amongst the African workforce. In the post-apartheid period employment in local government demonstrated very similar tendencies to that of public sector as a whole. 'Whites' were disproportionately represented in local government in relation to their overall number. Racial stratification of the labour market had been rigidly regulated, creating disparities in work and wage practices and layered contradictions in the national structure. Table 13.1 shows the total employed in local authority city councils from 1994-7.

**Table 13.1****TOTAL EMPLOYED IN LOCAL AUTHORITY – CITY COUNCILS, 1994-97**

	Blacks	'Coloureds'	Asians	Whites	Others	Total local authorities
June 94	78 644	35 571	7 140	47 408	49 883	218 646
Sept 94	78 553	36 150	7 080	46 874	58 132	226 789
Dec 94	77416	35 804	6 794	45 173	65 671	230 858
Mar 95	77 063	35 864	6 897	41 331	68 301	229 456
June 95	71 254	34 704	6 855	38 576	79 481	230 870
Sept 95	69 874 (68423)	34 237 (35 238)	7 027 (6892)	39 036 (38 694)	79 009 (79371)	230 183 (228 618)
Dec '95	67 456	35 808	6872	38 362	81 112	229 310
Mar '96	67 385	35 772	6859	37 607	81 353	228 976
June 96	71 778 *	35 605 *	6967	37 658 *	79 891	231 899 *
Sept 96	74 538	36 100	6943	37 790	80 993	236 364
Dec, 96	74 462	36 437	6969	37 700	81 931	237 499
Mar 97	74 126	36 089	7058	36 541	84 675	238 489
June 97	75 070	35 767	7195	36 081	84 195	238 308
Sept 97	75 673	34 433	6809	35 621	81 148	233 684

Source: CSS PO251, Labour statistics – Employment, Salaries and Wages: Public sector from June 1994 to Sept. 1997.

As with the public sector generally, employees in all race groups fell between June 1994 and September 1995. The figure for whites fell the most drastically, by approximately 18% - but this figure was probably misleading because, whilst employees almost certainly took advantage of the increased severance packages on offer during this period, many others employees would have been relocated to other sections of the public sector during the reorganisation of local government.

From September 1995 to March 1997, there appeared to be a slight rise in employment for all race groups, apart from whites, this may have reflected the governments response to increased strike action during this period. However, figures began to fall again in March 1997 in all groups apart from 'Africans'. Overall the figures for the period from Sept 1995 to September 1997 (post-local election period) registered a fall in all groups except Africans: 2.2% amongst 'coloureds'; 1.2% amongst 'Indians'; 8% amongst whites; and a rise of 10.5% amongst Africans. The increase in 'Africans'

being employed in local authorities would almost probably have been due to the implementation of affirmative action policies.

### **13.3.2 Evidence of privatisation**

Nevertheless, despite the lack of reliable statistics to support the evidence of downsizing, the government's enthusiasm for privatisation could not be denied. The discussion document on the white paper on Local Government in South Africa (1997) had specifically identified local government as failing and advised municipalities to change their role in order to concentrate on the regulation of municipal services - rather than providing them. South African municipalities were persuaded to become more strategic and to act innovatively. A variety of joint arrangements were to be used, including management contracts, contracting-out and leases (White Paper on Local Government Discussion Document, 1997: section 10.7). From this point on, it was private contractors and consortiums - and not the council - that were to be encouraged to take responsibility for employing labour to deliver services.

Such changes in the financing and organisation of local government were to have far-reaching consequences for SAMWU and its members. In June 1997, although the employers, at the South African Local Government Bargaining Council (SALGBC), continued to reiterate their commitment to basic services remaining the responsibility of local government, they increasingly involved the private sector in the running of municipalities. Throughout the year they continued to employ consultants to advise on privatisation or awarding contracts to private sector firms. In local government, specific municipal services - such as meter reading, water, sanitation and refuse - were especially earmarked for 'contracting out'. Responsibility for extending and delivering the service was to be taken away from the municipality and given to private contractors, who were set to reduce costs by employing a smaller more flexible labour force (SAMWU Worker News, June, 1997d).

The contracts varied - some were quite short, less than one year others, such as the Water and Sanitation Services South Africa(Pty) Ltd, in Queenstown (Eastern Cape), were contracted to operate for 25 years. Lyonnaise des Eaux, a large multi-national, had by 1997 already secured a handful of water delivery contracts with municipalities in KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern and the Western Cape. This French based company - which specialised in the delivery of water and water-based sanitation systems - had

agreements all over the developing world, and argued that a similar venture in South Africa, could provide valuable services at a time when local government - due to the merging of racially separated authorities - was in disarray (Edmunds, 1996)

Initially, it appeared that the councils were chiefly 'contracting out' to smaller local businesses - even ex-municipal managers - but the smaller companies were often being financed and controlled by the larger contractors. Large organisations like Billy Hattingh & Associates and Wade Refuse (Pty) Ltd. - under the guise of assisting black empowerment - acted as brokers and consultants to small individual businesses. Wade Refuse Co. for example, had managed to negotiate a 5 year contract between the Greater Benoni Council and a small company, Daveyton & Etwatwa Refuse Removers (DERR). DERR had originally consisted of five local residents who had been prohibited from collecting refuse because of their practice of dumping rubbish, illegally. Unperturbed, Wade Refuse had helped the five individuals form a company and secure a contract with the council. Although no real party to the proceeding, Wade benefited from the financial and managerial assistance they gave to the five local residents (SAMWU Worker News June 1997d).

A number of these companies claimed to be influenced by altruistic motives wanting only to encourage black, local entrepreneurs, and limiting their support to training and equipment. Far from encouraging black empowerment, the local black businesses were usually wholly dependent on the larger companies for continual financial help and support. Moreover, such services still had to be paid for by the impoverished township residents - a service which now included the basic cost, plus the added profits of both the local entrepreneurs and the larger consultants. Finally, with the prospect of municipalities no longer employing direct labour for the services, the likelihood of obtaining, secure, union negotiated pay and conditions, was set to diminish for many black workers (SAMWU Worker's News 1997b; 1997c ;1997d)

#### **13.3.4 Cape Town privatisation and deregulation**

In Cape Town, both stewards and SAMWU workers interviewed in 1997, were adamant that casual working, outsourcing and subcontracting had increased during this period. Such practices seemed to undermine their position in the labour market and accentuated their feelings of insecurity. One full-time steward explained how the council was now employing more temporary workers on special projects for up to six

months, without the added burden of permanent contracts. The union remained opposed to such practices.

We have casual workers..the council contracts special projects by which they get these guys in on a special basis ... once these guys are in they just extend their contracts for 6 months, again not taking people on a permanent basis. But our focus is we are totally against this exercise. If the need is there they should take these men on permanent basis because people want a job, they need a job

**Dennis Arendise, SAMWU organiser, Interview 21/8/97**

SAMWU workers, interviewed whilst carrying out maintenance work on a small site in Mowbray, Cape Town in September 1997 appeared frightened...

Everything is getting worse . Jobs are insecure. Some of these workers are still casual workers yet they`ve been employed for 5-6 years. We need more jobs, secure jobs.

**Maintenance worker - Electrical Dept. ex-shop steward, interview Sept 1997.**

Permanent council workers were often employed alongside casuals, many of whom came from poorer African states and were willing to accept meagre pay and conditions.

He`s a Zimbabwean, he`s a casual, they work for a day and then sign a contract for 2-3 weeks

**Maintenance worker - Electrical Dept. ex- SAMWU shop steward, Interview, 4/9/97**

This group of employees were extremely vulnerable - subject to tight control they remained fearful of managements constant supervision and ability to easily replace them. One member`s comments illustrated this vulnerability well.

...[tell the lady what you do].... He won`t talk to you -he`s afraid - he thinks you`re the `entrapment` woman out to retrench him. He might talk if you make him a cup of tea.

**SAMWU worker in Mowbray, Aug 1997**

Such a culture of fear also served to remind the permanent workers of their own vulnerability, and helped to increase their own feelings of powerlessness and lack of job control. These anxieties had recently intensified due to management`s practice of hiring

private individuals, who posed as members of the public and enticed the unknowing council workers into carrying out 'private' work, on their behalf.

In the Electricity department a number of workers have been dismissed due to what they call the "enticement" or "entrapment" officer. They hire a private company to come around to people and offer them money to buy council stuff from workers. They take a video tape of people with 10 to 30 years service.. and the offering of money, 10, 20, 50 bucks

**Dennis, Cape Town Organiser, Interview 21/8/97**

But, such methods of managerial investigation and control were not uniform throughout the council. White-collar workers, usually white - presumably beyond suspicion - were excluded from such practices. One union organiser bemoaned this practice ...

Our arguments is why catch the blue-collar workers when your white collar have better access because they have signing powers. They are in charge of the operations and they can get away with thousands of the councils materials, but they`re not doing the same exercise to the white-collar workers.

**Dennis, Cape Town Organiser, Interview 21/8/97**

Yet, the same union official acknowledged that the white-collar worker were unlikely to be performing such an act, chiefly because his economic and financial position in the council was far more advantageous than the blue-collar worker

We know for a fact the white-collar worker won`t fall into that trap, because the ultimate problem with the blue-collar is he earns so little money ...he can be bribed.

**Dennis, Cape Town Organiser, Interview 21/8/97**

But, some SAMWU workers' response to this complete lack of trust and tight regulation was to resort to violence, which - although totally unorthodox - had been seemingly effective as the council had recently abandoned the practice as a result of such actions.

Our position is firm, we don`t condone it. We educate our members in meetings that if you go out to do that kind of thing you have to pay the price..... but we have to be honest... the practice has been stopped - for the moment. People`s lives are at risk, ...investigators or council officials have been threatened by workers. We`ve said to the managers, if you people are not going to stop this, many innocent people will get hurt.

**Dennis, Cape Town Organiser, Interview 21/8/97**

Whether this can be construed as the employee's attempts to seize back a fragment of control over the working environment, may be stretching a point, but it did illustrate the levels of alienation and frustration that continued to govern the employment relationship between the council and members of the mainly coloured, blue-collar, workforce in Cape Town council.

#### Private labour

Such a sense of worthlessness and powerlessness was especially evident around the issues of privatisation. The plans to commercialise public services, was now being identified, by many SAMWU workers, as the greatest peril facing them in Cape Town.

Its like the U.S ... council is doing the job but we don't see the profits. The council are starting to use more casuals, more and more contract workers are working with us. People are getting retrenched , there`s 7 to 8 in a team but lots are being retrenched.

**Marcel - SAMWU member in the Electricity Dept, interview 5/9/97**

Some were angry - they felt they could do the job better than the private companies...

we can do the jobs better then the private companies, they do a inefficient job, they spend more money in getting the contracts then in doing the work

**John September SAMWU member,  
maintenance worker, Electricity Dept, Interview 5/9/97**

Areas that had previously fallen under the Black Local Authorities were particularly susceptible in Cape Town.

The problems of commercialisation means that jobs are not uniform. Conditions of service are different throughout the country, especially in the old apartheid BLA`s and rural areas

**Arthur, Cape Town steward, Interview 6/9/97.**

The council continued to deal with these localities separately, and remained reluctant (or unable) to upgrade their services to the standard of the former white areas. A planned "Clean and Green" campaign - backed by the ANC - proposed to recruit

jobless people to provide a refuse removal service for the townships and informal settlements. As the Branch Secretary of Cape Town explained, such policies was designed to exploit cheap unemployed labour.

The salary of R750 being offered is not enough to live on .....this proposal is clearly privatisation of the refuse removal services .... If the council is serious about cleaning up the area, why don't they show some responsibility by employing more staff on a permanent basis?

**Robert Adams Branch Secretary of Cape Town  
(`SAMWU Worker`s News' 1997C, p.5).**

Overall, the use of sub-contracted privatised labour remained the most worrying to SAMWU members, especially as most contracted labour were earning half of the permanent municipal workers' salary, with inferior working conditions. Roger Ronnie (General Secretary) explained that the private companies' claims, that they brought with them finance for investment and better conditions for workers, was simply untrue. He quoted a recent case of a water purification firm where the conditions of the workers had deteriorated. Despite the original promise of training and promotion, workers were now earning between R600 and R1,500 gross a month - whereas, the minimum wage in the municipalities of Cape Town, was R1,600 (Edmunds, 1996)

A further example was found in Khayelishsha - a black township in the Western Cape - where the municipality had simply gone ahead and privatised the whole of the refuse removal. No employment conditions were specified for the sub-contracted workers, and health and safety conditions were known to be considerably worse than those of the local authority workers. Although, SAMWU eventually won the case at arbitration - which ruled that the privatisation of refuse removal was an unilateral change in terms and conditions of workers engaged in refuse removal - the whole affair served to highlight the vulnerability of municipal workers, not just in Cape Town but throughout the country (van Drie, 1998).

#### **13.4 LEVELS OF CONFLICT**

Such observations clearly need to be placed in context -especially as the attempts at privatisation and deregulation, and the resulting feelings of vulnerability were not only

confined to Cape Town. Overall, SAMWU reported a general discontent amongst its public sector workers, during the 1995-7 period. It was a discontent that was creating disquiet not just around issues of privatisation, but conditions in local government generally (SAMWU Worker's News, 1997b) Subsequently, it may have been the stirring of this dissatisfaction that helped to explain the extra-ordinary high levels of industrial action that began in 1995. During this year workers reacted angrily to public sector cuts being instigated by the ANC government (Mabogoane, 1995)

Although strikes in the post-apartheid public sector, fell from the one time recorded high of 24%, in 1990, there was still a marked shift in their pattern and concentration in 1995. Moreover, the sudden rise in strikes during this period could not be attributed exclusively to the lifting of the old regime's ban on public sector strikes. Levels of insecurity and the state's success in holding down pay to below inflation in the public sector, almost certainly had an impact - especially as, unlike the private sector where union organisation was strong and workers were winning settlements of 10-12%, the public sector was receiving less than 5% pay rises (Mabogoane, 1995). This section reviews the level of strikes in 1995 generally, and in Cape Town Council in 1996. It then proceeds to explore the levels resistance to privatisation, both generally in the union and in Cape Town itself. Finally, it reviews the effects on SAMWU's anti-privatisation stance on its relationship with COSATU and other affiliates.

#### **13.4.1 1995 Strikes**

The 1995 strikes in public sector were quite unexpected to the government - what began as a peaceful start to the year suddenly emitted into mass action. In local government, the strikes were part of a national campaign to improve conditions and pay above the minimum wage. Yet the threats to job security, posed by the introduction of the free market, and subsequent changing work patterns, often accompanied calls for action. On the 5th day of what was technically an illegal strike, 40,000 of SAMWU's 110,000 members joined the action (Financial Mail,, 1995c) `

Such strikes were incredibly successful, and spread throughout the country. The strikes were to ensure similar wage rates would be applied in all local authorities, a common wage grade rate with allowance for the bigger cities. In Natal they managed to achieve R1200 as an average minimum wage - up from R600-R800, - this meant increases between 40-70%. In Johannesburg - despite having earlier settled their own wage

based on a R1500 minimum - a thousand Greater Johannesburg Transitional Metropolitan Council members joined a sympathy strike. In Cape Town, Municipal workers along with nurses found themselves at the forefront of wage-related strikes. Such actions unleashed intense emotions and caused public disturbances. In many small towns, where strikers and demonstrators were visibly seen to clash with right-wing residents, it was often the first time that municipal workers had taken large-scale action (Financial Mail, 1995c; Mabogoane, 1995)

The attempts by the government to implement formal methods of resolution initially floundered. In all, the strike affected 250 municipalities. Statutory mediation imposed by the Labour Minister Tito Mboweni failed to bring an immediate end to the illegal strike. Consequently, despite the government's best efforts to institutionalise industrial conflict in South Africa - all the indications were that the public sector workers had not lost sight of their industrial strength and were refusing to surrender their militant tactics in return for conciliation and legal regulation (Financial Mail, 1995c).

#### **13.4.2 Strikes in 1996 in Cape Town**

Further strikes took place in 1996. On 16th August, the anger of SAMWU workers in Cape Town erupted, and resulted in them joining other local authorities in the region, in taking industrial action. The Western Cape regional secretary, Mr Stanley Yisaka said that approximately 18,000 members in the six municipalities of greater Cape Town and in the Cape Metropolitan Council would be striking. They wanted a minimum wage of R1600 and increase of R250 a month for those earning above the minimum. Management's offer stood at R1545, and R130 or 7%, for those earning above the minimum. The branch stressed the dispute was not just about Cape Town and SAMWU, but several employers and unions - including the Cape Metropolitan Council, the Cape Local Authorities Employers Organisation and the previous staff association, SAAME now Independent Municipal & Allied Trade Union (IMATU). Nevertheless, it was the Cape Town Municipality the largest of the seven local authority bodies that was most affected (Cape Times, 1996)

Although, the issues were still primarily about pay - thousands of municipal workers also proclaimed their concern over lack of job security. Previously, SAMWU - the largest of the council employee unions in the city - had demonstrated this fear by joining other municipalities in the region and marching through the city on the eve of the local

elections (June 3rd 1996). Then as now, many remained anxious about their livelihoods, as the 39 local authorities in the metropolitan became 6 "substructures." (Cape Times, 1996)

The strikes hit all six municipalities in the greater Cape Town and metropolitan council. Officials said 95% of SAMWU workers were on strike. Refuse collection was the first service to be disrupted, and all council pay offices closed as municipal workers embarked on a strike in the greater Cape Town area. What had become a tradition since the 1990 strike, saw between 3,000 to 4,000 municipal workers from the metropolitan area gathered on the ground-floor concourse of the civic centre. 50 of them occupied the offices of the mayor and town clerk. Mr Trevor Serfontein, the workers' chief negotiator and regional treasurer of SAMWU addressed the workers and said the union could not guarantee the safety of those that did not observe the strike (Cape Times, 1996).

Councillor, Judy Sibisi of the ANC spoke for the employers - and offered a minimum monthly wage of R1600 an increase of 7.5% or R185, or whichever was greater. She argued the offer represented a "significant increase" that ranged from 13% to 43% across the municipalities. SAMWU's key demand for equal wages for equal work throughout the metropole had been met. On the 22nd Aug 1996, municipal workers returned to work. They finally settled for R1,600 monthly minimum and a R220 a month or 8% annual increase, or whichever was the greater. Cape Town's branch chairperson, Mr Lance Veotti: led the SAMWU members victoriously back to work. (Cape Times , 1996)

What had emerged as significant about the strike was the union's apparent ability and willingness to still take illegal action. Throughout the dispute very few of the formal legal procedures had been followed. SAMWU's negotiator, Serfontein conceded that a strike ballot had not been held - although he was reluctant to accept the action had been a wildcat strike.

Interestingly, IMATU with its 4,000 members, including firemen, ambulancemen and white-collar workers in the metropole, continued to call for 10% or R220 a month which ever the greater, and minimum wage R1600. Despite not having a tradition of striking IMATU refused to return to work until they had held a ballot to decide on the offer. The employers took a tough stand and got a court order that required all union members to

"perform their duties in accordance with their terms and conditions of service". IMATU complained that council negotiators have a different criteria for dealing with different unions and pointed out that the council didn't take any legal action against SAMWU's 3-day strike (Cape Times, 1997). As one SAMWU member commented ...

We are still the union with power. In all the council chambers when SAMWU threatens any action they take us serious  
**John, interview, interview, 5/9/97**

The explanations for the explosion of conflict in Cape Town - and for that matter the public sector as whole - were quite complex. For many strikers, although the dispute was clearly one of economics - wages and conditions - it also brought to the fore the questions of control and job security in the post-apartheid era. In this matter very little had changed for the SAMWU workers. Despite the supposed implementation of a new 'union - friendly' labour Act, and greater partnership in the workplace, the SAMWU worker's material circumstances and his or her position within the council had not been significantly transformed

Moreover, the stifling and constraining effects of ideologies like racism and class superiority still existed. It might now be possible to discuss issues of worker participation and affirmative action quotas in new collective bargaining forums - but Managers still maintained their policy of close supervision and tight managerial control. Therefore, the Cape Town Council still held the power to introduce changes that could devastate the lives of many black municipal workers. In recognition of such a fact - SAMWU worker's responded to the lack of power over their working lives, by taking strike action. Chiefly because it was an action they knew - through historical experience - to be the most effective.

The ability of members to still engage in industrial action is still a fact. For the bulk of COSATU members nothing has changed...perhaps a strengthening of local SAMWU structures.... but in a number of areas tensions still remain...we are still under the control of apartheid.  
**Hennie, Cape Town Councillor, 24/8/97**

The level of dissatisfaction was not confined solely to pay and conditions, issues of security linked to increased privatisation was also a concern. It is to the issue of resistance to privatisation that we now turn.

### **13.4.3 Resistance to privatisation**

By 1997 - although several leading ANC/SACP members now actively supported the plans for privatisation - the resistance amongst SAMWU continued unabated.

Throughout the post-apartheid period (1995-7) SAMWU had continued to be at forefront of direct opposition to all types of privatisation. In December 1995, SAMWU had been amongst the first to support COSATU's two-hour stoppage on the 15th December, and a further one-day strike on the 16th January 1996, both called to oppose government's plans to privatise a number of state assets - the Cape Town branch supported both strikes. Further strikes were subsequently planned, but were later called off after promises from the Government to establish a joint committee, on the future of the state sector (SAMWU Congress Report: Secretariat Report, 1997c).

SAMWU's opposition continued throughout 1996 - even when COSATU appeared to accept the inevitability of privatisation by signing a National Framework Agreement on the Restructuring of State Assets, with the government. SAMWU remained hostile to such agreements and continued to engage in campaigns, that ensured that the involvement of the private sector in the provisions of basic services did not undermine the public sector, or lead to job losses. In particular, SAMWU declared itself determined to block any moves to contract-out the basic municipal services to large or multi-national companies, like the French water and sanitation company, Lyonnaise des Eaux (SAMWU Congress Report: Socio-economic issues, 1997b).

In June, 1997, the dispute over privatisation shifted to the government Department of Constitutional Development, where SAMWU expressed further concern over its setting up of 'Project Viability', a body to be used to monitor the financial situation of local authorities. The project advocated privatisation as the main solution to the financial and service delivery problems being experienced in local government. SAMWU, was opposed to such moves and pushed instead, for a national tariff to finance all basic services, with provision for cross-subsidisation, from the richer to the poorer councils (SAMWU Worker's News , 1997b)

Throughout 1997, SAMWU maintained its fight against the privatisation of services. It was during this period that the union's resistance campaign began to show signs of consolidating - as it continued to battle for the notion that services should be provided to meet needs and not to create profits. All over the country it began to publicise and support pockets of resistance, with a view to preparing for united mass action (SAMWU Worker's News, 1997b)

In the Eastern Cape - Queenstown - where the council had attempted to privatise the refuse collection service, SAMWU joined forces with the ex-white local government union - IMATU - to oppose it. In other areas of the Eastern Cape, SAMWU members travelled from door-to-door delivering publicity and educating others about the dangers of privatisation. In the Free State, SAMWU managed to convince the Welkom City Council not to privatise the cemeteries maintenance. Finally, in KwaZulu-Natal, SAMWU marched on 9th May and gave a petition to the Mayor of the Municipality, after discovering that services were to be privatised in Newcastle, Matatiele, Scottsburg/Umzinto North and Zinkwazi - they demanded a list of all the proposed privatisations (SAMWU Worker's News, 1997b)

The fight against privatisation in Mpumalanga was also well known during this period, as SAMWU members made headline news with its anti-privatisation fight against the Nelspruit Transitional Local Council. The union had opposed all moves to privatise water and sanitation services to the British multi-national firm - Biwater (SAMWU Worker's News, 1997e)

In Gauteng Region, attempts to put water services out to tender and to privatise the 'crushers' (coach and bus services) were opposed. In the black township of Alexandra, SAMWU fought the 'contracting out' of refuse removal and privatisation of electricity. These initiatives all culminated in a day of action on 1st Sept 1997, when services were seriously disrupted as thousands (32,000), of municipal workers took to the streets of Johannesburg to protest against privatisation. The water, electrical, refuse, bus services workers - and many more - supported the one-day strike and stopped services throughout the region (Russell, 1997; Thembo Nxumalo, Gautang Branch Secretary, interview 3/9/97).

## Resistance in Cape Town

After the 1996 strike, the union's campaign to stop privatisation appeared to gain momentum in Cape Town. Whether the success of the strike had led to an increase in members' confidence and further recognition of their power was difficult to measure - although all the indications are that workers' collective consciousness widens during a strike (Mann, 1973). Nevertheless, like the national union, anti-privatisation appeared to assume a central role in the policy of the branch. In particular, the interviews with stewards and members in Cape Town in 1997, seemed to indicate a need to prioritise anti-privatisation issues and begin building solidarity action with all groups effected by the new free-market policies.

Our role has changed with the local government transition, we have to fight.. We have a new co-ordinator who is addressing the whole of privatisation - the subcontractors, services which private companies are taking over, contracting-out... He is focusing now to get an anti-privatisation campaign moving, with subcommittees and organisation.

**Arthur, SAMWU steward, interview, 6/9/97**

Such committees were part of provincial wide campaign organised throughout the Western Cape. The aim was to involve as many interest groups as possible - other unions, community groups, township residents, anyone who was prepared to fight privatisation. During this period the union actively lobbied the council to find alternatives to privatisation. In September, it made a formal presentation to Cape Town's municipal task team - currently investigating different options for service delivery in the area. Unfortunately, such attempts at conciliation ended in deadlock, after the task team indicated their intention to appoint a consultant to investigate PPP's - SAMWU walked out of the meeting in disgust (SAMWU Worker's News , 1997i).

Incidents like these, seemed to indicate that SAMWU would have to organise more than just publicity and presentations if it was to stop privatisation. The size of the membership and their willingness - and ability - to take action, would obviously be an essential element. The success of any of these activities would be ultimately dependent on the active support of the unions' members. Struggles or campaigns would be worthless if they remained confined to the levels of the leadership. They

would need to involve the rank and file membership - a point emphasised by a number of members interviewed in 1997 and reinforced by the Cape Town Organiser.

we're not talking simply of the leadership involvement here...it is the policy of this organisation that it should be worker to worker contact. I think these are the strengths of SAMWU. If we are successful we will be able to take the struggle forward.

**Dennis, interview 21/8/97**

Yet, the task was immense, especially since there was now a greater risk of losing members as a result of possible downsizing and use of sub-contracted labour. The branch recognised these dangers and began - as a point of urgency - to recruit many of the temporary and casual workers now being employed by the private contractors. In Cape Town, they concentrated on areas like water and sanitation - where the private companies were particularly prevalent.

We have signed up those members - they now all belong to the organisation. They pay subscriptions, they have a body that can see to their benefits, negotiate for better wages and conditions of services.

**Arthur, SAMWU steward, interview, 6/9/97**

However, progress was slow, especially as union organisers were usually confronted by extremely high levels of hostility from the private contractors.

We've achieved a negotiation agreement, but we still encounter tremendous problems - and resistance. We are entitled to recruit in any sector or private company in local government - it is our right or constitution to organise those workers.

**Dennis, interview 21/8/97**

The extent of the popularity of privatisation amongst local people should also not be underestimated, especially as one steward recognised that township residents were often desperate for new services...

It is the magnitude of this, it has opened up the way for all these consultants to come in. For example the informal settlements in Cape Town - in 30 years there is one standpipe, no toilets, there is nothing

and then comes someone who says they can put water in there - now people aren't going to worry about privatisation. It is that need that is now being exploited ,

**Arthur, SAMWU steward, interview, 6/9/97**

Nevertheless, the branch remained determined to fight privatisation. A number of members and stewards interviewed continued to express their opposition ...

The private companies are not there for job creation they are only there on the basis of profit they exploit people in terms of giving jobs to people because they underpay them - we've got to fight it.

**Marcel, SAMWU worker, interview 5/9/97**

Most feared privatisation would lead to job losses and a general fall in their standard of living.

we don't want privatisation, we'll lose our jobs. I don't know what we'll do if we lose our jobs. We need more investment, the council should invest more money into jobs and houses.

**SAMWU member working in Mowbray, interview, 4/9/97**

Some of the members and stewards interviewed, made social and political connections between the 'rights' of the community and privatisation.

Our ultimate goal as a trade union in the local government, is we feel that local government should be seen to be serving our communities, and we won't see any private enterprise taking over the role of local government.

**Anon, maintenance worker ex-shop steward, interview 4/9/97**

Still others made overtly political links by acknowledging the role of the government and the power of the labour movement to force the ANC to find an alternative to privatisation.

But with the resistance building from the trade union movement they (the government) will not implement privatisation - because of the threats and the political problems they will encounter from the labour

movement. They will have to listen to the labour movement, specifically to SAMWU, in the local government area. They'll realise they can't just go ahead with this type of thing they will need to consult and plan an alternative to privatisation - that is our focus.

**Arthur, SAMWU steward, interview, 6/9/97**

The recognition of the political components of privatisation, seemed to indicate that *some* SAMWU members in Cape Town were not intending to limit their opposition to purely aggressive economism and defensive job control.

SAMWU will go full steam on this whole exercise of anti-privatisation...political as well as economic battles

**Dennis, Full-time Organiser, interview 21/8/97**

In particular, local government MEC - Peter Marais - accused SAMWU of having a political agenda, unrelated to the best interests of workers and charged them with speaking only for the few who have jobs and not the many jobless (SAMWU Worker News' 1997b). Despite this accusation the union refused to be detracted from its main aim, and continued - as it had done in 1993 - to campaign against privatisation. This opposition was echoed and supported by many of the Cape Town members interviewed in 1997. A number of members expressed anger with the council, accusing them of nepotism and the willingness to be motivated purely by money.

The private contractors are everywhere especially where there is money, the council is giving its friends the work, even though we can do it better. I can give you names if you want , Musterd, Esterhaisen, Piper  
**SAMWU member in Mowbray, interview 4/9/97.**

Others expressed disgust and disappointment with the post-apartheid era. They had expected change - even a better system - but instead they had been confronted with the prospect of further misery and suffering as the result of possible further downsizing and flexible-working.

Things is bad in Cape Town. We`ve suffered too long and now we`ve got to suffer again

**SAMWU member in Mowbray, interview 4/9/97**

Links to the national union

Cape Town was not the only branch to appreciate the full extent of the threats of privatisation, to the livelihood of many black and 'coloured' workers. The pattern of determined resistance to commercialisation, evident from the interviews carried out in Cape Town, was replicated in other parts of the union too. The following statement, by the Regional Secretary in Gauteng, illustrated well the union`s determination to stop privatisation, even if it meant opposing the `new' democratic government.

we`re opposed to privatisation - the decision was not taken lightly, it was a long debate .... we believe that the struggle against privatisation will become the pivotal struggle. In fact the position of SAMWU is that the campaign against privatisation is the campaign of the year (1997). Not because we simply believe in the slogan against privatisation, but it is more a question of the effects that privatisation will have in terms of our jobs, working conditions, even our lives.... We are presenting this to the government in terms of how really serious SAMWU is in terms in anti-privatisation

**Victor , Regional Secretary Gauteng, 2/9/97**

Other SAMWU members - interviewed at the September 1st Rally in Gauteng (Johannesburg) in 1997 - also expressed their determination to fight privatisation.

We`re striking because its the only way to stop privatisation  
**Lillian, SAMWU member, interview Johannesburg  
Demonstration, 1/9/98.**

The Branch Secretary of Greater Johannesburg, also explained how industrial action would force councillors to listen to them...

We`re protesting and engaging with councillors. We`ve having discussions showing what our fears are and what other options we can offer them.... but they still won`t sit down with us - but they will have to listen. We had a protest on the 1st July last year and we`ll have more.  
**Thembo Nxumlo - SAMWU Branch Secretary,**

**Greater Jo`burg, interview Jo`burg Demo., 1/9/98)**

Such sentiments were further reflected in comments of the SAMWU leadership. In 1997 it called on all unions to support a Local Government Summit to develop an alliance programme of action at all levels. The general secretary explained that..

Our starting point is that the government should not be involved with privatisation and so we consistently oppose it. We want the public sector, we will fight for the public sector, if we loose it, well we fought for the public sector.

**General Secretary, Roger Ronnie, Interview, 20/8/97**

### **13.5 LINKS TO COSATU**

Nevertheless, despite such determined support throughout SAMWU, it was equally true that both the branch and its union were experiencing difficulties gaining solidarity within the wider union movement. Although there was clearly opposition to privatisation throughout the union movement, with COSATU claiming ....

COSATU`s vision on public sector transformation and the role of the public service should be aggressively placed on the national Agenda  
**COSATU Congress Report: September Commission.  
Secretariat Report, 1997**

... the resolve to fight privatisation was not nearly as strong as that of SAMWU`s. One SAMWU organiser in Cape Town even indicated that SAMWU was being forced to fight the threat of privatisation alone...

No, SAMWU is the only public sector union in terms of opposing this whole privatisation movement, even in COSATU. It is likely we stand alone now. The other public sector unions don`t seem to be worried about the privatisation movement.

**Denise Ardense - SAMWU Organiser, Interview, 21/8/97.**

Such comments were supported by a Cape Town ANC councillor - interviewed during the same period - he believed COSATU recognised the threat of privatisation, but unlike SAMWU was anxious to maintain a working relationship with the new government.

SAMWU has become a stumbling block for COSATU. COSATU is making noise but the COSATU leadership is basically keeping in step in government. There was a huge outcry, but when it came to it they backed off.

**Hennie, ANC Councillor, interview 24/8/97.**

COSATU's initial response to the government's free market policy, GEAR, in 1995, was to un-characteristically urge its members not to directly oppose its implementation, but rather to engage 'in progressive dialogue with its new partners in the hope of changing their minds'. COSATU claimed, that it would 'not be possible to shift development of policy, without engagement with GEAR and the philosophy that underpins its general acceptance'. Consequently, it encouraged its affiliate unions to 'propose progressive policies in key areas of social and economic development ..(and) in that way hope to shift the parameters of GEAR'. (COSATU 6<sup>th</sup> National Congress Report:, 1997c).

Even more alarmingly was COSATU's seeming concessions to government's privatisation plans, when it declared its intention to establish a team to work with the National Labour and Economic Development Institute (NALEDI) in order to develop overall perspectives and strategies for the "restructuring of state assets" (COSATU's 6<sup>th</sup> National Congress Report , 1997b).

In essence, the reason for the vacillation and weak support from the COSATU leadership for SAMWU's campaign was clearly linked to COSATU's close alignment with the ANC, and its growing engagement with new institutional responsibilities. The militant impetus predominant during the resistance politics was now being replaced with a new attitude of compromise and non-adversarialism, both at a centralised level and in the workplace. Yet, COSATU's long-standing goal of being recognised as a player, together with business and government in centralised tripartite policy-making, appeared to mean an acquiescence to free-market policies of GEAR. The free market was clearly linked to tight fiscal discipline, public spending restraint and privatisation (Barchiesi, 1999). Consequently, the impossibility of balancing its position between an allegiance to the ruling coalition and a vague commitment to socio-economic transformation, made it increasingly difficult to fully support the rank-and file militancy being championed by SAMWU, in response to privatisation.

The Gauteng Regional Secretary reiterated this point, explaining that SAMWU was basically being ostracised because of its belligerent opposition to privatisation and its wider commitment to the working class and socialism -

ahh privatisation - we, unfortunately are not having a good reputation in COSATU. We seem like the black sheep because we fortunately (or unfortunately) have a leadership that is committed to the struggle of the working class of South Africa. A leadership that is committed to the goal of achieving socialism. And therefore the way that we argue, the way that we conduct ourselves is not always popular.....

**Victor, interview 2/9/97**

Yet, whether COSATU's prioritisation of pragmatism and institutional negotiation would coincide with the rank-and file views of trade unionism - especially in places like Cape Town where members were entering a period of instability and uncertainty - still remained to be seen. Nonetheless, the Regional Secretary of Gauteng - for his part - remained confident that the current situation could not prevail, especially as high unemployment and the free market constraints on labour would force the traditions of socialism back on the agenda.

we may be feeling isolated at the present time but we believe that the traditions of socialism, the struggle of socialism will come back. In fact the spirit and consciousness that prevailed in 1985 - when Cosatu was formed - will come back and SAMWU will not find itself as an individual

**Victor interview, 2/9/97**

### **13.6 CONCLUSION**

Trade union action in Cape Town had traditionally produced gains for 'coloured' workers in the Council. During apartheid, strikes had been the principle means of mobilising this often isolated group of workers, and posing a substantial threat to the stability of the council. Strikes in the post-apartheid period appeared to be yielding similar results, and were often being perceived as fundamental stands against exploitation in a labour market increasingly influenced by neo-liberal policies (Interviews 1997).

Yet - as in 1992-4 - strikes in the post-apartheid period appeared to have a political as well as an economic dimension. Whereas, the 1996 Cape Town strike obviously represented the branch's traditional concern with wages and conditions, there was also evidence of an increased awareness of the threats to themselves and the community generally, posed by government policies of privatisation (Interviews, September 1997). Overall the branch's - and SAMWU's - fight against privatisation could be interpreted of defending not only basic terms and conditions, but of raising issues of power and control within the council, and the country as whole.

But whether the experiences of taking industrial action, particularly in the post-apartheid period would raise the 'coloured' workers' consciousness to even greater political levels was not immediately apparent in 1997. It could equally be true to argue, that despite the militant discourse and obvious willingness of SAMWU workers to still engage in industrial action, the gap between the activity and the consciousness of such members in Cape Town was still very uneven. Whilst the day-to-day activities and relations in the council seemed to indicate a high level of instability and a willingness to oppose privatisation, events were still - in 1997 - unclear. Whether these members would continue to rise above their own prejudices - forming links with other, mainly black workers - and presenting a generalised threat to the government and their policies of privatisation, was still open to speculation.

Conciliation or strikes?

Throughout the post-apartheid period (1995-7) SAMWU had continued to be at forefront of direct opposition to privatisation. Yet, such actions were clearly against the political spirit of the Labour Relations Act (1995), which could be broadly defined as being designed to create a non-adversarial industrial relations framework - where issues of worker co-operation and participation would be central. Institutions like NEDLAC, centralised collective bargaining and workplace forums were bodies aimed at facilitating the establishment of a 'conflict-free' work environment, whose central role was to develop a climate of social stability conducive to growth and foreign investment (Financial Mail, 1995c; Macun and Webster, 1999).

Therefore, in many ways the new LRA acquired a much broader scope than was usually envisaged for labour legislation, it was to be used to encourage different levels

of responsibility and self-discipline on the part of the labour movement. The aim being in order to broker an economy of stabilisation and industrial peace, for the sake of growth and development. This was to be part of the trade unions' new conciliatory, institutionalised role. In return for social pacts, workplace participation and centralised negotiation, COSATU union affiliates were now expected to assist in mediating between its traditionally radical workforce, and the powerful economic actors linked to multi-national capital and finance (Barchiesi, 1999).

As a consequence, the SAMWU leadership's continued emphasis on adversarial industrial relations, and its extremely truculent declarations of intentions to strike against the black liberation government's policies, was almost certainly in direct contradiction to the spirit of new legislation (van Driel, 1998). Yet, this opposition was not confined to the national leadership - in Cape Town too - interviews conducted in 1997, seemed to support a growing hostility towards government policies, and a determination to use industrial action to oppose them.

Nevertheless, it was only after the Cape Town strike in 1996, that the campaign to stop privatisation began to gain real impetus - with some branch members beginning to move beyond pure economics to articulating a political dimension to the issues. Moreover, - although matters of pay were foremost in the minds of strikers in 1996, the material realities of job insecurities and lack of control over their working environment, did highlight how little conditions had changed for the SAMWU workers. Despite, a major transformation of the apartheid system, the fact remained that the managers - still retained control over the lives of every council worker in Cape Town (Wilhelm, 1997).

Moreover, the experiences of SAMWU in Cape Town - namely increased privatisation and casualisation - brought into question the ability of formal institutions to stem the inevitable effects of the free-market policies, largely based on cost-cutting and outsourcing. Commitments - on the part of the ANC government - to downsize public employment provided little support for the advocates of conciliatory institutions like NEDLAC and workplace forums. On the contrary, all the indications were that such structures had been developed as vehicles for the acceptance of free market policies of wage restraint and increased flexibility (Adler, 1998; Barchiesi, 1999).

Consequently, rather than heralding a new era in managerial thinking, South African experiments with co-determination were more easily understood as part of a continuum

in strategies of control. As a consequence, the adoption of 'union friendly' partnership initiatives could be conceived as having more to do with controlling and co-opting strong shop stewards and shopfloor structures, then ensuring a fundamental shift in managerial thinking and power. So it was hardly surprising that SAMWU expressed ambiguities surrounding the use of partnership initiatives, like NEDLAC and works forums. A view reflected by other unions who also reported limited scope for effective engagement in industrial and economic policy-making (Barchiesi, 1999)

On reflection, the largest stumbling block to efforts to engineer flexible negotiations with government and business, on the socio-economic reconstruction of the workplace, remained the ANC's insistence that the free-market policies - such as GEAR, was 'non-negotiable'. As a consequence the attempts to use conciliatory methods to placate a radical labour movement may have been largely unachievable. Chiefly because the realities of the escalating retrenchments and historically high unemployment - being witnessed in South Africa during this period - made it extremely difficult (although not impossible) to peacefully 'negotiate away' major changes in work practices. In particular, the government's devotion to municipal privatisation, left unions like SAMWU, with little choice but to take industrial action. This was especially because profitability and market performance - and certainly not 'friendly' partnerships with business - has become the main criteria for deciding labour adjustment, wages and conditions (Barchiesi, 1999). The next chapter (14) gives an overall summary of part 2 (1995-7) and where appropriate compares with the 1992-4 period.

# **CHAPTER 14**

## **SUMMARY OF POST-APARTHEID PERIOD (1995-7) AND COMPARISONS WITH PRE- APARTHEID ERA (1992-4)**

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### **14.1 INTRODUCTION**

The willingness to resist and strike against privatisation was by 1997 - as in 1992 - fairly evident from the interviews carried out in Cape Town. Yet, the ability of SAMWU workers to overcome government policies of privatisation would largely depend on a combination of factors - namely the overall levels of collective consciousness and solidarity amongst the membership, its interaction with organisation and leadership of the union, and finally the state's response to such pressures.

### **14.2 COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS**

Throughout the whole of the 1992-7 period under investigation, the degree of collective consciousness amongst SAMWU workers in Cape Town was unquestionably uneven. By 1997, it was still unclear whether the membership would manage to transcend the bigotry of their immediate environment, by choosing instead to generalise from their own experiences and struggles, and makes connections between the economic events in the workplace, and those in the wider political environment.

The province within which the SAMWU worker lived and worked in 1997, was in many ways similar to 1992. The material circumstances of most SAMWU workers remained poor and inferior to whites. Yet, these actualities did not lead automatically to a working class ideology, indeed the dominant ideology of capitalism - even apartheid - appeared

to be surviving. In the case of the 'coloured' worker, the racism in the area clearly had the ability to continue undermining any nucleus of united class action in the region. More especially, the political consciousness of the 'coloured' community in the Western Cape - rather than becoming clearer in the post-apartheid era, had become even more complex. The 'coloured' worker's fear of losing their meagre advantage in the labour market, was already weakening the potential for solidarity action with other black workers.

Such difficulties were historically typical of the Western Cape, its origins lay in the historical nature of apartheid, and how its peculiarities had contributed to the social formation of a distinct 'coloured' identity. Yet, understanding and removing the divisive racial ideology that governs this identity, means also recognising that the specific structures of labour division and control developed under apartheid in Cape Town - were in no way inconsequential to capitalism, and were indeed functional to the workings of capitalism in South Africa. Consequently, this means continuing – even after 1994 - to analyse the relation between capital accumulation and racial domination, and challenging the view that there was a contradiction between capitalism and apartheid (Legassick, 1974, p. 269).

Yet, the growth of a class consciousness amongst this group did not rest solely on their broader economic and social or political environment, but also relied on the 'coloured' workers' interaction with his or her trade union organisation - and with the policies of their employers and state. As previously explained the precise nature of a workers' class consciousness, encapsulates the concepts of productive forces and relations - which includes labour, capital and their inter-relationship with institutional forms, such as trade unions (Clements, 1977). Throughout the whole of the 1992-7, the union was undergoing a fundamental transformation, but whereas the union's prime aim in 1992 - to overthrow the apartheid state - had been clear, by 1997 its goals, whilst less formidable, were in many ways more complex (Interviews, 1997)

### **14.3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The targeting of privatisation and the 'living wage' in 1995 may have represented a change of focus for the union, but in other respects illustrated a degree of continuity -

the nature of which was forcing the union to confront those issues already evident in 1992. Disturbingly, privatisation still remained a problem by 1997. Despite an initial commitment on the part of the ANC to public spending, it became clear that local government had been selected for deregulation and private finance. In 1995 - as in 1992 - SAMWU vigorously opposed all attempts to privatise by building a campaign to defend local government services and jobs. In 1996, the union continued to argue that 'the only real way to meet all elements of the RDP was to move away from reliance on the private sector and to focus more strongly on state-based delivery systems' (quoted in Hemson, 1998). The key issue was, whereas in the 1992-4 period, privatisation had played a prominent role within the aims and objectives of the union, by 1997, it had become economically and ideologically *crucial* to the union and its members. The privatisation of services now held the potential for a bitter economic and political engagement with the government (Hemson, 1998; van Driel 1999).

Threats to working conditions - posed by the introduction of privatisation - also served to highlight SAMWU's other major area of concern: the eradication of the apartheid wage gap and the establishment of a "living wage" for all groups and races. Here there were elements of both continuity and change. The 1994 election may have heralded the end of political segregation but as in 1992, the *economic* effects of apartheid still predominated. Not only was the continuing apartheid wage gap an enormous obstacle to equality in the workplace, but the emphasis on equal terms and conditions in 1995, brought to the fore the changing economic and social position of the 'coloured' members in Cape Town.

#### **14.4 UNION ORGANISATION**

Yet, such aims were also dependent on the development of an effective union organisation. The 1995-7 period, was particularly symbolic because, unlike the early nineties when unions had struggled for recognition, the new state was now actively encouraging the role of black trade unions in the workplace. But the new legitimacy of the union also posed new problems. The growth in its membership, and an emphasis on core activities, presented fresh organisational difficulties for SAMWU, many of which had not been encountered before - or at least not to the same level. In 1995 the union began to voice concern over its ability to co-ordinate the work of the national, region

and branch organisation, in particular to service many new groups in one union. There was a fear - on the part of the leadership and many shop stewards interviewed - that the increased workload, as a result of the growing membership and increasingly complex procedures, was creating a potentially damaging bureaucratic organisation (SAMWU, Congress Reports 1997b ;interviews 1997).

#### **14.4.1 Formal activities**

Part of the problem was linked to the increased formalisation of the industrial relations system. Although the leadership continued to emphasise the importance of rank-and-file shop floor work, the union found its activities becoming more and more formalistic with the possibility of being drawn into policy-making forums at all levels. The new Labour Relations Act (1995) may have given SAMWU an opportunity to influence policy in the national decision-making forums - such as the national bargaining councils (NBC) - and locally in work forums; but in so doing it risked the loss of one of its greatest strengths, its reliance on shopfloor power. To neglect such a legacy could well threaten the very life blood of the union itself - and more importantly diminish its ability to fight privatisation and smash the apartheid wage gap (The ShopSteward, 1995a).

Nonetheless, the involvement of SAMWU in the new legitimate channels of communication - especially formal national collective bargaining - appeared initially to be producing gains for their members, especially in terms of pay. However, the success of the formal collective negotiations needed to be placed within its historical context. It could be argued that the securing of better terms and conditions, and a legitimate role in employee relations, especially in Cape Town, would scarcely have been possible, without the threat of exceptionally high levels of industrial action in the public sector. This action dated back to the early nineties.

#### **14.4.2 Conflict**

In the past many black South African trade unions had by means of resistance, managed to extend 'the frontiers of control' (Goodrich, 1975), on a whole range of managerial and production questions. The high levels of resistance in SAMWU during 1995-7, seemed to indicate the remnants of such a doctrine had survived in Cape Town. Despite the use of formal collective bargaining, and the veneer of normality

between management-worker relations, rank-and file resistance and strike action continued to underscore the unions relationship with management.

Moreover, any attempts to achieve a peaceful, formal industrial relations environment, were in reality being seriously undermined by the ANC`s neo-liberal agenda, implicit in the government`s new `Growth, Employment and redistribution` policy (GEAR) - actively being introduced alongside the `liberal` labour legislation. The ANC`s public declaration in, December 1995, to privatise its services - which included subjecting the public sector to privatisation and wider market forces - profoundly threatened those efforts to achieve conciliation and partnership in the workplace (SAMWU Congress Report: 1997b) . In the process the branch and its union were forced to re-assess their tactics - leading to an upsurge in resistance to employers and government in the public sector, between 1995-7.

Yet, the `real` explanations for the explosion of opposition in Cape Town - and the public sector as whole - were not entirely straight forward. Although the dispute for many of the strikers was clearly one of economics – wages, conditions and job security - it also appeared to bring to the fore questions of control in the post-apartheid era. Unfortunately, with regard to all these issues very little had changed [from the apartheid era] for the SAMWU workers. Despite the supposed implementation of a new `union - friendly` labour Act, and greater partnership in the workplace, the SAMWU workers` material circumstances, and in particular his or her position within the council, had not been significantly transformed (Interviews, 1997).

And although, initially the maintenance of wages appeared to be the common cause that united this group against their managers in Cape Town, the combined and increased repression of the bourgeoisie – around issues of apartheid and later privatisation – also helped to develop a collective awareness among SAMWU members. It was during these periods of resistance, reaching back throughout the whole of the period under review, that the class solidarity of SAMWU workers appeared to develop most. The clearest examples were found immediately after, the 1992 strike and the industrial action taken in 1996. During these periods, interviews with the leadership and membership, indicated an upsurge in solidarity, not simply around economic concerns of pay and conditions, but more generally around political issues concerning anti-apartheid and state privatisation.

Therefore, despite trade unions being reformist organisations - with a tendency to narrow conflict down to aggressive economism (Simon, 1988; Luxemburg, 1989) - it was still possible, as South Africa had shown, for working-class radicalism to develop within its ranks. Furthermore, strikes, which arise out of the conflict within capitalism, often signify the beginning of more working-class struggles, opening the eyes of the workers to the nature not only of capitalists, but of governments also (Lenin, 1961). And although, strikes in of themselves will not eradicate the power of capitalism, it might be the case in South Africa - that during the process of resisting apartheid, low pay and privatisation - the municipal workers' experience of solidarity engendered a stronger class-cohesiveness, one that could be used to undermine the government's ability to implement privatisation in the public sector.

#### **14.5 RELATIONS WITH COSATU**

SAMWU's continued use of industrial action was clearly at odds with the policy of its national federation - COSATU. Around issues of privatisation the federation had advised all of its public sector affiliates to engage with the government and employers, to develop their capacity to formulate policies on procurement, tendering and private sector partnerships, and to train representatives to sit on the relevant structures. As a consequence by 1995 SAMWU's insistence in rejecting all types of privatisation was creating divisions between it and COSATU. Whereas, both organisations continued to voice their opposition to privatisation they now - unlike 1992 - had different perspectives on their interpretations of how to tackle such policies. In 1997, COSATU stated that it was not opposed to 'forms of partnerships with the private sector' that were aimed at leveraging resources for '... improved and greater levels of service delivery'. SAMWU, on the other hand remained adamant that it was opposed to all privatisation - irrespective of what form it took - and continued to devote a national anti-privatisation campaign to this end (Patel, 1996; COSATU - September Commission, 1997a; van Driel 1999).

The reason for COSATU's hesitation over forthright opposition to privatisation, was linked to its close alignment with the ANC, and its growing engagement with new institutional responsibilities (Barchiesi, 1999). However, COSATU's partnership with the government, far from protecting labour from privatisation, appeared only to accelerate the negative effects of the free market on members; and eventually forced

COSATU to concede that they, with regards to GEAR, at least needed to shift their strategy to one of greater opposition (COSATU's 6<sup>th</sup> National Congress Report, 1997c).

Nonetheless, its close alliance with the ANC government, continued to make it increasingly difficult for COSATU to fully support the hostile rank-and file militancy being championed by SAMWU in 1997. As a consequence, over issues of privatisation, both the branch and SAMWU, remained unique and often 'out of step' with much of the rest of the union movement. As in 1992, what continued to distinguish this union from others was, the reiteration that only industrial action would stop free-market government policies (interviews, 1997).

## **14.6 RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ANC GOVERNMENT**

In the final analysis the union's willingness to strike, even if it meant challenging the aims of COSATU and threatening the new government, continued to be restated by the leadership in 1997. In an interview with the General Secretary in September of that year, Roger Ronnie indicated that there would probably be no alternative, but to take action because the government had stopped listening to them, choosing instead to favour the opinions and activities of the private consultants

In South Africa there is this fear, there is this uncertainty - but more and more we are thinking it will have to come down to mass action. Our meetings with government departments have been one in which they listen and the moment we are out of the door they continue.

**Interview 20/8/97**

However, it may well be that the resolve to resort to strike action on the part of the leadership, and their confidence in the membership to do so was linked to the material circumstances posed by privatisation - namely downsizing, retrenchments and outsourcing. There existed a recognition, voiced not only by the leadership, but also the stewards and members interviewed in 1995-7, that privatisation would lead to a gradual deterioration of jobs, conditions and services for the poor, and only mass action could force the government to abandon such policies. This certainty that they as a collective

group would be adversely affected by such policies, was linked to the realisation (expressed by a number of those interviewed) that the South African state had not fundamentally changed. Although apartheid had been removed, the power and control of the present system still lay with the *same* managers and owners of capital who had previously used apartheid to exploit Black and 'coloured' workers. The point was further reinforced by Victor - the Gauteng Regional Secretary - in 1997, who saw the ANC's adoption of free-market policies like GEAR, as highly predictable because, contrary to popular opinion, the government had never been committed to removing the owners of capital, only the system of apartheid. He made the argument forcefully, that since the ANC was a capitalist government, one should not be surprised that South African state had continued to adopt capitalist policies of privatisation.

Now the reason why we have GEAR, is that within government, and within the ANC, and within Mandela we still have capitalism. If you remember in 1990 Mandela was released, he was asked the question if he still believed in nationalisation and he said 'No'. He was asked that in 1955 and he indicated he was only interested in the black bourgeoisie...so from that point of view, it is no surprise that the government and the ANC itself has moved in the direction of adopting the capitalist policies, and abandoned the RDP.....And why one should not be surprised at the speed the RDP has been abandoned, is that we have a people in government and also in the ANC that have never believed in the struggle to overthrow capitalism - but instead have been pro-capitalism and see nothing wrong with GEAR

**Victor, interview, 2/9/97.**

# CHAPTER 15

## CONCLUSION

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### 15.1 INTRODUCTION

The thesis explored the changing relationship between the public sector trade unions and the government in South Africa - during the historical transition of the South African state from 1992-7. The research was located in debates concerning the current state ideology and the ANC's governments apparent shift from a policy of nationalisation to endorsement of the 'Free-market' economy in the post apartheid period.

By 1992 the system of apartheid had been notably discredited, as a result of sustained political resistance and the system's inability to facilitate the capitalists' need to produce profits. The ANC, had emerged as a key player in the new state apparatus and attempted to devise policies aimed at rejuvenating a rapidly deteriorating economy. At the pre-election stage at least, the ANC's reconstruction plans contained a commitment to state economic intervention and a promise to redistribute wealth. But the reintegration of South Africa into global capitalism brought subsequent pressure on the post-apartheid African government to implement an environment, more favourable to business interests. As a consequence in 1994/5, the ANC, anxious to transform itself from an exiled liberation movement into a legitimate government, adopted the neo-liberal economic policy, GEAR (Growth Employment and Redistribution). This was a policy highly supportive of market forces, and proposing the role of the public sector might be reduced through privatisation.

Nonetheless, the shift to a free market ideology was fraught with difficulties. The ANC, due to the historical circumstances of apartheid, had pledged itself to a coalition with the trade union federation, COSATU, yet the rank and file membership remained resolutely opposed to privatisation policies. The ANC could not easily dismiss these objections because, for the time at least, it needed the support of the trade union to

provide it with a level of credibility in the immediate post-apartheid period. Fortunately for the government, the trade union bureaucracy was willing to furnish such support in exchange for a place at the country's central decision-making forums.

To secure the consent of the trade unions, a corporatist model of employee relations was introduced in post-apartheid South Africa. The policies - seen as a method of shifting the economy away from adversarial labour relations by placating a strong labour movement - were not unconditional. In return for encouraging union-employer social contracts, the new government expected the trade union leadership to concede to a deregulated, flexible labour market. Ultimately the changes raised fundamental questions about the nature of the 'new' state and whether the trade unions would - or could - resist their free market policies.

In order to address this question, the final chapter of the dissertation, firstly summarises the case study and the main questions that emerged from it with regard to the state and trade unions. It then subsequently revisits the conceptual framework, with a view to answering these questions, and refining the theoretical understanding of the changing relationship between the state and public sector unions.

## **15.2 THE CASE STUDY**

In an attempt to expound these issues, the study of the Cape Town branch of the municipal union - SAMWU - was considered useful. The distinctive features of this branch made it inherently important as a focus for study. Its characteristics helped to demonstrate the complexities of the changing relationship between the state and public sector trade unionists. The value of studying SAMWU in this area was multi-faceted, not only did the case study serve to illustrate the labyrinthine nature of apartheid - and the multiple functions it historically performed for the state and capitalism in South Africa - but it also took account of the state's on-going free market policies of privatisation and commercialisation, and their continuing threats to the public sector.

Cape Town, the founder branch of SAMWU, illustrated well the contradictions and inconsistencies propagated within the apartheid system. The experiences of racial segregation in this region controlled and shaped the lives of its (almost exclusively)

`coloured' membership by offering concessions and privileges over Africans on the one hand, whilst continuing to discriminate and oppress its members on the other. Yet, such a brutal racist regime did not go entirely unchallenged, the union with its stewards and rank and file members constituted one of the pivotal forces against apartheid in the Western Cape during the this period.

Nonetheless, this branch was also different primarily because its resistance did not remain confined to fighting apartheid. The union and its members had consistently - since the policy was originally introduced by the apartheid government in the 1980s - recognised and resisted the dangers of local government privatisation. With the abolition of apartheid it was hoped that such polices would disappear but - with attempts by the new black leadership to attract inward investment - the South African government began adopting strategies commonly associated with the free market policies of `Thatcherism' and Japanese flexible labour practices. More significantly, public sector shop stewards and members, previously nurtured in the skills of militancy and disruption, were now being asked to respond to such initiatives with compliance and co-operation.

The essential questions that arose from these observations was whether SAMWU, as an affiliate of COSATU, would reject strategies of co-operation and conciliation and choose instead, as it had done so under apartheid, rank and file resistance as the main agency for opposing state policies of privatisation. This in turn posed a further related question, linked to whether the state would be free to respond positively to this resistance if the alternative economic policies being advocated by labour, differed fundamentally from those of global capitals'.

Although no clear answers were immediately forthcoming by 1997, the case study description and analysis did provide a useful vehicle to explore further the theory of the state and its inter-relationship with the trade unions. The overall deliberation had generated questions related to two areas, which needed attention in the dissertation:

1) The state:

- whether the state was free to decide its own national policy if it differed from global capital
- or more theoretically whether a state`s political superstructure could ever be independent of the capitalist economic system?

## 2) The trade unions:

- whether the public sector trade unions (in this case the Cape Town branch of SAMWU) had the collective strength, leadership and organisation capable, of utilising resistance (conflict) to stop local government privatisation and deregulation. Which was linked to the question of.....
- whether the peculiarly skewed membership (mainly 'coloured') would affect the members' class consciousness, and as a consequence its ability to use resistance to stop privatisation. Which prompted the further question of....
- whether trade unions could realistically improve their members' material circumstances by the use of corporatist agreements with governments?

The following sections consider these two areas and attempt to address the related questions, in the process of refining the theoretical understanding of the relationship between the state and public sector trade unions in South Africa.

### 15.3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

The thesis used the Marxist method of historical materialism to explain the changing relationship between the state and public sector unions in South Africa. In sum it was the shifts in the mechanism of bourgeois/capitalist control that accounted for the recent actions of the state and its public sector trade unions. To explain more fully, Marx, identified material production as the dynamic in society - it was the adoption of new tools, technologies, or forces of production that produced new and different 'relations', or modes of regulation. Nevertheless, the relationship is not simple, such changes in the various modes of regulation of capitalism are also founded on the tensions and *contradictions* intrinsic to the capital-labour relations.

An understanding of these contradictions rests on an acceptance of the social world as being, not an aggregate of unconnected happenings but a totality. Such a Marxist, dialectical approach relies on the historical understanding of all the parts and relations of the present system. As Hegel wrote 'Things and events only become comprehensible when set in the context of the web of relationships that bind them together into a single interconnected whole (Hegel, 1977, s20, p.11). This totality is a contradictory one - the essence of dialectical thinking consisting of the recognition that

the conflict and struggle contained within the contradiction, is at the root of all movement. It is only in so far that there is a contradiction that anything moves. For Marx these contradictions were located in the tendency of the prevailing social relations of production to become a fetter on the further expansion of productive forces, and in the class struggle which develops within the framework of the conflict between exploiters and exploited (Harman, 1991). These contradictions between the forces and relations of production, and between classes are the driving forces of social transformation, and are central to understanding why capitalism and its states - as part of that system - changes. Such an analysis helps us to develop an understanding of the nature of the state and trade unions in South Africa from 1992-7.

## **15.4 THE STATE**

The conceptual framework, developed in the literature review (Chapter 3), had previously theorised the (class) nature of the state as a means of explaining not only why the South African state changed its policy, but also the levels of freedom the government might have to decide those policies. The study began by reviewing the literature and deducing that the modern nation state, in this case the South African state, remained relevant and intrinsic to capitalism. It was only with the development of modern capitalist society that the division of labour and differentiation of social institutions had reached their highest point yet, and now more than at any other time, needed to be underpinned by the political structures of the state.

### **15.4.1 'State derivation' debate**

In keeping with this analysis the dissertation held that the materialist approach to the subject, offered by the 'state derivation' theory - promoted by Bonefield and Holloway, 1996 ; Burnham, 1996; Burnham, 2001; and Holloway and Picciotto, 1980 - provided a further discerning evaluation of the state and its actions. The 'state derivation' theorists viewed the different parts of the system not as things but as relations - relations that involved the exploitation of labour at the point of production. Yet, to explain the relative freedom the state appeared to occasionally enjoy from economics, it identified two totally distinct logics within capitalism – the rule of law, and the rule of money - two capital 'forms' enjoying a separate existence whilst springing

logically and historically from the nature of that relation - a sort of 'two heads on one body'.

However, the dissertation remained critical of the 'state deviation' theorists for several related reasons. Firstly, the level of abstraction of the theory means the state is only ever conceptualised as one single form. Secondly – and this is linked to the problem of abstraction identified in the first criticism - because the theory perceives a structural differentiation between the state and business as a point of principle - its forms being separate but equal - difficulty is found in locating the precise causal links between their two respective modes of regulation (the rule of law, and the rule of money). This makes it hard to identify the reasons for the shift in regulation from one to the other, in this case the shift from state regulation to free market privatisation. More especially, the emphasis on the distinctiveness of the two separate modes of regulation, rules out the possibility of the two modes of regulation ever merging - or the state ever acting as capital. Which makes [the concept of] different types of states, such as Nazi Germany or Soviet Russia - when the two modes of regulation did in fact merge - impossible to theorise. Thirdly – and finally - for the 'state derivation' theorists (in particular Holloway and Bonefield, 1996) the policy of the state is the result of class struggle, the state being an aspect of the capital relations, and that in of itself a relation of class struggle. But herein lies 'part' of the problem because such an approach only allows for 'part' of the answer - it only recognises the capital-labour relations. Although the 'state derivation' approach takes account of the essential 'vertical' capital-labour relationship it neglects the 'horizontal' struggles between exploiters (capitalists), and even between the states themselves (Catchpole, Cooper and Wright, 1999).

In order to address these related points it is essential, firstly to identify the basic impasse in the 'state derivation' analysis, the nature of which lies in its inappropriate level of abstraction that defines separate modes of regulation and results in the state being perceived in the singular. However, as Barker (1978 p.118) argues, capitalism is not made up of a singular model of the state, it is in fact a world system of states, with any discussion of its form having to take account of the state both as an apparatus of class domination, as well as the state as an apparatus of competition, between segments of the bourgeoisie. Indeed it is the set of very different nation-states that make up the "international political community" of world capitalism. The nation-state system is a product of development, and is global in scope, in just the same way that capital (as a social relation) is.

To explain more fully, it might be better to consider firstly the nature of capital, which according to Marx (Marx 1973,p.421) can only exist as many capitals, through the interaction between many capitals, The capital relation is not just alienated, exploited relations at the point of the production (Marx, 1976, p.477), it is a summary expression for the whole nexus of social relation, founded in the production of surplus-value, embodied in the whole circuit of capital. This circuit of capital then is more than the 'moment' of capitalist production, it is also the other 'moments' of the capital circuit (exchange, realisation, price formation etc) (Barker, 1978, p120). Therefore, a single universal capital is a contradiction in terms, it is the characteristic of capitalism that it develops through competition where competition is the source and expression of the anarchy of capitalism. The social relation of capital has the dual form: anarchy and despotism - between many capitals there is anarchy, within each capital despotism.

Now if capital relations have this form, so too does the state, the state is also part of that anarchy and despotism. The very form of the state expresses the fact that the capitalist state is not something above and separate from the relations of capitalist production, but is itself directly part of those relations. But equally, because the state is not one singular state, it can never represent the 'whole' bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie like the proletariat is an international class, and so a single state cannot manage the affairs of the whole bourgeoisie, it is only part of *some* capital(s), a segment of the whole of the bourgeoisie. Individual states are part of a capitalist state system, with different states taking different forms, due to being shaped by a fusion or mobilisation of a particular segment of the bourgeoisie, and other classes, into a nation, formed moreover in opposition to other states (Barker, 1978).

What is crucial to remember is that in the process of accumulation, not all states adopt methods of capital accumulation in the same way, capitalism is characteristically uneven. In the past century there has been those states which have been totally centralised into one nation state capital (such as Stalinist Russia); and more commonly national states of western capitalism, around which are formed, more or less articulated and enlarged blocks of capital, which are either direct legal property of the state (such as nationalised industries in the 1970s), or (more usually now) effectively state property, given their dependence on the state for investment capital, orders etc. (Barker, 1978, p123). In the case of South Africa, although the state remains a part of capital - with failure, to adapt to the constantly changing conditions and ideology necessary to create

the surplus for capital accumulation, resulting ultimately in the collapse of that state - it does not mean that it adopts that model of capital accumulation in exactly the same way and pace, as other states. It is in fact influenced by its competitive relationships with other capitals and states, and the balance of class forces within that country, which effects the method of class domination it chooses.

That brings us to the second criticism, (although linked essentially to the first). Here the level of abstraction in the theory, which attempts to define - however tenuously - separate forms of capital, makes it also difficult to locate the precise causal links between their two respective modes of regulation. What this conveys, even if unintentionally, is the political form is in some way separate from the basic relations of capitalism, and as such distinctive from the business of 'economic exploitation'. Yet, as events in South African from 1992-7 have shown, both the apartheid and post-apartheid state and their political forms are not independent from their economic base, in reality they can never escape from their role of maintaining the overall conditions for capital accumulation. The state, along with everyone else is dependent upon the activities of capitalism for its revenue. There is a structural dependence of the state on capitalism, even when the state seems to be in charge, even when economics and politics are fused - as in Nazi Germany or Soviet Russia.

More directly though, what in fact this separation between economic and political does is rule out theoretically, the state ever acting as capital. In particular it fails to acknowledge the tendency, particularly within 20th century capitalism, for capital to be organised directly by nation-states, by taking the form of state capital, or to put it more simply, it fails to acknowledge the many different ways states adopt methods of capital accumulation. In actual fact it is only by rejecting the distinctiveness - however ambiguous - between the separate capital 'forms', that one can find the causes for the shift in state regulation and policy, from the 'rule of law' to the 'rule of money'. But, because the state derivation theorists analysis continues to treat the state as external to the process of accumulation (Holloway and Picciotto, 1977, p96), it quite simply prevents them from recognising that it is the bourgeoisie's competitive struggles, with other bourgeoisie, other nations, other capitals - which shapes the structure of any particular nation-state, and forces it to shift its policies and actions.

This brings us to a third, but once again related criticism - the 'state derivation' theorists' neglect of the "horizontal" relations between and within capitalism. Such a

view can lead to the unintentional neglect of the *totality*, a concept central to the dialectical method of analysis outlined above. The "vertical" relationship between labour and capital are not the only relations to consider, the "horizontal" relations *between* and *within* capitals also constitute an essential element, and although founded on - and subjected to - the basic tensions and contradictions intrinsic to the capitalism, it still needs to be recognised.

The *totality* of the dialectic dictates that the state policy cannot be understood independently of other relations, the activities of labour are not self-contained practices, the labour-capital relation is not the only influence on the state - the relations (competition) *within* and *between* the capitalist classes - and between states themselves - also has an impact. However, with the state derivation theory the world market appears only as afterthought (in particular Holloway and Picciotto, 1977 p.93), it is not central to the analysis of the state and its relation to capital (Barker, 1978)

However, what had become apparent in South Africa by 1997, was that the ANC's political and economic relations were now unquestionably tied up with those of capitalism - and any developments or changes in that system, in the competition between the bourgeoisie (national and international), between firms (national and international) and different world states, were bound to have an impact on the government and its freedom to decide policy. In particular, the intense global market pressures which were propelling changes in relations and activities between firms world-wide, were also forcing a shift in world ideology - one that favoured and accommodated free market needs - and one that South Africa, as always part of the capitalist system, may adapt to in its own peculiar way, but could not afford to ignore.

Therefore, in keeping with the totality of relationships, relationships *within* and *between* capitals, states, and bourgeoisie also have to be considered, all of which have an impact on the form that the state takes. Each productive capital may be seen as growing up within the confines of a particular state or territory, but they grow up alongside other capitals. They are all mutually dependent on each other for resources, finances and markets, and act together to try to shape the social and political conditions to suit their purposes - they inevitably become what Marx described as 'warring brothers'. The specific character of each capital is influenced by its interaction with the other capitals - they boost their competitive positions by establishing alliances both with each other and prestigious figures. Furthermore, such co-operative relations do not

exist in a vacuum - "struggles" between rival exploiters, both nationally and internationally are also part of the relationship (Harman, 1991; Ruigrok and van Tudler, 1995).

Yet because productive capital grows up within the confines of a particular territory - along side other capitals - the nation state and different nationally based capitals are intertwined with - and dependent on - each other. The one is not independent of the other, whereas states are dependent on the surplus created by capitalism, capitals are equally bound up with states. Individual capitals may be able to uproot themselves temporary from nation state and settle in another, but in truth it cannot operate for long without having some nation state (or states) to support them. Capital is not increasingly dispensing with the services of the nation state, multi-nationals still need a 'national base' to operate from, the state still plays a key role in establishing and maintaining key firms, providing the necessary home base for research and development, specialist skills and education, beneficial laws and finance etc. (Hirst and Thompson, 1996; Ruigrok and van Tudler, 1995)

And precisely because states and capitals can influence, are influenced by each other - are dependent and inter-dependent - they are affected by the same crises (Ruigrok and van Tudler, 1995). Recently, (the relations of) competition between firms have been changing - partly as a result of the economic crisis since the 1970s and 80s, which helped create more intense market pressures. Changes in the material production and accumulation by firms, the increased coercion between businesses as they search for new sources of profits, has made competition between capitals more acute. That said, there is nothing new in these changes, the contradictory exploitative relationship at the root of capitalism, as it strives for never-ending profits and accumulation means the system is always transforming itself. Capitals are part of a global system whose logic forces individual capitals to continually adopt new methods of achieving profits and accumulation.

But as a consequence - and as a result - of the recent economic changes, governments have found it progressively more difficult to try to 'manage' its own national economy - although, controlling their national capitals has always been problematic for states. Failure to handle the constant restructuring and periodic recessions has meant that states have retreated from promises to do so and have returned to talking about market forces. The changes have led to a shift in ideology in favour of the free market, a trend

from which even the South African state - with its interesting mixture of corporatism and privatisation - has not been exempt from in the post-apartheid era.

Consequently, the changes in (the relations of) competition between firms have an impact on the South African state and its actions - and accounted for the ANC governments' shift in 1995 to another mode of regulation, essentially a shift to the 'rule of money' and the free market. Because of the structural inter-dependence between states and capitals, the ways in which capitals are being forced, locally and internationally - as a result of changes in competition within capitals - to (re)organise their methods of production, influenced the South African governments actions both in 1992 and 1997. Such changes forced the National Party to retreat from apartheid and adopt the ideology of the free market. Likewise the ANC government was obliged to shift its position in favour of the market. It was precisely because the state's relations were intrinsically tied up with those of capitalism, that changes in relations *within and between* capitals also impacted on the relations *within and between* the state and capitals - bringing about a change in state regulation in favour of the market and the 'rule of money'. Consequently, the changes in the form of, and relation between capital (due to changes in the world economy) can also have a bearing on government policy.

Therefore, directly because the South African state was part of - and integral to - the capitalism system, changes in the relations between capitals, both domestically and globally, were bound to affect the relations between the government and these capitals. And, although the ANC badly needed to adopt corporatist policies in order to contain the resistance from a strong trade union movement - it was still being pressurised by international capital, and its own domestic capitals to abandon such social democratic policies and shift to state regulation in favour of the market and the 'rule of money' (Catchpowle and Cooper, 1999).

To conclude, in response to the analysis developed by the 'state derivation' theorists, the theory provided a useful tool, but for the reasons outlined, neglected the state's basic structural dependence on capitalism. This was perceived by the author as chiefly linked to the theory's level of abstraction which neglected not only to recognise, the different forms the nation-state can take in its pursuit of capital accumulation; but also failed to conceptualise, that the two modes of regulation - rule of money and rule of law were not -however tenuously - separate, and could in fact merge. Finally by only recognising the vertical relations between 'labour and capital' it neglected the concept

of the 'totality' contained within the historical materialist approach, which demands that all relations - capital, state and labour - should be considered. Ultimately, the models and actions of the nation states can not be understood in isolation, the Marxist method of dialectical materialism requires that all relations should be understood in relation to each other. All are structurally and mutually intertwined with each other and what drives society as a whole, namely the changes in the 'forces of production' that presently creates the profits and capital accumulation in a capitalist society.

- **In sum**, the answer to the original question, of whether the state is free to decide its own policy if it differs from global capital - or more directly whether the political superstructure of the state can ever be independent of the capitalist economic system - must be (as derived from the theoretical discussion) no. True, it might be possible for the state to adopt its methods in different ways, or at a different pace, but ultimately, if it neglects to conform to the global system whose logic continually forces individual states to adopt new methods of capital accumulation, it will not survive.

## 15.5 THE TRADE UNIONS

But what does this mean for trade unions like SAMWU if the South African state can never be independent of capitalism? Is it pointless for it to pressurise the government to abandon privatisation, especially as the current 'forces and relations of production' and ultimately profits continue to be governed by the free market ideology? Dialectical Materialism provides an answer. In keeping with the principle of the 'totality' - and as a consequence still recognising the power of the changing relationships between capitals, and their ultimate impact on states - the vertical relationship between capital and labour still remains crucial.

More especially, the 'contradictory' element of the system is important and can impact on the relations *between* capitals and states, and *within* capitals - especially as relations *within* and *between* capitals and states are usually bound up with exploitative relations between classes and the process for surplus extraction. It is only when we consider relations between labour and capital - along with relations *within* capitals and *between* capitals and states, that we begin to fully understand the actions and freedoms of the South African state (Rees, 1998; Cooper *et al.*, 2000).

In essence it is the basis of this exploitative, conflictual relationship within capitalism that has the potential - within the dialectic - to create movement and change. Moreover, it was this exploitative relationship, which helped to create, in the case of South Africa, a level of collective consciousness amongst workers in Cape Town - which in turn originated the momentum to resist privatisation. Therefore, **the question of whether SAMWU would be capable of utilising resistance to stop privatisation was directly linked to the levels of class consciousness and solidarity within this group.**

What the case study revealed was a level - albeit at this stage, uneven and contradictory - of a class-consciousness amongst the SAMWU workers in Cape Town. But as Gramsci explained, to understand the uneven consciousness of workers it is important to embrace all aspects of society, all dimensions of human existence, and social relations. Like Marx, Gramsci used a 'totalising' theory which incorporated all areas of society within a historical framework. He used the notion of '*ensemble of relations*' that assimilated all economics, politics, culture, social relations, ideology etc (Boggs, 1976; Simon, 1988). On reflection although, the brief analysis of the social, political and economic environment of the region - was not adequate enough to fully measure the Cape Town members' level of class consciousness - it did at least provide some insight.

### **15.5.1 Issues of race**

The issue of class and collective consciousness within this group was inherently tied up with the issues of race, in particular the 'coloured identity'. This 'coloured' community in South Africa have historically held a position between whites and blacks, with 'coloureds' generally enjoying a marked material and social advantage over blacks, which appears to have influenced their political affinity with the NP, and prevented class solidarity with the majority of the black population in South Africa.

The dissertation has from the beginning conceptualised apartheid and the issues of race as a function of capitalism (Leggasick, 1974; Wolpe, 1975; Callinicos, 1986). The reality of the Western Cape, a region that had been subject to the longest continuous colonial occupation since 1652, makes a complete nonsense - with its blending of descendants of the original Khoisan inhabitants, Xhosa-speaking Africans, Malay slaves, Indian traders and indentured labourers, Dutch settlers and French Huguenot

refugees - of the apartheid regimes' cultural and racial classification of a separate 'coloureds' identity (Callinicos, 1986). A pertinent foundation for social analysis in this area can be framed as racial division helping to facilitate capitalist growth in South Africa, by securing a cheap, weak divided labour force, which assured for the white bourgeoisie a material and political advantage.

Further proof that the white bourgeoisie only utilised apartheid for the benefit of capitalism, can be perceived from Botha's (South African President) willingness to abandon the ideology of race, if it meant preserving the economy's ability to create profits. In 1983 - in a response to international criticism and capital flight from the country - Botha was willing to desert the long-standing principles of apartheid, by granting limited 'power sharing' with 'coloured' leaders, and granting concessions to skilled black workers. In both cases he changed the legislation, in order to create a tricameral parliament for 'coloureds' and Indians, and to grant rights of residence in urban areas for skilled Africans. The aim was to replace legal racial discrimination, with the internationally more defensible socio-economic inequalities, which it was hoped would cut across the black-white divide, and replace race with class as the main antagonism (Callinicos, 1988 p147)

Unfortunately, the use that capitalism made of the race ideology - the direct links between racism and capitalism in South Africa - meant the demise of white rule was unlikely to signal the end of economic inequality. Whereas a change in the regime may have taken place in South Africa in 1994, the mass of workers, not just in the Western Cape but South Africa as a whole, have yet to see any significant improvement in their lives. It follows that while it proved possible in the end, to remove the political institutions of apartheid from the capitalist framework, the social and economic inequality, remained (Callinicos, 1996). Consequently, whereas the courage and political sacrifice of Mandela and ANC leaders are not in question, the failure of the ANC to pursue any real attempt to transform society - other than tokenistic attempts of affirmative action and black empowerment - has meant the socio-economic position of the 'coloured' community - along with many Africans - has not changed. The result being 'coloureds' in Cape Town continued to retreat to racial discrimination, in a pathetic effort to boost their relatively poor position in the economy.

**To that end,** and in response to the question of whether the peculiarly skewed ('coloured') membership would affect the members' class consciousness, undoubtedly

the preservation of a 'coloured' identity in the region, had (and has) the potential to negate against the SAMWU workers ability to develop a collective consciousness and solidarity to fight against privatisation.

### 15.5.2 Cape Town Branch: conflict or conciliation?

Nevertheless, an understanding of this groups collective and class-consciousness, should not simply be confined to an analysis of being 'coloured', a further measure can be gleaned from the members' interaction with the Cape Town branch itself. The dissertation traced the progression of Cape Town, from a small, yet significant branch to one of immense importance, capable of influencing and originating national leadership and policy. It continued to measure (however inadequate given the limited time period under review) whether the branch within the context of the union, would not only have the structure, organisation, leadership and collective strength to resist local government privatisation, but whether these factors would sufficiently interact with each other, in order to do so successfully? The issues of conflict and conciliation were crucial to the discussion. The case study attempted to provide an understanding of such elements whilst continuing to reflect on the contradictions prevalent in the relations between capital and labour in South Africa, generally.

#### Conflict

A comprehension of conflict in South Africa was linked to an understanding of the relatively spontaneous development of mass struggles around apartheid, and the subsequent protests emerging around the apartheid wage gap, and privatisation. Both being examples of when the underlying conflict between capital<sup>46</sup> and labour had surfaced during the 1992-7 period under review. Yet it also recognised that the power and success of such activities hinged on the balance of class forces, the leadership and the organisation through which class consciousness could be strengthened and articulated (Callinicos, 1999).

In the midst of this scenario the historical power of the mass struggles in South Africa and the effective leadership were central. Whereas it might be true that, the leadership and mass strikes had failed to bring about a revolutionary change in South African

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<sup>46</sup> This obviously includes the local South African state, since the state is theorized as an integral part of capital

society - they had nevertheless been central to bringing an end to one of the most repressive ideologies and regimes of the twentieth century - apartheid. It could not be denied, that it was the strength and endurance of the black organised labour that had first brought de Klerk to the negotiating table. Furthermore, the events and interviews in the 1992-7 period, continued to reveal a confidence in such strikes to bring about change - which in turn could be interpreted as a level of collective consciousness - however uneven and confusing - in Cape Town. Many of the 'coloured' members and stewards when asked - in 1993 - what they were fighting for, made it clear they wanted more than just new laws and constitutions, they wanted to change their lives dramatically. Some were prepared to put it into more theoretical terms saying they had been fighting for socialism as well as national liberation. More especially, a number of SAMWU shop stewards and rank-and-file members, interviewed in both 1993 and 97, believed that strike action and other forms of resistance, were the only ways to stop privatisation. And why should they doubt it - especially as many had already witnessed mass action bringing an end to the almighty power of apartheid? Such views help to support Gramsci's argument that the ideological domination of the capitalist class remained precarious - resting as it does on a relative balance of rival conceptions of the world, on the part of the working classes.

**In sum then**, although it was impossible in 1997 to conclude whether the branch, indeed the union as a whole, would have the leadership and organisation to complement the collective strength of the membership to successfully resist privatisation, the actions taken and comments made by both the leadership (General Secretary, Regional secretary etc.) and members (interviewed in Cape Town and Gauteng), appeared to indicate this was the case. The re-organisation of the union in order to remain rooted in rank-and-file activity, the campaigns instigated to fight privatisation (often in isolation of COSATU), the declared intention to use strike action to stop privatisation, all seemed to imply that the union leadership and its members (interviewed), at the very least, had confidence in the collective strength of SAMWU to resist local government privatisation

### Conciliation

Yet equally the involvement and success of mass action are not the only impact on levels of collective and class consciousness, other elements need to be considered during this period. Essentially the issues of the COSATU leadership and formal

organisation could not be ignored. In South Africa, all trade union organisations were becoming increasingly sophisticated and formalised - with some form of accommodation taking place between employers, labour and their organisations. In particular, the COSATU leadership appeared to be viewing a partnership between labour, the state and employers as essential, especially as they moved further from a potential revolutionary union activity towards formal bureaucratic accommodation. (Ajulu, 1993; Murray, 1994).

As explained in the conceptual framework, the establishment of a constitutional democracy had obviously created some of the necessary conditions for the emergence of a strong and 'civilising' civil society. But the incorporation of the trade unions - as a branch of civil society - into the state through forums such as NEDLAC, was also a source of concern for a number of stewards interviewed in SAMWU. Many feared corporatist institutions would erode their 'real' power base, rooted in the rank and file mass struggle. More especially, the use of state institutionalised regulation might possibly be used to conceal the centrality of conflict - the real driving force of change - in the fundamental structures of capitalist relations of production (Hyman, 1975).

In contrast Schreiner (1994), argued that (left) anti-corporatism was misfounded, because of its infantile leftism and workerism. Instead, as outlined in the literature review, he saw a role for the market, running along side the corporatist experiments. Although he and other advocates of tri-partism, social contracts, and centralised bargaining, recognised there were dangers, they were seen as being outweighed by the tactics of mobilisation, consultation, participation, and by remaining accountable and democratic (Gall, 1997).

Nevertheless, even a 'modified' corporatist model still involves imposing certain social priorities on the market, which in turn would entail establishing a new accumulation strategy for capitalism with state-directed investment towards manufacturing and social infrastructure, and improvements in living standards (Callinicos, 1992b). The essential problem as Gall (1997) explains, is trying to make the South African economy more productive so as to provide resources for such social progress within a capitalist local and world order. Inevitably, workers will be made to make unacceptable sacrifices over the extent and pace of the progress of the project. Equally, such a national accumulation strategy fails to recognise that the South Africa state is part of an international world market, subject to the pressures and competition from international

and national bourgeoisie and firms, as well as other states themselves (Barker, 1987). Already, despite a long established model of co-determination, the far wealthier German state is under competitive pressure from its own bourgeoisie, firms and international states to engage in a process of restructuring, with employers introducing new working arrangements, detrimental to labour (Upchurch, 2000).

Almost certainly then, reformist experiments of corporatism, will force the South African trade union bureaucracy to concede ever greater concessions to the market, in return for apparent partnership arrangements with capital and the state. Such a relationship can be highly restrictive - even going as far as forcing the leadership to discipline their own powerful rank-and-file membership, should they threaten disruption (Palmer, 1983). As Fine (1992), suggests 'democratic corporatism' may be seen as a way of empowering civil society, but its true purpose is usually to formalise the participation of interests which already have power, and whose demands the state needs to incorporate, if it is to safeguard the interests of capitalism effectively.

Consequently, it might be necessary to query whether the mechanism of social contract and partnerships can ever actually lead to a shift in the balance of power, favouring labour over capital (Kelly, 1988). Moreover, in the case of South Africa, the concern still remains over whether the COSATU leadership - once institutionally involved in corporatist structures - would be forced to take joint responsibility for the consequences of the state's shift to the free-market. Repercussions from such actions may lead to criticism and loss of support from their membership. Trade unions - then failing to bind their constituents to negotiated agreements - may find employers abandoning partnerships agreements, and resorting all the more easily to ever more repressive means of controlling a now, weaker disillusioned workforce (Friedman and Reitzes, 1996; Gall, 1997).

**Therefore** although in 1997, it was too soon to speculate whether trade unions- and the Cape Town branch in particular - could realistically improve their members material circumstances by use of corporatist agreements with the government (in return for an acquiescence to free market principles as Schreiner suggests) many SAMWU leaders and members interviewed from 1992-7 believed it could not. A number of leaders and members interviewed, even predicted that such experiments would eventually lead to the demise of the collective strength of the South African trade unions .

## 15.6 CONCLUSION

In sum, when addressing the general questions associated with the changing relationship between the government and public sector trade unions, the case study of SAMWU provided a useful tool for furthering the analysis of the state and its trade unions. Whereas, in 1997 it was impossible to answer irrefutably whether SAMWU would reject co-operation and conciliation, and choose instead rank- and- file resistance to oppose state policies of privatisation, it was possible to deduce that the recent strong bureaucratisation of trade unions – linking increased formalisation, social contracts and partnerships – had done little to prevent free market ideologies and practices from being introduced in the workplace. Yet, whether SAMWU, would opt decisively for strategies of strikes and resistance, would in the final analysis be inescapably tied to the levels of collective and class consciousness - and its links to an effective leadership and organisation. At this point, the empirical data from the case study, indicated all three areas were uncertain and indeterminate. However, it was possible to conclude theoretically, that the pressure for resistance would continue (as was the case during apartheid) to rest on the workforce's collective confidence in its own ability to challenge the hegemony of both the state and the trade union bureaucracy (Ronnie, 1996; Miliband, 1983).

Whether the state would be free to respond to this resistance, if the alternative economic policies advocated differed fundamentally from those of global capitals, was a further related question. The answer was once again linked to the contradictory nature of capitalism and the balance of class forces. The theoretical conclusion of this thesis, was the state was not independent of capitalism, that it – along with business and labour - was ultimately bound up with the relations of capital. And whilst the state's material relationship with capitalism meant it was not a mere reflection of the economic base – being able to influence and be influenced by capitalism – it was still not free from the means and relations of production, on account of being dependent on the surplus produced under that system.

Nevertheless, as an integral part of capitalism it was also bound up with the 'contradictions' of capitalism, found within the exploitative relations between capital and labour. Such 'contradictions' are important because they influence the levels of conflict within society, which is the engine for changing the balance of class forces, and

subsequent system. In this process the role of the state is crucial because its central function is to control any major threat to the power of the capitalist classes. Consequently, although it may frequently force labour to undertake policies that continue to support the dominance of the surplus-appropriating classes it may also – due to being directly enmeshed in the class contradictions of capitalism – choose to meet the challenge of labour by seeking reform and compromise in order to minimise the resistance to capitalism.

As a consequence, the ANC government – as an integral part of capitalism – could not afford, long term at least, to ignore the class threat posed by an increasingly strong trade union, like SAMWU. Especially as the exploitative relationship between labour and capital, being pushed to the fore on account of changing conditions and ideologies in capitalism, would be sure to mean that the traditionally volatile South African industrial relations environment, would remain a contested terrain (Goodrich, 1975) long after 1997.

In short as to whether the state would respond to public sector union pressure to abandon privatisation, the answer in 1997 remained inconclusive, but any future deduction would almost certainly rely on continually analysing all the parts of the relationships within capitalism. The ‘contradictory’ element of the system between labour and capital would remain important, but so too would the relations *between* and *within* capitals and states and even the local and international bourgeoisie – as they are all bound up with exploitative relations between classes and the process for surplus extraction. It is only when relations *within* and *between* capitals, *between* capitals and states, and *between* states themselves – along with relations between labour and capital – are surveyed together, that we begin to fully understand the balance of class forces and how it might effect the South African state and its actions towards business and trade unions. In conclusion, it only the interaction of all parties – historically overtime – that can give rise to a qualitatively new situation. In a dialectical system, the entire nature of the part can only be understood by its relationships with other parts. It is only when we bring the parts into relation with each other, overtime, that their real meaning is perceived and the situation transformed (Rees, 1998; Cooper *et al.*, 2000).

## POSTSCRIPT

Throughout the rest of the millennium the ANC remained committed to privatisation. In the year 2000 the ANC leader, President Mbeki felt confident and bold enough to announce that the country was in a better position to tackle poverty and mass unemployment because of the partnership between public and private sectors (Mckinley, 2000). SAMWU and many other unions disagreed, they remained convinced that the involvement of the private sector had resulted in dire consequences for their members and users of public services (WM&G, 2001a)

In 1998 a programme of privatisation had been enthusiastically introduced in Johannesburg (van Driel, 1999). Despite union protests the Johannesburg City Council remained determined to implement its "Igoli 2002" masterplan. The transformation scheme entailed a privatisation drive set to commercialise water, sanitation, electricity, waste management, parks and cemeteries, the civic theatre, the zoo, metro bus service, and the fresh produce market. The council also identified specific plans to cut 40% of the workforce - of the 27,000 workers only 15,000 were to be left, once privatisation has been completed (WM&G, 2000). The decision was endorsed by the ANC, whose Finance Minister, Trevor Manuel, had agreed to provide R550 million to the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council, on condition that the iGoli 2002 plan continued (Davis, 2000).

A further Unicity plan was introduced in Cape Town. Plans to restructure the City were designed by a team of consultants with no input from the unions or community groups (Services for All, Sept. 2000, p.6). In March 2000, the Democratic Alliance controlled council unveiled its plans to "corporatise" Cape Town's water and sanitation, electricity, and solid waste disposal services. Senior council sources told the Mail & Guardian, that they had opted for the corporatist route because this would be more palatable to the unions, than privatisation in its pure form. However they intended, once the new business units were established, to involve the private sector (Streek, 2001).

Opposition to such privatisation plans has since led to a series of protests, occupations, and a wave of industrial action, on the part of SAMWU and other unions. In Johannesburg, in January 2000 SAMWU representative, Victor

Mhlongo declared that the union had withdrawn from all negotiations regarding Igoli 2002, and were planning further protest action (WM&G, 2000)

In June 2000, SAMWU members occupied Johannesburg council's executive offices in protest against the privatisation of services. The occupation only ended after the MEC for Local Government in Gauteng, Trevor Fowler gave a written undertaking to the unions, that all implementation of Igoli 2002 would be stopped. SAMWU also demanded that central government stop putting pressure on local government to implement their policies of privatisation. (Davis, 2000).

In Cape Town, SAMWU had already blocked the privatisation of refuse removal in Khayelitsha, in 1998 (Gumede, 1998). On the 29<sup>th</sup> July, 2000, the Local Government Transformation Forum was launched to fight the privatisation initiative of the Unicity, and to ensure Cape Town's municipal services remained in the hands of local government. The forum consisted of SAMWU, community based organisations, churches and other trade unions. On the 14<sup>th</sup> Aug 2000, 200 shop stewards occupied the offices of the Unicity Commission in Cape Town. They were protesting to keep local government in the hands of the people (Services for All, Sept. 2000, p.6).

Intriguingly, during the protests against privatisation, the liberal reputation of Cape Town Council appeared to evaporate. On October 2000, SAMWU reported that WELOGO (the employer organisation representing the seven municipalities in the Cape Metro Area) and the Unicity Commission, intended to institute disciplinary action against SAMWU shop stewards. The reason was linked to the stewards (presumably unauthorised) attendance at a shop stewards council meeting, in order to obtain a mandate on the union's approach to bargaining for the new Unicity (SAMWU, 2000).

Finally, on the 29<sup>th</sup> Aug 2001, millions of workers downed tools in a national strike to protest against privatisation of state assets (WM&G, 2001b). It was an attempt by COSATU's two million members to force the government to engage with alternatives to privatisation. SAMWU for its part, said it could not wait until Aug 29 and 30 to strike, it was doing so immediately. The protest was over the Khara Hais (formerly Upington) municipality in Northern Cape, where the council - after writing off a debt of R150,000 owed to it by Enterprises (a company that taken over the privatised

Gordonia Resort last year) - was planning to privatise the traffic department. Despite a further meeting between the ANC, COSATU and SACP, the parties failed to resolve the privatisation issue, no agreement was reached and the national strike proceeded (WM&G, 2001b).

SAMWU and the Cape Town branch remain at the forefront of the struggle against privatisation. The union continues to commit itself to a policy of opposing *all* forms of privatisation. Such a pledge maintains the potential for a bitter economic and political confrontation with the ANC. To date SAMWU remains on collision course with the government, over the issue of privatisation of public services.

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# Appendices



**Appendix 1: List of Interviewees in alphabetical order (by first name)**

Name of interviewee (by first name in alphabetical order)	Position or identity	Interview date in 1993/4	Interview date in 1997
Alfred	Black unemployed worker	2/3/94	
Andre	SAMWU member, Muizenburg Depot	20/12/93	
Angie	UCT 'coloured' student	17/10/93	16/8/97
Anonymous	ex- SAMWU shop Steward, Maintenance Worker		4/9/97
Anonymous	Zimbabwean casual worker		4/9/97
Anonymous	3 x SAMWU members working in Muizenburg Depot		4/9/97
Archie Flax	SAMWU member, Ambulance Service	4/1/93	
Arthur, Fillies	SAMWU member, Maintenance Worker, Electrical Dept.		6/9/97.
Brenda	Domestic Worker, Crossroads Township resident	3/3/94	20/8/97
Cheryl	SAMWU member, on Jo'burg Demonstration.		1/9/98
David Sesman	Chauffeur for 'Old Mutual' Insurance company	15/11/93	
Dennis, Arendise	Full-time SAMWU Organiser,	5/11/93	21/8/97
Denis, Joseph	SAMWU member, Waterworks	5/2/94	

<b>Dorothy</b>	<b>Dept.SAMWU member, on Jo'burg Demo.</b>		<b>1/9/98</b>
<b>Dumi</b>	<b>Black student, ANC supporter</b>		<b>19/8/97</b>
<b>Ezekiel Morolong</b>	<b>ANC activist – led the potato revolt in 1950s , Crossroads township resident</b>	<b>17/2/94</b>	
<b>Frank</b>	<b>SAMWU member in Muizenburg Depot.</b>	<b>20/12/93</b>	
<b>Frank, Pontax</b>	<b>SAMWU Full-time Administrator</b>	<b>4/1/94</b>	
<b>Funds</b>	<b>Black student, ANC supporter</b>		<b>19/8/97</b>
<b>Guy</b>	<b>Nehawu steward (white)</b>		<b>17/8/97</b>
<b>Hennie</b>	<b>SAMWU Shop Steward in Electricity Dept.</b>	<b>3/9/9</b>	
<b>Then as</b>	<b>Retired Steward/ANC Counsellor</b>		<b>24/8/97</b>
<b>J.P. Kanderman</b>	<b>Researcher: privatisation, ALA</b>	<b>7/3/94</b>	
<b>Jackie, Kelly</b>	<b>Strike Researcher, ALA</b>	<b>7/3/94</b>	
<b>James</b>	<b>SAMWU member</b>		<b>15/8/97</b>
<b>James, Moures</b>	<b>NEHAWU steward, Univeristy of Cape Town</b>	<b>15/1/94</b>	
<b>Jennifer, Soghuwas</b>	<b>Resident of Crossroads Township Cape Town</b>		<b>6/9/97</b>
<b>Jeremy</b>	<b>Shop Steward, Treasury Dept.</b>	<b>10/9/93</b>	
<b>John</b>	<b>SAMWU member, Electrical Dept.</b>		<b>5/9/97</b>

<b>John</b>	<b>Striker, who worked for South African Beer (SAB) 'Coloured'</b>		<b>17/8/97</b>
<b>Khalk</b>	<b>CCC Administrator,</b>	<b>7/1/94</b>	
<b>Lance</b>	<b>'Coloured' SAMWU worker</b>		<b>15/8/97</b>
<b>Lance, Veotte</b>	<b>Regional Education Officer</b>	<b>10/11/93</b>	
<b>Larry, Palk</b>	<b>Management Consultant, for CCC Andrew Levy Associates (ALA)</b>	<b>18/1/94.</b>	
<b>Leonard</b>	<b>UCT, Nehawu Branch Secretary</b>		<b>6/8/97</b>
<b>Lindwe</b>	<b>Crossroads township resident</b>	<b>17/2/94</b>	
<b>Lillian</b>	<b>SAMWU member, on Johannesburg Demonstration.</b>		<b>1/9/97</b>
<b>Lisa</b>	<b>UCT white student</b>	<b>4/1/94</b>	<b>27/7/97</b>
<b>Lombo</b>	<b>Crossroads township resident</b>		<b>20/8/97</b>
<b>Marcel.</b>	<b>SAMWU member, Electrical Depart.</b>		<b>5/9/97</b>
<b>Moses</b>	<b>SAMWU member, Jo' burg Demo</b>		<b>1/9/97</b>
<b>Motaung</b>	<b>SAMWU member in Waterworks</b>	<b>17/11/93</b>	
<b>Paul</b>	<b>UCT white student</b>	<b>4/1/94</b>	<b>27/7/97</b>
<b>Peter, September</b>	<b>SAMWU member, maintence worker, Electrical Dept</b>		<b>5/9/97</b>
<b>Patience</b>	<b>Crossroads township resident</b>	<b>17/2/93</b>	<b>20/8/97</b>
<b>Phaldie, Telip</b>	<b>SAMWU member , Town Planner</b>	<b>6/12/93.</b>	

<b>Piet</b>	<b>Striker, who worked for South African Beer (SAB) 'Coloured'</b>		<b>17/8/97</b>
<b>Prenden</b>	<b>Striker, who worked for South African Beer (SAB) 'Coloured'</b>		<b>17/8/97</b>
<b>Pumiani</b>	<b>Black unemployed worker</b>		<b>21/8/97</b>
<b>Roger Ronnie</b>	<b>Full-time Regional Negotiator.</b>	<b>8/10/93</b>	
<b>Then as</b>	<b>General Secretary</b>		<b>20/8/97</b>
<b>Renee Graivitzky</b>	<b>Researcher for ALA</b>	<b>7/3/94</b>	
<b>Ray, Jaftha</b>	<b>NEHAWU, Full time steward. University of Cape Town</b>	<b>17/2/94</b>	
<b>Richard Hiongwane</b>	<b>Unemployed black worker Mbali (Durban) township resident</b>		<b>26/8/97</b>
<b>Sam</b>	<b>SAMWU member, Jo'burg Demo.</b>		<b>1/9/97</b>
<b>Samaria</b>	<b>SAMWU member, on Jo'burg Demo.</b>		<b>1/9/97</b>
<b>Sentu</b>	<b>Wife of Natural Healer Vander Biji Park township resident</b>		<b>28/8/97</b>
<b>Sipho</b>	<b>Black unemployed worker</b>		<b>21/8/97</b>
<b>Tami</b>	<b>Black unemployed worker</b>		<b>2/3/97</b>
<b>Tankeiso</b>	<b>UCT Black student</b>	<b>20/10/93</b>	<b>17/8/97</b>
<b>Temba</b>	<b>SAMWU. Muizenburg Depot</b>	<b>20/12/93</b>	
<b>Thandeki</b>	<b>UCT Black student</b>	<b>2/3/94</b>	
<b>Thembo, Nxumalo</b>	<b>SAMWU Greater Jo'burg Branch Secretary, Jo'burg Demo.</b>		<b>1/9/97</b>
<b>Thobile</b>	<b>Natural Healer, Vander Bifi Park township</b>		<b>28/8/97</b>

<b>Tulo</b>	<b>Black worker, Nehawa member</b>		<b>21/8/97</b>
<b>Tyrone</b>	<b>unemployed coloured' worker</b>	<b>3/3/94</b>	
<b>Victor, Mhlongo</b>	<b>Gauteng Regional Secretary</b>		<b>2/9/97</b>
<b>Vusi</b>	<b>Black unemployed worker</b>		<b>21/8/97</b>
<b>Wifred</b>	<b>unemployed 'coloured' worker</b>	<b>3/3/94</b>	

Appendix 2 :

List of main interviewees with dates of interviews (1993/4)

SAMWU - Full time Officers	SAMWU - lay officials & members	OTHER UNIONS	OTHERS	USERS OF THE SERVICES (City & Township)
<p><b>Roger Ronnie</b> (8/10/93) F.T.O - Regional Negotiator</p> <p><b>Dennis Arendise</b> (5/11/93) Organiser</p> <p><b>Frank Pontax</b> (4/1/94) - Administrator</p>	<p><u>LAY OFFICIALS</u></p> <p><b>Hennie</b> (3/9/93) Steward/Executive member - Elect. Dept (C.C.C)</p> <p><b>Jeremy</b> (10/9/93) Steward -Treasury Depart. (C.C.C)</p> <p><b>Lance Veotte</b> (10/11/93) Regional Education Officer Waterworks Dept.</p> <p><u>MEMBERS</u></p> <p><b>Phaldie Telip</b> (6/12/93) Town Planner</p> <p><b>Archie Flax</b> (4/1/94) Ambulance Service</p> <p><b>Denis Joseph</b> (5/2/94) Waterworks Dept.</p> <p><b>Khalk</b> (7/1/94) Admin worker CCC</p> <p><b>Motaung</b> (17/11/93) waterworks Dept</p> <p><b>Andre, Frank, Peter, Temba</b> (20/12/93) Muizenburg Depot</p>	<p><b>Ray Jafftha</b> (17/2/94) University of CapeTown (UCT) F/Time Steward NEHAWU</p> <p><b>James Moures</b> (15/1/94) Nehawu steward (UCT)</p>	<p><b>Larry Palk</b> (18/1/94) Mang. Consultant Andrew Levy Assoc.(ALA) Portfolio for C.C.C</p> <p><b>Jackie Kelly</b> (7/3/94) Strike Researcher for ALA</p> <p><b>Renee Graivitzky</b> (7/3/94) Researcher for ALA</p> <p><b>J.P Kandaman</b> (7/3/94) ALA Researcher - Privatisation</p> <p><b>David Sesman</b> (15/11/93) 'Old Mutual' Insurance Co</p>	<p><u>City- CapeTown</u></p> <p><b>Angie</b> (17/10/93) 'coloured' student</p> <p><b>Tankeiso</b> (20/10/93) black student</p> <p><b>Paul</b> (4/1/94) White student</p> <p><b>Lisa</b> (4/1/94) white resident</p> <p><b>Wilfred &amp; Tyrone</b> (3/3/94) 2 'coloured' unemployed</p> <p><u>Townships Crossroads</u></p> <p><b>Brenda</b> (3/3/94) domestic,</p> <p><b>Patience &amp; Lindwe</b> (17/2/94) residents</p> <p><b>Tami, Alfred &amp; Thandeka</b> (2/3/94) black unemployed</p> <p><b>Ezekiel Morolong</b> (17/2/94) ANC activist led the potato Revolt in 1950s</p>
				<p><b>Total = 35 interviews</b></p>

## Appendix 3

### List of interviewees: interviewed both in 1993/4 and 1997

Interviewee	Position in 1993/4	Position in 1997
<u>FULL-TIME SAMWU MEMBERS</u>		
<b>1) Roger Ronnie</b>	FTO - Regional Negotiator	General Secretary
<b>2) Dennis Arendise</b>	FTO - Organiser	FTO - Organiser
<u>SAMWU members</u>		
<b>3) Hennie</b>	SAMWU Steward & exec.member	Retired, ANC Counsellor
<u>OTHER UNION MEMBERS</u>		
<b>4) James Moures</b>	NEHAWU steward (UCT)	NEHAWU steward (UCT)
<u>USERS OF THE SERCVICES</u>		
a) <u>City of Cape Town</u>		
<b>5) Angie</b>	coloured' student	unemployed/casual student
<b>6) Tankeiso</b>	Black student	student
<b>7) Paul</b>	white student	I.T employee
<b>8) Lisa</b>	white resident	Student & P/T tutor
b) <u>Township</u>		
<b>9) Brenda</b>	Domestic	Domestic
<b>10) Patience</b>	unemployed	Art student

Appendix 4

List of main interviewees (1997)

SAMWU Full time Officers	SAMWU Lay official & members	OTHER UNIONS	OTHERS	USERS OF THE SERVICES (City & Township)
<p><b>Roger Ronnie</b> (20/8/97) General Secretary</p> <p><b>Dennis Arendise</b> (21/8/ 97) Organiser</p> <p><b>Victor Mhlongo –</b> (2/9/97) Gauteng Regional Secretary</p> <p><b>Themba Nxumalo</b> (1/9/97) SAMWU Branch Secretary, Greater Jo`burg</p>	<p><b>Hennie (24/8/97)</b> Retired steward - ANC counsellor</p> <p><b>Arthur Fillies (6/9/97)</b> Steward, `coloured' maintenance worker, CCC Electrical Dept.</p> <p><b>Peter September (5/9/97)</b> `coloured' maintenance worker - CCC Electrical Dept.</p> <p><b>Marcel &amp; John (5/9/97)</b> `coloured' main. worker - CCC Electrical Dept.</p> <p><b>Maintence Worker for Electrical Department (4/9/97)</b> ex-steward (preferred to remain anonymous)</p> <p><b>Zimbabwean casual worker. (4/9/97)</b></p> <p><b>James &amp; Lance (15/8/97)</b> SAMWU `coloured' workers</p>	<p><b>Leonard (6/8/97)</b> UCT Union Office - Nehawu Branch Secretary</p> <p><b>James Moures (16/8/97)</b> Nehawu steward - UCT</p> <p><b>Guy (17/8/97)</b> Nehawu steward (white)</p> <p><b>Piet, Prenden &amp; John (17/8/97)</b> - 3 South African Beer (SAB) strikers (coloured)</p>	<p><u>Township- Vander Biji Park (nr. Jo`burg)</u></p> <p><b>Thobile (28/8/97)</b> Natural Healer, worked voluntary for the hospital</p> <p><b>Sentu (28/8/97)</b> Natural Healers' wife</p> <p><u>Township - Mbali (Pietermaritzbergnr . Durban)</u></p> <p><b>Richard Hlongwane (26/8/97)</b> unemployed</p>	<p><u>City, CapeTown</u></p> <p><b>Angie (16/8/97)</b> `coloured' unemployed/casual worker</p> <p><b>Tankeiso (17/8/97)</b> black student</p> <p><b>Paul (27/7/97)</b> White, I.T employee</p> <p><b>Lisa (27/7/97)</b> white,P/T tutor,</p> <p><b>Joan - (27/7/97)</b> white ANC member</p> <p><b>Dumi &amp; Fundsa (19/8/97)</b> 2 black students (ANC supporters)</p> <p><u>Township- Crossroads</u></p> <p><b>Brenda (20/8/97)</b> domestic,</p> <p><b>Lombo (20/8/97)</b> (Brenda`s son) unemployed</p>

	<p><b>3 SAMWU workers at Mowbray Dept. (4/9/97)</b> (anonymous - did not want their names used)</p> <p><b>Cheryl, Samaria, Dorothy &amp; Lillian (1/9/97)</b> - 4 SAMWU women - Jo`burg demo</p> <p><b>Sam &amp; Moses (1/9/97)</b> Jo`burg Demo</p>			<p><b>Jennifer (6/9/97)</b> Petrol pump attendant</p> <p><b>Patience (20/8/97)</b> Black student</p> <p><b>Vusi, Siko, Pumlani, &amp; Sipho, (21/8/97)</b> black unemployed</p> <p><b>Tulo (21/8/97)</b> black worker</p>
				<b>47 interviewees</b>