

The role and challenges of Trade Unions in Post-Apartheid South Africa: the case of the National Education Health and Allied Workers Union

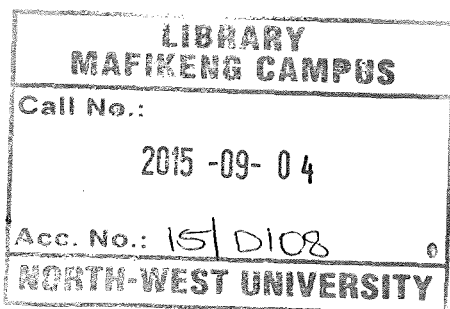
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Mini-dissertation Submitted to the School of Management Sciences in the Faculty of Commerce and Administration, North West University Mafikeng Campus, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Administration in Industrial Relations

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ABSTRACT

In South Africa trade unions played a very important role to dismantle apartheid. However, since 1994 a series of questions that relate to their role in democratic South Africa have remained unanswered. This is what inspired the researcher to conduct a study in order to examine the role and challenges of trade unions in post-apartheid South Africa.

In an attempt to gather data bearing on the subject of this investigation, the provincial office of NEHAWU in Mafikeng was visited and focus group interviews were held with the provincial officials of the union. Through these interviews the study found that NEHAWU advocates for a model of trade unionism which officials described as 'transformative unionism'. According to the respondents, this form of unionism advocates the transformation of the South Africa society to socialism.

The study also found that although the union has made significant gains in the workplace, it was still faced with many challenges. Some of the major issues mentioned include lack of transformation in certain sectors where the union organizes employees, casualization of jobs, outsourcing of services, deployment of union leaders outside the union, corruption in the workplace, threat posed by rival unions and many other issues.

The study concludes by arguing that the conditions are not yet conducive for trade unions to lead the struggle for a socialist transformation in South Africa. The researcher attributes this largely to the contradictions that continue to affect the alliance and the inability of unions to exert their influence in the alliance on major policy issues. The findings revealed that the alliance is characterized by the presence of two camps, whose goals and objectives are not the same. These divisions within the alliance work against any commitment that these leaders might have in the struggle. Finally, the study recommends that unions in South Africa will need to review their relationship with political parties if they are to realize their long term goals and objectives.

DECLARATION

I Gerald Monyatsi, solemnly declare that the mini-dissertation for the Master of Administration in Industrial Relations hereby submitted at the North West University has not been previously submitted by me for a degree at any university and that this is my work and all material herein used is duly acknowledged.

.....

G. Monyatsi

DATED AT MAFIKENG ON NOVEMBER 2013

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Figure 1: Structure of NEHAWU

ABBREVIATIONS

AMCU	Association of Mine Workers and Construction Union
ANC	African National Congress
BEE	Black Economic Empowerment
CEPPWAWU	Chemical, Energy, Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers Union
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
FEDUSA	Federation of Unions of South Africa
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution
HORSPERSA	Hospital Personnel Trade Union of South Africa
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMATU	Independent Municipal and Allied Trade Union of South Africa
NACTU	National Council of Trade Unions
NEDLAC	National Economic Development and Labour Council
NEHAWU	National Education Health and Allied Workers Union
NUM	National Union of Mine Workers
NUMSA	National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa
PSA	Public Servants Association of South Africa
SACP	South African Communist Party
SACTU	South African Congress of Trade Unions

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) played a key role in challenging the policies of the apartheid government in the 1980's. Various strategies were used in order to win the struggle for basic worker and trade union rights around this period. This also involved various campaigns to challenge the economic policies of the government. Amongst these were the anti-privatization and anti-VAT campaigns.

These struggles benefited labour in a number of ways. For example, through these campaigns, the government, together with employers were forced to start negotiating issues such as economic policy, restructuring, and many others with labour. In the later years, this culminated in the establishment of negotiating forums such as the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) which are so important in this new democracy.

At the same time it is important to note that the role of trade unions changes especially when a society goes through a process of transformation. In this case, South Africa has experienced what writers call a 'double transition'. On the one hand, this refers to a shift from apartheid to democracy and on the other hand to South Africa's shift from an economy of international isolation to one which is linked to the rest of the world (Webster & Adler, cited in Webster, et. al. 2003:48). It is for this reason that in 1996 COSATU appointed a commission, known as the September Commission, which was mandated to investigate and make recommendations on the future of trade unions in South Africa, and how to deal with the uncertainties presented by the new environment. An important point to note is that the commission recommended that COSATU should pursue the option of 'social unionism' (September Commission, 1997). The concept of social unionism is explained in chapter 2.

Thus, after nineteen (19) years of democracy, it becomes necessary to determine the form of trade unionism that is being pursued by trade unions such as the National Education Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) in their quest to achieve their goals.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

The role played by trade unions in the fight against apartheid is well documented. However, a series of questions that relate to the role of trade unions in a democratic South Africa remain unanswered. The following are the questions that the study attempts to answer:

- What are the main goals and objectives of trade unions in post-apartheid South Africa, with specific reference to NEHAWU?
- What are the factors that prevent NEHAWU from achieving its goals and objectives?
- What is NEHAWU's current experience with strategic engagement?
- Is the African National Congress (ANC), South African Communist Party (SACP) and COSATU alliance an appropriate vehicle through which unions can achieve their goals and objectives?
- What are the strategic options available for NEHAWU to advance members' interests?
- What are the major challenges that NEHAWU face in post-apartheid South Africa?

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine the role and challenges of trade unions in post-apartheid South Africa with specific reference to NEHAWU. The specific objectives of the study are:

- To determine NEHAWU's goals and objectives in post-apartheid South Africa.
- To identify those factors that prevent NEHAWU from achieving its goals and objectives.
- To examine NEHAWU's current experience with strategic engagement.
- To determine whether the ANC, SACP and COSATU alliance is an appropriate vehicle through which unions can achieve their goals?
- To examine strategic options available for NEHAWU to advance its members' interests.
- To understand the major challenges that NEHAWU faces in post-apartheid South Africa.

1.4 Significance of the Study

It can be argued that there is a need for studies of this nature to be undertaken in the field of Industrial Relations. Therefore, there is a possibility that the research findings will add new knowledge in Industrial Relations and other related fields.

Several studies related to this one have not followed an empirically based approach. Thus, there is a need for empirically based research to be undertaken on this subject in the hope that the findings might provide critical ground work for future research in this area.

1.5 Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 provides a background, aim and objectives and the significance of the study.

Chapter 2 reviews literature related to the research problem.

Chapter 3 covers the methodology used to arrive at certain important findings.

Chapter 4 involves the presentation and discussion of research findings.

Chapter 5 provides a summary and conclusion, followed by recommendations for practical application of certain findings and for future research into specific issues which could not be actively pursued in this study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definition of Concepts

The discussion in this chapter begins with the definition of the main concepts used, followed by a discussion on the role of unions during the apartheid era. It also examines the changing role of trade unions in South Africa, particularly after 1994. Lastly, it gives an exposition of some of the challenges faced by trade unions in post-apartheid South Africa.

2.1.1 Trade union

Finnemore & van der Merwe (1989:39) define a trade union as "an organization of workers who, by collective action, strive to defend and advance their interests". At the same time, the Labour Relations Act, No 66, 1995 defines a trade union as "any number of workers in a particular enterprise, industry, trade or profession who are united for the purpose, either alone or with other objectives, of organizing relations between them or some of them and their employers or some of their employers in that enterprise, industry, trade or profession".

2.1.2 Social Unionism

According to Webster (2003:45) this term is used to refer to two dimensions of trade unions. "The economic dimension is about trying to achieve increases and improvements in wages and conditions. The other, the political dimension, is about acting as a voice for its members on social and political issues". Another definition is that social unionism "is concerned with broad social and political issues, as well as the immediate concerns of its members. It aims to be a social force for transformation. Its goal is democracy and socialism" (September Commission, 1997: 2).

2.1.3 Bread and butter unionism

This style of trade unionism is an opposite of social unionism. It is also called 'business unionism'. The terms 'business unionism' and 'bread and butter unionism' are used interchangeably to refer to "those unions which concentrate on the improvement of wages and working conditions at either plant or industry level" (Bendix, 1992:75).

Another definition is that 'bread and butter' unionism refers to a labour movement that "abandons any concerns with broader political and social issues and focuses on the immediate demands and interests of its members. The main terrain of bread and butter unionism is collective bargaining in the workplace and the industry" (September Commission, 1997:3).

2.1.4 Strategic unionism

Strategic unionism implies "the use of power by unions in ways that differ from the conventional exercise of power through resistance and opposition" (Macun, 2000:69). Similarly, Von Holdt (1993:47) describes it as a type of unionism that "introduces a new kind of negotiation which establishes common interests or shared objectives between the labour movement, business and the government".

2.1.5 Corporatism

Corporatism is defined as "an institutionalized process of negotiation and implementation of agreements between sectors of the State and powerful organizations including trade unions, whose cooperation is indispensable if public policies are to be implemented" (Schmitter, cited in Maree & Godfrey, 1995:86). A similar definition is that corporatism refers to "an institutional framework which incorporates the labour movement in the economic and social decision-making of society" (Von Holdt, 1993:46).

2.1.6 Societal corporatism

Societal corporatism is described "as a social- democratic order where the state allows the other key interest groups to be full participants in the process of formulating certain state policies and in making certain key governance decisions" (Nel, 2002:6). A definition related to the previous one is that societal corporatism is a form of corporatism whereby "the monopolistic interest organizations independently earn recognition by the State, which grants recognition as a matter of political necessity" (Maree & Godfrey, 1995:86). In short, under conditions of societal corporatism, the powerful interest groups in society, namely, unions and employer associations are independent of governmental control.

2.1.7 State corporatism

State corporatism is the opposite of societal corporatism. On the one hand, it is defined as a form of corporatism whereby “the emphasis shifts from tripartite coordination and cooperation to a situation where the state moves into a paternalistic or authoritarian mode to demobilize and co-opt organized labour (trade unions) into government structures” (Nel, 2002:7). On the other hand, according to Finnemore (1997:13), state corporatism is a form that “usually encompasses an authoritarian response to labour mobilization”. It can be deduced from these definitions that under conditions of state corporatism, trade unions and employers’ associations are subjected to governmental control.

2.2 The Role of Trade Unions during Apartheid

Trade unions are organizations formed by workers to protect their interests in the workplace. However, in many countries, they also play an active role in politics. For instance, in South Africa, trade unions were instrumental in the dismantling of apartheid. Since the early days of apartheid, many of these unions formed an alliance with liberation movements and community organizations to address issues that affect their members beyond the workplace. The term ‘social unionism’ is used to describe this type of unionism. As defined earlier in this chapter, this concept is used to describe a form of unionism that is concerned with the economic interests of their members as well as serving as a vehicle through which workers can express their socio-political interests. This kind of unionism also emphasizes active participation in societal transformation and advocates for democracy and socialism (Webster, 1994; September Commission, 1997). This is in sharp contrast with a type called ‘bread and butter unionism’ or ‘business unionism’ defined earlier, which is less concerned with broader social and political issues and focuses merely on collective bargaining in the workplace.

In South Africa, the relationship between trade unions and political parties can be traced back to the early days of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) which was formed in 1955 and formed an alliance with the ANC. Today reference can be made to the alliance that exists between COSATU, ANC and the SACP. COSATU was at the

forefront in the mobilization and organization of campaigns to protest against the unjust and discriminatory laws of the country.

Webster, et. al. (2003:48) observe that this alliance provided COSATU with a platform to influence key policies of the new government after 1994. In this regard, several COSATU and SACP members joined government as members of parliament, others as senior officials in government. This provided these organizations with a voice in the new government. Even today trade unions have a strong influence on policy and legislative proposals through their participation at NEDLAC.

Prior to 1994, South Africa was economically isolated from the rest of the world due to its apartheid policies. It was only after the first democratic elections in 1994 that South Africa became re-accepted into the world economy. These political and economic developments caused unions to search for new ways to adapt to this new environment. The establishment of the September Commission chaired by Connie September, Vice-President of COSATU at that time was therefore an attempt to find ways to deal with this challenge.

As part of its recommendations, the commission presented COSATU with the following three options to choose from in order to deal with challenges in the workplace. The first is what is referred to as 'militant abstention'. Using this option, it meant that unions would adopt a militant approach in their dealings with management and refuse to take part in discussions relating to issues such as workplace restructuring, productivity and others. The belief was that participation may compromise the unions' independence and cause them to be co-opted into management structures. However, the danger of this option highlighted by the commission was that by abstaining unions may not be able to influence the way change is being implemented in the workplace (September Commission, 1997:6).

The second option presented is called 'strategic engagement with restructuring'. In terms of this option, unions would choose to engage with employers on issues such as restructuring. From the Commission's point of view this is a strategy aimed to transform as well as democratize the workplace. It would also prevent employers from making unilateral decisions on those issues that affect workers.

The third option which is linked to the above is called 'institutionalized participation'. This option involves participation in the organization's structures of decision making. From the Commission's point of view, participation in such structures, for instance, in workplace forums would give unions access to important information regarding the organization (September Commission, 1997:6).

2.3 The Changing Role of Trade Unions after 1994.

With the demise of apartheid, trade unions have found themselves having to deal with new kinds of issues and challenges. In the past, the struggle was to fight against oppression in the workplace and in society. However, since 1994, trade unions are operating in a democracy and trade union organizations such as COSATU are in alliance with the governing party.

Since the demise of apartheid, organizations such as COSATU have focused their energies to transform the South African society and its institutions. South African society continues to be characterized by inequalities which manifest themselves in different forms. These include inequality of income, inequality of economic power and inequality of access to basic services such as health care, water, education, and so on. In short, the new struggle for trade unions is to overcome the legacy of apartheid. It is on the basis of this challenge that unions have been compelled to develop new strategies and policies (September Commission, 1997:5).

The 6th National Congress of COSATU in 1998 resolved to adopt 'strategic engagement' as a key strategic option in their dealings with the state and business. It is described as a strategy that entails engaging both the state and business on key socio-economic policy issues and also emphasises the democratisation of the workplace (Adler, 2000:4). At the workplace level, for instance, the union would engage the employers in order to defend workers' interests, increase workers' control of production, improve the quality of working life and obtain other gains whilst at the same time preventing employers from taking unilateral decisions on issues that affect workers (September Commission, 1997:7).

It should be noted though that during the apartheid era many of these unions had adopted a militant stance against the apartheid state and employers. They refused to take part in any statutory structures or schemes initiated by the state and employers. There was this fear that participation may cause unions to end up being co-opted into capitalist and apartheid structures. It should also be mentioned that the unions which emerged in the 1970's and 1980's were built on strong traditions such as worker control of the affairs of the organization, strong shop-floor organization and militant struggle for worker rights, and were committed to a vision of socialist transformation (September Commission, 1997:5-6).

A change of attitude began to occur in the trade union movement around the 1990's when it started to engage the apartheid state and business at macro-level in forums such as the National Manpower Commission and the National Economic Forum. Other forms of engagement also took place at that time in particular industrial sectors. These include the Mining Industry Summit and the Textile-Clothing Working Group. Unions feared that if they did not participate, they would be unable to influence the way change was being implemented in various sectors of the economy (Maree, 1993 and Baskin, 1993).

Different interpretations have been given to describe this change of strategy by unions. Some labour analysts talk of a shift 'from resistance to reconstruction' (Baskin, 1993:64) while others refer to a shift from 'social unionism' to 'strategic unionism'. Strategic unionism is described as a form of unionism that puts emphasis on engaging the state and business at the macro level and democratisation of the workplace (von Holdt, 2000:100).

Writers such as Baskin (1993) describe this development as a trend towards corporatism in South African industrial relations. Governments may enter into corporatist relationships with other social partners in order to deal with major economic problems facing their countries. For instance, in the case of South Africa, problems such as unemployment, the stagnant economy in the 1980's and 1990's and the country's low levels of productivity may have compelled the government to enter into such relationship with these interest groups (Maree, 1993).

One central feature of corporatism is the establishment of tripartite decision making institutions. A case in point is NEDLAC in South Africa which was established after the merging of the National Manpower Commission and the National Economic Forum. It includes representatives of the state, organised business, and labour and a constituency dealing with community and development. The state is a major player in a corporatist relationship. However, it can enter into this relationship with powerful organisations in civil society in different ways. In this case, the literature distinguishes between two different forms of relationships, namely societal and state corporatism (Maree, 1983, Baskin, 2000, Nel, 2002 and Finnemore, 1997).

As pointed out earlier, societal corporatism is an element of democratic societies whereby trade unions and employers' associations exist independently of state control. Consensus building is the key element that characterises the relations between various parties. An opposite type of corporatism is called state corporatism. It said to be a characteristic of authoritarian or autocratic regimes whereby the state uses its power to control the activities of the other groups such as trade unions (Nel, 2002:6-7).

In the case of South Africa the literature points to several examples to support the view that there is a trend towards societal corporatism. Firstly, these include the establishment of NEDLAC in 1995. NEDLAC provides representatives of the state, business and labour with a platform to engage and reach agreements on key economic and social policy issues. The founding declaration of NEDLAC states that: "the National Economic Development and Labour Council is the vehicle by which government, labour, business and community organisations will seek to cooperate, through problem solving and negotiations, on economic, labour and development issues and related challenges facing the country" (NEDLAC, 1995).

Secondly, reference can be made to the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995 which was first negotiated and agreed upon at NEDLAC by these three social partners before it became law. Thirdly, engagement also occurs at industry level whereby unions have an opportunity to influence policies in various industries. Lastly, at shop-floor level the Labour Relations Act, 66 of 1995 provides for the establishment of workplace forums so that labour can engage employers on various substantive issues such as training,

introduction of new technology, and many others (Webster, 1995, Finnemore, 1997, Adler, 2000).

While workplace forums provide workers with an opportunity to participate in decision making there has been a fear on the part of labour that they may be used to undermine trade unions in the workplace, especially if they are independent from unions. For example, COSATU's view is that the powers envisaged in the Labour Relations Act, 66/1995, namely information sharing, consultation and joint decision making should be conferred on shop stewards' committees to avoid any divisions in the workplace (September Commission, 1997).

Some labour analysts are opposed to the idea of corporatism. They argue that by participating in structures such as NEDLAC, unions run the risk of being co-opted into capitalism and this may eventually prevent them from struggling for socialism (von Holdt, 1993:48).

2.4 Challenges of Trade unions in post-Apartheid South Africa

The literature points to a number of problems within trade unions which have begun to emerge, especially after 1994. Amongst these is the decline of worker involvement in union affairs, demobilization of union members, lack of organizational capacity, lack of a clear vision of changing society, and the fact that most unionists are now being driven by individualism and a quest for upward mobility (Webster, et. al. 2003:48-54, September Commission, 1997: 9-16). The failure by union leaders to deal with such problems has led many of their members to join new rival unions. An example in this case is the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) which recently in 2012 suffered a massive loss of members to its rival the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) in the platinum mines.

The re-integration of South Africa into the world economy has also compounded the problems that unions have to deal with. In its report, the September Commission (1997) identified globalization as one of the major challenges facing trade unions in post-apartheid South Africa. Globalization makes it imperative for local enterprises to be

competitive in order to succeed in the global market. To respond to this challenge, many organisations have tended to embark on the process of restructuring.

Workplace restructuring leads to the retrenchment of many workers and contributes to an increase in the unemployment rates. The loss of jobs creates poverty for many workers who may not have any form of income protection at their disposal. Currently, South Africa is facing a serious unemployment challenge. Responses on how to deal with this problem have varied. South African big business in particular advocates a flexible labour market. Labour market flexibility is a term used to describe “the extent to which labour markets can adjust quickly to changing circumstances, that is, whether enterprises or industries can adjust to, for instance, technological transformation, changing economic circumstances, external shocks, and so on” (Barker, 1995: 36). The literature identifies different dimensions of labour market flexibility. One aspect deals with the need to deregulate the industrial relations environment so that all unnecessary constraints on the system of collective bargaining, wage determination and setting of conditions of service are eliminated (SACOB, 1996:5)

A second feature of labour market flexibility is the need to promote flexibility at enterprise level. This is sometimes referred to as ‘numerical flexibility’- which relates to the extent to which an enterprise can hire, fire or retrench workers and set wage levels at a rate more appropriate to productivity levels. Added to this is the need for a multi-skilled, adaptable and motivated workforce at enterprise level in order to survive in a competitive economy (SACOB, 1996:5).

Another feature of labour market flexibility identified by Cunningham & Finnemore (1995:182) is a greater reliance on what they call ‘non- standard forms of employment’ or ‘atypical forms of work’. This involves the utilization of independent contractors or contract, part-time and non- fixed-term employees to complement a core of permanent employees.

Business concern is that some aspects of the legislative framework create rigidity in the labour market which in turn hampers competitiveness. In terms of this view, the current nature of the South African labour market discourages foreign investment and undermines efforts to create jobs (COSATU, 1999:7). Similarly, the International

Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have identified the lack of flexibility as the key weakness in the South African labour market (Fast Facts, 1997:1).

However, the above assumption is refuted by the findings of a study conducted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in South Africa. This study found that South Africa's labour market is more flexible compared with other middle income countries (ILO cited in <http://www.cosatu.org.za>). Economists usually put the blame on trade unions' demands for high wages as the cause of retrenchment. Other commentators attribute the problem of unemployment to the lack of skills on the part of South African workers.

Supporters of a flexible labour market would argue that it brings certain benefits from an organizational point of view. They argue that it makes companies more adaptable and more efficient (Barker, 1995: 37). The idea of a flexible labour market is not well received by COSATU. The labour federation argues that labour market flexibility threatens to casualize existing jobs and create poorly paid jobs and deepen rather than alleviate poverty. The deregulation of the labour market is further perceived by labour as a strategy to ensure that employers can fire workers easily. This can be illustrated by the fact that if the workforce is casualized it becomes easy to fire workers and when there is large unemployment workers are forced to accept low wages. The opening of the economy further ensures that if workers in a particular country are unionised and strong and do not accept low wages, employers can close their factories and relocate to other countries. This threat compels workers to accept bad working conditions and lower wages (Coleman, 1997: 5).

Retrenchments not only lead to job losses but also contribute to a decline in the level of unionization in this country. The statistics for instance, show that by July 2005, membership of COSATU had dropped. The most affected affiliates were the National Education Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) which had lost 50 000 members, the National Union of Mine Workers (NUM) 40 000 members, and Chemical, Energy, Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers Union (CEPPWAWU) 8000 members (Vavi, 2005:1-2).

An issue related to the above is that in period after 1994, COSATU and its affiliates began to experience 'brain drain' as many of their key leaders joined the new

government as members of parliament and others ventured into business. It is reported that COSATU alone allowed twenty (20) of its key officials to join parliament (Webster, et. al. 2003:48). It is further indicated that in 1995 during the local government elections, 101 members and officials of the NUM were elected as councillors and 6 (six) as mayors. The reasons for the brain drain are believed to be salaries offered by unions, which are fairly low compared to those of the public and private sectors, and also the desire for upward mobility on the part of union officials (Baskin, 1996: 15).

The pressure on the South African economy to compete in the global market has also given rise to new forms of employment. In trade union circles this is called the 'casualization of work'. This trend is evident in several sectors such as retail, services, higher education, and mining where there is now an increase in the use of contract, part-time, and temporary workers, outsourcing to independent contractors, and sub-contracted arrangements in order to reduce labour costs.

A survey conducted by Crankshaw & Macun (1997) shows that although most workers are still employed on full-time and permanent basis, casualization is becoming the norm in certain industries. For instance, 85.5% of the companies they surveyed indicated that they have made use of temporary or casual workers and 43.5% had relied on contract labour.

South African trade unions are against the casualization of jobs because according to them, it creates divisions among workers. In recent years, COSATU has called for the banning of the system of labour broking. COSATU perceives labour brokers as the main drivers of casualization in the South African labour market. COSATU describes labour broking as a 'form of modern slavery' whereby labour brokers provide cheap labour to their client companies thus relieving them of the responsibility of paying workers decent wages and related benefits (COSATU,2011).

Another criticism of labour broking stems from the fact that workers employed under these conditions are unlikely to join trade unions as they are constantly being moved around from one enterprise to another for short periods, often with no access to unions (COSATU, 2008). Government has been criticised by COSATU unions for its failure to ban labour brokers. However, the banning of labour brokers or private employment agencies

as they are called, is not a simple process as this would require the amendment of the Labour Relations Act 66/1995. This Act makes provision for the establishment of these agencies.

Another challenge is that the labour movement in South Africa remains divided. These divisions reflect themselves in terms of the political or ideological orientation of these unions. There are presently three union federations in the country, namely COSATU, the Federation of Unions of South Africa (FEDUSA) and National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU). COSATU is the biggest federation and draws its membership from the predominantly black working class, is in alliance with the ANC and SACP and supports the policy of non-racialism. Its biggest affiliates are the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA) followed by NUM.

FEDUSA (Federation of Unions of South Africa) is the second largest federation and is not politically aligned. Its biggest affiliates are the Public Servants Association of South Africa (PSA), the Independent Municipal and Allied Trade Union of South Africa (IMATU) and the Hospital Personnel Trade Union of South Africa (HOSPERSA). NACTU is the smallest of the three federations and has links to the political ideology of Pan Africanism and Black Consciousness.

However, despite this, a new trend is beginning to develop in the union movement, whereby there is now greater cooperation between unions from opposing formations on issues of common interest (Nel, 2002). A useful example to illustrate this point is the 2009 public servants strike whereby different trade union groupings such as COSATU and FEDUSA joined forces to press government to meet their salary demands. Even at the level of NEDLAC, these three federations also try to present a united front when dealing with issues of direct concern to their constituency.

In conclusion, the above discussion has attempted to show the changing nature of the role of trade unions in South Africa since the 1990's. It has tried to identify the factors and circumstances that have compelled trade unions to review and redefine their role and strategies in the new South Africa. The appointment of the September Commission by COSATU was an important intervention to deal with the uncertainties presented by the

political and economic developments in the country, which sought to provide the necessary strategic and tactical direction for the trade union movement.

It has further been noted that the new political and economic environment has also brought along new challenges for trade unions in South Africa. The discussion on the problems and challenges presented here is not exhaustive. It is hoped that more information pertaining to these issues will be revealed in chapter 4. Chapter 4 deals with responses obtained from NEHAWU officials in the North West province on the issues that were under investigation.

CHAPTER3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The study used a qualitative approach in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the issues involved. The study was conducted over a period of one month in Mafikeng in the North West province. Background information regarding main issues that are central to this investigation was gathered through secondary sources such as journal articles, books, press statements, documents, internet articles, newspaper articles and discussions with trade unionists in the North West province. The field work undertaken was shaped largely by the results of this phase of the study.

During the period from July 2013, NEHAWU's provincial office in Mafikeng was visited to arrange for focus group discussions with key functionaries of the trade union. These included officials such as the Provincial Secretary, Treasurer and other members of the provincial executive. The purpose of these interviews was to acquire an in-depth understanding of the current practices and goals of NEHAWU and more specifically the challenges the union faces in South Africa. In all instances, interviews were conducted by the researcher with the help of one research assistant who was trained in the art of note-taking.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The study population consisted of eight NEHAWU officials in the North West province. Four officials were from the Provincial office and another four from Mafikeng Regional Office. Participants from both the Provincial office and Mafikeng Regional Office comprised of the Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, Treasurer and Secretary. The criterion for their selection was based on the fact that they are the people who have the confidence of workers, and have a thorough knowledge of the needs of fellow workers and the policies of NEHAWU. Given the size of this population, it was necessary to include all eight officials in the study.

3.3 Method of Data Collection

3.3.1 Primary Data

A focus group discussion was used as a method to gather information from NEHAWU officials. A focus group as opposed to individual interview becomes a useful tool to collect data when the researcher is exploring a new topic or thoughts and feelings of a particular group of individuals (de Vos, 2002:291). In this study, this method was used because it saves time and it enabled the researcher to interview all the respondents at the same time. Another advantage mentioned by Bless, et. al. (1995:113) is that the focus group discussion enables members of a group to share ideas with each other on the research problem and reach some kind of common understanding about the issue.

Prior to the focus group discussion session, respondents were given two weeks' notice to enable them to arrange their schedules and a venue acceptable to all parties was agreed upon. Only one focus group session was held since these were the only officials representing NEHAWU in the province. The focus group was held on 31st July 2013 and it lasted for about two (2) hours.

The role of the researcher (moderator) was to facilitate discussion on the issues under investigation. The moderator was assisted by a research assistant who played the role of a note-taker. Open-ended questions were prepared in advance for the discussion guide. Questions were broken into three thematic groups. These were: (a) the role and goals of NEHAWU in post-apartheid South Africa. (b) NEHAWU's strategies and tactics in achieving its goals (c) NEHAWU's gains and challenges.

Some of the ethical considerations in the study involved explaining the purpose of undertaking the study to the participants, and obtaining permission from them on the use of the tape recorder and note taking. The researcher also assured the confidentiality of information obtained from the respondents and the latter were also informed that participation was voluntary and that their identities will not be revealed. Lastly, the respondents were acknowledged for their participation and cooperation in giving information.

3.3.2 Secondary Data

As stated before, data was collected from secondary sources such as: journal articles, books, press statements, documents, internet articles, newspaper articles and discussions with trade unionists in the North West province.

The information obtained from the respondents was retrieved from the tape recorder for data processing and analysis purposes.

3.4 Data Analysis

Qualitative data obtained from union officials was transcribed, analyzed and narrated.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The findings of the study are based on interviews conducted with NEHAWU officials in attempt to elicit information about their union. Responses from the respondents were classified into the following major themes: the profile of NEHAWU, the role, goals, strategies and tactics used by the union to advance its members' interests, the gains that have been achieved by the union in the workplace, the challenges facing NEHAWU at the workplace level, and views on the alliance with the ANC and SACP. The last part discusses the respondents' views on engagement at NEDLAC.

4.1.1 A Profile of NEHAWU

NEHAWU was formed in 1987. Its head office is situated in Johannesburg. So far it has established offices in all nine provinces of South Africa. The national office bearers consist of the President, 1st Deputy President, 2nd Deputy President, National Treasurer, General Secretary, and Deputy General Secretary. It organizes workers in state administration, health, education and social welfare. It is affiliated to the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). Since its formation, the union has identified with the ANC and adopted the Freedom Charter as a guiding document.

Its main founding principles are:

- Worker control of the unions;
- Non-racialism;
- Solidarity with COSATU affiliates;
- International working class solidarity;
- One industry, one union [www.nehawu.org.za].

4.1.2 Organizational Structure of NEHAWU

Figure 1 below presents the organizational structure of NEHAWU. In terms of NEHAWU'S Constitution (NEHAWU, 2007) union members from each workplace come together to form a branch and in the process elect a Branch Executive Committee (BEC). Such a committee

consists of a Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, Treasurer and Secretary. Among the functions of these office bearers is to liaise with the regional office and keep it informed about the affairs of the branch. The Branch Congress is the governing body of each branch structure of the union.

At regional level, the constitution makes provision for the establishment of regional offices together with Regional Executive Committees. Each committee consists of a regional Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, Treasurer and Secretary. Regional office bearers are required to liaise with the provincial office bearers and keep them informed about the affairs of the union at regional level. Regional offices are established by the Provincial Executive Committee (PEC) in line with the prescriptions of the constitution. The Regional Congress is the governing body of each regional structure.

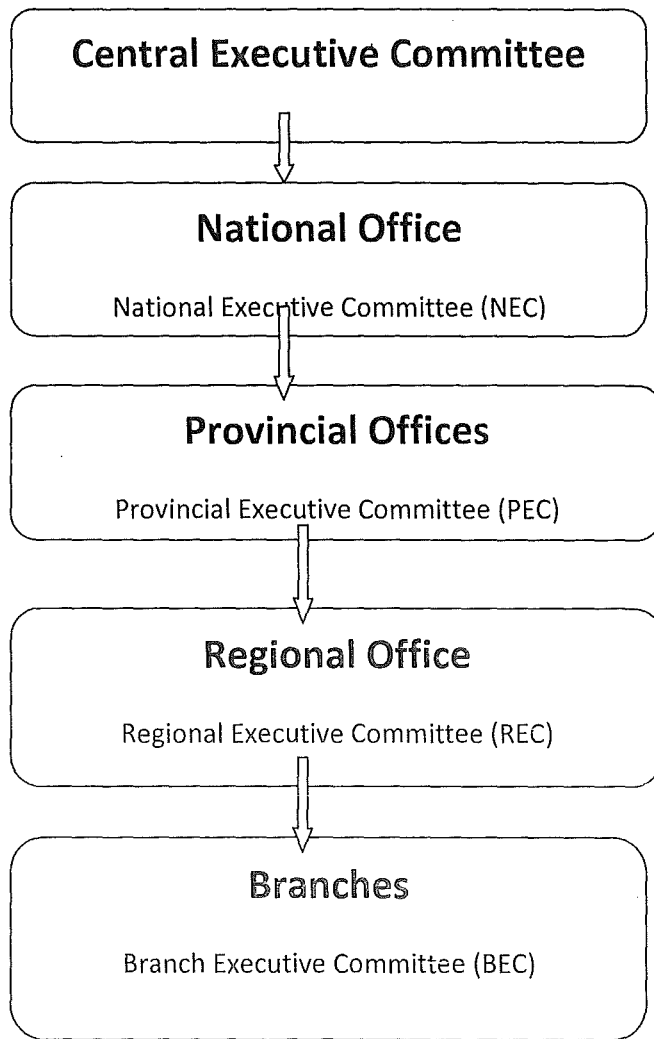
At provincial level the constitution also provides for the establishment of provincial offices. These offices are manned by the PEC which consists of provincial Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, Treasurer and Secretary. The PEC has to liaise with national office bearers on provincial matters that affect the union. The Provincial Congress is the governing body for provincial structures.

At national level, there is a national office which is in charge of the day to day running of the union. It consists of a National Executive Committee (NEC) which is made up of the President, First and Second Deputy-Presidents, National Treasurer, General Secretary and Deputy General Secretary. Each office bearer is elected for a term of three (3) years.

The top structure of the union consists of a Central Executive Committee (CEC). This committee is made up of national office bearers, Chairpersons and Secretaries of each region and any other person who is a member of the NEC. Among its function is to give direction to structures of the union on organizational, political, educational and policy issues, establish or dissolve branch, regional and provincial structures of the union.

The National Congress is the highest governing body of the union. It is a structure where policies relating to political, socio-economic and organizational issues are adopted by the union.

Figure 1: Structure of NEHAWU



Source: NEHAWU (2007)

4.2 NEHAWU's Role, Goals and Strategies

The study was focused on identifying the type of trade unionism that is currently being practiced by NEHAWU and the union's strategic goals. This issue was raised in view of the fact that there are different styles or forms of trade unionism and these tend to have a strong influence on the political, socio-economic and organizational policy positions of any union.

On this issue the study found that NEHAWU advocates what they call 'transformative unionism'. Transformative unionism is described as a form of unionism that tries to maintain a balance between workplace struggles and the struggle for socialism. Union officials were asked to differentiate between 'transformative unionism' and 'social unionism'. In their view, the difference lies in the fact that while social unionism also concerns itself with broad social and political issues, in practice it tends to ignore the tasks of a revolution. This argument becomes valid when it is used to examine the activities of trade unions in South Africa.

Evidence shows that the activities and programmes of trade unions in South Africa are mainly directed towards improving the economic position of their members instead of challenging the existing economic order. For writers such as Miliband (1971) and Anderson (1977) it is this type of union activity which accounts for the failure of the type of socialist revolution which Karl Marx envisaged, and in addition it is what prompted Lenin to emphasize the importance of the party in mobilizing the revolutionary consciousness of the working class.

As for NEHAWU, union officials believed that they can achieve their goal of a socialist South Africa once they have succeeded in raising the political consciousness of their members. They stated that it is for this reason that NEHAWU has adopted Marxism as its official ideology that guides the union in its day to day activities and struggles. For instance, to emphasize this point one official remarked as follows: "socialism is our future; it is through socialism that the workers can achieve total liberation".

Marxism is an ideology based on the writings of Karl Marx which advocates the transformation of the capitalist economic system. In terms of this doctrine, capitalism is

an exploitative system since it benefits only a few individuals. It is a system characterized by a conflict of interests between two major social classes in society, namely the capitalists and the working class. Therefore, it is not surprising that trade unions such as NEHAWU would align themselves with the Marxist ideology since it advocates a radical change of society.

Contrary to what NEHAWU officials say, further evidence shows that while these trade unions want to appear to be opposed to capitalism, the reality is that it is the same unions that have adopted practices and developed tendencies which are in conflict with their socialist line of thinking. Research by Webster, et. al. (2003: 50) for instance, shows that many of these unions have opened investment companies that buy shares from big companies as part of the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) process. In addition, there seem to be a growing gap between the union leaders and their members as it was shown recently by the Marikana incident.

Respondents were further asked about other tactics and strategies the union uses in order to achieve the above-mentioned goals. According to them, political education is one crucial aspect in the development of workers' class consciousness. Class consciousness is a concept used by Marxist scholars to describe a situation where workers become aware of their role in transforming capitalism into socialism. This issue is examined further in the last chapter.

In addition, the study also found that NEHAWU, together with other COSATU affiliates rely heavily on mass mobilization in the workplace and on the streets, and engagement, in order to advance workers' interests and goals. Strikes as well campaigns were also identified as other weapons used to enforce members' demands both at the workplace and societal level. Some of the campaigns in which NEHAWU is said to have taken part include the living wage campaign, campaigns for or against various legislation in parliament and the recent campaign in 2013 against the government's e-tolling system. Respondents felt that through these campaigns, unions are able to bring to the attention of government and employers their members' dissatisfaction with certain policies and programmes.

4.3 NEHAWU'S gains at Workplace Level

The study was also aimed at discovering the gains that have been achieved by NEHAWU in the workplace and for its members. The information obtained from the respondents was discussed under the following sub-categories.

4.3.1 Growth in Membership

NEHAWU was described as the third largest union within COSATU after NUMSA and the NUM. At the time of the interview, the union was said to have an estimated membership of about 260 000. Union officials indicated that the union has been able to consolidate itself on the shop-floor in terms of membership particularly in the public health and tertiary education sectors. This is in spite of report in the Sowetan (2012:4) which indicates that the union had lost 5283 members between 2009 and 2011.

Officials attributed the growth in membership to two factors. Firstly, to the growth in the unionization of white collar employees in the public sector as more and more of these workers have begun to see the need to join trade unions. It was pointed out that although membership of NEHAWU consists mainly of black employees, its constitution allows any person irrespective of race or sex to join the union if he or she so wishes. Secondly, the growth in union membership was attributed to the role played by the national leadership who frequently visit union branches and directly interact with members. This practice, according to union officials, has served to narrow the gap between the union leadership and its members and increased members' confidence in the union.

4.3.2 Transformation and Industrial Democracy

Union officials indicated that their union has made great strides in its fight for transformation. According to them, signs of transformation and industrial democracy are now evident, particularly in the public sector, which is beginning to reflect the demographics of this country. Union officials indicated that NEHAWU always fights for change in management structures and insists on workers participation in the decision making structures of their organizations.

4.3.3 Improved Wages and Working conditions

According to union officials, this has happened particularly in the public health sector which has been characterized by a wide wage gap all along. It was reported that NEHAWU has been able to improve conditions of support staff in this sector by fighting for a changed wage or salary structure. It was indicated that this change has resulted in many support employees moving from level 1 to 2 whilst others from level 2 to 3 in the wage or salary structure.

4.3.4 Cooperation with other Public Sector Unions

Union officials indicated that this trend has become evident particularly during strikes in the public sector. They argued that cooperation between unions is not only reflected in terms of the common demands that they make but also by the common programme of action that they adopt to push for these demands. For instance, reference was made to the 2009 public servants strike which showed unity between NEHAWU and the Public Servants Association (a FEDUSA affiliate). This point is consistent with Nel's (2002) observation in chapter 2 that there now seems to be greater cooperation between unions in the public sector on issues of common interest.

4.4 NEHAWU'S Challenges at the Workplace

The study was also aimed at discovering the type of challenges that are faced by NEHAWU in the workplace. Responses from union officials were classified under the following sub-headings.

4.4.1 Lack of Transformation in Certain Sectors

Managements' failure to implement change particularly in the higher education sector was cited as one of the challenges facing the union. At the time of the interview, for instance, NEHAWU officials reported that they were joining forces with other political formations in the North West province to embark on a full scale march to demand transformation at the North West University. Union officials felt that the university

management was not committed to redressing past inequalities and contributing towards a new social order.

Accusations leveled against the university management relate to salary disparities between black and white employees, unfair dismissals, language policy and the fact that the university management is hostile towards NEHAWU and its members.

4.4.2 Outsourcing of Services

Another challenge identified by union officials is the need to reverse outsourcing of services in the sectors in which the union is recognized. According to union officials, employers outsource many of the services under the pretext that they are not the core business of their organizations. It was argued that outsourcing measures create job insecurity on the part of workers, considering the fact that NEHAWU's membership is mainly constituted of workers in support functions.

4.4.3 Casualization of Jobs

At the same time union officials argued that the casualization of jobs makes workers vulnerable to exploitation since they are deprived of the benefits of full-time employment. According to them, this is a major challenge for the union in its attempt to establish decent jobs and centralized bargaining. In their view, casualization affects general workers and professionals alike in the sectors in which the union organizes. Union officials blame government for its failure to ban labour brokers since the latter are perceived as the main drivers of casualization in the South African labour market. In their view, conditions of employment with labour brokers are less favourable than with employers.

On this issue, one official remarked: "the banning of labour brokers is not negotiable, whether government likes it or not. This system is not doing any good for workers because it creates misery and perpetuates poverty. We will fight until our demands are met". In practice, employers use casualization in order to cut costs and free themselves from the legal requirements to provide fair labour practices.

4.4.4 Threat Posed by the Emergence of Splinter Unions

This issue was raised in view of the recent Marikana incident in 2012 at the Rustenburg platinum mines after the well established National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) suffered a massive loss of members to its rival, the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU). This happened after large numbers of NUM members turned against it accusing its leaders of colluding with mine employers and delivering poor quality service to its members. The strike has caused the NUM to lose its status as a majority union in the Rustenburg platinum mines.

It should be noted that AMCU is not the only breakaway union from COSATU in recent years. Two other unions namely the National Transport Movement and the South African Postal Workers' Union were born out of a split from COSATU's South African Transport Workers Union and the Communication Workers' Union respectively.

According to union officials, splinter unions are a threat to the established unions as they poach their members thus weakening their influence in the collective bargaining process. An important observation during the interview was that union officials did not want to put the blame on union leadership and the quality of service offered to members as the main sources of the problem. Instead, they attribute this to employers' failure to address employee's wages and working conditions. In contrast, a COSATU (2012) draft discussion document entitled "Organizational Report" which was discussed at its National Congress reveals that the union federation and its affiliates were losing their membership to rival unions due to poor service to members.

4.4.5 Poaching of Union Members

According to union officials this occurs because of overlapping union representation within COSATU and as such creates confusion among workers. Cases referred to involve NEHAWU and SADTU which both organize employees in the education sector and the NUM and NUMSA in the construction and mining sectors.

4.4.6 Deployment of Union Leaders in Government and outside the Union

Mention must be made that NEHAWU is not the only union affected by the ANC policy of cadre deployment. Immediately after the 1994 election, many COSATU unionists were deployed into government, municipalities and state owned enterprises. NEHAWU officials stated that while this policy ensures that the deployees are able to influence and implement ANC policy, it has had a negative effect on the capacity of the union to carry out its functions. It was also mentioned that due to their political engagements in COSATU and SACP, national office bearers tend to spend much of their time in deployments outside the union.

4.4.7 Corruption in the Workplace

Trade unions are also faced with the challenge of dealing with corruption in the workplace. Union officials raised concern about the problem of corruption and maladministration at local, provincial and national government level. According to them, corruption impacts negatively on service delivery and this in turn affects the image of the ANC. Nepotism in staff appointments and procurement practices were identified as the most common types of corruption in the public sector.

It was reported that NEHAWU has called its members to work with the union in exposing corrupt activities in the workplace.

4.4.8 Apathy on the Part of Members

One of the problems experienced by the union involves workers who join the union but fail to attend union meetings and only surface when they are faced with problems. According to union officials, this tendency makes it difficult for shop-stewards to carry out their function of representing members' interests effectively.

4.4.9 Lack of Capacity of Shop-Stewards at Regional and Provincial Level

According to union officials this problem has been attributed to the lack of training of shop stewards and has resulted in poor service to union members. It was revealed that the national office has since allocated funds to provinces for this purpose. Added to this

provinces are further required to conduct at least one shop steward training session a month in order to capacitate the shop stewards.

4.5 Responses on the ANC, SACP AND COSATU Alliance

In addition, the study was also aimed to determine the respondents' perceptions on the ANC, SACP and COSATU alliance, i.e. whether they view it as an appropriate structure through which they can achieve their goals and objectives. As stated in chapter 2, the relationship between trade unions and political parties in South Africa can be traced back to the early days of apartheid. For instance, when the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) was formed in 1955 it linked with the ANC and supported the movement in its political campaigns.

With regard to NEHAWU, union officials hold the view that the alliance remains the only appropriate vehicle in the country that has the capacity to advance transformation and through which unions can achieve their goals. It was reported that it is through this alliance that unions can realize the goal of a socialist South Africa. According to them, unity in the alliance is of paramount importance to ensure that they achieve their goals.

However, union officials stated that the alliance is characterized by certain contradictions which sometimes generate crisis and tension among the alliance partners. At the heart of this crisis in the alliance are two opposing forces: those that promote the capitalist agenda and those in favour of socialism. It was argued that the latter seek to promote 'neo-liberal policies' which are not in the best interest of the working class. Amongst these, reference was made to policies such as privatization, outsourcing, downsizing and casualization of employment in the labour market and government's failure to ban labour brokers. According to union officials, these policies have contributed to growing unemployment and poverty among workers. Respondents were also not happy with the fact that certain policy resolutions adopted during the ANC Polokwane conference to deal with some of these issues had still not been implemented. In their view, it is the failure to completely do away with the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policy that has exacerbated problems such as unemployment.

Respondents attributed all of these problems to the emergence of capitalist forces within the ruling party (ANC). Members of this grouping were accused of using their positions within the ANC as a means for personal wealth accumulation. According to union officials, it is the same grouping together with big business that has largely benefited from government's policy of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE). This view is articulated in the following comment made by one official: "these days many people join the ANC in order to accumulate wealth; they do not have the interest of organization at heart and this tarnishes the image of the organization"

On the other hand, it was argued that the socialist forces seek to mobilize the working class to break the power of monopoly capitalism and realize their goal of a socialist South Africa.

Union officials also referred to the marginalization of unions in the alliance during President Thabo Mbeki's era. According to them, this usually happened whenever key policies were adopted without proper and adequate consultation with other alliance partners. However, they indicated that although there might still be policy differences among the alliance partners, relations have improved since the Polokwane Conference and there is now consistent engagement between them. They further indicated that as a strategy to combat the marginalization of its members, the union always encourages the latter to participate in the ANC at all levels, such as standing for election to leadership positions in the structures of the ANC. According to them, this form of participation in the ANC can enable the union to influence important policy decisions and ensure that activities of ANC structures are dominated by working class issues rather than by matters that have no bearing on workers' interests and goals.

4.6 Responses on Engagement at NEDLAC

NEDLAC is a structure created to advise parliament on matters relating to labour legislation and other labour market policies. The respondents were asked about the benefits of trade unions' participation at NEDLAC. According to union officials, during apartheid, it was only big business which had an influence on important policies and labour legislation in this country. Therefore participation at NEDLAC, for instance,

ensures that before any new labour legislation is passed it has to incorporate the views of labour.

It was also reported that through the process of social dialogue at NEDLAC, labour is able to make an input to address some of the fundamental problems in society. This relates to issues such as skills shortage in the economy, transformation in the education system, employment equity programmes and many other social and economic issues. Union officials acknowledged that this process of social dialogue deepens democracy by ensuring greater participation by unions in decision making.

At the same time however, union officials were very critical of the processes at NEDLAC. According to them, NEDLAC takes time to reach important decisions. They attribute this to the tendency of government and business to send representatives who do not have the mandate to take decisions. Hence they spend a lot of time trying to consult with their principals.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter contains a summary of the study, conclusions that can be drawn from the findings and the recommendations that can be applied to solve some of the problems identified in this study.

5.1 Summary

Trade unions played a very important role in dismantling the apartheid system in South Africa. However, because of the political and economic developments that took place in 1994, trade unions have been forced to review their role in post-apartheid South Africa. These developments therefore, inspired the researcher to carry out a survey in order to examine the role and the challenges faced by trade unions in post-apartheid South Africa.

As indicated in chapter 3 of this study, focus group discussions were held with NEHAWU provincial officials in Mafikeng in the North West province. The aim was to get an in-depth understanding of the problem under investigation. Information obtained through these interviews showed that the transformation of South Africa to socialism remains the key strategic objective of NEHAWU.

The findings also show that although NEHAWU has achieved significant gains particularly at shop-floor level, South African unions generally are still faced with many challenges. The major challenges relate to issues such as the organizational capacity of unions, quality of service to members, threat posed by splinter unions in the workplace and the inability of COSATU unions to exert greater influence in the alliance on important policy issues. Mention must also be made that employers' response to global challenges has impacted negatively on trade unions. For instance, policies such as the outsourcing of services and use of labour broking have had a direct impact on trade union membership. Unions' responses on these issues have varied. Some of the unions have preferred to engage with employers on these issues whilst others have resorted to mass action.

5.2 Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, it has been noted that NEHAWU describes itself as a transformative union which subscribes to Marxist socialist principles. It is for this reason therefore that NEHAWU and other COSATU affiliates are opposed to the system of capitalism. NEHAWU sees the transformation of South Africa to a socialist order as its main strategic objective. In terms of the Marxist literature, this goal can be realized only when workers have developed class consciousness.

Class consciousness is a concept used by Marxist scholars to describe a situation where workers become aware of their role in transforming capitalism into socialism. According to the Marxist approach, for this to happen, members of this class must be aware of their class position and interests. They must also be aware that it is through collective action that they can ensure that their needs are realized. Lastly, it requires them to have a conception of an alternative society (Haralambos and Heald, 1985:43).

In terms of this explanation, workers should not only be aware of their class position and interests but must also see a need for the total restructuring of society. The questions that arise are whether the working class in South Africa has developed enough to satisfy all these four elements of working class consciousness and whether unions are able to fulfill their role to raise the class consciousness of workers. From a Marxist perspective, if workers were to possess full class consciousness then they would seek worker control of industry and society as one of their goals.

In the case of South African unions, it can be argued that their current activities and programmes are limited to developing what Lenin called 'trade union consciousnesses'. This concept refers to a situation where members of a particular trade union only become concerned with their interests as group as opposed to those of the working class as a whole. In such a situation, each trade union's demands tend to be focused to improve their members' economic interests rather than challenging the capitalist economic order (Haralambos and Heald, 1985:265).

Karl Marx's prediction that class consciousness will eventually lead to a unified working class that will challenge the system of capitalism has been questioned by contemporary

writers. For instance, Dahrendorf cited in Poloma (1979:82) points to certain developments that have taken place in the structure of capitalism since Karl Marx wrote in the nineteenth century. One such development is what he calls the 'decomposition of labour'. Dahrendorf argues that since then the working class in industrialized nations has become differentiated. Today for instance, there are skilled, unskilled and semi-skilled groups of workers whose interests are not identical. This leads to a plurality of interests and therefore we no longer have working class interests which are identical.

Again in the case of South African unions, further evidence points to oligarchic tendencies that have developed within these unions and these act against the achievement of the goal of socialism. There seems to be a growing gap between the top union leadership and the rank and file. For instance, during the Marikana strikes, workers accused union leaders of neglecting their needs and demands. There is also the issue of control whereby a certain amount of power has shifted into the hands of elite of few top officials who make decisions without the involvement of members. This defeats the democratic principles of accountability and worker control on which some of these unions were founded.

This issue is well captured in Robert Michels' theory called 'iron law of oligarchy'. This theory warns about the emergence of oligarchic tendencies in political parties and trade unions. According to this theory, trade unions are largely formed to be democratic organizations, but in practice they tend to be pronounced in terms of the 'iron law of oligarchy'. In other words, there is a tendency that once officials are elected in office, they become irremovable from their positions and as time goes on, they tend to run unions on oligarchic lines and become more concerned with their current economic positions rather than serving the interests of their members. In short, their positions tend to undermine any commitment to the struggle which they might have once held (Hyman, 1971:20-21).

It has also been noted that NEHAWU uses certain tactics and strategies in order to achieve its goals. Those mentioned include political education offered to members, mass mobilization in the workplace and on the streets and engagement with employers on issues that affect its members. Although NEHAWU describes itself as a transformative

union, a closer look at its approach and tactics shows that its model of unionism ranges between what is called social unionism and strategic unionism. This is explained by the fact that the NEHAWU always concerns itself with broad social and political issues that affect its members, while at the same time it uses engagement as a strategy to address shop floor issues.

There was also general consensus among the respondents that one area in which the union has made a significant gain in the past few years is the growth in membership. This was largely attributed to the rapid growth of white collar unionization in the public sector. For some writers, the growth of white collar unionization is seen as a response to the changing employment conditions and status of white collar employees in industrialized societies. It is argued that people in many non-manual jobs such as clerks have become deskilled to the extent that their working conditions have brought them closer to manual workers. For instance, it is assumed that jobs such as clerical work have become routine, repetitious and fragmented into small simple operations while in other cases, the use of machinery has replaced the skills that were previously required to perform the job (Giddens, 1997:257). In the case of South Africa, the rapid growth in white collar unionization, particularly in the public sector is attributed largely to the desire by workers to protect their jobs and improve their wages (Finnemore, 1997:38)

The study has also noted that unions have to deal with serious challenges which cover a wide range of issues. The emergence of rival or splinter unions such as AMCU in the platinum mines in the Rustenburg area is one major challenge which seems to have shaken up many of the traditional unions. The emergence of splinter unions and loss of membership to such unions is indicative of the divisions that exist within COSATU. AMCU was formed due to member's dissatisfaction with the NUM. Infighting within COSATU unions has led to unions losing support and membership to rival unions. This taken together with restructuring in different industries is likely to result in a decline in membership of COSATU unions.

The study concludes that conditions are not yet conducive for trade unions to lead the struggle for a socialist transformation in South Africa. It should be stated that while union officials hold positive views about their alliance with the ANC and SACP, many

commentators are beginning to dispel the notion of an alliance as an appropriate vehicle to advance the workers' struggle. Questions are being raised about trade unions' inability to exert their influence within the alliance particularly on important policy issues. This is attributed largely to the contradictions that continue to affect the alliance and the inability of union leaders to provide quality service to their members. At the same time, the SACP, which is supposed to act as the leader of the working class, has also failed to assert itself in the alliance and provide leadership on issues facing workers. The SACP does not seem to have a clear programme to advance workers' interests.

Finally, since 1994, trade unions in South Africa, both in the private and public sector have been greatly affected by the new political and economic environment. Their responses have differed depending on their ideological outlook. The responses have ranged from a total acceptance of globalization as an objective reality within which unions must adapt their activities and strategies, to a total rejection of globalization as a capitalist strategy to weaken trade unions.

5.3 Recommendations

5.3.1 From the findings, it is evident that NEHAWU is committed to Marxist socialist principles. However, with the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, Marxism has become unpopular in many parts of the world. Even the ANC, which is the leading partner in the alliance, is neither a socialist party nor committed to Marxism. Thus it becomes difficult to understand how unions can achieve the goal of socialism while they are still in a political alliance with the ANC.

Cooperation between unions and political parties (in this case with the ANC) is likely to compromise working class objectives. This is said largely in the light of the contradictions mentioned earlier that characterize the ANC, SACP and COSATU alliance. Unions in South Africa will have to rethink their relationship with political parties if they are to realize their long term objectives. COSATU unions in general and NEHAWU in particular may also need to develop a programme that will heighten the class consciousness of its members, i.e. a programme that enables them to have a conception of an alternative society.

5.3.2 Existing unions need to do self-introspection. The emergence of rival unions in the workplace poses a serious challenge to existing unions and points to the weaknesses that are inherent in union leadership. This also begins to question the relevance of traditional trade unions and whether they are responsive to members' needs and new challenges.

The Marikana incident was a result of workers losing faith in their union, namely the NUM. Workers accused the NUM of providing poor quality service to its members and its leaders of colluding with employers. For instance, reports of collusion between union leaders and employers are contained in *The Sowetan* (2013:11). This report refers to a 'secret deal' between mining bosses and the NUM. According to this report, the salaries of the president of NUM (which amounts to more than R1 million a year) and that of his deputy are being paid by Anglo Gold Ashanti and BHP Billiton respectively. This raises a number of critical questions about these union leaders. For example, what is the agenda of mining companies in this regard? Will these leaders have the capacity to operate without being subjected to the control of these employers and to what extent can they defend the socio-economic and political interests of their members when these interests come into conflict with those of employers?

As it is common with most employers, it can be argued that they would prefer to deal with 'sweet-heart unions'. As opposed to militant trade unions, 'sweet-heart unions' are those that do not challenge employers on issues that affect their members. Instead they work in close cooperation with management, their role being to ensure that workers conform and share the same values and goals as the employer. In this case, it is important to state that paying union leaders salaries could be an employers' strategy to co-opt these leaders into management structures and prevent the possibility of the emergence of militant unions in the workplace.

In recent times trade union leaders in the alliance have also tended to be too preoccupied with ANC politics and in the process the interests of workers becoming compromised. This has even led to the development of factions within the structures of COSATU. This was quite evident for instance, in the run up to the Mangaung ANC

conference, a period that was characterized by tensions between the pro-Zuma and anti-Zuma factions.

Factionalism within COSATU is one aspect that threatens workers' unity and works against the attainment of working class objectives. For instance, at the time of the finalization of this study, there were reports of an imminent split within COSATU. NUMSA which happens to be the largest affiliate of COSATU was reported to be calling for special congress whereby they were expected to make a decision on whether to withdraw from the ANC, SACP, and COSATU alliance and form a new workers' political party (City Press, 2013). NUMSA leaders and its General Secretary in particular, Mr. Irvin Jim contends that the ANC has abandoned the Freedom Charter and is instead now supporting neo-liberal policies. The Freedom Charter as a blue print of the ANC advocates for aspects such as the nationalization of mines, the banks, factories and other major enterprises. NUMSA's unhappiness also stems from COSATU's decision to suspend its General Secretary; Mr. Zwelinzima Vavi for misconduct.

5.3.3 All these problems mentioned above point to serious weaknesses in union leadership. They call for unions to look into the kind of leadership they continue to provide to members and whether these leaders act in the best interest of their members. It also calls for unions to start reviewing their relationship with political parties. Alliances of this nature also bring into question the issue of workers' right to associate freely since many workers who are registered with COSATU unions who may not necessarily be ANC members, are forced to identify with and support this political organization.

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