

A decorative graphic consisting of a grid of dots in various shades of gray and red, arranged in a pattern that suggests a world map or a network of connections.

Trade Unions in Transformation

Towards A Powerful Value Chains Trade Union: South African NUMSA's Expanded Scope

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August 2017

- NUMSA's answer to the challenges of globalizing capital is the new strategy of building a value chain union, not centred on its stronghold in the automotive industry, but designed to organize sectors in which NUMSA can gain the most leverage in the economy.
- The ensuing expulsion from the national union federation COSATU initially fostered NUMSA's associational power. To ensure its sustainability across its multi-sectoral organizing domain, NUMSA needs to translate it into workplace bargaining power and institutional power.
- Trade Unions in Transformation is a FES project that identifies unions' power resources and capabilities that contribute to successful trade union action. This study features among two dozen case studies from around the world demonstrating how unions have transformed to get stronger.



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Abstract

This case study of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) analyses the union's efforts to transform itself into a value chain-based union with the goal of meeting the challenges of globalizing capital. Toward this end, NUMSA would have to be able to organize and service workers along value chains in targeted sectors in South Africa. Whereas the initial assumption was that NUMSA would build its value chain around its largest sector, the automotive industry, the finding is that NUMSA's strategy is to organize in sectors not necessarily interconnected to the automotive and metalworking industries, but where the exercise of structural power is likely to have the most disruptive impact in the economy. With its decision to embark on this path and its ensuing expulsion from the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), internal support for this course has been manifested, testifying to a solidifying of the union's associational power. The challenge for NUMSA today is to harness this associational power along the value chains and translate it into workplace bargaining power. Equally important for NUMSA is the goal of forging institutional power especially through a strategy for newly structured collective bargaining councils.

Introduction

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa's (NUMSA) expulsion from the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and expansion of its scope to organize along value chains make NUMSA an instructive example of the utilization of trade union power resources in South Africa. NUMSA managed to continue growing its membership through global economic crises and bitter political battles within COSATU over the federation's relationship with the ruling African National Congress (ANC). Since its formation from a merger of similar unions, NUMSA has managed to successfully organize in globally integrated industries such as the auto and steel manufacturing industries.

This heuristic analysis sought to see how NUMSA will be able to transfer its enviable power resources to adequately organize and service workers along value chains in targeted sectors. Does organizing along value chains mean organizing all workers in the metals manufacturing value chains, or is NUMSA aiming to be a general union? Were its past successes intricately dependent on its access to various resources of power through its symbiotic relationship with COSATU and the ruling ANC?

Birth of the National Metals Union

In May 1987, the NUMSA was formed by the merger of metal trade unions, some of which had been formed in

the 1960s and 1970s (Hlatwayo, 2015; NUMSA). These unions were¹:

- MAWU – Metal and Allied Workers Union;
- MICWU – Motor Industry Combined Workers Union;
- NAAWU – National Automobile and Allied Workers Union;
- UMMAWOSA – United Metal, Mining and Allied Workers of South Africa.

MICWU, which started as a union for coloured workers in 1961 when laws forced unions to be divided along racial lines, organised and represented workers in the motor industry, specifically *components manufacturing, body building, servicing, and petrol attendants*². Similarly, MAWU was the first union formed in Durban from the General Factory Workers Benefit Fund when it was illegal for black workers to belong to a registered trade union so workers joined Benefit Funds as a cover for trade union activity. The fund became a union in 1973 in Durban when thousands of workers joined the fund following the historical strikes of 1972 and 1973. NAAWU was formed in 1980 from three unions in the motor assembly industry with bases in the Eastern Cape around the auto assembly factories of Ford, General Motors and Volkswagen (NUMARWOSA); Western Cape union organising Leyland and Chrysler workers (WPMWU); and the third union (UAW) was a parallel union for black African workers because of the laws at the time on organising along racial lines, and WPMWU represented

1. <http://www.numsa.org.za/history/>.

2. Ibid.

coloured workers. Interestingly, UMMAWOSA was a breakaway from MAWU, formed in 1983.

Around the same time that these unions were forming in the early 1980s, the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF), MICWU, MAWU and NAAWU were engaging in discussions to prevent the poaching of each other's membership in the component sector. These discussions led to the emergence of the idea of building one metal union, culminating in the formation of NUMSA. The merger was further bolstered when two COSATU affiliates – General and Allied Workers Union (GAWU) and Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) – transferred all their metal worker members to the newly-formed NUMSA³. The formation of NUMSA in 1987 allowed for the construction of efficient bureaucratic structures to support organizational and bargaining activities (Forrest, 2005:ii). Building on its predecessors' democratic organizational and bureaucratic power, NUMSA successfully forged national bargaining forums and built hegemony across auto and metal industries (Forrest, 2005).

While NUMSA continued to operate in three distinct areas i. e. metals, motor assembly, and motor components and services, it was in motor assembly in particular that NUMSA made its most telling interventions and contributed most significantly to the restructuring of the industry (Maree, 2007). As early as 1989, the union fought for and won industry-wide centralised bargaining in the National Bargaining Forum; all but one of the eight motor assembly corporations participated and in the process the union built hegemony across the metals and motor industries (Maree, 2007; Forrest, 2005:ii). Similar bargaining gains were seen in the metals manufacturing sector where NUMSA became the Steel and Engineering Industries Federation of Southern Africa's (SEIFSA) major bargaining partner on the Industrial Council. With this latter victory, NUMSA »had in effect for the first time attained an institutional power which would enable it to engage in shaping the future of the industry«. (Forrest, 2005:272-3). Today NUMSA is recognised as one of the most militant trade unions in the country, as exemplified by its ability to mobilise more than 220,000 metal workers to strike throughout the country in 2014.

At its launch NUMSA was already a giant union by South African standards, incorporating 130,796 paid-up mem-

bers and constituting the second largest COSATU affiliate at the time, after the National Union of Mineworkers' 261,901 paid-up members (Forrest, 2005). Over time, NUMSA became one of COSATU's most successful trade unions as epitomised by its exponential recent growth from 236,909 members in 2009 to 291,025 in 2012, representing 23 percent growth (Benya and Ncube, 2015:15). »As of 2015 NUMSA are the largest union in the history of the African continent with over 360,000 members«⁴.

Towards a Powerful Value Chains Trade Union

The Shield and the Spear

In December 2013, NUMSA held a Special National Congress whose more significant tasks included deciding: »whether we should remain restricted within the confines of our current organising strategy (...) or whether we should extend the scope of our organisation in line with the realities of 21st century global capital« (NUMSA, 2013:37). Ashman et al (2015:3) provide a succinct synopsis of these new realities facing workers and organised labour in the country: »There has been extensive corporate restructuring across the South African economy in line with the global restructuring of capitalism in accordance with the imperatives of finance. South African conglomerates have »unbundled« and »rebundled«, internationalizing and financializing their operations whilst focusing on core concerns within South Africa«. NUMSA had to respond to these structural changes, including global trends showing fewer large companies manufacturing, assembling products, and providing all their own services under one roof, and the prevalence of value chains of separate companies manufacturing components and providing services to the final assembly plant (NUMSA, 2013:3). Over time, the increased outsourcing of key functions such as logistics and transportation by many major companies made it increasingly difficult for unions to bargain effectively (NUMSA, 2013).

Thus, according to NUMSA (2013:3), workers' only hope of pursuing labour is to collectively push back against the upper levels of the value chain and demand a redistribution of the value that is created by the collective value

3. Ibid.

4. <http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/national-union-metal-workers-south-africa-numsa>.



Table 1: Options for Positioning NUMSA as a Shield and Spear

<p>1. One Industry, One Union</p> <p>This option entailed working within COSATU's principle of »one union, one industry« and rejecting the employers' principle of »core and non-core« business. Under this strategy NUMSA organises all workers »core and non-core«, white collar and blue collar including services in: canteen services, cleaning, security, machine maintenance, warehousing, transport, and shop staff in garages.</p> <p>If adopted as a strategy, besides adhering to the »one industry, one union« principle of the COSATU's resolutions, this approach would allow for the phasing out of outsourcing; the creation of one strong union in a workplace; worker unity; an opportunity to launch a total onslaught with maximum focus on the attainment of greater representation in the sectors currently organized; and would address the weaknesses that limit NUMSA from having majority representation in certain sector.</p>
<p>2. Sectoral Union (i.e. Organise along value chains)</p> <p>The first step here would have been to persuade COSATU to move away from an industrial approach to organising and towards a »value chain« approach. For NUMSA the shift would be feasible, seeing that COSATU's 6th Congress had already opened the pathway to this form of organisation when it resolved to create groups of unions called »cartels«, including a »Manufacturing« cartel. Lobbying for the value chain approach was also further bolstered by reality that NUMSA already organised general workers along the value chain of the motor industry such as petrol attendants who do not have a trade and are not »metalworkers« per se.</p> <p>If NUMSA were to convince COSATU to adopt this strategy – or went at it alone – the proposed value chains for the union would be: Petrochemicals; Oil Pipe Lines; Petrol and Diesel depots; Building and Construction; Energy and RNWs; Upholstery; Scaffolding; Nuclear; Hydro; Production, sale, and fitment of glass components including wind-screens and fitment centres; and Car valet and wash bay establishments.</p>
<p>3. Hybrid Union</p> <p>The third option discussed entailed acknowledging regional differences, as development in South Africa is uneven with some provinces developing faster than others with huge investment in the manufacturing industry which employed large number of workers. In these populated provinces workers are better organised. However, in the less industrialised provinces with high unemployment, NUMSA believed that it would never be strong as a sector/industrial union and questioned its relevance there. In response to this situation, it was proposed that it can be an industrial or sectoral union in provinces like Gauteng, Mpumalanga, North West, and a semi-general or general union in provinces such as Northern Cape which are vast with high levels of unemployment and a high level of dependence on subsistence farming and the informal economy.</p>

Source: NUMSA, 2013:7-9

chain. These considerations were outlined in the seminal congress discussion document, *Positioning NUMSA as a shield and spear of struggling workers* (2013:7-9) which in the main considered three organising strategy options (Table 1).

These options were discussed in the context of two decades of unions responding to organising challenges through mergers (NUMSA, 2013). NUMSA found that it was not the only union that was considering changing its organisational scope, as some unions in Europe had initiated a similar discussion process. Pertinent experiences could also be drawn from how unions broadening

their scope of activity, such as the IF Metall in Sweden and UNITE in the United Kingdom, arguably contributed to their bargaining power.

IF Metall, the result of a 2006 merger between the Swedish Industrial Union and Swedish Metal Workers Union, became Sweden's second-largest union with 400,000 members and organising in nine sectors: metal; mining; chemical; pharmaceuticals; automotive; component; plastics; glass; and clothing (NUMSA, 2013:6). Similarly, established in 2007, UNITE became the biggest union in Britain with 1.42 million members through mergers in which smaller, more specialised unions came together

to combine their resources and increase their bargaining power (NUMSA, 2013:7). UNITE organises in twenty-three sectors including Aerospace and shipbuilding; Chemicals and Pharmaceuticals; Community and Youth Work; Passenger Transport; and Rural and Agricultural sectors (NUMSA, 2013).

Inevitably, the option to organise along value chains and the expansion of organisational scope had to be given earnest consideration as »this has been necessitated by the global restructuring of capitalism« (Irvin Jim, 2014).

2013 Special Congress Resolution

As much as NUMSA (2013) advanced the strong arguments and provided relevant context for organising along value chains, and even had ideas of which value chains to target, it still grappled with foreseeable challenges such as struggling to meet the required membership threshold for the new bargaining councils. Nevertheless, for NUMSA it ultimately made sense for it to resolve to organize along value chains in acknowledgement of trends of trade unions such as the aforementioned cases of the IF Metall and UNITE in advanced economies increasingly organising along value chains and broadening their scope to gain better leverage in negotiations with employers⁵. Thus, at the end of the Special Congress in December 2013, NUMSA adopted the resolution to expand its scope, with the general secretary rather belligerently declaring that:

»We are no longer going to reject any worker who comes to NUMSA. If people want to take that as poaching, well, workers are not rhinos but human beings. The focus on NUMSA membership must be rejected. COSATU Public sector unions are recruiting among themselves. They [those opposed to the idea of NUMSA recruiting in other sectors] can go to hell. We will recruit workers that come to us and want to belong to the organisation.«

(Irvin Jim, General Secretary, NUMSA⁶)

Arguably, there is a sense of inevitability that the union would pursue this option within the interpretation of the

5. <http://www.bdlive.co.za/opinion/editorials/2013/12/20/editorial-numsa-a-sign-of-things-to-come>.

6. <http://mg.co.za/article/2013-12-18-numsa-will-now-recruit-from-mining-sector-says-jim>.

evidence or circumstances the union published before the decision was taken. For example, the discussion document concedes that:

- »We already made a beginning to such an approach with the proposed amendment from the 2012 Congress on petrochemicals to include refineries, drivers of tankers and pipeline employees.
- In auto we should look at motor-ferry drivers and workers who manufacture seat covers and even industrial clothing.
- Mining of gold, platinum and iron ore, for example, are also clearly part of the metal industry value chain. It may be that our 2012 decision to add jewellery and the refining of base and precious metals and related work including extractive processes will inevitably lead us into mining« (NUMSA, 2013).

Furthermore, from the onset of the discussion document (i.e. Shield and Spear) value chain analysis is earmarked as strategically critical for the union under the belief that such an analysis would enable NUMSA (2013:3) to organise in the value chains so that it has the power to disrupt them. The a priori preference for a shift to value chains strategy is also betrayed by the amount of space afforded to each of the three options considered towards repositioning NUMSA. More time is spent on outlining and motivating for organising along value chains compared to the other two options (i.e. One Industry, One Union and/or Hybrid Union). Arguably, the 2013 resolution to expand its scope and organise along value chains was the culmination of the process of organisational renewal embarked upon by NUMSA since 2002 in an endeavour to regain its marketplace and workplace bargaining power in response to weak workplace organising and declining membership.

2015 Expanded Scope

Since January 2015, when the Department of Labour finally approved its amended constitution; NUMSA has been free to organise workers in sectors identified in its scope. The new constitution expands NUMSA's scope to include mining, transport, security, construction, cleaning, industrial chemicals, renewable energy, information and communication technology, aviation and related services, and health and canteen services.

These services and sectors were included in the expanded scope for a combination of factors, namely:

- To counter and reject employers' principle of »core and non-core« business (security, cleaning, canteen services, transport);
- NUMSA already organised general workers within the value chain (industrial chemicals, renewable energy);
- Some sectors inevitably have to be organized as they are intricately part of metal industry value chain (mining, construction);
- Other sectors not previously organized by NUMSA (transport, aviation and related services, health) would be of strategic value to building NUMSA's our power to effectively disrupt the economy.

The strategic motivation for the choice of some sectors is encapsulated in an interview with Hlokoza Motau, Head of Organising, Campaigns and Collective Bargaining (OCCB). Motau revealed that the drive to recruit new members is explicit: »We started recruiting. For us the linkages give us (...) will give us both bargaining power and political power«. Comrade Motau emphasizes that the expansion of scope is an expression of NUMSA's desire to expand its workplace and market power and have the ability to markedly disrupt the economy. He elaborates:

»In order to build our power it is important that we exist in these sectors (...) I mean we are organizing companies at the docks, we are organizing transport, the trucks. Although it depends how much organizing goes into those strategic sectors. But because (...) it becomes possible to have general strike because part of NUMSA's strategy is to have the same bargaining periods and when we strike it means we can almost bring the country to a standstill.«

(Interview, Hlokoza Mouta)

Expulsion from COSATU

From the outset NUMSA acknowledged that expanding its scope could be faced with resistance from other unions whose membership would be affected and that such an agenda may have the unintended consequence

of sowing disunity within the federation and tripartite alliance (NUMSA, 2013).⁷ All permutations considered, NUMSA (2013) felt that it could no longer ignore that members of other unions were voting with their feet and coming to its offices for answers. Fearing leaving these workers to wilderness of non-unionism, or the mushrooming of opportunistic organisations, NUMSA empathised that these workers needed representation. As such, at the end of the special congress NUMSA took a resolution to organise along value chains and expand its organisational scope. Consequently, in November, 2015, NUMSA was officially expelled from COSATU ostensibly for violating the federation's »one industry, one union« policy.

This charge was rebutted comprehensively by the general secretary of NUMSA at a meeting of the COSATU Central Committee on the 17th of November 2014, where he painstakingly recounted how recruiting and organising along value chains has been reflected in the constitutions and practices of many COSATU affiliates. At the time of this presentation, NUMSA faced expulsion from COSATU for violating a plethora of the federation's resolutions and policies including, but not limited to:

- the decision to call on COSATU to break its alliance with the African National Congress (ANC);
- the decision to hold back on paying affiliation fees to COSATU until a special national congress is held;
- the decision to cease to pay a contribution into the COSATU/South African Communist Party (SACP) levy;
- the decision »to extend our scope« of operation (NUMSA, 2014: 2).

While the document aimed to, and does indeed, respond to each of the charges faced by NUMSA, a significant proportion – at least ten pages – of the twenty-nine-page document is particularly dedicated to rebutting the charge that NUMSA has violated the federation's policy on demarcations. From the outset the general secretary argues that NUMSA (2014:15) is sim-

7. Through its affiliation to COSATU, NUMSA became part of the part of the wider Tripartite Alliance, along with the governing African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) (Hlatswayo, 2015).

ply carrying out the federation policy on supply chain organizing and progressive demarcation as resolved at COSATU's 8th National Congress in 2003. The policy of COSATU supporting supply chain organising was adopted in the resolution called *7 Principles for Demarcation* which said that: »Demarcation must take into account conflicting needs.

As far as possible, it must support:

- Protection for vulnerable workers through solidarity with workers in more strategic jobs or in jobs connected in the supply chain;
- Continuous membership if the employer hives off activities, for instance by outsourcing or privatisation« (NUMSA, 2014:15).

For NUMSA (2014:15) the above resolution served as clear mandate to recognise the need for value chain organizing as aptly carried out through its resolution. Furthermore, the need for progressive demarcation across interrelated industries had been recognised by the federation for many years, as evidenced by suggested mergers such as the between the Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU) and the South African Agricultural Plantation and Allied Workers Union (SAPPAWU), as well as *the* Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa (DENOSA) and the South African Democratic Nurses Union (SADNU) (NUMSA, 2014:15).

Pertinently, recruiting and organizing along value chains is reflected in the constitutions and practices of many other COSATU affiliates such as the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), opening its scope to include construction and all auxiliary services, which NUMSA read as the value chain. FAWU had also confirmed at previous COSATU central executive committees that it organises workers who are sub-contracted by food manufacturers to fill supermarket shelves (2014:15). In addition to the above reality, the idea of not organizing along value chains is exacerbated by the threat of unions newly registered as general unions organising along value chains.

That NUMSA was not earnestly facing expulsion for violating the »one industry, one union« is further illustrated by the fact that other COSATU unions affiliates organized across sectors, competed with one another and still faced

no sanction from the federation, such as DENOSA, the National Health Education & Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) and SADNU all organising nurses, or FAWU losing members to South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union (SACCAWU) (NUMSA, 2014:17).

The document goes through great lengths and irrefutable evidence that a vast majority of COSATU affiliates have extended their scope at one time or another in a manner that infringed on the interest of other affiliates (NUMSA, 2014:20). Evidently, NUMSA was essentially expelled for demanding an end of COSATU's participation in the tripartite alliance with the ANC and the SACP as well as for withholding donations and political support from the ANC in the 2014 national elections. NUMSA's lack of repentance to the charges it faced was in line with its rejection of the ANC and the Alliance and its support for independent, militant unionism (Bieler, 2014). Furthermore, beyond broadening its organising scope as a revolutionary union, NUMSA wanted to move ahead to explore what may constitute a revolutionary programme for the working class (Bieler, 2014).

Quo Vadis a Metals Value Chains Union?

Immediate Impact of and on NUMSA's Associational Power

With NUMSA expelled from COSATU and a new trade union federation not yet formed, it has to go it alone and embark on a national project to champion the organizing of workers along value chains. Fortunately, NUMSA's resolution has resonated with its members, shop stewards and organisers in testament to the union's internal cohesion; which is one of the key role players in harnessing *associational power* (Schmalz et al). This much was illustrated by the *General Secretary's Report to the National Bargaining Conference* which welcomed workers (+ 27,760) from the new sectors who were in a display of NUMSA's organisational efficiency and member participation (Table 2).

That these new recruits are directly attributable to NUMSA's resolution to expand was reaffirmed by the Head of OCCB, who indicated that its organisers had in fact started recruiting in different workplaces and sectors as soon as the resolution was passed in November,



Table 2: New NUMSA Members

Workplace/Sector	Numbers
Transnet	10,000
South African Airways (SAA)	500
SAA technical and maintenance	560
Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA)	1,000
SASOL	700
Mining	2,000
Road freight and logistics	5,000
Security and cleaning	Not Indicated
Canteens	500
Landscaping	200
Construction	5,000
Bus	2,300 including: - Greyhound: 183 - Autopax: 786 - Golden Arrow: 400 - Putco: 524 - Algoa (not indicated)
Total	27,760 (est)

Source: NUMSA, 2016

2013. This was long before the Department of Labour had officially approved NUMSA's new constitution with its expanded scope in January, 2015. Arguably, NUMSA harnessed its existing resources – infrastructure, efficiency, member participation and internal cohesion among others – to draw new members, a reliable indicator of a union's associational power.

Translating New Found Associational Power to Workplace and Institutional Power

Prior to officially expanding its scope, NUMSA's *associational power* was already a draw factor to workers who were either poorly serviced by their existing union or unorganized workers who wanted to join the union for its well-known fight for workers' rights and improved working conditions. Hence, as is suggested by the aforementioned member statistics, workers that NUMSA could not organize either because of constraints of

being a COSATU affiliate and/or lack of constitutional mandate were ready to join the union as soon the union expanded its scope. As welcome as these new members are in terms of bolstering NUMSA's numbers, the union was aware of the fact that these new members were not recruited for the sole purpose of making up numbers. In the 2016 National Bargaining Conference it was reiterated that NUMSA must ensure that in all the new sectors that are organised, workers must get fair wage increases and that they must feel the benefit of being its members. At least it can be said that NUMSA is conscious of the imperative to ensure that associational power translates to *workplace bargaining power* for new members.

Associational power does not readily translate into *workplace bargaining power* and it is always the primary target of power restriction by capital through measures such as relocating sites, changing the way production is organized or through rationalization measures. The reciprocity lies in workers trying to secure their power position by influencing the reorganisation and innovation process. Another source of workplace bargaining power is found when capital and workers' movements are willing to cooperate (Schmalz et al). As a union in South Africa, a country with one of most progressive labour regimes, NUMSA has thrived from broader national institutions as well as industry-specific institutions that have solidified co-determination with capital. Thus, the necessary question: how will NUMSA make sure that these new members benefit from joining it? For some answers to this question one has to look back to NUMSA's past experience in responding to adverse changes to production (e. g. in the auto and steel sectors) as well as its plans to extend industrial institutional power to its new members.

Sustaining Workplace Bargaining Power

Prior to its resolution to organize along value chains NUMSA was still exposed to value chains through the sectors that it organized such as the auto and steel sectors. NUMSA is the biggest trade union in the broader automotive industry, which contributed 7.5 percent to the country's GDP in 2015, through its well-integrated value chain from downstream to upstream activities (AIEC, 2016). Similarly, it is the biggest union at ArcelorMittal, a component of ArcelorMittal International,

which is the largest steel manufacturer on the African continent (Hlatswayo, 2015). Both sectors are intricately integrated into the global economy and served as two of the main sites of extensive corporate restructuring as the country opened up to global capitalism in accordance with the imperatives of finance. In both instances, NUMSA was adversely affected by changes to modes of production as it lost members to retrenchments or voluntary retirement.

These developments were subject to intensive scholarly research. For brevity, Hlatswayo's (2015:285) – who conducted the most recent of this kind of these studies – literature review found that:

*»As part of understanding trade union responses to work reorganisation, Mashilo (2010) and Masondo (2010) conducted research into »lean production in the auto sector and trade union responses«. The conclusions of both authors are that unlike *Industriegewerkschaft Metall (IG Metall)*, NUMSA was unable to respond proactively to work reorganisation that includes technological changes and lean production.«*

(Masondo, 2010; Mashilo, 2010)

In the steel industry, AcelorMittal in particular, NUMSA tended to respond slowly and reactively to technological changes at the plants and continued to prioritise wages over other matters (Hlatswayo, 2015). In the automotive industry Mashilo found that NUMSA itself has not yet worked out a comprehensive new organising strategy in terms of a change in production organisation as reflected in Just in Time (JIT), particularly JIT Areas:

»For instance, despite the fact that workers from suppliers in JIT Areas – assembly plant premises – are NUMSA members, they are not coordinated. (...) They are just not invited. When NUMSA holds shop steward elections, these members are not there in their respective supplier premises to vote. Their respective NUMSA shop stewards from suppliers also reported that they had not visited the workers in the JIT Areas.«

(Mashilo, 2010:93)

Arguably NUMSA has heeded the findings of these studies and their main recommendation that for it to successfully respond to changes in the production it needs research to be flexible and proactive:

»NUMSA's Research & Policy Institute should commission a study that thoroughly investigates the value chain linkages relevant to our industry including the possibility of having one collective bargaining forum for the value chain. The outcome of such research should be fed into constitutional structures.«

(NUMSA 2013)

The union is harnessing its research resource by reaching out to sister unions like IG Metall to cooperate on research on restructuring in the context of a drive for electronic monitoring of production for the fourth industrial revolution and also wider issues on value chains (Motau, 2016). With this knowledge, experience and explicit mandate to organise along value chains, NUMSA is poised to improve on its service to different workers within a company and companies within a sector thereby maintain new gained associational power and translate it into sustained workplace bargaining power, which in the long run should contribute its endeavour to restructure collective bargaining institutions in line with its expanded mandate.

Forging New Institutional Power

At the moment, NUMSA members have access to enviable institutional representation in various existing industrial bargaining councils that would, in all likelihood, not fully be representative of the interests of new members, such as those involved in cleaning or work at a canteen or as security guards at an engineering or tyre factory, in their current form. The union has resolved that part of the new bargaining strategy will be to persuade the employers to move to new bargaining structures which would, for example, have auto, components and tyre and rubber – i.e. automotive manufacturing value chain – under one umbrella organization.

To translate realisable growth in *associational power* into effective *workplace bargaining power*, an element of *structural power* (Schmalz et al.), the union has targeted the establishment of eight new sectors for purposes of collective bargaining, namely the automotive manufacturing industry; motor vehicle and fuel sales services; state owned enterprises; metal, steel and engineering; mining; chemicals and plastics; goods and passenger transport; and security and cleaning services.

Ideally, each sector would have a chamber for its specific industry (NUMSA, 2016). Furthermore, according to Motau, in addition to restructuring collective bargaining structures, NUMSA would like to see all sectors hold collective bargaining at the same time to give the union the opportunity to effect the most disruptive of strikes should the need arise.

This is arguably the most ambitious element of the expansion of scope and strategy to organise along value chains, for, as a product of voluntary co-determination, the union has to negotiate with and get the buy-in of both capital and other workers' movements that are independent of, if not in competition with, NUMSA. On the issue of other worker movements NUMSA could find inspiration in its own formation through mergers of similar unions; rely on its experience after decades as a COSATU affiliate; and exploit its ability to cooperate with non-COSATU affiliated unions in bargaining councils in which it held the majority position. Hopefully, NUMSA has sufficient *associational power* to get the cooperation of the other unions, working in concert with other social associations to build enough *societal power* to at least get employers and employer organisations to the negotiating table. It is with the restructuring of existing collective bargaining structures that NUMSA will have to be at its most innovative and flexible as some employers have already indicated their reluctance for this as, in the words of Motau (interview), they fear they are negotiating their own death.

Besides the predictable reluctance to have working conditions be centrally negotiated for all workers within a company and/or sector, existing collective bargaining institutions are under attack by certain employer organisations, a key example of this being bosses refusing to put resources into the infrastructure of the Metal Industries Bargaining Council, rendering it almost unworkable and with layoffs of staff being threatened (Vavi, 2016). In 2016 NUMSA was already applying this strategy in negotiations in the automotive sector where it has been insistent on the establishment of a mega-bargaining council comprising the vehicle manufacturers, oil refineries and retail motor industry (Cokayne, 2016). This was rejected by the Retail Motor Industry Organisation (RMI), who did not believe a mega-bargaining council was a workable solution because the retail motor industry comprised small businesses, had a different business model, and served a different client base (Cokayne, 2016). Further-


more, over and above the predictable reluctance of employers, the fact that NUMSA has been expelled from COSATU and by extension the tripartite alliance entails a threat of the extent to which the rest of the Alliance can succeed in isolating NUMSA and its allies (Ashman et al, 2015). It is inevitable that NUMSA is likely to attract the vehement opposition of both COSATU/SACP and the ANC-controlled State in a scenario where the resources available to counter the new movement for socialism are far greater than those available to build it (Ashman et al, 2015:9).

Concluding Remarks

NUMSA should, ideally, continue to rely on its historical *associational power* stemming from over 300,000 members, and explore its ability to make instant inroads in new targeted sectors, using its 27,760 new members to build *workplace bargaining power* to the benefit of formerly unorganised workers and recruit more members in a mutually reinforcing organising process. This can transpire when existing *associational power* results in ameliorative *workplace bargaining power* for newly organised workers and vice versa, as sustained success on the latter further adds to the former's allure.

NUMSA's associational power and ability to disrupt the key national industries has had the desired impact on centralised bargaining institutions, as exemplified by its ability to raise wages and gain significant benefits for workers in the auto sector in 2016 without going to strike. This was partly in recognition and in avoidance of the long-felt impact of the 2010 strikes where NUMSA had up to 200,000 workers on strike. It is this kind of effective use of workplace bargaining power that drew workers to NUMSA. In the process NUMSA has simultaneously maintained and enhanced its associational power as epitomised by its rise to be the biggest union in Africa and its ability to instantly gain new members in line with its expanded scope.

However, NUMSA's ability to hold firm and carry out its ambitious programme of movement-building will hinge on the success of its grassroots mobilization of workers, but it will also depend on the alliances it will forge with those social movements disillusioned with the ANC and other unions (Ashman et al., 2015:9). The most important finding is that as much as NUMSA wants to champion



the cause of the working class, it is aware that it cannot be all things to all workers at once. Hence: »comrades we must be specific. There are certain sectors that will give us power«. Those are the sectors we want. Those are the sectors in which we are prepared to invest monies for recruiting. But the other sectors we said no, like the service sector, we said »comrades lay off from the service sector. We'll come back to those.« (Motau, interview).



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Imprint

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ISBN
978-3-95861-902-9