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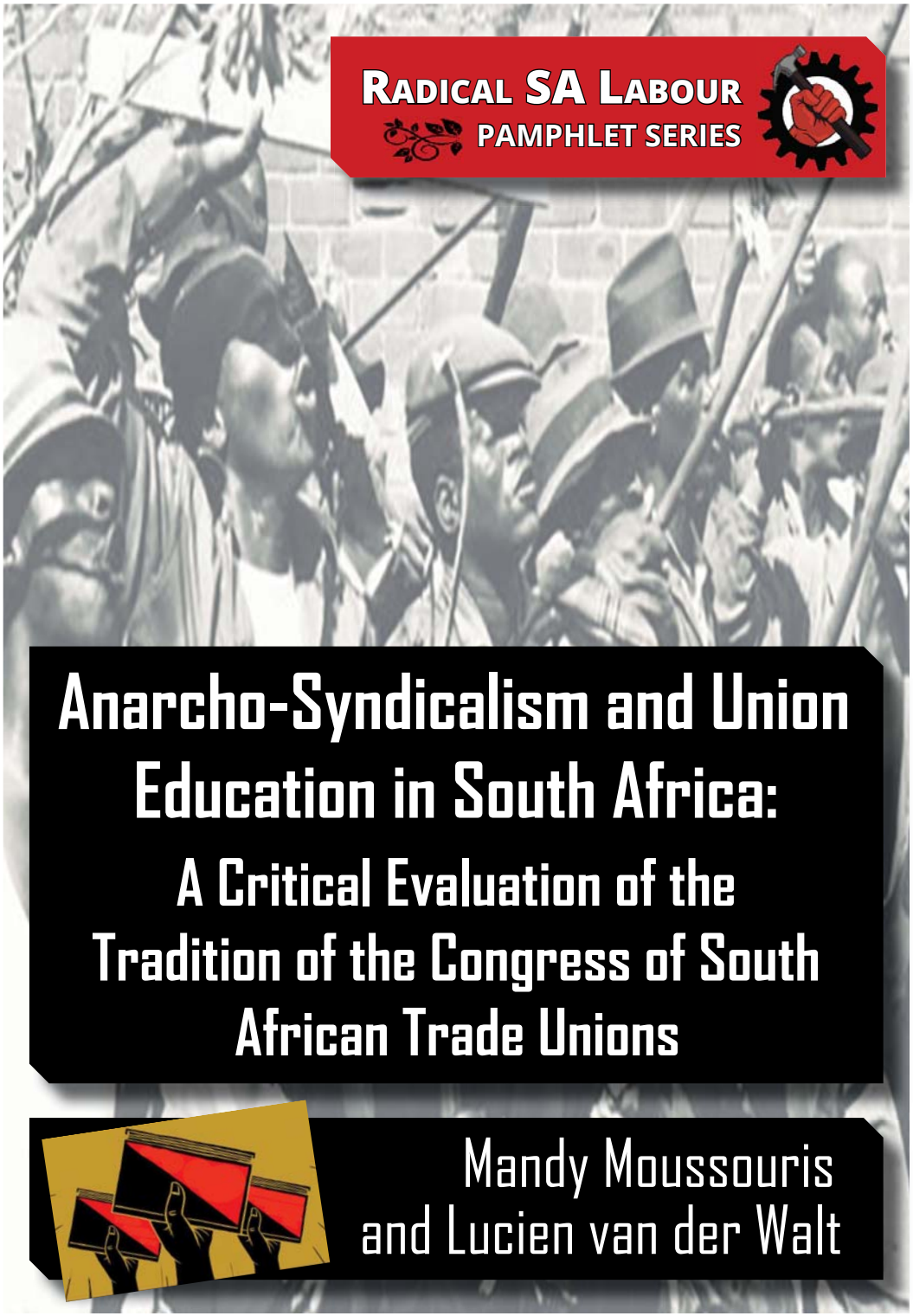

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Anarcho-Syndicalism and Union Education in South Africa:

A Critical Evaluation of the Tradition of the Congress of South African Trade Unions

Mandy Moussouris
and Lucien van der Walt

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Front cover: *Municipal workers on the march, Durban, 1973*

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1. Skills Development Act 97 of 1998.

2. Clauses 7.1.8, 7.1.9 and 7.1.10

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Introduction

This text focuses on the potential of trade union education as a revolutionary force in society. It aims to provide a deeper understanding of types of union education in history and practice – primarily anarchist/ anarcho-syndicalist education – which have either led to revolution or built a strong revolutionary culture, and to use these to evaluate critically the evolution of union education in South Africa from the late 1980s. It seeks to understand why, in some instances, union education broadens and deepens struggle, and in others does not.

It is intended that the overall analysis provide some understanding of the potentially revolutionary role of union education and enable some lessons to be drawn on what can limit, even completely undermine, this potential. By 'revolutionary education,' this chapter means education linked to, and controlled broadly by, the working class through its organisations – in particular, the unions – and which builds political understanding, strong organisation and the individual's intellectual and other skills. These include capacities in critical, evidence-based, logical reasoning and individual initiative, and intellectual and other skills that have the explicit intention of replacing the existing social order with a new, egalitarian and democratic one.

Against this backdrop, the chapter examines the evolution in South Africa of the main trade union federation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), from its founding in 1985 as an independent mass movement struggling against both capitalism and apartheid towards a more corporatist union model focused on replacing neoliberal with social-democratic capitalism. It also examines the accompanying shift from fighting the (apartheid) state to being closely connected to the (parliamentary-democratic) state as part of a Tripartite Alliance with the ruling African National Congress (ANC) government and South African Communist Party (SACP). It argues that running alongside these shifts, there was a move from revolutionary education towards a doctrinaire hierarchical model rooted in Marxism-Leninism, which had significant

negative effects on union education's revolutionary potential.

The chapter specifically challenges the contention on the left that it was the unions' embrace of the post-apartheid state's stress on accredited, skills-focused education that crippled union education. Formal education and skills development are particularly important to challenging the apartheid legacy of racist educational inequities and workplace hierarchies, including *de facto* job colour bars, and are potentially able to equip workers with the vocational and administrative skills needed to take over and self-manage production. There is nothing in the pursuit of accreditation and vocational skills intrinsically at odds with the development of revolutionary ideas; indeed, these complement a radical, politicised union education. rather, today's crisis in union education is strongly linked to a shift in pedagogy, rooted in the increasing power that a section of the SACP wielded over unions, and the accompanying closing of political space, debate and critical thinking.

Anarchist Education, Syndicalist Unions and Social Change

Anarchism, which emerged from the 1860s in the First International, stressed the transformation of consciousness as key to the creation of a libertarian society and to enabling a revolutionary class struggle to create a society based on common ownership, equality and self-management. This led to major projects in anarchist education, sustained mass-based examples of which were in place by the beginning of the twentieth century. Many were closely associated with – emerging from and supporting – the powerful international syndicalist trade union movement, exemplified by the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) in Spain and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in the USA and elsewhere. Well documented cases of anarchists in education include Cuba, Egypt, France, Spain and the USA (Moussouris, 2009). Syndicalist unions, radical press, popular militias and people's schools were the primary institutions of an anarchist and syndicalist movement that, at its peak, overshadowed Marxism (van der Walt, 2016: 106).

Anarchist education with its strong base in the syndicalist union movement, provides an historical case of radical education led by workers through autonomy from the state and capital, but also through treating each other with decency and dignity, and recognising that disagreement and debate are valuable and essential.

workers' education traditions which emerged at the turn of the twentieth century across the world. Secondly, that skills training is not the preserve of capital or the state and a more holistic, revolutionary form of skills development has a very important role to play in enabling a society beyond capitalism. Anarcho-syndicalists are able both to appreciate this role and begin to organise and educate in a way that aims to empower the individual worker and the working class with the skills to run a new society. If not coupled with a vision of a new society and a new and empowered role in that society for the working class, skills development will necessarily not be revolutionary education. Thirdly, by analysing the shifts and changes in education within COSATU this chapter has shown how the federation has changed its orientation from a struggle for workers' control and socialism to the adoption of a nationalist programme with the ANC, which has meant being allied to the very same neoliberal state that attacks working-class people. The role of education within this has necessarily had to change from what was a revolutionary education to centralised control of education devoid of revolutionary political content and vision, and the outsourcing of skills development.

If we are to chart a different way forward, we need to learn from the mistakes of the past. A true revolution requires truly revolutionary education: education controlled by the working class through working-class organisations, which builds political understanding, is based on strong organisation and more importantly that ensures the self-emancipation of all workers both intellectually and in terms of his/her skills. It means engaging with a range of perspectives, and having political pluralism and tolerance within the working-class movement, rather than imposing one position. At the 2009 COSATU congress, the political report recognised the importance of building a socialist movement that would 'draw on many forces in civil society', going beyond the Congress/SACP tradition (Vavi, 2009). Indeed, it was stated that 'while we differ with some of the theoretical, strategy and tactics of the Trotskyites and Anarcho-Syndicalists…it will be folly to ignore some of their valuable critique' (Vavi, 2009). regrettably, however, such sentiments remain on paper, coexisting with an intolerance expressed in purges of dissidents in the federation in 2007–2009, and again in 2013–2014. To create a better society requires an education that can enable replacing the existing capitalist order with a bottom-up socialist one, run by and for all those in it; it means building a working-class counter-power that can lay the organisational basis for a new, bottom-up democracy, based on participation and equality; and both require prefiguring that better society in our daily activities – not just

and the community which not only supported and built organisations and propagated the revolutionary aims of the union movement, but also focused strongly on the emancipation of all working-class people: children, women and men, the employed and the unemployed. It developed deep, strong links between unions and working-class communities, and included not just union members but also children, housewives and the unemployed. The understanding of education as both a weapon of struggle for the unions and the class, and a means of challenging the individually oppressive and restrictive nature of education under capitalism and the state, was key to anarchist pedagogy.

Whilst concrete examples provide essential illustrations, it is important to note that anarchist pedagogy was systematically theorised, notably by Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin, and was always rooted in the larger anarchist project. The core of anarchism is opposition to unjust hierarchies, including economic and social equality and, from this, opposition to class, capitalism and the state, with a stress on bottom-up organising, including of unions, and on the conscientisation of the popular classes (Guérin, 1970).

This led directly to a critique of capitalist education. For Bakunin (1869), 'complete emancipation' for the working class was impossible while its education was inferior. Denial of access to education was central to the exclusion, repression and exploitation of the class. The forms of education on offer also reinforced the class system: official education was used for disciplining, 'deceiving and dividing the masses of the people,' so 'keeping them always in a salutary ignorance lest they ever become able, by helping one another and pooling their efforts…to conjure up a power capable of overturning states' (Bakunin, 1869).

Kropotkin, too, discussed how workers were deprived of access to quality facilities, opportunities for further study and a comprehensive and humanistic 'integral' education. He stressed how official education reinforced the hierarchical corporate division of labour, dividing conception and execution and manual and mental work. 'The worker whose task has been specialised by the permanent division of labour has lost the intellectual interest in his labour,' and this reduced innovation, creativity and initiative; where 'three generations have invented; now they cease to do so' (Kropotkin, 1890: 3). This 'deskilling' as Braverman ([1973] 1998) would note later, was heavily driven by ruling class efforts to uproot any workers' control of production.

Education, then, must be transformed into a tool for liberation by challenging unequal access to vocational skills and by laying claim to 'the common inheritance of all the world,' including science (Bakunin, 1869). It aimed at replacing hierarchical divisions of labour with collective self-management in a classless society where people were invested in the work they chose to do and had an in-depth understanding of both the knowledge behind the work, the practical skills to carry out production and the larger systems in which each job fitted. It aimed at a new society where production was for the common good rather than the profits or power of a ruling minority, and where income was no longer linked to occupation, output or skill but provided solely on the basis of need.

Kropotkin envisaged 'integral' education as one that prepared everyone in society for a life of thought, production and community by focusing on scientific knowledge, skills training and humanist education. It developed the individual, enhanced creativity and provided the range of skills needed to participate in economy and society in a meaningful and equal way. It was humanistic and normative as it aimed to enable a genuinely democratic, egalitarian society that fostered solidarity and care: we should feel our 'heart at unison with the rest of humanity' (Kropotkin, 1890: 9).

Kropotkin, like Bakunin, was under no illusion that such combined education would be possible in a capitalist and statist society. However, both insisted that developing such an alternative within but against capitalism and the state, through working-class organisations like unions, enabled resistance and helped lay the basis for – that is, prefigured – the new society. Education had to be linked to the broader political aims of the revolution in a strategic way which clearly challenged and ultimately 'smashed' the current education status quo. As already noted, this meant, at one level, building alternative, mass-based educational institutions, but at another level, it involved concrete struggles for more equal access to education, skills and jobs. Immediate reforms, won from below, built confidence, consciousness, and organisation, as well as made very real improvements in working-class life and so were essential to building a working-class counter power that could challenge the status quo (Rocker, [1938] 1989).

This meant the content and methodology of anarchist education is rooted in the commitments to fostering free, reasonable and active people, as part of a participatory, holistic development of both individuals and society

Conclusion

Critics of the new skills system in South Africa focus on the influence of globalisation within the South African economy as the main driver of the adoption of a neo-Fordist approach to capitalist production and skills development (Allais & Byrne, 2002; Cooper, 1998). For this reason, the shift towards accredited training has been perceived by some on the left as undermining revolutionary education within the trade union movement.

Whilst the weakening of revolutionary education is not disputed, what we dispute is the argument that it was the focus on skills training and on building the skills of individual workers which resulted in these changes in trade union education. From an anarchist perspective, the call for skills development is a legitimate working-class demand. What has caused the problem has been the movement's shift away from revolutionary politics and into a corporatist alliance with the state and capital – and that includes the ANC and SACP alliance – bringing in its wake top-down, intolerant Marxist-Leninist approaches to politics and education. Political education moved from providing a critical consciousness that seriously engaged debates, to promoting a single view while closing down discussion beyond its ambit.

Cooper et al. (2002: 14) argue, for example, that the engagement of the union movement in workplace skills training issues 'resulted in the beginnings of a dissolution of boundaries between workers' education on the one hand, and workplace training on the other, with the notion of workers' education being depoliticised and losing its distinct class identity.' However, it can be argued that breaking down these boundaries is, in fact, an essential part of a revolutionary education. As the anarcho-syndicalist union movement argued, skills development is key to the individual empowerment of workers as part of a broader strategy to ensure workers participate in the transformation and running of a new society, which certainly requires not only political education and critical thought but also the vocational skills that can enable a take-over and self-management of production. The importance of access to education and training which recognises and empowers everyone to play a meaningful role in society is key to any real revolution and the emphasis by workers themselves on the importance of skills training must be recognised.

This chapter has attempted to illustrate firstly, the emancipatory, participatory workers' education that was born from the anarchist

Educational tools which were integral to education in the earlier years of COSATU, like informal and experiential learning, disappeared from congress resolutions in the 1990s and 2000s, along with the emphasis on workers' culture that had been so central to the unions in earlier years. This increasing separation of union education from organisation and working class culture illustrates both a lack of appreciation for the role education plays in organisation, as well as (if not consciously) a move away from a real commitment to worker participation. The previous quote from Vally (2007: 45) supports this contention: 'During the 1990s, union education programmes became more directed towards union leadership and full-time staff, with little or no education for the "rank and file"' (Cooper, et al. 2002: 13). Now, rather than union leadership and full-time staff being a *means* to build the rank and file and serving at their pleasure, the rank and file were increasingly cut out.

Education also focused increasingly on training on new legislation which was being promulgated by the ANC government in the mid-1990s. Funding for this training came from government and the COSATU budget, but funding for regional or provincial education dried up. Attempts to enable direct worker engagement with the new legislation were stopped as well. In CWIU, for example, an initiative in the 1990s to establish local discussion groups was shut down. The 1997 Congress resolution that 10% of workers' subscriptions be dedicated to union education was never effectively implemented across affiliates. The crisis in union education cannot be reduced to a simple lack of resources. Membership dues were growing as COSATU continued to grow rapidly with unprecedented breakthroughs in the state sector; unions now had unprecedented access to state assistance; unions were able to move hundreds of millions of rand into a plethora of investment arms; and unions were able to fund the SACP and contribute generously to ANC election campaigns.

Political education sidestepped the awkward fact that COSATU and the SACP were, in fact, allied to an overtly capitalist party heading a bourgeois state and engaged in neoliberal attacks on the working class. Although the rhetoric of struggle towards socialism still pervades COSATU discourse, it refers nowadays mainly to modest social-democratic reforms rather than a new mode of production.

in the present as well as in an ideal society in the future, based upon individual freedom within the context of equality and self-management. The new society could not be created by hierarchical methods, including in education, nor sustained by narrow-minded and dogmatic approaches to ideas.

Diverging Roads on the Left

Thus, like the liberals, the anarchists stressed the importance of a comprehensive education, including critical thought and evidence-based reasoning. Like the Marxists, however, they stressed class struggle, linked education and mobilisation, and had a strongly anti-elitist thrust (Suissa, 2001). The latter included a dislike of competition and humiliation, a focus on initiative and inquiry rather than rote learning, a rejection of authoritarian methods, and skills training that challenged narrow specialisations.

Marxist education is very varied, just like the different schools of political thought within Marxism. The dominant Marxist tradition for the last century has, however, been Marxism-Leninism, that is, the Marxism of the official Communist Parties, and aligned with the regimes of the former Eastern bloc. This had a distinctive approach to education, exemplified by that which was provided to foreign communist cadres within the Soviet Union and carried out through a large apparatus of party-political schools globally.

Filatova (1999) provides a fascinating study of the J.V. Stalin Communist University of the Toilers of the East, much of which also applies to the closely associated International Lenin School. At one level, the Stalin University was highly interactive, a novelty for the time, as lecturers and students pooled their efforts to develop, for example, the 'correct' interpretation of specific situations. The education also included basic skills and professional training at factories, and there were numerous academic and cultural programmes. In addition, there were skills taught in political work, from running secret operations to giving speeches.

Despite the innovations and comprehensive curricula, and as well as the remarkable research generated by the Stalin University, the overall aim was indoctrination.

Courses were highly ideological and dogmatic: rather than provide the ability to evaluate different views, rival views were treated as inherently anti-working class. Trotskyists, for example, were treated as agents of fascism or imperialism and the emphasis was on mastering and applying the correct line, which was what the Communist Party had decided elsewhere. It must also be borne in mind that the University and others operated within the context of an extremely repressive state that outlawed independent unions and similar formations as well as anarchism, dissident forms of Marxism, social-democracy and a range of other ideas.

Whilst Marxist-Leninist education shared with the anarchists a commitment to revolutionary change and opened new vistas to many of its students, there are very important distinctions with the anarcho-syndicalists. The anarchists stressed antiauthoritarian, working class-owned and controlled education, debate and dissent, teaching critical thought, and emphasising the individual's role in the emancipation of him- or herself and society (Suissa, 2001). For anarchists, education should not just develop a political cadre to carry out the programme of a single, centralised dogma but rather critical thinking, skilled individuals who have collectively developed a revolutionary understanding of what an ideal society should look like, and the agency to help create and participate in that society.

Therefore, while the two currents shared a commitment to revolutionary education, they approached it in very different ways. This reflected a basic difference in what the two envisaged as 'revolution' itself. Both aimed at socialism, but the former saw this in terms of a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' exercised by a single party claiming to be the unique repository of truth, run from above with a central plan. The latter aimed at a decentralised society tolerant of different views, involving self-management, participatory planning and workplace and community councils.

Anarchist education was, first and foremost, anti-authoritarian and thus anti-state and anti-capitalist, rejecting the notion the state could be used for popular emancipation. This separates anarchism from other forms of socialism and anarchist education from other forms of working-class education. In particular, it entrenches an approach which relies on the self-delivery and autonomy of revolutionary education.

narrow and since the SACP leadership was itself increasingly integrated into the capitalist ANC state, it had a strong tendency to promote the ANC and to construe its policies as part of a revolutionary march forward, and therefore, deserving of union support. While in the 1980s, union education helped promote a systematic critique of the state and its education system, and with it of capitalism, from the 1990s, union education in COSATU retained some critique of capitalism but presented the state as the workers' ally in this battle, and explained away ANC attacks on the working class in various ways.

Alternative views were side-lined, and thus, while a COSATU or a DITSELA course could, for example, criticise neoliberal policies, it could not criticise the ANC directly, label the ANC a party of neoliberalism or capitalism, question the NDR or SACP, nor engage with left traditions outside of the Congress/SACP tradition, nor open a discussion of anything that would threaten the Alliance. COSATU unions had engaged in a series of mass strikes against the ANC from 1997, mainly around its neoliberal politics, but the obvious political conclusions – that the ANC was in fact opposed to working-class demands – were swept away. The problem was one that could supposedly be solved by getting the ANC more votes and by working within the Alliance.

There was an ongoing debate over – and resistance to – the issue of skills training and the accreditation of trade union education, and this generated serious delays in the roll-out of education. COSATU's leadership was pushing for accreditation, a demand based very strongly on calls from the shop floor. Those arguing against skills accreditation argued that accreditation would remove the revolutionary focus of the movement and undermine important informal and experiential learning. However, as we have suggested, the debate here is not that useful. Workers had a very legitimate desire to have their existing skills recognised, and to access more and better training and there is no intrinsic reason why this should undermine revolutionary union education. The focus on the issue of skills accreditation, in fact, did not deal with far greater challenges arising from a general decline in union education, an increasingly narrow and top-down and uncritical union education, and a general decline in workers' control of the unions and of union education.

Meanwhile, the 2000 Congress report, in indicating affiliates' newfound dependence on COSATU for education beyond basic shop steward inductions, pointed to a worrying lack of education within the affiliate unions themselves, a problem doubtless worst in the weaker affiliates.

There was, moreover, 'a strong view' within the federation 'that workers' control of their own education was being supplanted by the policy workshop/conference approach of relaying information and decisions from the top down,' which 'paralleled a marked shift in the locus of decision-making within the unions from the local to the national level' (Cooper, et al. 2002: 13). In other words, it is not the case that the unions had a revolutionary education model that was being neglected; rather, union education itself had been profoundly reconfigured in line with an increasingly centralised politics, a shift in which the SACP played a central role.

By the time of COSATU's National Congress in 2000, it is clear that DITSELA had begun to play a much more central role in the delivery of COSATU education as COSATU's in-house education faltered. Commenting on a paper adopted by the National Education Committee (NEDCOM), the Congress' Secretariat report reflected this centrality by stating that in future 'the role of the education and how education and training' needed to be 'co-ordinated between NEDCOM, affiliates, DITSELA and other labour-service institutions and organisations' (COSATU, 2000). A division of education responsibilities was proposed: affiliates (CWIU, NEHAWU, NUMSA, etc.) would be responsible for foundation courses for shop stewards and for staff training; the federation (COSATU) would run political education; and DITSELA would 'support the federations and deliver higher-level courses, which should be accredited where possible' (COSATU, 2000).

The crisis was used to give the SACP a greater role than ever before. Although the SACP included only a minority of federation members and was independent of COSATU and therefore not subject to any sort of workers' control, the 2000 Congress decided that the SACP would work with the federation to provide political education. Moreover, it would also be funded with a levy from COSATU and given offices in COSATU's buildings, participate in COSATU material development meetings and provide support to affiliates in the form of training material. The 2000 COSATU Secretariat report also spoke of collaboration in training with National Labour and Economic Development Institute (NALEDI), the federation's policy unit, and with the ANC around elections. These, too, indicated how union education was moving outside of direct worker control.

While NALEDI lacked the capacity to provide any sustained education, the SACP played an increasingly central role. Political education was

Education was a site of class struggle, and since the class struggle pitted the working class and its institutions, like unions, against the ruling class and is institutions, like corporations and states, any revolutionary education project had to be autonomous of state and capital. It needed to be based in the movements of the working class, getting support from these and in turn, strengthening the class.

Revolution required both widespread revolutionary consciousness – a revolutionary counterculture or counter-hegemony – and organs of counter-power – mass organisations outside and against the state and capital. These should be used both to fight in the present and to provide the basis for the working class to overthrow the state in the future and reconstruct society from below. The aim, for example, of syndicalist unions, a central part of the counter power project, was the occupation of the workplaces, putting the means of production directly under working-class control. The envisaged social transformation required the 'prior organisation and education of the working class' including 'the development of its skills and self-confidence' (Wentzel, 2006).

From this perspective, revolutionary union education was essential to building both revolutionary counterculture and counter-power. It involved autonomy as well as workers' control of education. This meant that control would not be vested in union bureaucracies, in donors or in political parties aiming at state power. The importance of education as a tool for organising and building the political understanding of the working class entailed a rejection of vanguardist and substitutionist politics. So, education for building political understanding and organisation must be led by the working class democratically and not imposed from above by a centralised party or a party central committee. This is very different to the Marxist-Leninist view that the working class expresses itself through a Party of the 'intelligent workers' and 'technical intelligentsia', which then uses the 'lever' of the state to 'create the new laws, the new order, which is revolutionary order' (Stalin, [1934] 1978: 40).

The emphasis on creating a libertarian society also meant that union and other working-class education was never envisaged as an instrument serving an organisation. This was because working-class organisations of counter power were themselves a means to change society, and because conscious people were not a means to the end, but an end. There was a stress on the individual as the centre of the revolutionary project, but this should not be confused with the liberal approach. rather, it rejected 'misanthropic bourgeois individualism' in favour of a 'true individuality'

developed 'through practising the highest communist sociability' (Kropotkin, [1902] 1970: 296–297).

It is clear that this approach has many parallels with that of Paolo Freire (1996), who stressed the importance of critical and creative thinking and of positive change, and its problem-posing approach. However, it comes from different intellectual roots – the anarchist tradition of Bakunin and Kropotkin – and links education to a comprehensive and distinctive project of building working-class counter-power, including building syndicalist unions, and anti-statism.

Anarchism and early COSATU Education

Tracing the history of the emerging unions after the 1973 uprisings shows the importance of the role of education in building organisation and empowering workers to challenge both the appalling working conditions and the racist and exploitative system of apartheid-capitalism. While anarchism and syndicalism had an important influence in South Africa before the late 1920s (van der Walt, 2007), it cannot be said these directly influenced the later unions. There are, however, similarities between the new unions of the 1970s and the anarchist approach, including the linking of union education to community struggles, the importance placed upon education as a means of liberation, demands for equal access to a resource traditionally the preserve of the elite, resistance to oppressive official education and the aims of creating a new, socialist society.

The 'workerist' current associated with the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), sceptical of the nationalists and the SACP, stressed education and debate while the proliferation of Freirean ideas and aspirations towards an emancipatory 'people's education' facilitated a more bottom-up approach to union education. A rich intellectual culture drew in workers, labour service organisations and radical academics, marked by 'the power and significance of the union movement' (Bozzoli, 1990: 251). It is also important to bear in mind that until the late 1980s, neither the ANC nor the SACP had secured the almost complete dominance they would later wield. From 1973–1985, they did not lead any union federation that was active within the country. Meanwhile, COSATU's founding congress which united FOSATU and others, unambiguously resolved that while the new federation would

her executive. This effectively enabled the executive – made up of ANC and SACP loyalists – to decide the very content of workers' education. As unelected officials, those appointed to these positions would not be part of democratic structures, were distanced from the worker base, and their job security would depend greatly on their ability to satisfy a very small number of senior office-bearers.

The Decline of Autonomy

There is a certain irony in the fact that union education entered a serious crisis by the late 1990s, that is, while unions were courted by the state and had access to unprecedented resources from both state and capital. Yet in its Special National Congress resolutions of 1999, COSATU was obliged, in its resolution on 'organisational renewal of COSATU', to report that 'we are extremely sceptical about the federation's capacity to deliver on the proposals for education and training, gender, campaigns etc.' (COSATU, 1999: point 6). Under the heading 'The need for restructuring the federation,' COSATU noted:

1. There are definite problems within some departments at COSATU Head office. There is a lack of focus caused by a lack of clarity about the role of the departments and individuals employed in the departments. Some departments seem to have a very unclear remit.
2. Whilst comrades are doing good work in the Education Department, particularly in the election campaign, the strategic role they are playing is very unclear. This is not surprising given the growth in the programmes delivered by DITSELA, but there is a need to clarify the role of the department and for there to be workplans that address organisational needs and priorities. It is noticeable that the ExCo [executive committee] proposals to congress are very wide-ranging and ambitious. NEHAWU [National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union] is very doubtful that the Education department in its present form would be able to achieve such a wide remit. There is also a need to clarify the role of DITSELA, and the way COSATU develops input into DITSELA policy-making processes must be sharpened up.

have been impossible for COSATU to avoid pent-up demands for access. Furthermore, anarchist and syndicalist education manages to balance the two imperatives as part of a larger 'integral education'.

The crisis in COSATU union education that emerged was, we suggest, strongly linked to a shift in union education's pedagogy itself. It is not so much that there was a marginalisation of revolutionary education in the unions by the new focus on policy and on vocational education – and, therefore, that the one lost out to the other – but, rather, that union education had already been profoundly changed by the unions' growing alignment to the ANC and SACP. our point goes beyond the established points – with which we agree – that COSATU's links to ANC/SACP fostered a shift from confrontation to collaboration and corporatism (Ginsberg, 1997), and that senior union leaders' growing access, via the ANC networks, to high-end government jobs promoted a pervasive careerism that eroded older cultures of solidarity and sacrifice (Buhlungu, 2010).

We stress, rather, that the political culture of the parties to which COSATU was now allied, had profound implications for the direction of union education. The growing hold, in particular, of the SACP saw a traditional Marxist-Leninist approach to politics – and education – put in place. As ANC and SACP influence grew in COSATU, 'gatekeepers' emerged to filter what union activists could read, increasingly controlling popular access to critical thinking (Bozzoli, 1990: 255, 261). Within the unions, there was growing intolerance for dissent – a notable example being the 1997 expulsion of the Trotskyist president of the Chemical workers' Industrial Union (CwIU), Abraham Agulhas – with criticisms of the ANC labelled as 'counter-revolutionary', 'ultra-left' and so on. Union education increasingly centred on promoting, mastering and applying one correct line: the ANC/SACP strategy of National Democratic Revolution (NDR). Those on the left of COSATU were increasingly marginalised and views outside the Congress camp were rubbished as representing sectarians who 'howl on the periphery' (Mantashe, & Ngwane 2004: 26).

COSATU's constitution was amended at its 1997 National Congress in a way that signified increasing centralisation and diminishing of workers' control. The 6th National Congress agreed to amend clauses[2] that had stipulated that the Education Secretary, organising Secretary and Administrative Secretary be appointed by worker representatives in the Central Executive Committee (CEC). This was amended so that these positions would in future be filled according to normal employment procedures, and appointments made by the General Secretary and his/

play an active political role, it would 'not affiliate to any political tendency or organisation' (COSATU. 1985, annexure I: 5).

Ginsberg (1997) and Cooper, Andrew, Grossman and Vally (2002) provide valuable studies of education within the new unions, illustrating the vibrancy in place before 1994. This education built organisation and developed an active, skilled (black) working class. The transfer of skills took place through literacy programmes as well as through informal learning in meetings, cultural activities and participation in struggle. An important part of this education was its ideological role: within COSATU, there developed a more self-conscious philosophy of what 'workers' education' meant within the context of the workers' movement. Workers' education had to be developed as a socialist alternative to Bantu Education and capitalist education. (Cooper. et al. 2002: 20)

This education framework had a revolutionary, bottom-up flavour and played a significant role in the anti-apartheid struggle. Whilst not without its problems, FOSATU/early COSATU education was generally vibrant, dynamic, and collective in nature, based in union organisation with a strong focus on union activities, workers' control and class struggle. Meanwhile, the underground SACP's centralist, Marxist Leninist approach to education and the ANC's increasingly militarised politics, had only limited traction.

Shifts in Union Education Post-Apartheid

By the end of apartheid, trade unions – COSATU particularly – had become a leading political force, but COSATU had also moved decisively into the ANC/SACP camp, the three organisations forming the Alliance. There is broad agreement that, at this point, there was a shift in union education.

Ginsberg (1997) links this to COSATU becoming more involved in policymaking in the 1990s, as the unions shifted from combat with the old state to engaging the ANC and SACP and the new ANC-led government, using the Alliance, corporatism and parliament. radical unions like the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) – rooted in FOSATU 'workerism' but by the mid-1990s under SACP control – were operating in a new education environment. Looking at NUMSA's engagement with the Metal and Engineering Training Board, Ginsberg

suggests the movement shifted from building union education to engaging state educational policy with a concomitant focus on vocational skills rather than building union power. The emphasis was on having the state 'deliver' career paths and accreditation in order to transform the apartheid workplace and enable access to better jobs. Shopstewards complained that the union 'was concentrating too much on the political direction and forgetting about expanding the education' (Ginsberg 1997: 142). Ginsberg summarises the shift and its consequences:

The politics of the post-election era subtly undermined the experiential learning which had been the bedrock of…union education during the years of struggle. reforms designed to institutionalise labour management conflict and move dispute resolution away from the shop floor also tended to eliminate important learning processes… (Ginsberg, 1997: 142)

Cooper (2005) argues that skills development increasingly focused on individual career progression. To the extent that it looked at building unions, it focused on filling skills gaps left by unionists who had moved into government or business; the collective emancipation of the class receded. The increasing focus on workplace training was associated with a shift away from collective learning to emphasis on individual development and career progression (Cooper, 1998). Unions seemed to forget how they had, themselves, developed skills and looked towards other institutions to provide skills development (Ginsberg, 1997: 147).

The move towards the formalisation of union education was consolidated with the 1996 establishment of a new Development Institute for the Training, Support and Education of Labour (DITSELA), which opened the door to formal accreditation of union education itself, illustrative of the professionalising moves underway (Cooper, 1998: 7). The allocation of state funds to DITSELA illustrated COSATU's changing relationship with the state as well as its willingness to relinquish direct control of a significant part of its education. While the DITSELA governing board had a majority of COSATU representatives, DITSELA was not directly subject to workers' control as FOSATU's, and the early COSATU's, union education had been. The COSATU imprint was also diluted by having the relatively conservative Federation of Unions of South Africa sit on the DITSELA board. DITSELA's reliance on state funds also undermined the autonomy of union education. The upshot was that the training delivered by DITSELA tended to be far less political than the old in-house COSATU union education, and that there was, in this case, a marked distance between union education and the unions which profoundly

limited the scope for an ongoing link between union education and mass mobilisation.

COSATU played a leading role in the development of the new South African skills legislation. The formation of the Participatory research Project, which later became the Participatory research Unit within COSATU after 1994, led the process of inputs from labour into the development of the 1998 Skill Development Act.[1] whilst including the participation of representatives from COSATU's affiliates, this process had limited linkages to COSATU and its affiliates. It was almost a parallel process and once the Act was passed, skills became the domain of the Sector Education Training Authorities (SETAs) which the Act established. Meanwhile, participatory research projects like the research Dynamising Groups in NUMSA, began a rapid decline and had, by the mid-2000s, largely collapsed.

The emphasis on struggle meanwhile faded as 'union leadership began to shift the vision and role of the labour movement from that of opponent and adversary of capital and the apartheid state, towards a stated goal of "equal partner"' (Cooper, et al. 2002: 12). The new alignment saw a shift in focus away from mass organisation and politicisation towards policy engagement, staff training and paralegal expertise (Cooper 1998). Union education increasingly focused on capacity-building, understood as the professionalisation of unions as providers of services, with 'education programmes… more directed towards union leadership and full-time staff, with little or no education for the "rank-and-file"' (Cooper, 1998: 13). Given that the new South Africa was resolutely capitalist – and from 1996, explicitly neoliberal – post-apartheid workplace education was focused on the needs of business and government and the new National Qualifications Framework (NQF), clearly reproducing a narrow, fragmented education (Allais, 2012).

Cooper (2005) and Ginsberg (1997) emphasise the role of COSATU's pursuit of opportunities for workers to get skills training and its concomitant engagement in post-apartheid policy, in the decline of revolutionary union education. While there is a germ of truth in this claim, it is not altogether convincing. COSATU had always combined its rejection of apartheid education's 'ideological bondage' and 'ruling class' agenda with a commitment to 'create and transform skills…that they are accessible to the oppressed and exploited' (COSATU, 1985, annexure I: 41–42). There is also no necessary trade-off between revolutionary education and opening up vocational opportunities and skills training, and it would