ELECTRICAL AND ALLIED
WORKERS TRADE UNION OF
SOUTH AFRICA:
A HISTORY

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INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to chronicle the history of the Electrical and Allied Workers Trade Union of South Africa (EAWTUSA) with particular emphasis on the period 1977 - 1986. It focusses on an aspect of the organisational (trade union) life of the working class in South Africa, which flows from, and reflects the increasing pressure which that class has brought to bear on society as a whole. Most notably from 1973 onwards (but with renewed impetus in 1976), the various struggles of the working class have left their imprint on politics, economics and even culture.

On the economic level, the growth of the independent black trade union movement in the 1970's and 1980's directly affected the profitability and competitiveness of the manufacturing industry. The new, militant black unions demanded and won bigger and bigger wage increases for their predominantly semi-skilled and unskilled members. Thus, real wages for African workers in the decade of the 1970's increased by 56% compared to only 30% in the decade of the 1960's.

This growth in labour cost coupled with low world demand and high inflation had serious implications for manufacturing and is pivotal to any explanation for the significant outflow of foreign capital from South Africa that started in about 1976. Higher labour costs made locally manufactured goods even more expensive than they had historically been and therefore even less competitive in a depressed world market.

The high inflation rate in this same period lowered even further the demand for manufactured goods. Hence the exodus of foreign capital in search of more profitable

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areas. More recently, the higher wages won by the unionised goldmine workers and the resultant implications for the cost of gold production, as well as the Congress of South African Trade Union's and others' call for sanctions and disinvestment, have had a profound effect on the economy.5

The stamp of the working class on political life has been even more profound. After more than a decade of convulsive but increasingly militant political struggle, with the high point being reached in the period 1984 – 1986, the working class has posed a clear alternative to Apartheid Capitalism: Socialism.6 In this process of developing a consciousness of itself as a class, the working class has developed a range of organisational forms through which the political struggle is pursued. It developed street committees, people's courts, civic associations, youth congresses and the trade unions. The trade unions, in particular, have played a crucial political as well as economic role.

Putting the question of Socialism on the agenda provoked different responses from the state. While its repressive measures were directed against the working class activists in the townships and the trade unions, the state's reform programme aimed to prevent socialist revolution. In fact, the question of Socialism had become so real, that the ruling class itself was forced to fight it on an ideological level also. Representatives of this class, such as Clem Sunter, have been obliged publicly to weigh the comparative virtues of Capitalism and Socialism.7 The fact that they are talking about a 'mixed economy', combining both elements of Capitalism and Socialism attests to the political weight of the working class in South Africa today.

But the political pressure of the working class has not only affected the state and the ruling class - it has fundamentally affected the political organisation supported by the majority of Blacks i.e. the African National Congress (ANC). Whereas the ANC earlier considered the role of the black working class in the struggle for 'national liberation' to be 'special', the intense working class struggles in the 1980s in particular have obliged them to concede 'the leading role' to the working class. The working class has thus determined the terrain of black and white politics, raising in the case of black politics many new and important questions such as the validity of the South African Communist Party's two-stage theory of revolution in South Africa and how the working class is to ensure its leadership role in the struggle.

In broader social terms, not only has the working class left its imprint on economics and politics, but on culture as well. Apart from the initiative towards 'working class culture', initiated by the Federation of South African Trade Unions, publications including novels, biographies and poetry often display a preoccupation with working class life. So too does theatre and art. In addition, at university level, courses quite often include studying for example the Russian Revolution in order to draw comparisons with South Africa, as well as Marxist philosophy and economic thought. This reflects once again the intensity of class struggle waged by the working class.

Given the essential social and political actor it has become within South African life, it is important that various aspects of the working class' own life be documented and analysed.

The specific focus on the Electrical and Allied Workers Trade Union, is explained by the extent to which it allows us to look at how certain sections of the working class (the black skilled workers) responded to (i) the economic decline starting in the early 1970s, and (ii) the growth of the independent black trade union movement, and also (iii)
the growing general political militancy of the black working class as a whole.

Chapter One reviews the formation of the white South African Electrical Workers Association (SAEWA) in 1937. As in almost all other branches of industry at that time, skilled work in the electrical industry was performed almost exclusively by white workers. There were, however, some 'coloured' and Indian skilled workers in the industry. But on the whole, white workers were able to protect their craft. So much was this so, that they could rely solely on the principle of the 'rate for the job' for this purpose.

As early as the 1940s, Capital had managed to effect a degree of deskilling in the industry. This paper shows how SAEWA responded by drawing semi-skilled black workers into its ranks. It saw this strategy of organising and drawing into its ranks those workers who could potentially undercut the wage rates of its members as the best guarantee against further deskilling. Thus, SAEWA's 'non racialism', like that of some other craft unions, was determined to a significant degree by pure economic self interest. This policy could not conceal the fact that SAEWA was continually shifting to the right politically. In 1950 SAEWA left the Trades and Labour Council (TLC) as a result. By this time the TLC had come to be dominated by the growing militancy of the mainly semi- and unskilled unions.

During the 1950s, the South African economy boomed. The need for skilled labour increased. Capital could no longer tolerate the control exercised by SAEWA. Nor was the problem confined to the electrical industry. Manufacturing as a whole suffered from an assault on skilled work. The state responded via the 1956 Industrial Conciliation Act, which was aimed at achieving two things. Firstly, the Act outlawed 'mixed' unions such as SAEWA. Secondly, it legally entrenched job reservation.

Chapter One shows how white skilled workers were instrumental in initiating the Unity Committee mainly to resist the dissolution of mixed unions. This was not in
support of any non-racial principle, but because protection of their skill depended upon the continued existence of such unions. When this resistance was defeated, SAEWA changed its strategy by initiating the formation of a parallel union and thereafter dominating it, right up until 1985. After 1956, a separate union, the Electrical and Allied Trades Union of South Africa (EATUSA), consisting of 'coloured' workers was formed. Nevertheless through manipulation of the closed shop and control of the Apprenticeship Committee white electrical workers continued to exercise significant control over the labour process in the industry.

This, however, was mostly the case in the Transvaal, where many electrical workers were employed on the mines, the area of much deskilling. In the Western Cape, the area on which we concentrate in this paper, the situation with regard to deskilling was different. Here electrical work was confined mainly to electrical contracting, and 'coloured' workers entered the industry as skilled workers steadily through the decades, although 'coloured' apprentices were only indentured from 1972 onwards. The strategy of SAEWA in relation to these workers was the same: complete organisational domination.

Constitutionally and legally, SAEWA and EATUSA were completely independent and separate organisations. In reality, as Chapter Two will show SAEWA exercised tight control over EATUSA right up until 1985. The challenge to its control and interference started much earlier and is examined in detail in Chapter Two. The process of economic crisis which South Africa experienced from the early 1970s onwards brought about the political crisis. From 1973 onwards, black workers started organising into trade unions in their thousands. At the same time, Black Consciousness started to take root, signalling a process of political ferment within the working class as a whole as well as among students where it originated. The ultimate symbolic expression of this was the 1976 student riots.
A combination of economic decline and the general increase in the political temperature of the working class is what first sparked resistance to the bureaucratic control by SAEWA of EATUSA. This process of resistance is described in great detail in Chapter Two. While African workers had witnessed a rise in real wages of 56% in the period 1970 to 1980, white workers saw their real wages increase by only 14.9% in the same period. The skilled workers in EATUSA were no exception. In addition to the attack on their living standards, they were of course, not immune to the political struggles being waged around them.

It was therefore no accident that the first challenge to SAEWA's hegemony and control arose in 1977. The initial incident described in chapter Two itself appeared of no great importance and concerned a single individual. It resulted, however, in the formation of a core group of young union members, who began to raise questions around EATUSA's constitution, management and leadership: in effect about democracy, responsibility and accountability.

Chapter Two further traces the long battle fought by the core group as they struggled to free EATUSA from SAEWA's unwanted control as well as detailing the kinds of manoeuvres and wangles employed to block and frustrate the progressives. Finally, it will be seen how the tenacity of a small handful of individuals won the day, in 1984.

Chapter Three examines SAEWA's motives for establishing an umbrella body, the Federation of Electrical Workers of South Africa (FETUSA). It also outlines the developments that led to the merger between EATUSA and the Electrical and Allied Workers Trade Union of South Africa (EAWUSA) in October 1985. It reveals how the slow chipping away by the core group and the increasing power it won in this process allowed it to start introducing a new tradition into EATUSA, after 1985 and even before the final split with SAEWA. This new tradition was essentially that of workers' democracy and workers' control that became so prominent in

the independent black trade union movement. Control of the Cape Town Branch Committee (in 1980) and representation on the National Executive Council (in 1984), all described in Chapter Two, made possible a new departure of prime importance: the organisation of labourers on building sites. Chapter Three also examines how the union broadened its base in 1986 to include factory workers in the metal and electronics industries.

The argument put is that the appointment of a progressive organiser in the Western Cape in February 1985, whereafter various progressive transformations occurred, played an important part in this process. The significant degree of support of skilled workers for the transformation is also demonstrated.

The combined effect of the general political struggles of the working class and the impressive new tradition of the independent unions impacting on a historically conservative section of the working class, namely skilled workers, receives due consideration in Chapter Three.

A note on sources used in this paper is necessary. Finding information for Chapter One was extremely problematic and we had to rely extensively on SAEWA's journal Power for the period 1939 to 1986. In addition, books dealing with early trade union history provided some background, although this was very limited.

For Chapters Two and Three we relied very heavily on interviews with union officials. We interviewed three of the five core group members. Newspaper articles, in particular the Cape Herald for Chapter Two, proved very useful in tracing the chronology of the history, which served as background for the interviews. The Western Cape Branch newspaper, 'Sparky', selected documents and pamphlets given to us by the union, and national executive council minutes for 1984/1985 added to our understanding of the struggle in this period.
1.1 The Emergence of Craft Unions in South Africa

With the discovery of diamonds and gold in South Africa in 1867 and 1885 respectively, and the subsequent growth of a more sophisticated manufacturing sector, the demand for more skilled labour arose. Because of the virtual complete absence of artisans in South Africa itself, skilled immigrants were recruited mainly from Britain and Australia. Besides the technical expertise, the immigrant artisans brought with them a rich experience of trade union traditions and organisations.

Artisans' unions were thus not only started by British immigrants but in most cases were affiliated to British Unions. Initially craft unions were organised in the printing, engineering, mechanics, boilermaking, carpentry and building industries. In 1881, a branch of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners was established, and between 1886 and 1893, branches of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (later called the Amalgamated Engineering Union) were founded in Kimberley, Durban and Johannesburg. The Iron Moulders' Society and the SA Engine Drivers' Association were established in 1896, and in that same year the SA Typographical Union absorbed various typographical societies that had been set up earlier. The South African Electrical Workers Association

10. Horrel M, 1961, p1
12. This information from Horrel M, 1961, p1
SAEWA), registered in 1937, was one of the last of the earlier wave of the major artisan unions to be established.

In 1933 electricians in the Building Industry in the Transvaal were considering the formation of an Electrical Trade Union, but were persuaded to form an Electrical Branch of an existing Union - the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU). It soon became apparent that because of the many ramifications of the electrical industry and because of the limited certificate of registration of the AEU, the leaders of that Union found it difficult to involve electricians in its activities. The result was that a meeting was convened with representatives from the Mines and it was decided to inaugurate a purely Electrical Trade Union.

The first mass meeting was held in the Brakpan Town Hall on the 16th December, 1936, to be followed by a series of meetings throughout the Witwatersrand and Pretoria, and so great was the response that the South African Electrical Workers Association (SAEWA) was registered on the 25th May, 1937, for the Mining Industry in the Transvaal Province. At the date of registration there were 650 members in 10 branches all on the Witwatersrand. A national electrical trade union was desired. Consequently the Executive Council commenced discussion with other centres. A branch was opened in Durban on 11 November, 1937, to be followed by another in Kimberley at Easter 1939. In May, 1939 the Port Elizabeth Branch was inaugurated.

Additional branches were established at Witbank, Vereeniging and Pretoria and although the Association was originally only registered for the Mining

13. Power, the official journal of SAEWA, May 1940, p2
14. Certificate of registration determines both industrial and geographical scope of a registered union.
16. Power, May 1940, p2
17. Power, September 1947, p1
Industry, by May 1940 it had obtained registration for the Building and Engineering Industries and Municipalities and membership had increased to 3,127. The union grew steadily over the next two decades to reach a membership of 12,000 by March 1960.

The union proved active in more general trade union affairs and had already joined the Trades and Labour Council (TLC) in 1939. The TLC was an umbrella body and largely a response to the economic depression in South Africa in the early 1930's when the need for greater unity was felt by the existing co-ordinating bodies. It represented the Trade Union Council, the Cape Labour Federation and unions not affiliated to either of these two bodies. SAEWA remained affiliated until 1950 when, along with the other craft unions, it broke away and established the South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU - see below). During its affiliation it played a pivotal role in determining the activities and direction of the Federation. In fact, Jerry Calder, who was General Secretary of SAEWA at the time, was vice-president of the TLC in 1944 and became president in 1947.

Any examination of SAEWA during the period of affiliation to the TLC must deal with the changing attitude of the Association to the racial question and the organisation of African workers. Jon Lewis convincingly argues that the breakdown of unity in the TLC and the division within the labour movement at the end of the forties must be ascribed mainly to the changing labour process and the division of labour, rather than to any racist or Nationalist ideologies. Furthermore, he maintains, that earlier craft unions

18. Power, September 1947, p1
19. Power, May 1960 p1
20. Horrel M, 1961, p12
had a monopoly of skills and therefore did not have to resort to strategies of racial exclusion and it was this that allowed them to ally with the militant industrial unions and to support the TLC's non-racial policies. The craft unions were thus able to safeguard their members by virtue of a monopoly of skills and control over the labour process. But, during the 1940s, the alliance broke down as a process of mechanisation and craft-dilution took place. Faced with a loss of skills and consequent control over the labour process, the old craft unions set about redefining demarcation lines on the basis of race. This threat to the bargaining position of the old craft unions forced some of them to reconstitute themselves as craft-diluted unions and to organise the lower section of the skilled labour hierarchy.

The strategy of racial exclusion implemented through the industrial conciliation machinery was in conflict with the interests of African workers and ran counter to the non-racial tradition of the TLC. It seemed that the leaders of the craft unions preferred to control African unions through a system of parallel unionism.

While the available evidence for SAEWA appears to confirm the above analysis, it is necessary to qualify this. The development of racial forms of protection in industry cannot merely be explained in terms of the changing labour process, but should be accompanied by an explanation of a racially discriminatory hierarchy in the division of labour. It is important not to take for granted the racial differentiation within the labour process, but to situate the division of labour within the context of a racially segregated society in South Africa. Historically, the late development of

23. Lewis J, 1984, p 179
26. This is based on a close reading of Power from 1939 to 1986.
capitalism in South Africa determined the racial form that capitalism was to take.

Since its inception SAEWA had always propagated its own brand of racism. It argued that the best protection for artisans against undercutting of their wages and status was in fact the policy of equal pay for equal work or what is referred to as 'the rate for the job.' In July 1943 in the editorial of the union magazine, the Association's position with regard to organising African workers was very clearly stated.

"Those who approach the problem from a racial or colour angle are demonstrating an utter lack of comprehension of fundamental economic facts; economics pays no regard to colour and creed but is concerned only with the development and exploitation of cheap labour markets...

Discrimination on the basis of colour suits the interests of Capitalism and can only divide workers against themselves. The simple truth is that we are governed by a money machine which would, if practical and possible, relegate Europeans to the ranks of the unemployed and employ the cheapest labour." 28

The article concludes by suggesting that the Association consider the formation of Native representative groups within the framework of the Association. At this stage there was already a clear recognition of the threat posed by unorganised labour - be it of any colour. Throughout this period there is a very explicit and consistent support for the policy of the 'rate for the job' but it is always in anticipation of the threat posed by African workers selling their labour power at a cheaper rate. The solution proposed at that early time was to organise Africans in parallel structures and in so doing channel and control their demands. 29

29. Power, August, 1946
in *Power* in August 1946, just after the major African mine workers' strike involving about 40 000 workers, the Association once again reiterated the need for the recognition of the elementary right of expression for workers irrespective of colour but while recognising the legitimacy of African worker rights went on to say that:

'such organisation should be wholly African, self-contained and confined to African workers, in the industry concerned. European participation in such unions should not be permitted. Stated bluntly, the development of such unions should be in the hands of the Natives themselves.'

The Association did not in practice organise African workers into parallel unions. We can safely assume that this was because the problem did not really affect SAEWA directly and was not threatening their privileges at that time. It only became a problem for them in the 1970s for reasons which will be discussed later. Only in 1978 did SAEWA take a decision to assist Africans in the electrical industry to organise a parallel trade union.

According to Lewis and De Clercq, by 1945, capital had succeeded in undermining craft union controls. The result was that these unions now employed the usual techniques of craft unions to exclude African workers from particular grades or jobs. It is necessary to quote at length from the Association's journal as this provides evidence that the union was trying to deal with the effects of mechanisation and deskilling, and as De Clercq suggests, had to reconstitute itself as a craft-diluted union by organising semi-skilled workers as well.

32. She is here referring not specifically to the Electrical Industry.
'old established unions must abandon their isolationism and become the sheet anchor for the hosts of semi-skilled who are now beginning to dominate the scene; failure to recognise this inevitable development may well leave some of them in the unhappy position of having to look both ways at once - to the right, where the same exploitative interests will seek to demolish whatever privileges their skill may endow them with: and left, where the dynamism of less fortunate elements will prove an embarrassment.'

'Our association approaches the future on a basis of a skilled nucleus maintaining its status and at the same time extending its protection and guidance to those fortunate workers who for various reasons, particularly the evolution of the machine, find themselves classed among the semi-skilled or operative workers category.'

The craft union responded as Lewis suggests by resorting to the traditional techniques of craft unions. Although the Apprenticeship Act of 1944 (replaced by the Manpower Training Act of 1981) provided no racial criteria for indenturing apprentices, in practice there were several factors that militated against the indenturing of 'coloured', Asian and African apprentices. In addition, the Black Building Workers Act, 1951, prohibited the employment of Africans as skilled workers in an urban area. The most common method used to exclude apprentices who were not white was the 'closed shop' agreement negotiated between the registered union and the employer associations at Industrial Councils. This reserved skilled jobs for registered union members and because Africans could not belong to these unions,

34. Power, August 1943.
they were automatically barred from the job as well. Craft unions representing artisans also used their seats on Apprenticeship Committees to block applications by an employer to indenture an African or 'coloured' apprentice.\textsuperscript{36} This ensured that Africans, particularly, could never become artisans. Non-statutory work reservation, educational requirements for apprentices, and a lack of technical and theoretical training facilities in some areas were other factors which ensured that largely Whites would beindentured as apprentices.\textsuperscript{37}

This strategy of racial exclusion using the Industrial Conciliation machinery was in conflict with the interests of African workers and also contrary to the non-racial tradition of the Trades and Labour Council. However, it is not enough to isolate these structural problems as the cause of the breakdown of unity in the TLC and to neglect the political and racial issues. The editorials of \textit{Power} during this period constantly refer to the increasing domination by the left-wing industrial unions. A SAEWA editorial in 1949, stated 'The artisan unions particularly have been unhappy with the trend of policy being laid down by the majority group within this organisation.'\textsuperscript{38} Lewis argues that 'the left's victory in 1948 (referring to a motion that was defeated which proposed to exclude African trade unions from the TLC) further polarised politics in the TLC, and as the craft unions developed explicitly racial strategies they became increasingly disposed to adopt right-wing positions on other issues.'\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{36} 'Coloureds' were only allowed to become apprentices in the early 1970's. Before this they were not formally apprenticed but became qualified after working in the industry for a certain number of years. They had to write a trade test to qualify.

\textsuperscript{37} Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Labour Legislation, Part 2, Department of Manpower Utilisation, p32

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Power}, April 1949.

\textsuperscript{39} Lewis J, 1984, p168.
The craft unions for example supported the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act. SAEWA's only concern was, 'we sincerely hope that this Act is only implemented against genuine Communists, and not used as a weapon to hamper, or even crush legitimate non-Communist Worker's Organisation.'

SAEWA finally disaffiliated from the TLC on 30th October, 1950 explaining the decision to its members in the following way:

'During the post-war years, the section of the Trades Council representing the purely secondary industries has steadily been gaining control of that body. Today, the artisan, or skilled union group is in the minority on the executive of the TLC and the decisions are dictated by organisations representing the manufacturing trades.'

The union was subsequently instrumental in initiating the South African Federation of Trade Unions.

1.2 Response to the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act 1956: The Birth of the Electrical and Allied Trades Union of South Africa

In early 1952, the Minister of Labour made a public pronouncement concerning the Government's intention to introduce legislation to segregate 'mixed' unions. The Industrial Conciliation Act finally enacted in 1956 provided for the creation of separate trade unions or separate branches of existing unions for white and 'coloured' workers. No further mixed unions

41. Power, November 1950.
were to be registered. Existing mixed unions were to be split along racial lines. It allowed that if over half the white and 'coloured' membership in existing unions wished to break away and establish a separate union along racial lines, they could apply for registration. It further allowed splinter unions to obtain a share of the assets of the original mixed union. Any mixed unions which continued to exist had to have separate meetings for their white and 'coloured' workers. The other important provision of the Act was the introduction of job reservation — making it possible to reserve specified types of work for persons of a defined racial group.

The Co-ordinating Body representing registered mixed unions (the SAFTU — of which SAEWA was a member, TLC, WPFLU, the Mechanics' Unions' Joint Executives (MUJE) and the Co-Ordinating Council of Furniture Unions) responded by meeting on the 26th March 1953 and issued a statement to the government demanding that:

'there should be no legislative interference with the right of workers in any occupation, ... to organise in such manner as best suits their economic interests. Experience has shown ... there can be no adequate safeguards against the lowering of the workers' standards of wages and employment conditions other than the total organisation of the workers concerned irrespective of race or colour, on the basis of the "rate for the job".'

Superficially this opposition to the proposed Act might seem to be contrary to the position of SAEWA and the other craft unions who according to our earlier analysis should have been in their 'racial phase.' However, a closer examination reveals that this is perfectly consistent with their earlier position. For the craft-diluted unions which sought to control access to certain skilled and semi-skilled grades it

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44. Lewis J, 1984, p172.
was essential to enlist the support of 'coloured' and Asian workers in these grades to prevent undercutting. In fact the protection of their skill depended on the continued existence of such unions. This was of course best secured by means of 'mixed' unions.\textsuperscript{45} Furthermore, because of the inherited tradition of British craft unionism, the craft unions in South Africa resented the interference of the state.\textsuperscript{46} They felt that official racist legislation was unnecessary and that they could continue to protect their members' interests utilising the mechanism of the 'rate for the job', the Apprenticeship System and the closed shop agreements.

After unsuccessful attempts to prevent the State from enacting the Industrial Conciliation Act, SAEWA was forced to establish the Electrical and Allied Trades Union of South Africa\textsuperscript{47} comprising the 'coloured' members of the Association. According to Paul Van Oordt, there were only 35 'coloured' members of the Association.\textsuperscript{48} In the words of Jordaan, the president of the 'coloured' Electrical and Allied Trades Union of South Africa, in 1971, '(w)e are the non-white off-shoot of SAEWA.'\textsuperscript{49}

It seems that SAEWA, in 1952, in anticipation of the legislation - separated their 'coloured' members by having separate meetings.\textsuperscript{50} According to Cyril Shield, it was only in 1961 that 'coloured' members of SAEWA registered as the \textit{Coloured Persons of SAEWA}\textsuperscript{51}. They held elections for the first time in 1961 to

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{46} Telephonic interview with Jeff Lever 2/5/89, Head of the Sociology Department at the University of the Western Cape.  
\textsuperscript{47} See Appendix A for diagrammatical representations of the establishment of the parallel union by SAEWA.  
\textsuperscript{48} Interview 2/5/89 with Paul Van Oordt, the last President of EATUSA before it merged with EAWUSA in 1985.  
\textsuperscript{49} Power, December 1971, p12.  
\textsuperscript{50} Interview 28/4/89 with Cyril Shield, general secretary of EATUSA since 1968 until he resigned in 1984.  
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
elect their own 'coloured' executive. In 1968, the name of the 'coloured' union was changed to the Electrical and Allied Trades Union of South Africa (EATUSA).

The 'Unity Committee', initiated by the craft dominated South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAEWA was an affiliate), the TLC and the Western Province Federation of Labour Unions, in 1954 to co-ordinate the campaign against the segregation proposals in the new Industrial Conciliation Bill, developed into the South African Trades Union Council (SATUC) (later TUCSA). According to Horrel, both the Trades and Labour Council and the Western Province Federation of Labour Unions subsequently voted themselves out of existence, advising constituent unions to affiliate to the new SATUC. Almost half of the members of the South African Federation of Trade Unions broke away to join the SATUC - included among these were the South African Typographical Union, the South African Boilermakers Society, the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers, the South African Electrical Workers Association (SAEWA) and the Natal and Cape Furniture Worker's Unions. The SATUC confined membership to registered unions - thereby excluding African Unions.

TUCSA's relationship with African unions amounted yet again to the need to control and subordinate them. Some industrial unions had decided to organise African workers in parallel unions in the 1950's. But this was seen as a strategy to break the independent African unions belonging to the Council of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU), who it was feared were using CNETU as a political platform from which to challenge the status quo. In 1955 the president of

55. See Appendix B for SAEWA'S historical affiliation to the different trade union federations.
TUCSA outlined what he saw as the tasks of the registered union:

'Trade unions should be willing to guide the Natives along the path of responsible trade unions without endangering their own standards of leadership. Suppression will instil in workers the desire for political power to alleviate their lot. That is a possibility which we cannot contemplate without grave misgivings if the European people wish to remain in South Africa.'

In 1962, because of pressure from the industrial unions TUCSA decided to allow African union affiliation despite opposition from the government and its affiliated craft-diluted unions. In November 1967, R. Cowley, General Secretary of SAEWA at the time, clarified the position of the Association in the midst of increasing tension on the question of African participation in TUCSA. For the first time we have overt racist statements emanating from SAEWA:

'We are up against employers who are turning the many industries with which we are concerned into black industries to the detriment of the white workers.'

'This Association reiterates its policy in regard to the clause in TUCSA's constitution which allows for the affiliation of unregistered Bantu trade unions. Two years ago we tried without success to have the contentious clause eliminated from the constitution and we shall press for it at the conference to be held early in 1968.'

The article called on all white trade unions to stand together and not be divided on the subject of organising 'Bantu' workers maintaining that this was

vital if they were to prevent industries from becoming blacker than they were. 'We believe further that it is at present a sheer waste of time and energy to attempt to organise the 'Bantu'. They are, firstly not interested, and, secondly, thankless.'

At the TUCSA Conference on 11 December 1967 the continued affiliation of the African Unions was discussed. The conference agreed to recommend to affiliates that membership be restricted to registered unions which would in effect debar African unions once again. However, the meeting agreed that no change could be made to the constitution as this was the prerogative of the ordinary general conference. At the next such conference, in April 1968, the issue was brought up for consideration. The debate, initiated by a resolution from SAEWA, who played a key role in the discussions seeking to debar African affiliation, took up practically the whole day and was conducted in open session. There was, however, a marked change of sentiment in that whereas at the December 1967 meeting most delegates supported the conclusion that TUCSA should be preserved at the cost of the African Unions, the overwhelming feeling now was the opposite. The exclusion amendment to the constitution was defeated, by 76 votes to 18, with 2 abstentions. At the subsequent Ninth Triennial Conference of SAEWA held in early May 1968 the National Executive Council was instructed by branch delegates to disaffiliate from TUCSA immediately. (Between July and September five other major craft unions also withdrew - among them the South African Typographical Union.)

60. Imrie R, 1979, p38.
61. Ibid, p36.
1.3 Response to Wiehahn: Birth of Electrical and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (EAWUSA)

The 1979 Wiehahn Report introduced a very significant restructuring of labour relations. The Wiehahn Report itself was the state's (and capital's) response to the deepening economic and political crisis in the country since the early seventies. The rapid growth of an African urban working class along with the growth of a militant, unregistered trade union movement signified to the state the need to embark on a new strategy if they hoped to restore stability.

Wiehahn introduced the official recognition of trade union rights for Africans, although initially excluding certain sections of the African working class as well as the abolition of job reservation.

Until 1979, it had been official government policy that African artisans should receive their training in the homelands and be utilised there after qualification. Africans were thus prohibited from doing skilled work in an urban area unless, 1) they had obtained permission from the Minister, or, 2) they wanted to work in a black residential area, or 3) the building or premises on which they were working was owned by them or was intended for occupation by them and their dependants. But the shortage of skilled manpower had reached such critical proportions, retarding economic growth, that Wiehahn was forced to address this problem as well.

SAEWA and other craft-diluted unions were faced with a situation where Africans were moving into semi-skilled and skilled positions. In addition, acceptance of

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64. Ibid. p18.
65. SALB, Critique of the Wiehahn Commission, 1979, p149.
trade union rights for Africans threatened the protection afforded by the closed shop agreement to Whites and to a lesser extent 'Coloureds' and Asians.

SAEWA, it seems, was left with few options. More especially because by then they had already lost control over the labour process as a result of the process of deskilling and job fragmentation. If they wanted to maintain control over job categories by representing everybody in these jobs, they had to consider ways of organising African workers. Cooper argues that the bulk of craft unions welcomed the incorporation of African unions under more effective state control since they were afraid that African unions might be used as a political platform or as a means to undercut their own position in the collective bargaining process. More than ever before the need to implement the 'rate for the job' became imperative. Only by including African workers in the same bargaining machinery - and this under the firm control of currently registered unions - could this principle be upheld. Furthermore, it was only in this way that the union could prevent the decline in membership which was a feature of most of the existing craft unions.

SAEWA moved quickly to organise Africans into a parallel union structure. As early as the Association's 12th Triennial Conference in October 1978 a decision was taken 'to take all necessary steps to bring about the formation of a separate union for African electrical workers but that the union should form another section of the umbrella system so successfully operated ... with our colleagues of the (‘coloured’) EATUSA.' Both the establishment of

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66. De Clerq F, p20. She is here referring more generally to the metal and engineering industries.
68. SALB Memo by FOSATU, 8/11/79.
EATUSA in 1956 and EAWUSA in 1978\(^{70}\), though largely a response to legislation enacted by the State, actually anticipated the legislation. The Electrical and Allied Workers Trade Union of South Africa (EAWUSA) was formed in 1978 with Ben Nicholson, who has been General Secretary of SAEWA since 1974, as General Secretary. Ben Nicholson was General Secretary of the 'coloured' EATUSA as well. Because of Nicholson's position as General Secretary of EAWUSA he was able to exert complete control over the African union. Like EATUSA, they enjoyed only nominal independence and in reality were unable to control even their own union subscriptions.

A good indication of the position of EAWUSA with regard to advancing the interests of workers could be gauged by the fact that a German multinational, Siemens based in Pretoria, is said to have actively encouraged the formation of an African union in the electrical industry.\(^{71}\) This is conceivable as by this time (1978), workers at Siemens already expressed growing frustration and dissatisfaction with the Liaison Committee which had been operating at the factory since 1974.\(^{72}\) SAEWA and EATUSA already represented the white and 'coloured' workers respectively at the company.

This laid the basis for the complete dependence of EAWUSA on its parent, SAEWA, a state of affairs which continued right up until the end of 1985, when the union was party to a merger with the 'coloured' EATUSA.

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70. See Appendix C for membership figures for SAEWA, EATUSA, EAWUSA AND EAWTU for the period 1970 to 1988.
72. Interview 18/4/89 with Raymond Khoza, the National President of the new merged union - EAWTU.
CHAPTER 2

THE STRUGGLE BEGINS: THE BIRTH OF "SPARKY"

The Electrical and Allied Workers Trade Union was a national union consisting of over 35,000 members located in the progressive labour movement of which COSATU and NACTU are the main pillars. Within a period of ten years (1977 - 1987) the union has been transformed from a conservative craft union, organised as an exclusively 'coloured' parallel union, into a union based on the principles of non-racialism and working class leadership.

The union's standing was the result of a strong interaction of socio-political developments in the period combined with certain significant isolated events which sparked and ignited a progressive struggle of transformation. In addition, the role of leadership, as manifested in the activities of the core group cannot be underestimated. This leadership originated and developed in a period of political upheaval and turmoil starting in the early 1970s.

The early 1970s marked the beginning of a deep crisis in the South African economy. This crisis in turn gave rise to a wave of militancy, especially from 1973 onwards, as the black working class (including skilled workers), reeled under the effects of high prices, and increasing unemployment. This new wave of militancy marked the first rise of the black working class after the prolonged period of defeat that followed the banning of the African National Congress and Pan Africanist Congress in the early 1960s. These

73. "Sparky" is the name of the newsletter of the Western Cape branch of EATUSA and serves as the mouthpiece of the core group.
74. Gelb S., 1988, p1
75. Gerhart G.M, 1978, p12
repressive measures, together with the bannings and arrest of the South African Congress of Trade Union's leadership and state legislation such as the Sabotage Act of 1962\textsuperscript{76}, laid the basis for undisturbed capitalist development in South Africa. This period of economic boom came to an end with the world-wide stock market crash of 1969, the effects of which were felt in South Africa towards the end of 1971.\textsuperscript{77} For the working class as a whole this meant the start of declining living standards. Gelb\textsuperscript{78} gives some statistics which indicate the extent of the economic crisis in South Africa. Since 1974 the inflation rate in South Africa, as measured by the consumer price index, has consistently remained over 10%. In addition, over 200 000 manufacturing workers lost their jobs between 1981 and 1985 - and over 300 000 people came onto the labour market for each of these years. Between 1946 and 1974 South Africa's gross domestic product grew at an annual rate of 4,9% per annum. Between 1974 and 1978, the growth rate dropped to only 1,9% per annum and in the period between 1982 and 1987, it dropped to only 0,6% per annum.

The first major response of the working class was the massive wave of strikes in Natal in 1973 involving over 100 000 black workers.\textsuperscript{79} Flowing from this series of strikes arose what came to be referred to as the 'independent' unions.\textsuperscript{80} By 1973, the formation of the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) and the National Union of Textiles Workers (NUTW) had been accomplished, followed by the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) and the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) in 1974. By 1974, these four unions alone had signed up over 10 000 workers.\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{76} Lacom publication, 1988, p137 (Sabotage Act - even strikes could be sabotage)
\textsuperscript{77} Gelb S. & Innes D, 1985, p35
\textsuperscript{78} Gelb S, 1988, p1.
\textsuperscript{79} Cobbett W & Cohen R, 1988, p22
\textsuperscript{80} This definition is used by Maree, J. The term independent refers to the union's strenuous efforts to be free from control by outside parties, particularly the state and management, in order to determine their own form of organisation policies and strategies.
\textsuperscript{81} Lacom, p155
This growth of new black trade unions spread rapidly all round the country. While the CWIU and MAWU emerged in Durban, organisations like the Western Province Workers' Advice Bureau - the forerunner of the General Workers Union (GWU) - was established. Although the rapid growth of the independent trade unions had diverse political origins, for our purposes, it is enough to mention the various wages commissions set up by the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) in the early 1970s, the Black Consciousness-orientated Urban Training Project (UTP) and the Trade Union Advisory Consultative Committee (TUACC). These independent unions were characterised by their rapid growth, militancy and growing sophistication in terms of factory floor structures such as strong shop stewards' committees and the negotiation of far-reaching recognition agreements.

Despite their varied political origins, the new independent unions all had certain characteristics in common. To a lesser or greater extent, they all stressed the need for democratic trade unions, with full worker participation in all aspects of the organisation's development - captured by the slogan 'worker democracy' and a strong commitment to building strong factory-floor shop steward structures. These two characteristics, 'worker democracy' and the great emphasis on shop steward structures marked a major watershed for the South African black working class. Tied to the idea of shop steward structures was the question of the role of the working class itself. These structures provided the organisational form and practice through which the class could challenge the bourgeoisie directly, thereby being able to develop confidence in itself, and developing consciousness of itself as a class. Furthermore, participation in these committees added to the process whereby the

82. Friedman S, 1987, p37-65
83. Ibid, p59
working class could begin to develop a layer of working class leaders, committed primarily to the political and economic interest of the working class. 84

But the 1970s did not only mark the rise of the black masses in the form of the new unions, but also their involvement in political struggles generally, particularly the broader based community and student uprisings of 1976, 1980, and the 1984 - 1986 period.85

Both the South African state and bourgeoisie were eventually forced to take into account the changing economic and political realities and rethink their strategies. The result initially was the Wiehahn recommendations, accepted by the state in 1979, which attempted to incorporate black worker demands into the industrial relations system.86 While the state had a degree of success, it also seriously undermined its own reform programme.87 In fact, it led to growth and consolidation as the independent unions learned to use the system, culminating in the formation of numerous trade union federations as the working class sought further unity. The formation of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) in 1979, was followed by the launching of the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA) in September 1980 in Johannesburg.88 Further consolidation took place with the formation of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in November 1985 and the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU) in October 1986.89

84. Ibid, p185-186.
86. E. Webster, SA Review 4, 1987, p215
87. Ibid
88. Lacom, p169 and p177
89. Lacom, p214-215
It is clear, then, that in the decade since 1973 the fabric of South African life had changed dramatically. An anecdote in Friedman's book captures this change in power relations very well.

"The Chairman had had enough. He was, he insisted, tired of the almost daily disruption in his factory. Every day seemed to throw up new worker demands and, each time there was a minor problem, the workers struck. It was time they learned some discipline - it hadn't been like this in the old days ... He had called the chief shop steward to his office, the chairman warned, because he was the leader of the trade union in the plant. He was responsible for the turmoil and must control his men. The steward listened for a while. Then he leaned slowly across the desk, "What you don't understand, he said quietly, is that I have more power in this factory than you do"."90

2.1 The Effects of this Period on EATUSA

The contradictions of the political and economic developments of this period were (among others) manifested in the development of EATUSA. It was in this milieu that, with the conscious intervention of a few workers acting as a core group, the struggle to transform the Electrical and Allied Trades Union into a progressive force within the labour movement took place.

For years, prior to 1976/1977, 'coloured' workers in the electrical industry were virtually defenceless victims of employers, despite being members of a trade union (EATUSA). It was one of many incidents of victimisation, related in one interview with Brian Williams91 which sparked off a conscious and consistent attempt to address malpractices in the

90. Friedman S, 1987, p1
91. Interview Brian Williams 20/4/89
union initially, and subsequently led to its complete transformation.

In 1977 Brian Williams worked as an apprentice electrician on a housing site in Atlantis.92 After a meeting called by workers on the site to discuss grievances about working conditions, he was accused by management of being an agitator, of instigating unrest and his apprenticeship contract was cancelled by the Apprenticeship Committee.93 At that stage he was completely unaware that he was in fact a member of the Electrical and Allied Trades Union. Acting on the advice of a co-worker, he approached the union seeking assistance with respect to victimisation. The General Secretary of the Union very reluctantly took up his case and eventually referred him to the the Coloured Affairs Department. Brian Williams later discovered that the General Secretary, who was the union representative on the Apprenticeship Committee, did not in fact support his case. However, Brian Williams successfully appealed to the Apprenticeship Committee against their decision.

It was this incident which signalled the start of the long arduous struggle to rid EATUSA of its conservative leadership. Brian Williams rallied a few sympathetic apprentices around this issue and formed, what we will refer to as the core group - a group consisting of five people which was responsible for co-ordinating and spear-heading the attack on the union bureaucracy. Williams explains this:

'Cecil94 worked for the same company ... so with the crisis in the union, one of the first things I did was to speak to the people that I know - to try and get them involved to see that this (here he is referring to the fact that no

92. Interview Brian Williams 30/3/89
93. Both Management and Union representatives in the Industry constitute this committee. The primary function being the regulation and control of Apprenticeships in the Industry.
94. Cecil Theys, an official of EAWTUSA was one of the first people that Brian approached.
At first this resistance was born of a desire to find out what was happening in their union, an organisation which deducted subscriptions from their wages every week but one which was unable to satisfy the workers' most basic needs. But, as they encountered more problems in the union's structure and operation, this initial resistance developed into a conscious strategy to replace the conservative leadership. As we will attempt to show, a combination of different tactics and methods, and quite often just plain manoeuvring, was used in the battle. Important decisions taken at strategic points served not only to ensure victory, but laid the basis for the democratic foundation of the union later. At the same time, the conservative white leadership, under pressure from the threat posed by the increasing radicalisation of the core group, responded by resorting to more bureaucratic and dictatorial methods in an attempt to retain control of the union.

EATUSA prior to the transformation, operated along traditional parallel lines enjoying nominal independence, but in reality being controlled by the White General Secretary of SAEWA who, as we mentioned before, was General Secretary of EATUSA as well. More immediate control in Cape Town was exerted by a paid White official, Cyril Shield, who acted as General Secretary for the Western Cape from the date of registration in 1967 to 1984 when he resigned.\(^{96}\) The core group was thus faced with a conservative, unchanging leadership with officials occupying executive positions for a long period. Since 1967 EATUSA has only had four presidents and two General Secretaries.\(^{97}\)

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95. Interview Brian Williams 30/3/89.
96. Interview Cyril Shield 28/4/89.
97. Interview Paul Van Oordt 2/5/89, ex president EATUSA - Honorary Life President
EATUSA displayed characteristics typical of all parallel unions. There was no tradition of wage bargaining on the basis of mandates from workers and union members never saw financial statements of the union. Until very recently union meetings operated on a 'tot system'. Members who attended union meetings were given beer or wine tickets on arrival. Very often the meetings lasted for not more than one hour as people were keen to start 'serious drinking.' Furthermore, the union operated strictly along Industrial Council lines - there was no conception of policing agreements or defending worker rights through shop floor structures. This bureaucratic nature of EATUSA precipitated the articulation of the core group's dissatisfaction.

The first concrete issue around which the core group agitated, was the refusal by the union, after continual requests, to provide a copy of the constitution to its members. This agitation took the form of questions raised by core group members at general meetings. Although this marked the beginning of the struggle to bring about progressive changes, they encountered initial resistance from the more conservative, older members. Despite the struggle, the union still refused to make available a copy of the constitution to members, prompting the core group to obtain one from the Department of Manpower in Pretoria.

Issues were subsequently broadened to encompass more generalised demands reflecting developments within the independent trade union movement and the rapidly changing balance of class forces within the country as a whole as the 1976 uprising left its mark. A common thread running through the questions raised by the

98. Interview Russell Sabor 27/4/89, Vice President EAWTUSA
99. Interview Cecil Theys 10/4/89 and Mr Hector 21/4/87. Mr Hector was one of the first senior workers won over by the core group to a more progressive position.
100. Cape Herald 22/7/1978
101. Interview Brian Williams 30/3/89
core group at meetings was one of accountability of the leadership to its members.

Manifestations of these concerns were embodied in the dissatisfaction expressed by core group members with respect to the executive negotiating for wages without a mandate from workers. Often issues raised included financial control of union funds by members.

At a general meeting in April 1979, Brian Williams made the following appeal to members:

'\textit{The time has come for the members of the union, the rank and file electricians, to make their presence felt. We must stop having people whom we have elected riding rough-shod over us.}'\textsuperscript{102}

At the same meeting he criticised the union officials for spending nearly R2 000 of members' money to attend a three-day conference in the Magaliesberg without bothering to report back to members.\textsuperscript{103} The executive was also questioned about the low wage electricians receive in comparison to other artisans in the building industry.\textsuperscript{104}

Historically, ('coloured') artisans in the Western Cape have a tradition of conservatism, but the deep crisis of South African capitalism at the time started eroding the existing privileges enjoyed by skilled workers, i.e. the effects of the process of deskilling and a decrease in real wages started having an effect on the lives of artisans. The naked reality of the effects of the crisis, made artisans in general more susceptible to the intervention of the core group with regard to demands made, encompassing worker control and accountability. This was very succinctly expressed by Brian Williams:

\textsuperscript{102. Cape Herald 7/4/1979}
\textsuperscript{103. Cape Herald 7/4/1979}
\textsuperscript{104. Cape Herald 7/4/1979}
'These ideas of worker control and accountability was reflected in terms of ideas that the union belongs to workers. Workers must control. So while the words worker control were not as explicit and as well known then - but the concept was there - in all the questions raised, for example wages, mandates, worker rights, worker power and worker democracy - those are things that we fought for in the trade union.'

The union leadership at first did not know how to respond to the increasing confrontation at meetings. An annual general meeting in July 1978 was abruptly closed after Brian Williams challenged the General Secretary, Cyril Shield, and the president, Paul Van Oordt. So, too, in August 1979, a meeting 'ended in near shambles this week with the chairman powerless to stop the storm of criticism from the floor.' As the struggle of the core group intensified and gained more support the leadership of the union responded in a more co-ordinated manner.

The core group broadened out into a Support Committee (1978) to include other (non-union member) militants and community activists. At any one time, according to Brian Williams, the Support Committee consisted of no more than ten people. The composition of this group changed from time to time and performed very different roles at different times, depending on the needs as perceived by the core group. Pamphlets criticising the union bureaucracy were issued at General Meetings in the name of the Electrical Workers Support Group or Action Committee. Support Group members also raised 'sensitive' questions at meetings, thus hoping to prevent victimisation of individuals.

105. Interview Brian Williams 6/5/89
106. Cape Herald 29/7/1978
107. Cape Herald 11/8/1979, p1
108. Interview Brian Williams 8/5/89
109. The Support Committee was called by different names at different times, depending on the circumstances.
In this period it seems that the Cape Herald - a very popular newspaper among the Cape 'coloured' community, was consciously used by the core group to advertise meeting dates and arouse the interest of members. The editor of the newspaper was himself an ex-electrician and the newspaper seemed to have taken a sympathetic position with regard to developments within EATUSA.

At various times people like Advocate A Omar, D Parker and unionists J Erntzen and J Bosch, (the latter two were involved in a similar struggle with the municipal workers in the sixties),¹¹⁰ and Steven Dublin (Furniture Workers Union) were consulted. What is clear is that the advice of the above individuals in no way determined the long term strategy that the core group pursued. They did, however, draw on the collective experience of these people in terms of the more 'technical' information. There seems to have been a conscious attempt by the core group to limit the participation of these individuals.

'...We controlled their (the individuals) participation. We never let them feel that they were in front. We tried as far as possible to play down their role although they were needed. They gave us a lot of help ... Mostly advising on constitutional matters, strategies at meetings, how to question things, to question financial records. We tried to restrict them to that...'.¹¹¹

A strong feeling existed that they (i.e. the core group) knew the industry very well and hence were in a good position to decide for themselves what was in their best interests. They felt that the most important factor was that the final decision about accepting any kind of advice should rest with them - that they should take final responsibility for decisions or

¹¹⁰. Interview Brian Williams 6/5/89
¹¹¹. Interview Cecil Theys 10/4/89
actions. In short this was a manifestation of the popular slogan emerging at the time, i.e. that workers should become their own liberators.

2.2 The 'Constitutional' Crisis (Nov '79-'80)

Armed with the constitution, the core group, after discovering that the constitution provided for a Branch Executive Committee (BEC) in each region of the Union, managed to pressurise the Cape Town-based Executive Committee (EC) of EATUSA to hold branch committee elections. Prior to this there had been no Branch Executive Committee in the Western Cape even though the constitution provided for one. Instead, the Executive Committee fulfilled this role. 112

At the November 1979 annual general meeting of the union, the 'young bloods' (members of the core group) swept to victory in the branch committee elections.

'Calls for action on wage demands, union money matters and alleged union irregularities, backed up by a well-planned election campaign, helped cause a swing towards a younger group opposed to the present national executive, which has been unopposed in office for a number of years.' 113

Quite significantly, at that general meeting, five of the seven seats were won by the 'young bloods' Brian Williams and Cecil Theys (both were members of the core group) were elected as chairman and vice-chairman respectively by the Western Cape branch. This represented a watershed in the development of EATUSA. A significant battle for worker control and accountability had been won. 114

112. Interview Brian Williams 20/4/89
113. Cape Herald 24/11/1979
114. Interview Brian Williams 30/3/89

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At this point the established leadership feared that victory in the BEC elections, automatically meant an NEC election victory for the 'young bloods.' The EC at the time motivated that the constitution be amended to allow for a 'truly' National Executive. In an attempt to bolster support for themselves, they invited other regions to the meeting. Prior to this the EC was elected from the Cape Town branch only. The core group, noting that this was a progressive step, albeit a manoeuvre by the EC, did not oppose this move, thereby sacrificing short term objectives (of being elected to the NEC) for longer term objectives of building a support base and increasing democracy to provide for greater accountability. The November 1979 meeting agreed to postpone the NEC elections for six months, to allow the newly elected BEC and EC time to draw up an amended constitution.\textsuperscript{115}

The EC, contrary to the decision taken at the annual general meeting (November 1979) went ahead and called a special meeting (January 1980) where they tried to get ratification for the amendments to the constitution which the EC drew up themselves, without involving the elected BEC, in breach of a decision taken by the November 1979 meeting. They (the EC) violated the constitution by convening the meeting as only the BEC had the power to do this. The proposed amendments were an attempt to ensure that only the existing executive members were eligible for nomination. They provided, \textit{inter alia,} that only people who had at least twelve months experience at executive level - whether at BEC or NEC level - were eligible for nomination.\textsuperscript{116} This obviously excluded anyone on the newly-elected BEC. The progressive group proposed at that general meeting, January 1980, that the item dealing with the NEC election should be placed on the agenda of a meeting to be held twelve months hence.\textsuperscript{117}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid
\end{flushleft}
According to Brian Williams, because of unanimous worker resistance at the meeting, they (the EC) were unable to get the new constitution ratified. The conservative EC thus found themselves in a situation where they were unable to call another meeting because, as mentioned earlier, constitutionally only the BEC could convene meetings. The BEC, being controlled by the progressive group, refused to convene any meetings. The NEC in turn responded by disbanding the Branch Executive Committee and in terms of the constitution, they were in a position to take over the function of this branch committee.\textsuperscript{118} Thus, at the next meeting, April 1980, the conservative group '... put the same item on the agenda. There were about one hundred workers at the meeting and there was no support for them, but they just went ahead and imposed themselves as the NEC. They wrote a letter to the Registrar and formally changed the constitution.'\textsuperscript{119}

The amended constitution introduced a new structure within the union, the Northern Areas Management Committee (NAMC) comprising the Transvaal and Durban region, and the Southern Areas Management Committee (SAMC) which would include Cape Town, Kimberley and Port Elizabeth. These structures would serve regional executive functions. Representation on the NEC was now national.

Once again, in terms of the constitution, Branch elections for the Western Cape had to be held. Preceded by an election campaign, the entire suspended BEC was re-elected at a meeting held in the Garment Workers Union offices in Salt River.\textsuperscript{120}

\textsuperscript{118} Interview Brian Williams 20/4/89
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid, 30/3/89
\textsuperscript{120} Cecil Theys 10/4/89
2.3 The Period of Consolidation (1980 - 1984)

A very crucial decision was then taken by the core group at the time. It would have been legally easy to challenge the nature of the elections and amendments to the constitution because of the unconstitutional imposition of the NEC, but they (the core group) decided against challenging this in court as it was felt that they were not 'organisationally ready' - that they enjoyed only 'soft support.' As Brian Williams explained:

"... if we had made ourselves available, we would have won the elections but we were not ready organisationally - we didn't have enough grassroot support from workers in 1980 ... so we reasoned that even though we were able to agitate and get the majority on almost every issue that we raised, we didn't feel that debating skills were sufficient, but it had to be deeper than that. It had to be organisationally rooted and support shouldn't depend on a particular meeting - and so you have different people at different meetings and different issues. We felt, what we needed to do was establish a hard core of organised support and not rely on soft support ..."¹²¹

This important decision reflects the attitude and commitment of the core group members to building an organisation with strong structures on the ground. It seemed, to them, futile to replace one bureaucratic structure with another top-heavy structure.

The next NEC elections were due to be held in 1984. During this period the Support Group role was developed into one where it operated parallel to the BEC. The Support Committee at this stage consisted of the progressive people on the BEC, as well as

¹²¹ Interview Brian Williams 20/4/89
community activists. There seemed to be a shift in tactics in this period as the people represented on the BEC had to act in a 'respectable' way, i.e. they had to act constitutionally. The individuals could no longer openly be identified with criticism or direct attacks on the leadership of the union. '...We wanted to create the impression that we (BEC) were working together. We didn't put out things attacking the NEC.' 122 and again 'we had to do the constitutional work on the BEC and this gave us access to certain things and even though it was very difficult - even though some of the things we requested were not forthcoming, we were in a position to provide constitutional pressure and legitimacy for some of the things we needed to do.' 123 Questions raised in this fashion included questions about the books, about expenditure, authorisation and more general issues like why labourers, for example, were excluded from the union. 124 The Support Committee on the other hand was used to complement the actions of the BEC. It raised all the issues which the BEC could not. 'The Support Committee could put out pamphlets which the BEC could not do. It could do all kinds of things and had the relative freedom to say what the BEC was unable to say.' 125

Pamphlets issued by the Support Committee, were distributed at almost every general meeting mostly by non-union members to prevent victimisation. These pamphlets raised various issues, but a common characteristic was a very conscious strategy of attempting to get workers to understand that it was they who should control the leadership in any union, that they should be consulted before wage negotiations, and that the unity of workers was necessary to defend their rights. Quite often

122. Interview Cecil Theys 10/4/89
123. Interview Brian Williams 20/4/89
124. Ibid
125. Ibid
pamphlets took the form of cartoons depicting similar themes.

In addition, a massive 'huisbesoek' campaign was embarked on in an attempt to build up grassroots support. Support Committee members systematically visited workers throughout the Cape Peninsula. The region was divided into areas with each core group person assuming responsibility for a particular area. This process was repeated in crisis periods or in the period just preceding an important meeting. It seems as if the core group was not very successful in consistent attempts to broaden the Support Committee by involving workers won over during 'huisbesoek' sessions. It appears as if workers were very keen to hear and talk about developments within the union, but did not get actively involved in the struggle on a consistent basis.

The programme of local 'huisbesoek' was followed by attempts to make contact with progressive people in the union on a national level. The core group tried to establish contacts with workers in Kimberley and Port Elizabeth. However, this wasn't very successful because it was difficult for the core group with limited resources at their disposal to maintain such contact on a regular and consistent basis.

Before discussing the response of the NEC to steadily made gains by the core group, it is interesting to look at how they managed to win over the older conservative union members, because skilled workers tend to be conservative, unless of course there is an immediate threat to their artisan status, as there would be in an imminent process of deskillling.

126. Interview Russell Sabor 27/4/89
127. Ibid
Initially, at about the time the progressives won the branch committee elections (in November 1979), they perceived a drop in attendance at meetings particularly by older people. This can be ascribed to the fact that meetings were no longer a 'pleasure' to attend. The newly-elected BEC shifted the venues of meetings away from drinking outlets as had been the practice, and in so doing, phased out the 'tot system.' In addition, each meeting was one of confrontation as the progressives proceeded to question the national executive. As Cecil Theys explained, 'It was easy to win over the younger people - we were speaking the same language.' This is understandable since the 'young people' referred to were products of the tumultuous 1970's. Thus, the ideas of worker control and democracy, were not foreign to them. The core group had to be more sensitive in appealing to the older people. One such instance was the way pamphlets were drawn up - as one of the core group members explained, 'older people like to deal with facts, they like to see something in black and white.'

'A turning point was reached for the core group when a few senior people began to attend meetings. As Cecil Theys explained "it was easier for a senior person to go to a senior person."'

2.3.1 Response of NEC

Meanwhile, the NEC (based in Cape Town) retaliated by steadily attempting to thwart the progressives' plans in any way possible. An opportunity arose for the progressive group after the death of Mr L Sabor, who

128. Interview Cecil Theys 10/4/89
129. Ibid.
130. ibid.
131. ibid.
132. ibid.
133. ibid.
was president at the time, leaving a vacant seat on the NEC. At a special general meeting on 8 June 1983, workers in the Western Cape Branch unanimously voted for Brian Williams as the delegate to the NEC. The rest of the NEC, feeling an increasing threat to their position, once again decided to suspend the troublesome Western Cape Branch Executive Committee, by declaring the meeting, where the nomination had taken place, null and void. This was on the basis that the meeting of the BEC was unconstitutional in that non-union members were present. These non-members referred to the wives of union members who attended the meeting. The wives were not allowed to vote. Once again, the BEC was re-elected by the workers in the Western Cape.

The conservative NEC leadership also tried to regain lost ground by employing the old 'divide and rule' tactic. In September 1983, they attempted to start a Mitchells Plain Branch. But this meeting had to be cancelled as workers refused to attend the meeting. Instead, they, the core group and workers, gathered outside and held another meeting later at a different venue, to condemn the NEC’s action to divide the union.

Throughout this period ('80-'84), at least two of the members of the core group were subject to continual harassment and victimisation by employers. There is evidence to suggest a direct linkage between the developments in the union and management strategies to rid the industry of these new 'troublemakers', who were upsetting the cosy relationship that existed hitherto between the union and the bosses in the industry.

134. Pamphlet issued by Electrical Workers Action Committee.
135. NEC Minutes 11 June 1983
136. In a later interview the core group conception of the trade union being an organisation of the family was explained. If a worker got involved, he did so as a representative of the family.
137. Cape Herald, 10/10/83
In 1980, two members of the core group were dismissed by an electrical contracting firm. The first member to be dismissed had earlier been questioned about 'Release Mandela' slogans which had suddenly appeared on his building site. He denied that he had painted the slogans. According to him, management accused them (members of core group) of 'causing too much problems' in Cape Town and said that they could only give him a job in a rural area. This was followed by an unambiguous statement that the next person they were going to dismiss would be the second core group member.

This was a further reminder to the core group members that the struggle within the union was not only a struggle against the conservative, bureaucratic leadership, but also against the bosses in the electrical contracting industry, who were directly affected by their actions.

Both men were dismissed when they worked on the Koeberg Nuclear Power Station site as well. Branded as agitators in the industry, both had great difficulty in finding employment and thereafter holding the job. At one firm it was alleged that the EATUSA general secretary had telephoned the management of the company where a core group member was employed.

2.3.2 Progressives are voted onto the NEC

In June 1984, with the NEC elections, four members of the core group (Russell Sabor, Brian Williams, Cecil Theys and Derrick Elbreght) were elected by workers at a Western Cape Branch General Meeting onto the NEC.
This meeting was attended by over 100 workers. By this time, as a direct result of the strategies of the core group during the period 1980 - 1984, solid support had been won in that workers were beginning to play a more active role at meetings.

A last, desperate attempt was made by the delegates present at a NEC meeting in July, 1984 to prevent these progressive delegates from representing the Western Cape on the NEC. They objected, without success, to the nomination on purely technical grounds.

While this marked a great step forward for the progressive group in their struggle, it is as well not to lose sight of the fact that even though the Western Cape had a progressive Branch Executive Committee and four progressive representatives at a national level, both the National Executive Committee (consisting of 16 members), as well as the other regions, were still predominantly conservative.

The core group's victory was not a result of having persuaded or convinced other leadership figures within EATUSA, but rather the result of a process of winning over workers in the Western Cape to an understanding of the progressive practices of the Western Cape core group. This uneveness in the union nationally, with its roots in the fact that the struggle within the union against white oppression and racism, was predominantly a Western Cape struggle, persists to this day and is manifested very often in anti-Western Cape sentiments.

In addition, until Brian Williams was elected a full-time area official of the Western Cape Branch in February 1985, the Western Cape office was still in

144. Minutes of the NEC meeting 28/7/84
145. Interview Brian Williams 20/4/89
146. Minutes of NEC meeting 28/7/84
147. Interview Brian Williams 6/5/89 and Russel Sabor on 27/4/89
the hands of conservative officials. Cyril Shield was secretary right up until May 1984, when he resigned as secretary of EATUSA’s Western Cape Branch. The position was then filled by Parker who was appointed by the Southern Areas Management Committee (SAMC) on 28 May 1984. The NEC minutes during the brief period of Parker’s employment in the union, (i.e. until Brian Williams was elected) reveals a bitter struggle between delegates from the Western Cape and the rest of the delegates. At a NEC meeting in July 1984, the Western Cape delegates reported that they had a mandate from their members to terminate the services of Parker. This it appears, was a further step in the increasing radicalisation of Western Cape Union members who felt that Parker was fulfilling a similar role to that played by Cyril Shield.

It appears also that support for the core group was very much on an ‘issue’ basis. There was no consistent support in the earlier phase of the struggle (up until 1980), but as the core group won more and more tangible gains, in the form of wage increases and the workers perceived them to be consistently acting in their interests, one could argue that a more cumulative ‘general’ confidence in the younger leadership developed.

148. Letter from president of EATUSA to secretary dated 6/7/84
149. Ibid
150. NEC minutes dated 28/7/84, September 1984 and special meeting of NAMC dated 31/7/84.
151. NEC meeting minutes 28/7/84
THE PERIOD OF RECONSTRUCTION: 1985-1986

3.1 The Merger

This chapter focusses on the amalgamation between the 'coloured' EATUSA and the African EAWUSA, which took place in March 1986 and gave rise to EAWTUSA which later merged with two other NACTU affiliates, in May 1989, to form the Metal and Electrical Workers Union of South Africa (MEWUSA).

The idea of one non-racial union in the electrical industry was born with the establishment of the Federation of Electrical Trades Unions (FETUSA) in 1980. At a FETUSA meeting in November 1983, however, the 'coloured' EATUSA and the black EAWUSA agreed to amalgamate without the white union. At the end of 1985, the two unions finalised the terms of the merger and the new union, EAWTUSA, was finally launched on 15 March 1986.

3.1.1 The Federation of Electrical Trades Unions of South Africa (FETUSA)

FETUSA was launched in Johannesburg on 29 November, 1980, on SAEWA'S initiative. As early as October 1978, just after the Association had taken a decision to assist actively in the formation of a black union for electrical workers, the editorial of the Association elaborated on the need for an umbrella body which would allow for the separate, racially-based unions to 'work together' while maintaining

152. This refers to the date the new union was formally launched
their separate identity. This was decided as delegates to the conference recognised:

'the realities of life in our country in that people of different origins and cultures prefer to have their own institutions .... There we have (i.e. in the umbrella body) the ideal situation of separate organisation to ensure that each group has complete autonomy in dealing with matters of common concern, all groups meet under one umbrella to decide on a policy which will provide for the protection of the Trade and ensure that electrical workers of all races strive towards the common good of securing the maximum advantage in working conditions for the workers representing each group.'

While this was the official explanation for the establishment of an umbrella body for electrical workers, there were more fundamental reasons.

An interview with Raymond Khoza, who was president of EAWUSA at the time, revealed that by 1980 there were already rumblings within EAWUSA for the establishment of one non-racial union for all electrical workers. At the same time, the progressive group from the Western Cape branch of EATUSA were demanding a non-racial union as well. At the time, Khoza alleged that the secretary of EATUSA, possibly acting under a misapprehension, maintained that while in terms of legislation Blacks could belong to a registered trade union, there was as yet no provision for non-racial unions. FETUSA would thus act as the intermediate forum which would be directed at building a non-racial union in the future.

155. Power, October 1978, p1
156. Interview with Raymond Khoza 18/4/1989. Mr Khoza is currently the national president of MEWUSA.
157. Interview Raymond Khoza 18/4/1989. The Act specifically prohibited the existence of mixed trade unions, although the Minister could make an exception where there were too few employees from one population group to form an effective separate union or where the ratios between the 'number of employees of the different population groups concerned' makes it 'expedient to form a union in respect of more than one such population group' (Act Number 94 of 1979, Section 3)
International pressure also played a major role. SAEWA was a member of the International Metal Workers Federation and since the affiliation of the independent metal union from South Africa, questions were being raised as to the alleged racial practices of SAEWA. 158

Another reason perceived by a core group member for the establishment of FETUSA was that the SAEWA General Secretary was responding directly to developments in the Western Cape. He alleged: 'The General Secretary, recognising that we (the progressive group) had established a foothold in the Western Cape and that we had a very radical position with regard to a number of fundamental issues ... founded FETUSA, not because he believed in non-racialism but because he would be able to exert greater control once he has the unification of the structures.' 159

The most important reason was the question of control by the white union after Wiehahn. As outlined earlier, after the Wiehahn recommendations were accepted, white artisans were left with no protection other than the old craft union principle of the 'rate for the job.' The establishment of FETUSA seemed to be a final attempt by SAEWA to protect the trade and interests of white artisans by preventing undercutting by cheaper black and 'coloured' labour. If FETUSA functioned as planned employers in the industry would be met by uniform wage demands.

One could argue that the stated position of SAEWA with regard to race had gone full circle. In the post-Wiehahn period, SAEWA was not able to rely on racial exclusivity as they did in the late 1960s, but were more dependant on the principle of the 'rate for the job' - which is reminiscent of their history up to the 1950s.

158. In fact SAEWA was expelled by the IMF in 1982 precisely over this issue.
159. Interview core group member 20/4/1989
3.1.2 Events leading up to the Merger

Both the 'coloured' EATUSA and the African EAWUSA were supportive of the merger talks at a FETUSA level but differed significantly with SAEWA in their vision of the new non-racial union. At a FETUSA meeting in November 1983, this difference in perception was concretised and caused the final split within FETUSA and the breakdown of the long-standing relationship with SAEWA.

Initially, the progressives in the Western Cape were opposed to merger talks at a FETUSA level because they saw this as part of a new strategy by SAEWA to control EATUSA and EAWUSA, particularly in the light of the gains the Progressives were making in the Western Cape.

They later changed their strategy as it was difficult not to accept the progressive-sounding rhetoric of 'One non-racial union for all electrical workers.' Thus, they supported the idea of a merger, while making quite clear their own conception of what the future non-racial union should be.

Brian Williams' version of events at the November 1983 meeting is:

'We agreed that there should be a single non-racial union in principle, but what I did at that meeting was to argue for a single union but to add that we will change the name SAEWA, all the badges we will change, all the emblems, we would like to see a black president and we must decide on the question of who must be employed.'

160. Interview Brian Williams 20/4/1989
This outraged SAEWA delegates at the meeting. It was claimed that one of the delegates said: 'For 300 years we Whites have been in control and for 300 years we will continue to be in control.'\textsuperscript{161} This open outburst was the factor uniting delegates of EATUSA and EAWUSA. The meeting ended abruptly after the president of EATUSA announced that they were going ahead with a merger of only EATUSA and EAWUSA.\textsuperscript{162} Negotiations proceeded between EATUSA and EAWUSA and were finalised in September 1985 when the new constitution was approved by the Registrar. EAWUSA was formally launched in Cape Town on 15 March 1986.

3.2 The Most Significant Changes 1985-1986

Even though, as we have seen, the progressive group in EATUSA had won the branch committee elections in November 1979, as well as being elected as the Western Cape delegates to the NEC in 1984 this did not yet signify a major change within the conservative structure of the union. The rest of the branches, as well as the majority of delegates on the NEC\textsuperscript{163} were still dominated by a conservative leadership. In addition, Ben Nicholson\textsuperscript{164} was still general secretary of EATUSA. It was only by electing Brian Williams as a full-time area organiser in February 1985 that more direct control was asserted by the progressive group within the Western Cape, in that everyday practices and policy of the union could now significantly be influenced by them.

It is imperative to highlight what seems to be the most significant changes brought about by the progressive leadership during the period of 1985 - 1986.

\textsuperscript{161} This quotation was confirmed by six of the people interviewed.
\textsuperscript{162} Interview Paul Van Oordt 2/5/89.
\textsuperscript{163} The Western Cape had four delegates to the NEC. The total was sixteen.
\textsuperscript{164} Ben Nicholson was general secretary of SAEWA and EAWUSA as well.
In 1985\textsuperscript{165} the membership of the union in the Western Cape was almost exclusively based in the electrical contracting sector.\textsuperscript{166} Total membership for the Western Cape at the end of 1984 was 700.\textsuperscript{167} Having embarked on a strategy\textsuperscript{168} of consolidation of existing membership and expansion within the contracting sector, the progressive leadership witnessed a phenomenal membership growth by 1986 in that membership figures had risen to 4870.\textsuperscript{169}

Consolidation of existing membership was achieved by introducing a new system of shop stewards for the construction sites. As Brian Williams explained:

>'When we started, we were based in construction, so the concept of shop stewards, while it existed (at this stage there were no shop stewards in the industry it is more of an acknowledgement for the need to have them) was very difficult to apply. We had shop stewards but had to develop a concept of 'area committees' because on some building sites, continuity was difficult as a boss could transfer a troublesome worker or shop steward from one site to another.'\textsuperscript{170}

The area committee had a very similar function to the present-day COSATU/NACTU locals in that they reflected similar elements of worker democracy and provided the springboard for worker unity. Based in residential areas, these area committees comprised delegates from various building sites.

Expansion of membership entailed a concerted effort on the part of the progressive group to sign up labourers in the contracting industry and to this end they were

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{165} Interview Cecil Theys 10/4/89
  \item \textsuperscript{166} This refers to electrical workers on building sites.
  \item \textsuperscript{167} Letter from Brian Williams to the vice president of EATUSA dated 24/9/84.
  \item \textsuperscript{168} Interview Brian Williams 6/5/89
  \item \textsuperscript{169} Figures derived from union records.
  \item \textsuperscript{170} Interview Brian Williams 6/5/89
\end{itemize}
assisted by artisans. Prior to 1985 the union was exclusively artisan-based. It was essential to sign up unskilled workers as Brian Williams explained:

'Because the question of workers – the struggle of workers – was important to us we didn’t believe that any section of the workforce had to be excluded. Essentially, the trade union should be a home for all workers. More particularly, labourers are more oppressed and exploited and the trade union is an instrument for them. That’s why we fought for them. We also believed that the vibrancy of that section of the workforce would be far more consistent than the skilled workers whom we regarded as mainly temporary and would operate in terms of spurts of militancy, except for a few individuals – but as a group we did not place much reliance and faith in them. We knew we wouldn’t be able to build and expand an organisation based mainly on exclusivity.'

Russell Sabor further explained how it was possible for the core group, as skilled workers, to identify with the needs of labourers. He personally was moved by conditions under which labourers worked. As apprentices, they too had started out with low wages, and worked alongside unskilled workers on the building sites. Labourers in the electrical contracting industry had no pension or medical aid benefits. It was issues like the above which motivated them to form one union for all electrical workers.

After 1985 workers were recruited against a backdrop of victories won by the union through legal reinstatement, (using the industrial court) work stoppages and strikes in the industry. For the first time ever strikes by electrical workers occurred on building sites. The union newsletter was used to

171. Ibid
172. Interview Russell Sabor 27/4/89
173. See "Sparky", Vol 1., No 3, p2. 'Electrical Workers on the Move'
publicise these victories and was instrumental in assisting the recruitment drive. Workers gained confidence in themselves and for the first time identified with an organisation which took their struggle forward in the best way possible.

June 1985 witnessed the first strike ever in the electrical contracting industry in South Africa.\footnote{174} About 100 electrical workers were dismissed by JMR Electrical\footnote{175} from the Wooltru site in Cape Town. Grievances included low wages, racism and abuse on the part of the director, and objection to the introduction of a system where workers were called by numbers given to them.\footnote{176} It is noteworthy that this happened under the auspices of Brian Williams' leadership as area organiser. The dispute ended in complete victory as all dismissed workers were reinstated. What was significant about the settlement between the Western Cape branch of the union and JMR Electrical was that management agreed to recognise and work through the union's elected shop stewards. In addition, grievance, retrenchment and dismissal procedure were to be negotiated.\footnote{177} These are features characteristic of the new independent unions referred to earlier. A further innovation was the concept of solidarity strikes, as in this case 70 workers at a Mitchells Plain site had walked off in protest against JMR's response to workers at the Wooltru site.

Electrical trade unions on building sites have the added advantage that all contractors are subject to a penalty clause if the job is not completed within the stipulated time. Very often, these penalty clauses are quite high, sometimes ranging up to R10 000 a day, depending on the size of the contract.\footnote{178} This obviously increases the bargaining power of the union.

\footnote{174} "Sparky", March 1987, p3. This includes a summary of events in 1985.  
\footnote{175} The Cape Herald 24/6/1985  
\footnote{176} "Sparky" Vol 1, No 4, 1985  
\footnote{177} Cape Herald 27/6/1985  
\footnote{178} Interview Cyril Shield 28/4/1989
and goes a long way towards explaining why in the building industry, particularly, it is so important for bosses to get their workers to join 'sweetheart' unions or preferably, letting the workers remain unorganised. In an interview with Cyril Shield, general secretary of SAEWA branch in the Western Cape, he explained why some bosses actually approached the union (SAEWA) to sign up their workers - including the labourers.179

'... because they (i.e. the bosses) would rather let them belong to us than some other union coming in. You see, you can get the black unions and they're very militant and that can cause a lot of trouble and if they start organising the labourers there - you get strikes and things like that.'180

While 1985 was marked by increasing militancy of workers and an expansion of union membership in construction sites, 1986 saw the shift by the union in the Western Cape to the organisation of workers beyond the contracting sector. They widened the scope of the union to organise electronics workers, and metal workers as well as engineering workers.

One of the motivations for this shift was that the union in the Western Cape had limited growth potential in terms of membership in the contracting industry. Also '... in terms of a stable181 workforce, which meant that we would be able to also develop a much greater cohesion within the union because a lot of time was spent getting to the various building sites, so we felt that our resources needed to be focussed in a manner that would reach more workers and so we

179. Interview Cyril Shield 28/4/89. This was in an attempt to explain to us that SAEWA did not consciously go out and organise labourers but would not refuse to do so, if approached.
180. Interview Cyril Shield 28/4/1989
181. Unlike the precarious employment that site work entails - factory work offers relatively more permanent and therefore stable, employment.
shifted to going to bigger factories. In addition to the reasons given above for expanding the base of the union, this decision was important if one examines the state of the electrical contracting industry at the time.

Within the electrical contracting industry, by 1985, a tendency existed to employ fewer skilled artisans (electricians) on building sites. Cyril Shield dates this process of deskilling in the contracting industry from 1971 with the introduction of new categories of workers at Industrial Council level. In 1973, in the electrical contracting industry in the Western Cape, there were only three job categories: an electrician, a labourer and a pupil engineer. The artisan's job included electrical wiring, installing electrical conduit tubing, installing and/or maintaining and/or repairing electrical equipment, installing electrical fittings, overhead line construction, cable jointing and electrical installation. In 1975, a new category of worker was introduced, namely, an 'electrical conduit installer' who, in addition to doing a labourer's work, was allowed to install conduit (piping). In 1981, a further addition was made with the introduction of an 'electrical systems installer', who as the name indicates, was an employee engaged in installing of a systemised electrical installation. Two years later, the Industrial Council Main Agreement defined five different job categories. This included a new category, an 'electrical installation operative' (later referred to as an installation operative) who was allowed to do a significant percentage of skilled work.

182. Interview Brian Williams 6/5/1989/ This view was confirmed by Russel Sabor in an interview on 27/4/87.
183. Interview Cyril Shield 28/4/89
This process of deskilling seems to have culminated in the enactment of the most recent (March 1990) Industrial Council Agreement in which all previous job categories are deleted. Instead, we have the following categories:

- Licensed electrician - as in the old agreement.
- Electrician - as in the old agreement.
- Electrical Construction Operator Level III (ELCONOP 3) - New category.
- Electrical Construction Operator Level II (ELCONOP 2) - This coincides more or less with the installation operator in the old agreement.
- Electrical Construction Operator Level I (ELCONOP 1) - This coincides more or less with the labourer grade I in the old agreement.
- Labourer - This is equivalent roughly to the old labourer grade II.

The level III worker after 5 years qualifies to write a trade test and become an artisan. The Electrical Contractors Association (ECA) argues, contrary to union claims that the new scheme would tend to undermine artisans' wages in the industry, that the new system in fact gives recognition to employees who are graded as labourers but have acquired certain skills and are doing substantially more skilled work than labourers.

The above confirms Shield's assertion that there was very little work left for the artisan - he had gradually been worked out of a job. Artisans these days occupy mostly supervisory positions. Amended legislation allows for only one licensed electrician.

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184. See Appendix D for table of job categories and corresponding wage rates for the period 1973 to 1990
on a building site and very often this is the owner of the company himself.\textsuperscript{187}

The result of this process, together with the gradual dilution of the ratio clause\textsuperscript{188} which traditionally protected skilled workers, and the new legislation which provides an alternative route to attaining apprentice status, is that, "apprentices are falling away and we have hardly any apprentices in the electrical contracting industry. They are doing away with the apprenticeship system..."\textsuperscript{189}

The number of registered apprentices in the electrical contracting industry dropped by 216\% from 1982 to 1988.\textsuperscript{190} In 1982, 216 new apprentices were registered, and in 1986 only 108 were registered. This figure dropped to only 2 in 1987.

This drastic drop can be explained by the de facto situation that existed in the building industry. The legislation referred to earlier merely legalised the existing situation. Already the skilled component of artisan work had been gradually broken down and, more and more, labourers were doing a greater percentage of what was once considered the prerogative of the skilled worker. As the ECA motivated in its three year struggle with the trade union representatives on the Industrial Council, they were merely trying to legalise the situation.

\textsuperscript{187} Interview Cecil Theys, 10/4/1989.
\textsuperscript{188} The ratio clause in an Industrial Council Agreement stipulates the legal ratio for artisans and unskilled workers. In 1973, for each electrician employed, 2 labourers could be employed. As the industry underwent a process of deskilling, the ratio clauses changed as well and in 1985 for each skilled worker, 2 labourers grade I and 2 labourers grade II could be employed. With the November 1989 amendment this further changed to: For each skilled worker - 1 ELCONOP 2, 2 ELCONOP 1 and 2 labourers could be employed.
\textsuperscript{189} Interview Cyril Shield, 28/4/1989.
\textsuperscript{190} Figures derived from Department of Manpower Official. There seems to be some discrepancy as the Minister, in reply to a question in Parliament, had given the 1987 figure as 127 new apprentices. See Appendix E for complete table of statistics.
In addition, there seems to be a shift with regard to training of apprentices in the industry, even before the legislation enacted by the state earlier this year. The Training Act of 1990\textsuperscript{191} makes major changes to the training system. The most significant of these is the establishment of Industry Training Boards which will replace the government's centralised Manpower Training Committee. The aim of this legislation is to shift the responsibility for training from the government to industry itself.

In the electrical contracting industry in the Western Cape training schools have already been set up. The ECA has started its own schools with a set training procedure for each category of worker. Electrical firms seem to favour this new system as they were reluctant to indenture apprentices under the previous system which was characterised by its rigidity, and bound them for a certain number of years. This was problematic because of the cyclical nature of the building industry with its booms and depressions. Also, in general, the small size of firms in the electrical contracting industry limits the availability of qualified artisans as well as the experience apprentices can gain. This meant that, under the old system, the industry was getting poorly trained people.

\textsuperscript{191} SALB, Vol.15, No.1, June 1990.
In this context it was impossible for the union to continue to organise artisans only as its membership potential was not only limited but was steadily being eroded.

Historically, one would expect the strategy of organising unskilled labourers to meet with massive resistance from the existing skilled membership. By 1985, however, skilled workers were suffering from the effects of both a decline in their living standards as well as from the effects of deskillling in the contracting industry. It is this which objectively draws them closer to other sections of the working class - in this case - the unskilled labourers.

It seems at first that there was a certain amount of resistance and resentment but this problem was overcome. Brian Williams explains how they overcame this problem:

'What we were able to show is that you had to make a connection between the various degrees of skillfulness and categories of workers that were
crystallising. We told workers that unskilled workers were doing skilled work and are being exploited by not being paid the rates that a skilled worker should be receiving. What we said was 'skilled pay for skilled work.' Politically, too, we made an important link - when we said we were from the same communities, we are oppressed, we had to struggle together and we should not be rejecting workers because of the lack of skill or because we regard them as a threat to us. 192

This strategy seems to have been successful because the union currently represents all categories of workers at Plessey, for example, including technicians and white collar workers. 193 A further indication of the success of the strategy was the response by members of EATUSA when a white technician who was delegated to attend a union conference overseas was dismissed on his return. Workers at the factory went on strike and demanded his reinstatement.

Renak, a Cape Town based subsidiary of the British multinational, Plessey, was the first company to be targeted by the union in its campaign to sign up electronics and metal workers in factories. On 30 July 1986194 workers at the company went on strike to force management to negotiate with the union for a living wage. An overtime ban was subsequently imposed. The company responded by attempting to recruit white University of Cape Town third and fourth year engineering students as scabs. The union appealed to the student organisation on campus and joint student and worker protests took place outside the factory. This linking of struggles between workers and students and community organisations is once again, characteristic of the period since 1976, where for example, stayaways initiated by students or

192. Interview Brian Williams 6/5/1989
193. Interview Brian Williams 8/5/1989
194. The Argus 29 July 1986
workers were campaigned for across all sections of the community.

Immediately after signing up Renak workers, the union signed up most of the workers at two other Plessey subsidiaries in Cape Town - Laingsdale Engineering and Plessey South Africa. At Laingsdale, management was allegedly particularly intransigent and according to officials of the union mounted a 'union-bashing' campaign. More than half the signed up membership (at Laingsdale) resigned after management had described the union as part of the African National Congress and threatened that they would be liable to detention under the existing security legislation.

Hence, it is not surprising that as the union becomes increasingly more embroiled in the fight for workers' control, the bosses in the industry respond accordingly by launching a concerted attack on the union in a more co-ordinated way than before.

Initially, bosses responded in an individual way. In December 1985, a clear case of victimisation occurred when Cecil Theys, Cape Town regional chairperson was refused a work permit and denied entry to his workplace at the Koeberg Nuclear Power Station. This followed the detention of Cecil and two other officials under the emergency regulations promulgated a few weeks before.

The union rallied community organisations around a campaign for his reinstatement and called the French company which was sub-contracted by Koeberg to abide by fair labour practices or leave South Africa. In addition, they appealed for international solidarity action and workers in Paris went on strike in support

197. 'Sparky' March 1987, p5
198. Cape Times 13/2/1986
199. Pamphlet issued at meeting with community organisations on 17 February 1986.
of the union's demands. The campaign culminated in the reinstatement of Cecil Theys as the company backed down in the face of growing opposition and potential community action.

Later, as the industry bosses perceived the increasing militancy of the union, they attempted to respond in a more coordinated way. At the annual general meeting of the Electrical Contractors Association (ECA) in Cape Town on the 24th September, 1986, a resolution was unanimously adopted, 'that trade union fees not be deducted from labourer's wages by the employer.' According to the Industrial Council Agreement employers were only required to deduct trade union subscriptions in respect of the Master Electrician, Artisan and Installation Operator. However, it had been the practice in the industry to deduct subscriptions for labourers as well. The reneging on this informal agreement by the ECA was seen by the union as an attempt to undermine the union, 'as the union's resources would be stretched to the limit simply to collect dues from scores of sites scattered around greater Cape Town.'

Brand Engineering was the first company to carry out this resolution and refused to process stop orders of labourers. The result was a strike by 95% of the workers supported by artisans and white union members. Management surrendered in a few hours and agreed to continue union deductions for labourers.

The period (1985 - 1986) is not only a significant one in the history of the union in that major economic demands and campaigns were waged but, more importantly, the union very clearly showed that it was willing to get involved in political struggles in the country.

200. 'Sparky' March 1987 p5
201. Letter from the ECA to branch members
203. 'Sparky' March 1987 p5
An example of this was the launch of a 'Stop the Killings Campaign', by EATUSA in May 1986. This followed the brutal killing of 2 EATUSA members in inter-community violence in the townships of Cape Town. The campaign was initially supported by, amongst others, the Congress of SA Trade Unions, Azanian Confederation of Trade Unions and the Council of South African Unions who all sent messages of support for the campaign to the first campaign meeting.

The main thrust of the campaign was that oppressed people should not be killing oppressed people. The union view was that violence against progressive political opponents should be outlawed by the various political organisations of the liberation movement.

However, against the background of the call for 'ungovernability' in the townships that existed at the time, support for the campaign was not consistently forthcoming from organisations within the mass movement. In addition, the state of emergency imposed in June 1986 prevented the convenors of the campaign from effectively coordinating mass mobilisation for the campaign.

On June 13th, 1986, the union office was raided by Security Police and the homes of Cape Town EATUSA officials were raided early the next morning.

3.2.1 Major Gains Made

We have seen above what the practices of the progressive group were. Not only did they expand the base of the union by organizing labourers in the contracting industry and factory workers in the metal, engineering and electronics industry, but they also

204. Cape Times, 21/5/86.
205. Argus, 21/5/86.
consistently demanded and struggled for higher wages for their members. It is significant that in June 1986, labourers (grade II) in the contracting industry received a 35 percent increase. This was the highest ever wage increase for the entire industry.\textsuperscript{207}

3.2.2 Progressive Tradition Entrenched

Before concluding this chapter, we would like to give a brief account of developments within the union in the period 1987 - 1989. This confirms the view that the union is now firmly embedded in the fold of the progressive trade union movement. Whereas, prior to 1985, the union operated like a typical 'sweetheart union', today it finds itself in the position of being one of the unions in the forefront of winning significant wage increases and other rights for workers at plant level, as well as representing workers on the biggest Industrial Council (i.e. the Metal Council) in the country.

One of the most important post 1986 developments was the decision at the first Annual Conference (in April 1987) of the amalgamated union, EAWTUSA, to affiliate to CUSA-AZACTU, (later NACTU) even though the Western Cape Branch had voted in favour of affiliating to COSATU.

3.2.3 The Metal and Electrical Workers Union of South Africa (MEWUSA)

This divide between the Western Cape and the rest of the unions' branches was carried through into the recent struggles which took place within the union as it prepared to merge with three other NACTU affiliates. Merger talks within NACTU had started in 1987 as the Federation moved towards an attempt at rationalisation of union structures and the principle

\textsuperscript{207} 'Sparky', March 1987, p5.
of 'One Industry - One Union.' This process culminated in May 1989 when the black Electronic and Electrical Workers Union, the Engineering and Allied Workers Union, the United Automobile and Motor Workers Union and the Electrical and Allied Workers Trade Union merged to form the Metal and Electrical Workers Union of South Africa (MEWUSA).^208

The Western Cape Branch however was dissatisfied with the terms of the merger. In particular, they were unhappy with two clauses included in the constitution which it felt was a reversal of the principles of worker control and worker democracy - principles which they had fought so hard for in the branch. The two clauses dealt with the issue of whether the power to decide about financial and human resources was vested in the NEC of the union or in the regional structures where workers were directly involved. The Western Cape Branch favoured the latter. Their tireless struggle proved worthwhile when an NEC meeting later in the year unanimously supported the amendment of the controversial clauses in the constitution.

A significant feature of the union in the period after 1986, was the high incidence of strikes in the industry. Both the electrical contracting and the electronics sector in the Western Cape were 'strike-free' industries before. In 1987 the union experienced the highest number of strikes of all unions in the Western Cape. The year 1989 witnessed the unions' involvement in two marathon legal strikes at Plessey South Africa and National Panasonic.

Both these strikes were characterised by a high degree of worker militancy and worker involvement as the new tradition of the union crystallised. Strike committees were established to coordinate the strike and

---

activities as striking workers met daily at a church hall near the factory. Workers divided themselves into different committees such as education, culture, media, fundraising and counselling. Involvement in these committees resulted in a new layer of worker leadership emerging, i.e. other than the recognised existing shop stewards. An organiser explained how new, different layers of workers were being drawn into struggle and taking the leadership in the different activities of the strike.210

In both the Plessey and the National Panasonic strikes workers played a big role in attempting to generate solidarity support for their struggle. Both companies had foreign links and delegations of workers approached both the British211 and the Japanese Consulates, appealing to them to pressurise the local management to negotiate an acceptable settlement. The chief shop steward at Plessey visited Britain and appealed directly to Plessey workers in Britain to support their struggle for a living wage.

A strong point of both strikes was the attempt by the union to involve local community organisations. With the National Panasonic strike, workers marched through the industrial area on two occasions. The second was a legal march which occurred after consultation with community organisations in the region, and involved approximately 7 000 workers, students and scholars from the surrounding area.212

One factor which weakened both strikes was the existence of another minority union in the factory. In both cases a small but significant percentage of workers were members of the ex-TUCSA, Radio and Television Workers Union and continued production while EAWTUSA members were out on strike. It is ironic

210. Interview union official, 20/10/1989
212. Interview union official, 20/10/1989
that the union found itself in a position where it was faced with opposition from a union established in the same conservative tradition from which it itself had emerged.

Both the Plessey and National Panasonic strikes were resolved after protracted battles, stretching over nine weeks and fourteen weeks respectively. In the case of National Panasonic management were only prepared to move from their intransigent position after striking workers had occupied the factory for an entire day and prevented both management and administration staff from working at all.

No gains were made with regard to increases in workers' basic wages - the issue which had originally sparked off both strikes. However, workers emerged from the experience strengthened, empowered with a new feeling of unity and strength on the factory floor.

In conclusion, what is the most striking feature of the 'new union' is the nature of the demands raised by the union in wage negotiations at factory floor level. There seems to have been a shift from what could be referred to as economic demands to a broader wage package which includes community or political issues.

A recent agreement concluded at a local Epping factory included a donation of R5 000 by the company towards a community-based campaign to 'save the Upington 14.' In addition, the company agreed to purchase a kombi to be used by a community organisation for rural relief work. They would contribute R600 a month towards fuel costs for a period of three years. A sum of R30 000 was donated towards the building of an Information Centre to be used by workers.

A part of the settlement of the Plessey strike was a contribution of R50 000 by the company to a community organisation, the Cape Flats Distress Association (CAFDA). This was intended to assist unemployed workers or workers on strike.

The union has also been in the forefront of the struggle for the demand that bosses pay workers 'detention pay.' At most of the factories where the union organises in the Western Cape, they have an agreement with regard to paying workers who have been detained in terms of the state of emergency. Metal industry employers were faced with this issue for the first time when the union raised this demand at Industrial Council level at the annual wage negotiations in 1989.

A union organiser explained why it was important to extend the negotiation agenda to include solidarity community items:

'Since the negotiations at the Epping factory we shifted our attention in negotiations. We were thinking that it is very important that we not only win in the factory, but that we win and create a bridge between workers in the factory and workers in the community, and part of the reason for that is ... Because what we discovered with our great success with the wage negotiations at one of our factories there was a tendency by workers to say that we've got everything. Workers were thus not prepared to support other workers in solidarity action. They were now reluctant to get involved in helping workers in the community or in other factories. By means of this new approach to solidarity we could get the companies to provide concrete support to the community via donations, the purchase of a Kombi, building and other material.'

215. Interview union organiser 26/9/89
CONCLUSION

This paper has chronicled a period in the history of the Electrical and Allied Workers Trades Union (now MEWUSA) which is important. The importance lies in the extent to which it illustrates how a historically conservative section of the working class - skilled workers - has responded to the militant struggles of other sections of the working class.

In Chapter One we traced the development of the white SAEWA since its inception until 1979, when it was directly involved in the establishment of its African parallel union - the EAWUSA. This chapter also introduced the establishment of the 'coloured' EATUSA.

We traced the changing attitudes of the Association to the racial question and the organisation of African workers. We found that the information available on SAEWA, seems to support the 'deskilling thesis' of Jon Lewis. We cautioned, however, that one could not only ascribe 'racial consciousness' directly to changes in the labour process, but rather that though this was the determining factor, other socio-political factors played a role as well.

In the case of SAEWA, this is particularly evident in its later history i.e. in the period since the late 1950s. We found that as skilled workers began to lose control over the labour process as a result of deskilling in the industry from the mid-1940s onwards, they tended to move politically to the right - eventually disaffiliating from TUCSA in 1968 over the issue of continued affiliation of African unions to TUCSA.

In 1956, SAEWA's response to the enactment of the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act was the establishment of a 'coloured' parallel union - the
Electrical and Allied Trades Union. This was once again an attempt to exercise control over the labour process, albeit in a different form.

In the same way, after Wiehahn in 1979, SAEWA initiated the formation of an African parallel union, the Electrical and Allied Workers Union. Once again, this was a response to the increasing threat to their position as skilled white workers, in that Wiehahn made provision for African workers to belong to registered unions. This, together with the shortage of skilled workers as identified by Wiehahn, placed white skilled workers completely on the defensive.

In Chapter Two the struggle of the progressive core group against the conservative leadership within EATUSA was documented for the period 1977 to 1984.

Although the struggle was initiated by a seemingly minor incident, (Williams' apprenticeship issue) it soon developed into a struggle by the core group to transform the union completely. Gradual inroads were made into the power structure and power relations of EATUSA as; by 1979 the core group had managed to have elected into office a progressive branch committee; by 1983, they had one progressive delegate represented on the NEC; by 1984 they were elected as delegates from the Western Cape to the NEC and finally; in February 1985, the progressives achieved control of the Western Cape office and activities as one of the core group members, Brian Williams was elected an organiser for the Western Cape.

As the progressives steadily proceeded to make gains, they were faced, (particularly from 1981) by growing sophistication and co-ordination on the part of both the conservative leadership of the union as well as the bosses in the industry, a combination which attempted to halt the process of transformation. Core group members suffered continual harassment by bosses.
in the industry and had difficulty finding stable employment.

The conservative union leadership, as early as 1980, responded to the threat to their position by engaging in a series of underhand manoeuvering. They proceeded to call meetings even though the constitution provided that only the BEC could convene meetings. In an act of desperation, the NEC constituted themselves as the BEC in 1980 without any real support or constitutional elections. In September 1983, the NEC, attempted to divide the support that the progressives were building up by attempting to divide the Western Cape into branches and tried unsuccessfully to launch a Branch of the union in Mitchells Plain.

In Chapter Three we examined the reasons for the establishment by SAEWA of an umbrella body for the three racially-based electrical unions. The most important reason was the question of maintaining white union control over the industry in conditions of the post-Wiehahn period, when Africans could for the first time legally do skilled work. The FETUSA was to lay the basis for the merger of the three unions, but as a result of irreconcilable conceptions by the different unions, the 'coloured' and African unions broke away from FETUSA and eventually formed one non-racial union in March 1986.

The 1985 - 1986 period was one of significant change in the union. EATUSA, until then, an artisan-based union, was strengthened by a move to organise labourers in the electrical contracting industry in the Western Cape. For the first time, labourers could belong to the union. This was a conscious decision made by the progressive leadership in the Western Cape.

While 1985 saw a deepening of union strength on building sites, 1986 was marked by a shift in the strategy of EATUSA in the Western Cape, to incorporate
organisation of factory workers in metal, engineering and electronics companies.

The democratisation of the union under its new leadership, the influx of unskilled and semi-skilled workers, and the initiation of regular educational work, as well as its overt involvement in political struggles transformed the union. Contrary to general expectations that this process would frighten off the more conservative skilled workers, perhaps the biggest success the union can claim is the remarkable extent to which it has been able to weld solidarity between skilled workers on the one hand, and semi-skilled and unskilled workers on the other. This has been borne out not only by the unusually high number of strikes in which the union has been involved in Cape Town since 1985, but also the solidarity shown by skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers.

Objectively, this same process outlined in Chapter Two and Three, although obviously differing in detail, was also replicating itself elsewhere. Other conservative unions, such as the Western Province Garment Workers Union and the Textile Workers Industrial Union have all succumbed to the enormous pressure of the independent unions, as well as the general political struggle of the working class. Today, both these unions have merged and are affiliated to COSATU.

In the case of EATUSA, the process of radicalisation which drew the working class together more closely was facilitated by the economic crisis of the 1970's and 1980's, which not only lowered the living standards of its membership, but also induced the employers in the Electrical Contracting industry to initiate a process of deskilling. In addition, the younger members of EATUSA were influenced either by Black consciousness, at a time when that particular political philosophy was still ascendant, or by the general increase in the political temperature after 1976.
In conclusion, it is a combination of all the different factors which determined the direction that the struggle within EATUSA took. A combination of the general socio-political environment of the 1980's together with good tactics by progressive leadership facilitated the progressive direction which EATUSA eventually took.
Appendix A

PARALLEL UNIONS ESTABLISHED BY SAEWA

1937
WHITE SAEWA

1961
COLOURED EATUSA

1978
AFRICAN EAWUSA

1986
NON-RACIAL EAWTUSA

SAEWA
Appendix B

HISTORICAL AFFILIATION OF SAEWA
1939 SAEWA is affiliated to Trades and Labour Council
1950 SAEWA leaves the Trade and Labour Council
1950 SAEWA is instrumental in initiating the South African Federation of Trade Unions.
1954 SAEWA affiliates to the Trade Union Council of South Africa.
1968 SAEWA disaffiliates from TUCSA.
## Appendix C

MEMBERSHIP FIGURES FOR SAEWA, EATUSA, EAWUSA AND EAWTUSA

### Table C.1

Membership figures for SAEWA, EATUSA, EAWUSA AND EAWTUSA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
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<th>EAWUSA</th>
<th>EAWTUSA</th>
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<td>385</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>16 077</td>
<td>1 692</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
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<td>1974</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>16 500</td>
<td>1 692</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>17 000</td>
<td>1 692</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
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<td>1979</td>
<td>17 000</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>17 000</td>
<td>5 400</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>21 000</td>
<td>10 240</td>
<td>5 700</td>
<td>4 500</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>4 500</td>
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<td>30 000</td>
<td>4 500</td>
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<td>22 000</td>
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Appendix D

JOB CATEGORIES AND HOURLY WAGE RATES IN THE ELECTRICAL CONTRACTING INDUSTRY, 1973 - 1990

Table D.1
Job categories and hourly wage rates

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>40c</td>
<td>59c</td>
<td>120c</td>
<td>135c#</td>
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<td>Labourer I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>160c#</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil Engineer</td>
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<td>123c</td>
<td>254c</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrician</td>
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<td>169c</td>
<td>375c</td>
<td>450c</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elec. Conduit Installer</td>
<td>82.5c</td>
<td></td>
<td>195c</td>
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<td>*</td>
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<td>Elec. Systems Installer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>200c</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrician (Constr.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>375c</td>
<td>550c</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elec. Installation Operative</td>
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<td></td>
<td>330c</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elec. Installation Operative Trainee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>200c</td>
<td>*</td>
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<td>Elconop 1</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>418c</td>
<td></td>
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<td>633c</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>700c</td>
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<tr>
<td>Master Electrician</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1090c+</td>
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$ March 1990 Agreement
* Wages no longer specified.
# In 1983 a distinction was drawn between labourers who do some (supervised) skilled work and those engaged in manual labour only. Categories introduced - labourer grade I and labourer grade II respectively.
+ Introduced in 1984.
Appendix E

NUMBER OF NEW APPRENTICES REGISTERED 1981 - 1988

Table E.1
New Apprentices Registered 1981-1988

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>Jo'burg</th>
<th>Cape Tow</th>
<th>Pretoria</th>
<th>P.E.</th>
<th>Bloemfon</th>
<th>Welkom</th>
<th>Kimberley</th>
<th>East Lon</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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<td>79</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>1983</td>
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<td>64</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
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NOTE:

1. Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Kroonstad recorded no apprenticeships during this period.

2. - indicates that data is not available

SOURCE: Department of Manpower
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Saldu Newspaper Clippings

Sparky
Volume 1, Number 2
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Volume 1, Number 4
Volume 1, Number 5
Volume 2, Number 1
March 1987
October 1987
December 1988

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The Cape Herald 1977 to 1985

DOCUMENTS

Documents received from Union

Pamphlets received from Union

National Executive Council Minutes 1984/1985

INTERVIEWS

Mr Hector - Cape Town 21/4/89

Raymond Khoza - Pretoria 18/4/89
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Cecil Theys</td>
<td>Cape Town</td>
<td>28/3/89, 10/4/89</td>
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<td>Russel Sabor</td>
<td>Cape Town</td>
<td>1/4/89, 27/4/89</td>
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<td>Cyril Shield</td>
<td>Cape Town</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paul Van Oordt</td>
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<td>Brian Williams</td>
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<tr>
<td>Union Official</td>
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</table>
To anybody interested in what is happening in Southern Africa at the present time, it is clear that an understanding of changes taking place in the field of labour is crucial. The whole debate about the political implications of economic growth, for example, revolves very largely around different assessments of the role of black workers in the mines and factories of the Republic. Many of the questions with which people involved in Southern Africa are now concerned relate, in one way or another, to the field generally set aside for labour economists to cultivate. The impact of trade unions; the causes of unemployment; the economic consequences of different educational policies; the determination of wage structures; the economics of discrimination; all these and more are matters with which labour economists have been wrestling over the years in various parts of the world.

At the same time there are many who would argue that these issues are far wider than can be contained within the narrow context of ‘labour economics’. These issues, it is pointed out, go to the heart of the whole nature of development. In recent studies, commissioned by the International Labour Office, of development problems in Columbia, Sri Lanka, and Kenya, for example, leading scholars have identified the three crucial issues facing these countries as being poverty, unemployment, and the distribution of income. Thus the distinction between labour and development studies is becoming more blurred as economists come face to face with problems of real life in the Third World.

It is here too that an increasing number of people are coming to see that study of the political economy of South Africa must not be done on the assumption that the problems there are absolutely different from those facing other parts of the world. Indeed it can be argued that far from being an isolated, special case, South Africa is a model of the whole world containing within it all the divisions and tensions (black/white; rich/poor; migrant/nonmigrant; capitalist west/third-world; etc.) that may be seen in global perspective. Be that as it may, the fact remains that the economy of Southern Africa (for the political and economic boundaries are singularly out of line with each other) is one of the most fascinating in the world. It is one on which far more research work needs to be done, and about which further understanding of the forces at work is urgently required. It is in order to attempt to contribute to such an understanding that Saldru is issuing these working papers.