

Love, Liberty and Learning

The Problem with Skills in Revolution; an Anarchist Perspective of Trade Union Education in COSATU

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A research paper submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for Honours Research Essay SOCL4028 (SOCL450)

Johannesburg 2009

Abstract

Declaration

I declare that this research paper is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Honours in Industrial Sociology in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

17th day of June 2009

***To my Mother Colleen,
for my love of freedom and people, miss you always.***

With special thanks to the following: my magnificent son Reilly, Toon, Danyal, Farah and my comrades Luce, Nic and Roo. My family, Nick, Dad, Pen, Lyn, Grace and friends, Kez, Is and Penny for believing in and supporting me always. My comrades in the Trade Union Movement with whom I have travelled and learned.

Acknowledgements

Many, many thanks to Dr. Lucien van der Walt for his supervision of this paper, his continuous support, encouragement and belief in me. Kezia Lewins for her patience and advice. Linda Cooper for her advice, time and encouragement. Nichole Ulrich for her support and advice. Anthony Dietrich for his time and thoughts.

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1. Introduction

This paper aims to critically assess, from an anarchist perspective, the changes that took place in trade union education in SA, before and after democracy, with particular reference to the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the problematic of skills education. Whilst the paper will address the broader context and the overall change, specific attention will be given to the role of skills in revolutionary education. Anarchist education provides examples of both the importance of skills in education and a way of linking, what is commonly held to be education which entrenches the capitalist system – skills training, with revolutionary practice. Ultimately, what the paper argues is that the ideological rejection of skills development by the political left as reactionary and as one of the primary contributors to the change in trade union education from collective learning to individual advancement is both simplistic and more importantly disempowering to the working class itself. Anarchist education makes the link between skills and revolutionary education and provides an example of how revolutionary education can and must answer the intellectual development of the individual, the political understanding of the Class as well as the development of a collective that is skilled in order to ensure the reproduction of society, during and after the revolution.

The paper will draw on literature, interviews, document analysis, conversations and personal experience in order to understand the changes trade union education underwent, as COSATU's role shifted from that of struggle against Capitalism under Apartheid to struggle against Neoliberal Capitalism under bourgeois democracy, as well as its shift from struggle against the Apartheid State to being part of a tripartite alliance with the ANC government. It is hoped that this analysis will provide some understanding of the role education can play but also a much deeper understanding of the issues and context which limit, change and ultimately undermine the revolutionary potential of trade union education.

Whilst the main focus of the paper will be on trade union education in South Africa, particularly in relation to COSATU, specific attention will be paid to global examples of Anarchist / Anarcho-syndicalist Education (very often the two overlap to the point of being indistinguishable) in history and practice as this is the paradigm upon which the analysis is based and upon which an attempt will be made to define what is meant by revolutionary education. From this understanding, the focus will narrow to the role and form of Trade union

education in COSATU, how its focus changed and what the implications of this were both for union education and for the movement itself.

Following from this broader analysis, the paper will challenge the contention of some in the South African left: that it was the introduction of accredited, skills focussed education which has led, in their opinion, to the undermining of revolutionary trade union education in COSATU. A broader focus on the political and contextual issues will attempt to place individual education and skills development within an anarchist understanding of revolutionary education. Whilst this investigation is not about the legacy of Bantu education the focus on skills is particularly important, given the emancipatory significance of education and skills development in the context of South Africa, with its Apartheid legacy of educational exclusion of the vast majority, and the motive force this legacy played in the shift in trade union education focus.

At this point, it is important to reveal that this paper is not written outside of a personal context. Many of the arguments and discussions will be drawn from my own personal experience as a trade union educator and researcher within COSATU affiliates and research institutes from the early 1990's to the late 2000's. It is as much an attempt to understand my personal experience and role as it is to understand the subject.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The literature reviewed for this paper has had a double focus. Literature on the Anarchist movements' education initiatives has been reviewed in order to understand better their approach to and implementation of revolutionary education. This has had a global perspective and literature on anarchist education in the United States of America, Mexico, Egypt and Spain has been read. Anarchist education theory has assisted to contextualise the cases read and provide an overall framework for understanding the subject.

Whilst much has been written on the trade union movement in South Africa, limited attention has been given to trade union education within the movement. As Ginsburg (1996) argues:

“...dedicated research on Trade Union Education is scarce, even though more has probably been written about education in South Africa than in any other Third World country.”(1996: 1)

As much literature as was possible on the subject of trade union education in South Africa, has been reviewed. As outlined in the introduction, the focus of the literature has been primarily on COSATU and to a lesser extent on the 'emerging trade unions' which led up to the formation of COSATU in 1985. To develop a better contextual understanding literature on the development of the trade union movement itself has also been read.

This paper will use the term 'emerging trade union' to refer to the trade union movement emerging from the 1973 strikes. However, it is important to note that term is contested and this movement, is also referred to as the 'new trade unions' or 'independent trade unions'. In this paper I will use the term 'emerging trade unions' as defined by Ulrich (2007)¹. It should be noted that this is not the only labour movement within South Africa but it is, today, by far the most celebrated and research tradition.

¹ For a detailed and comprehensive discussion on the use of terminology see Ulrich, Nicole. 2007. Only the Workers Can Free the Workers: the origin of the workers' control tradition and the Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Committee (TUACC), 1970-1979. Masters Theses. University of the Witwatersrand. Page 8-9.

2.2 Anarchist Education

Historically, anarchist education with its strong base in the syndicalist union movement, provides an example of education which not only supported and built organisation and propagated the revolutionary aims of the union movement but also focussed very strongly on the emancipation of children, women and men within the working class. In this way anarchist education developed deep and strong links between unions and the working class community. The understanding of education by anarchists as both a weapon of struggle within the union and as a site of struggle, in terms of challenging the oppressive and restrictive nature of education under capitalism raises key questions about South African union education. It echoes some of the early aims and policy claims of COSATU education and also reveals gaps and flaws, particularly more recently, in the policy and practice of education within COSATU.

The term 'revolutionary education' which is used through this paper is based on this approach to education. For the purpose of this paper 'revolutionary education' will be understood to mean education linked to and controlled by the working class through working class organisations, in particular trade unions, which builds political understanding, organisation and the individual both intellectually and in terms of his/her skills with the explicit intention of replacing the existing capitalist social order with a socialist/anarchist society.

A number of case studies were found which discuss different anarchist education initiatives, particularly round the turn of the 20th Century which was the height of both the syndicalist movement globally and education which both supported and emerged from the movement. These case studies assisted to deepen understanding on the principles in practice of anarchist education and also illustrated a number of problems which emerged through the practical implementation of anarchist education across the globe, both in terms of the impact of the political context in which they were established as well as in terms of the strategic mistakes which were made in the process. Significant for the comparison of these cases and South Africa is that, because of Apartheid and its policy of bantu education the conditions described in the case studies in terms of working class access to decent education was almost non-existent other than through the church, education had a strong nationalist (in the case of South Africa – racist nationalism) focus and was of extremely poor quality this is was all mirrored in education for black people in South Africa seventy odd years later.

Rogers (1975) provides a critical look at the Modern School² initiatives which took place in the United States of America (USA) from 1911, primarily instigated by the execution/murder of Francisco Ferrer, a Spanish libertarian educator by the Spanish State. Whilst the paper provides important insights into both Ferrer's life and his practice of libertarian education as well as a very detailed account of the development and demise of the Modern School in the USA. This account highlights a number of problems anarchists faced, not just in America but globally, in particular the ability to find teachers and funding. His analysis however, is limited he presents a rather confusing narrative of the Modern School which lacks an understanding of the purpose of the school and of the different tendencies which existed in the school at the time. In short it fails to provide any political analysis or context but does show the influential nature of education initiatives within the anarchist tradition.

In contrast, Tager (1986) provides much more insight into the political dynamics and context of the Modern School and the role it played in its convergence of two distinct, what he terms strands in anarchist education: the Romantic Libertarian strand which focuses on individual creativity and emancipation and the Communitarian strand which focuses on the liberation of the individual within a social context with strong emphasis on the role of individuals in creating and maintaining a new society. Rather than painting a disorganised, unsystematic narrative, as Rogers (1975) does, Tager examines "the central issues in radical education" (Tager, 1986: 392), he explains the convergence of two different strands and assesses how the Modern School reconciled these in order to develop a school which integrated "Revolutionary politics with personal liberation" (Tager. 1986: 392). In addition Tager (ibid) contextualises the Modern School in both a historical and cultural context and provides a vivid account of the vibrant and dynamic radical education that took place at the Modern School between 1911 and 1915 after which it moved to the Stelton in the country side in an attempt to separate the school from political activities.

Importantly for this study, Tager raises both the benefits and problems that emerged as a result of the convergence of these two strains:

"These years remain the most interesting because only during this period was the school able to integrate revolutionary politics with rebel culture. This was possible because the school's libertarian pedagogy which emphasized freedom and individual creativity was placed in a revolutionary context by the activities of the adult

² Whilst a number of anarchist education programmes used the term modern school, in this paper, where the 'Modern School' is capitalised it is used specifically to refer to the initiative undertaken in New York - USA between 1911 and 1915 and which later moved to the Stelton USA.

movement. Even though tension developed because of this interaction, a unique pedagogical experience occurred which has broad implications for radical education today.” (Tager. *ibid*: 392-393).

For Tager’s the value of this unique pedagogical experience, during what he terms the ‘New York’ years when the school included the creation of an educational centre which provided evening classes to workers, a reading room with radical literature and support for radical movements which met at the school created a space where “Self-exploration was tied not only to individual fulfilment, but also to class politics” (*ibid*: 413). This ultimately led to the decision to move the school away as the more libertarian members felt that the influence of the revolutionary elements was too dangerous for the school (Tager. *Ibid*). However, it was the link between individual development and class struggle which makes anarchist education unique. It is based on the understanding that the development of society is as dependant on peoples individual freedom and development as people are dependent on societies ability to reproduce – the two cannot be separated.

The experience of Anarchist education in Cuba in the early Republic differed in a number of ways to the Modern School in America and as a result different insights emerged. In Shaffers (2003) article, he describes an anarchist education movement linked much more closely with the syndicalist tradition present in the country.

Much like the education of Ferrer in Spain, (Goldman.1917, Rogers.1975 and Tager.1986) education in Cuba in the form of the Rationalist School, was strongly anti-religious in its rejection of the stronghold Catholic education held over the people and in the case of Cuba, anti-Nationalist education which emerged after Cuban independence:

“Anarchists believed that this patriotic education countered socialist working class internationalism whilst stifling free, individual thought in children.” (Shaffer. *Ibid*)

Like in the early years of the Modern School, linkages were made with anarchist activities and social gatherings ‘veladas’³ were used to educate workers and raise funds for the schools (*ibid*). Whilst the Modern School was funded primarily by “wealthy patrons” (Tager.1986:406) in Cuba the schools were funded with fund raising activities linked to the ‘veladas’ and trade unions. This made fundraising difficult but importantly less subject to political flux as the working class contributors, although poorer were more loyal and as part of the struggle did not base their support on political whims and fashion as was partly the

³ Anarchist social gatherings

case with the Modern School . Like the Modern School the Cuban Rationalist Schools experienced problems both with the appointment and retention of teacher but despite this, the Rationalist Schools of Cuba spread widely over the country and it was only with the repression of president Gerardo Machado in 1924 that the movement was crushed (Shaffer. Ibid). Its strong base in the unions and civil society helped it weather many storms and stay true to its principals.

Conflict between different strains of anarchist education as outlined by Tager (1986) in the Modern School are echoed in a different way in the case study by Gorman of the Free Popular University in Egypt (1901) and the study of the Mexican anarchist education initiative. All three have echoes, not only of different strains but the influence of different class positions, which played out in different ways in the different countries. From the cases it is clear that the positioning of anarchist schools in terms of class played a significant role in both their longevity and success, the closer the schools were to the unions and communities the more likely they were to survive. This will be explored further in the findings of this paper.

The Free Popular University of Egypt (Universita` Popolare Libera) (henceforth UPL) was opened on the 26th May 1901 (Gorman. 2005: 303). Gorman's describes how a vibrant radical workers movement was created in Egypt with linkages to Europe but which had as a main focus building solidarity amongst workers - both European immigrants and Egyptian workers. As such it faced a unique challenge at the time but not one dissimilar to the challenge faced in South African unions. He describes an education system, similar to the rest of the world, dominated by nationalism, religion and exclusive to the Bourgeois class.

“it aimed to break free from national and religious frames of reference by offering a programme of free, modern and accessible education for all, and particularly ordinary people.” (Gorman. 2005: 304)

The UPL was “founded by and anarchist nucleus” (ibid: 306) but whilst anarchists had strong representation on the committee which set up and ran the UPL, the UPL was not an exclusively anarchist organisation. Along with diversity in terms of different nationalities:

“There was also considerable diversity in social class. Workers ..., small businessmen ... and various professionals – medical doctors ..., engineers ..., and journalists ...” (Ibid: 307-308)

Gorman's detailed account of how the university worked, its educational focus and its special attempts to encourage women learners provide further insight into anarchist education's commitment to inclusive egalitarian education for all across both gender and racial lines. His

analysis of the FPU and the political problems the anarchists faced, especially due to pressure from the Italian government as one of the anarchist involved in the university had been wanted in Italy for 'subversive' behaviour, contextualises the education initiative well and provides an insightful and telling account of the vision and initial success. It also contextualises well, its fall "into the hands of 'the bourgeoisie and the aristocrats' and how it was turned from 'an institution of education into a place for meetings and hobbies' " (Ibid: 313). This again, despite the political and time differences resonates interestingly with COSATU's experience post 1994 and bourgeois influences from the ANC pushed trade union education in South Africa in a different direction.

The experiences of the Mexican anarchists in their attempts to establish an education strategy had even stronger resonance with South Africa, in terms of class issues. Hart (1978) provides a detailed description of a very vibrant and growing syndicalist movement and the establishment of a workers centre and Rationalist School (Escuela Racionalista) (Hart. 1978: 5). He describes how the syndicalist movement gets caught up in the politicking of the republican Constitutionalist bourgeoisie and drawn into a civil war against the militarist dictator Huerta and the revolutionary Zapatista's in order to defend the Republic which, once victorious, crushes working class resistance both with by force and the cooption of the radical unionists into the government sponsored union CROM (ibid: 18). Whilst obviously there are many differences between the Mexican experience and South Africa, the similarities are significant, in particular the class compromise which takes place in both instances.

What is most surprising about the Mexican experience is the urban rural divide between the working class and the fact that the syndicalists sided with republican Constitutionlists rather than support the rural anarchist struggle under Zapata. Hart explains:

"but urban workers, as proud citizens of Mexico City, considered themselves more sophisticated and modern than the Zapatista campesinaje." (Ibid: 12-13)

Whilst, an analysis of the divisions within the working class is not the focus of this paper and it would be unfair without further analysis to say that this experience has some resonance with South Africa, it is an important development to note especially since there have been, in some circles in civil society, allegations that COSATU represents an elite within the working class of South Africa, given the unemployment rate and urban rural divide – the employed.

All of the initiatives in the case studies share commonalities, immigrant workers from countries like Spain, Italy, Greece and Jewish workers from Europe who played an important

role in the development of anarchist ideologies, syndicalist unions and the linking of the two to the development of anarchist education centres. Education, globally at the time was both controlled by the church or the nationalist bourgeois and generally denied to the broad majority of the working class. As discussed previously they all embodied the underlying principles of anarchist or revolutionary education. Further analysis of the issues which emerged from the case studies, particularly in relation to class and political context, will be picked up in the findings of this paper.

The last example of Anarchist education which was assessed for this paper is that of the Spanish Revolution which took place three decades after the other case studies, in 1936. This example is particularly relevant to an assessment of trade union education in South Africa for a number of rezones which will be dealt with later. In his paper, Looking back after 70 years... Tom Wentzel (2006) describes a situation very different to the examples earlier in the century. In Spain, the Anarcho-syndicalist unions were the largest trade union movement in the country with 1.4 million members. Despite decades of repression, the anarchist had kept their culture and tradition alive and built their organisation through, amongst others a concerted focus on education. For the syndicalists social transformation must be “carried out by the workers themselves, who have the skills to continue the running of industry.”(Wentzel. 2006:no page).

In Spain, unlike the other cases, the unions had to deal with the very real reality of revolution and the new challenges of organising a new society along anarchist lines, which they did. The anarchists were very aware of the importance of skills development in the new society but Wentzel points out that in this very hectic time of revolution with strategic questions as to whether or not to join the Republicans and with the Franco Facists occupying one third of the country, some mistakes were made. In particular, with the expropriating of factories by workers, the union structures took over the function of organising production – this was done democratically but Wentzel raises the question of the existing inequalities in the workforce and argues that the “creation of a new organization [] Job definitions need to be re-thought, power equalized through learning new skills and workers taking over tasks formerly done by "professionals." Ingrained habits of giving and obeying orders need to be broken down. Because the new system inherits differences in skills, education and habits from hierarchical systems of power, there is a danger of expertise and decision-making being re-consolidated into some new hierarchy” (Wentzel: 2006:n/p). With the large tasks at hand it is no wonder that this was overlooked in the short time that the anarchists had but the importance of skills in the process of social transformation is strongly highlighted by Wentzel.

2.3 Anarchist Theory and Pedagogy

Judith Suissa's (2001) paper: 'Anarchism, Utopias and Philosophy of Education provides an important entry point into an understanding of anarchist pedagogy. Whilst she does tend to digress, especially around the issue of human nature, her understanding of both anarchist theory and account of what she terms "experiments in anarchist education" provide an important basis for understanding anarchist education and links with the liberal-analytical and critical pedagogy approach to education.

Suissa (2001: 631-633) provides both an understanding of the differences and similarities anarchist education has with both Marxist and liberal education (this will be visited later in the paper). She highlights the importance of science as a basis of knowledge in both liberal and anarchist education and links between education and propaganda between Marxist and anarchist education. Importantly, she discusses a set of principles/characteristics upon which anarchist education is based including: a vision of society as it should be, anti authoritarianism, anti elitism (similar to Marxist education), rationalist (similar to liberal education), an absence of grades, prizes and punishment, rejection of rigid structures and programmes, links between the school and the community and integral education (skills training). Significantly, what her discussions show, is the breadth of principles which underlie anarchist education which attempt to provide a holistic development of both individuals and society, towards what an ideal society should be.

Unlike Tager (1986), Suissa (2001: 633) makes a clear distinction between anarchist and libertarian education, in her understanding the Modern School in New York would not in the strictest sense, be anarchist, given the individualist strain which influenced it. Her analysis and this distinction, when linked to Tager's paper provides some useful insight into the dynamics of anarchist education and also provides a framework that can be used to understand other types of 'revolutionary' education. In particular, anarchist education differs from Marxist education in its strong anti authoritarian focus, the importance it places on the individual's role in emancipation both of him/herself and of society and the importance of education that does not just develop a political cadre but that develops critically thinking, skilled individuals who have a strong revolutionary understanding of what an ideal society should look like.

Her conclusion is that:

"A consideration of the anarchist perspective can help us to think differently about the role of visions, dreams and ideals in education. It suggests that perhaps we should think

of education not as a means to an ends, nor as an end in itself, but as one of the many arenas of human relationships, in which the interplay between the vision and the way it is translated into reality is the subject of constant experiment.” (Suissa.2002:644).

This sentiment is an echo of a Spanish Anarchist revolutionary in the movie “Living Utopia” who was a participant in the Spanish revolution. He says:

“There has always been an image of the anarchist wielding a gun. Yes, the gun was used, but mainly anarchism was based on raising people’s awareness through education in order to create what we wanted, a new world” (Gamero.1997)

The ideological basis of Anarchist education is what sets it apart from other ‘revolutionary’ education and in particular raises some key differences between the anarchist approach to education and that of COSATU, particularly after 1994.

Whilst the most illustrative information and particularly an understanding of the pedagogy can be learned from anarchist educational practice, this practice was based on the writings of a number of anarchist theorists, most notably Peter Kropotkin and Mikhail Bakunin. Anarchist education theory is based very strongly on the overall theories of these anarchists and much emphasis is placed on staying true to the doctrine. This being said, anarchist education theory is fairly limited in terms of its reference to education and whilst the underlying principles are clear, particularly when studying anarchist education in practice, there is no one theorist who outlines the principles.

The core feature, of both anarchist and libertarian theory is “the absence of authority or government” (Guerin,1970:11). For this paper a distinction will be made between libertarian in the Tolstoy tradition and anarchist theory in the communitarian or syndicalist tradition as Tager (1986) does in his paper and as Suissa (2002) elaborates. The anarchist theorists, who formed the basis of all but the Modern Schools pedagogy⁴ as these theorists were concerned with political (social and economic) revolution.

For Bakunin, “complete emancipation” for the working class was not possible for the working class while education was inferior and inaccessible (Bakunin.1869:no page number). In turn denial of access to education is a key feature of the exclusion, repression and exploitation of the working class in capitalist society. It is used by both the bourgeois and the state as a

⁴ The Modern School was influenced by theses theorists but also influenced very strongly by Tolstoy’s pedagogy – see Tager *ibid*.

means “of deceiving and dividing the masses of the people and keeping them allays in a salutary ignorance lest they ever become able, by helping one another and pooling their efforts, to conjure up a power capable of overturning States” (Ibid). Education in capitalist society is a tool of oppression and must be used in ways that ensure equal access to good education transforming it into a tool for liberation – and is thus a key component of the revolution - “that in destroying the social order which turns it [education/science] into the preserve of one or of several classes, we must lay claim to it as the common inheritance of all the world.” (ibid). This understanding of education as a site of class struggle is an important one when analysing the role of education in revolution and points to the importance of engaging with it in a strategic manner.

The understanding of education and the control of education as an exclusionary, repressive and exploitative practice by the capitalist class is a key feature of most trade union’s and particularly revolutionary trade unions across the globe. This understanding is very clear in COSATU’s approach to education and will be discussed further later in the paper.

This basis, education as a site of struggle, is carried through the ideas of anarchist theorists and educational practitioners. Kropotkin (1890) takes this basis further in his pamphlet ‘Brain Work and Manual Work’. Where he discusses the deprivation of workers from education and how this is worsening as manual work and ‘scientific work’ become increasingly separated. He argues that the outcry for technical education, at the time of his writing, is the result of “The worker whose task has been specialised by the permanent division of labour has lost the intellectual interest in his labour” and that as a result, “three generations *have* invented; now they cease to do so” (Kropotkin. 1980: 3 - authors emphasis).

He talks of an educational experiment at the Moscow Technical school which combines knowledge and handicraft – what he terms ‘education integral’ or combined education. This according to Kropotkin would end the classist distinction between ‘brain work and manual labour’ creating a classless society of people who are invested in the work they choose to do and have an in-depth understanding of both the knowledge behind the work and the practical skills to carry out the production that the work requires.

But this would not be enough, because the humanitarian education of people is also important in order to ensure we are all able to play a conscious, productive role in society and feel our “heart at unison with the rest of humanity” (ibid:9). Kropotkin (1890) is under no illusion that such combined education will be possible, in a capitalist society, combined education would be revolutionary education which prepared everyone in society for a life of thought, production and community by focussing on scientific knowledge, skills training and

humanitarian education. For Kropotkin true revolutionary education is education, which develops the individual, enhances his/her creativity but also provides the individual with the necessary skills to reproduce and participate in society in a meaningful and equal way. Education has to be linked with the broader political aims of the revolution in a strategic way, which clearly challenges and ultimately 'smashes' the current education status quo.

The benefit of studying anarchist education is that it has been taken from theory, put into practice and achieved revolution or the mass mobilisation of a revolutionary movement and also failed to do either. It provides insight into what did work, what can be achieved and what mistakes should be avoided. It provides a framework of analysis upon which 'revolutionary education' can be assessed. With this understanding, literature on the South African Labour movement and trade union education was read and engaged.

Whilst it cannot be said that trade union education in South Africa was in any way anarchist there are, particularly pre-1994 some similarities. The linking of union education to community struggle and the importance of trade union and community education as a means of liberation, access to a resource traditionally the preserve of the elite in society as well as a reaction to the reactionary education which did exist and the aims of the movement of creating a new, socialist society present important parallels. These parallels provide a basis upon which a critical assessment, from an anarchist perspective, can be based.

2.4 South African Trade Union Movement and Trade Union Education

Whilst there has been more written on trade union education in South Africa since Ginsburg (1996) wrote his paper, literature is still relatively limited. This paper owes a huge debt to Linda Coopers work on the subject which has managed to fill a vast gap in our understanding of trade union education, especially in the post Apartheid era.

In order to understand trade union education in South Africa and COSATU in particular an understanding of the development of the 'emerging' trade unions is important. This paper will use the term 'emerging trade union' to refer to the trade union movement emerging from the 1973 strikes. However, it is important to note that term is contested and this movement is also referred to as the 'new trade unions' or 'independent trade unions'. In this paper when referring to trade unions in South Africa I am referring to 'emerging trade unions' as defined

by Ulrich (2007)⁵. It should be noted that this is not the only labour movement within South Africa but it is, today, by far the most celebrated and research tradition.

Ulrich, Ginsberg, Cooper, Andrews, Grossman and Vally provide the basis for understanding the development of the 'emerging' unions and the education traditions, which developed with them. Whilst the focus of this paper is not to provide an historical background there are a number of important issues which emerge and which are important for understanding trade union education in COSATU. Education has played a central role in South African Trade unions, both as a tool for organising and a tool for emancipation.

Ginsberg concludes "that trade union education does not only take place in classrooms; rather the union as a whole is an important "learning site" (Ginsberg. 1996:2). This contention is supported by Ulrich, Cooper, Cooper et al.

Tracing the history of the emerging unions shows the importance of the role of education in building organisation and empowering workers to challenge both the appalling conditions under which they worked and the exploitative system of Apartheid capitalism. Whilst it is not the purpose of this paper to trace in detail the evolution of the emerging unions education, this has been done, it would be amiss not to touch briefly on the subject and add some context to education in unions. Cooper et al, Cooper and Ginsberg provide detailed backgrounds of the development of education within the emerging unions. A number of themes and areas arise from their work and a brief overview of this follows.

Firstly, that worker education which developed in the emerging unions drew on experience of past trade union struggles, in particular the Industrial Commercial Union ICU in the 1920's, Marxist and Trotskyist schools in the '20's and '30's and the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) in the 1950's (Cooper, Andrews, Grossman and Vally:2002). This learning was transferred from generation to generation:

"Throughout the 1950's and 60's repressive legislation on the one hand, and organisational policies which did not always prioritise the rank and file on the other, meant that workers – black and white – were denied access to information about their own history; about the socialist ideas deeply embedded in that history; and

⁵ For a detailed and comprehensive discussion on the use of terminology see Ulrich, Nicole. 2007. Only the Workers Can Free the Workers: the origin of the workers' control tradition and the Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Committee (TUACC), 1970-1979. Masters Theses. University of the Witwatersrand. Page 8-9.

about the principles and programmes of banned political organisations. To get this information they had to rely on sharing memories, informal discussions and increasingly from the 1970's, their own renewed and resurgent organisation. All of this created deep-rooted traditions of self-reliance and informal collective discussion in the struggle for socially useful knowledge and ideas." (ibid:2)

This changed significantly with the emergence of the emerging union in the 1970's. Whilst more focussed and strategic union education really began to take form in the 1970's there is general consensus between researchers that the classroom was not necessarily the most important or only site of learning in the trade union movement. It could also be argued that these learning sites opened up as a result of the more participatory and shop-floor based focus of the emerging unions which played an important role in broadening the role of the emerging unions in education.

Cooper and Ginsberg in particular highlight the indirect education that took place in the emerging union movement through meetings, cultural activities, newspapers and direct action. Ginsberg (1996) argues that there were three sites of learning: formal, informal and experiential learning. Formal learning took place in the form of structured learning programmes, informal education was acquired through cultural events linked to union activity like plays and poetry and experiential learning occurred from experience of direct action, involvement in strikes, sit ins and participation other union activities including meeting, report-backs etc.

Ginsburg takes the argument further by applying the theory of Cognitive practice, to the emerging unions and COSATU in particular, he argues that social movements are in themselves "learning sites" and "determinates of human knowledge" which challenge existing ideas in society and this translated into new learning processes and the development of new knowledge and new identities (ibid: 18-19).

There is no doubt that the emerging unions were significantly different to their predecessors in terms of their strategic focus on the active participation and development of workers. This led to learning experiences and the development of a critical layer of workers that had not yet been seen in South African Trade Union history. The focus on the empowerment of workers was central to education. Ulrich quotes Pat Horne a union activist in the 1970's "We were talking about national liberation, but we wanted to make sure that national liberation was going to be owned by the workers, run by the workers" (Ulrich.2007:112).

Another key feature of the emerging unions and their education was the role that intellectuals played. Probably the biggest legacy of the intervention by intellectuals was the strong tradition of workers control, which was supported by their education programmes and the experiential learning they gained from participating in movement activities. “Workers control was a product of the ideological and organisational renewal that characterised the 1970s and was initially created by the Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Committee (TUACC) in Natal and, later, the Witwatersrand (Ulrich 2007:viii). Ginsberg goes on to argue that by the 1980’s this strategy supported by the intellectuals had lead to intellectuals being “displaced by union leadership which had developed from the shop floor through experiential learning” (Ginsberg 1996:128).

Whilst the role of intellectuals in the movement is a hotly debated and an extensively researched area this is not the focus of this paper. Ulrich analyses, at length this role, through the establishment of organisations like and the Institute for Industrial Education (IIE) to “extend the educational component of the workers movement” (Ulrich 2007:128). It is enough for the purpose of this paper to note that intellectuals played a significant role in mainstreaming both the principle of workers control and formal education programmes within the labour movement, which supported and were supported by experiential and informal learning. This formal learning focussed on reviving understanding of trade union history, entrenched democratic organisational structure and also brought to the movement a Marxist political analysis, which was reflected in the movements strong socialist beliefs.

In a speech at a SACHED workshop Comrade Thami Mohlomi the Natal Regional Secretary speaks about education from a socialist perspective, he speaks of the need for an alternative to Bantu Education in the context of capitalists “using education to reinforce their ideas of individualism and justify the capitalist system” (Mohlomi, 1987:46). He urges workers to attend education classes as a way of fighting capitalism but also argues that this is a short term measure as the only solution to working class oppression is the seizure of power in order to firmly take control of the education system.

For both the intellectuals and workers, filling the gap left by Bantu education was critical although according to Ulrich (2007), whilst intellectuals wanted to build literacy education and training, union leadership were insistent on education, which focussed on the needs of the organisation. Perhaps because they understood better the role of experiential and informal learning and that strategically the stronger the organisation the more they would be

able to achieve. The need to fill the Bantu education gap and the role of skills education in the struggle was to become increasingly important in the 1990's.

Importantly, trade union education was embedded in the structures of the trade unions with Local and Regional Education Committees and shopstewards driving education, education became an important organisation-building tool. Siyalalas⁶ "Built on the experiences and innovations of the shopstewards' movement and strategic intervention of professional intellectuals, these worker-controlled education structures represented a fusion between the best of the union as a social movement and a formal organisation" (Ginsberg 1996: 132).

Cooper et al provide, in my opinion, an extensive overview of the development of trade union education in the emerging unions. They raise the issue of the ideological contestation within education arguing that there were three main positions, those who saw the role of education as building broad political consciousness, those who saw it as developing general education of individuals and those who believed education should be embedded in organisational objectives – it was this position which gained dominance (Cooper et al. 2002)

Cooper et al argue that these traditions continued into the 1980's but that new feature emerged as the movement strengthened "Firstly, having won some rights for 'time off' for shop-steward training through recognition agreements, union education became increasingly planned and structured from the early 1980s onwards" (ibid:7) and there was also a move towards the centralisation of the movements education. The second feature was the emergence of a cultural element in the form of worker plays poetry and choirs. There was also a growth of the use of media in the form of union newsletters and other media developed by emerging Labour Service organisations like the History workshop at WITS, the International Labour Research & Information Group (ILRIG) and Labour and Economic Research Committee (LERC). Lastly, "the emergence of new forms of worker self-education, in particular, shop-steward councils and all-night seminars known as "siyalala's"" (ibid: 8).

Another important feature of the union movement was its links with civil society. This was expressed most clearly with the formation of COSTU in 1985, which signalled a shift from FOSATU's focus on organising techniques to a more mass based, political focus as characterised in by the 'community unions' (Ulrich, Cooper et al.)

⁶ all-night seminars – Cooper et al 2002

“During the height of the struggles in the 1980s, the labour movement played an educative role not only for organised workers, but also for many other sections of the black working class. Workers brought to community organisations traditions of participatory democracy, accountability, worker leadership and mass action as well as a critique of capitalism and a growing vision of a transformed socialist society. The development of its vision of worker education was also closely linked with community and school struggles for a ‘People’s Education’.” (Cooper et al.2002:7)

Whilst not without its problems, education in the emerging trade union until the late 1980’s, early 1990’s was vibrant, dynamic, collective in nature and based in union organisation with a strong focus on union needs, union activities and the continuation of the tradition of workers control. In this respect there are many synergies with anarchist education – democratic participation and worker control, an emphasis on education as both a contested area and a tool for liberation as well as playing an educative role within the community. However, in the years leading up to and with the advent of democracy in 1994, trade union education made significant shifts as the role of the movement itself changed in society.

2.5 Changes after Democracy

Ginsberg argues that a shift in focus took place, as COSATU got more involved in policy making. Ginsberg’s limited focus on NUMSA tends to ignore the broader context as he uses NUMSA’s engagement with the Metal and Engineering Training Board around training strategies as a basis for blaming white intellectuals for shifting their focus from union education, to education policy development. He does this despite having argued that intellectuals had been marginalised within the movement and using quotes from shopstewards like... “[the union] was concentrating too much on the political direction and forgetting about expanding the education” (Ginsberg.1996:142) which clearly indicate that the union was shifting its political focus. If intellectuals within the unions had been marginalised, as he argues, they can hardly be held responsible for the political shifts, which took place within unions. In doing so he also undermines the role of worker control tradition and responsibility of the union leadership. In addition, ownership of the movement and indeed the power of the movement lay not with white intellectuals but it lay in the fact that worker control and participation shaped it and made it the dynamic movement it was. Ulrich (2007) argues that worker leaders and educated women workers play a critical role in the development of policy within the movement and in the political shift from resistance unionism to corporatist unionism.

Ginsberg (1996) highlights important trends, which characterised trade union education in this period. He summarises nicely the shift and the consequences it had “The politics of the post-election era subtly undermined the experiential learning which had been the bedrock of trade union education during the years of struggle. Reforms designed to institutionalise labour-management conflict and move dispute resolution away from the shop floor also tended to eliminate important learning processes which underlay the cohesiveness and dynamism of the union in the past.” (ibid:147).

Cooper et al (2002) concur and argue that “the trade union leadership began to shift the vision and role of the labour movement from that of opponent and adversary of capital and the apartheid state, towards a stated goal of “equal partner” with business and government” (ibid:12) and that this shift had two consequences for trade union education. Firstly, a shift in the focus from organisation and mass politicisation to policy, law and staff training. The aims of education increasingly become focussed on capacity building and professionalization of the movement and “education programmes became more directed towards union leadership and full-time staff, with little or no education for the ‘rank and file’” (ibid: 13). Secondly, there was an increasing focus on workplace training as a result of this new partnership with business and businesses concern for increased productivity. This resulted in a shift away from collective learning to emphasis on individual development and career progression. (Cooper.1998)

This move towards the ‘formalisation’ of trade union education was consolidated with the “establishment at the end of 1996 of a new, national trade union education institute, DITSELA (Development Institute for the Training, Support and Education of Labour), which will offer more systematic training programmes with the future possibility of formal accreditation, is illustrative of some of the formalising and professionalising moves being made in trade union education” (Cooper.1998: 7).

Many on the left, including Cooper and Ginsberg argue that this shift has depoliticised union education and resulted in it losing its class identity. Whilst I agree with this general sentiment, I disagree with the argument that a focus on skills education was the result of this loss. The anarchist schools and universities, to a large extent manage to make the linkages between skills development and revolution in a way that COSATU failed to do. This loss was less about the shift in focus of trade union education and more about the loss of the revolution itself as the movement increasingly became co-opted into a corporatist role, this discussion will be continued later in the paper.

2.6 Conclusion

The literature review has undertaken an analysis of anarchist education pedagogy and practice upon which the underlying perspective of this paper is based. It has outlined South African trade union education in the emerging unions, which will be critically assessed from this anarchist perspective and has also begun to build the documentary analysis which forms part of the research methodology to support the findings of the paper.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research methods

Whilst almost always a limitation of any research, time has been a major constraint in terms of the choice of methodology for this paper. Ideally, a comprehensive documentary analysis of education materials, union policy, speeches and analysis of journals like the South African Labour Bulletin would have revealed fascinating shifts and changes in trade union education in South Africa. This, coupled with extensive interviews and focus groups with both workers and unions educators would provide a rich and deep understanding of trade union education in South Africa. However, time, resources and the nature of this paper has not permitted such an in-depth analysis of the subject, this is undoubtedly an area for further research.

In developing this paper a number of different research techniques have been drawn upon, some conventional and some not. Document analysis has formed the base of the paper, it has been used in the literature review and in the findings as important sources of information, particularly in relation to understanding anarchist education as other sources of information are easily not available.

Document analysis, as all research methods has strengths and weaknesses. Whilst documents provide many varying sources from academic papers, books and articles to documentary movies, it is not possible to control or interrogate the information they provide. Information needs to be sifted in order to find information relevant to your work and there is no way of asking or probing the information in a document, as it is static. So whilst documentation was used, it was important for this research to find other sources of primary information in order to paint a more nuanced and detailed picture of trade union education. In particular information on Trade Union education, whilst available in the form of Policy resolutions and other union documentation, do not talk to the politics behind the resolutions themselves or the context in which these resolutions were made, they cannot be read in isolation.

It was also necessary to focus the documentation analysed. Because the focus of the paper is primarily on COSATU post 1994, and because it was looking at trade union education in context, it was decided to use Congress resolutions in order to provide an overview of the Federations education but it was also important to look at Congress resolutions prior to 1994 in order to understand and track any changes which may have occurred. For this reason Congress documentation from the second national Congress in 1987, as well as the 6th

National Congress in (1997), the Special Congress of 1999, 7th(2000), 8th (2003) and 9th (2006) National Congresses were analysed.

For this additional information, interviews were used to add depth and understanding and also to assist with focussing the information available. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants, unfortunately time and other resource constraints did not allow for extensive interviews and whilst a number had been planned only two were conducted – this is a gap which it is hoped the document analysis, literature and my own experience in the trade union movement has assisted in filling. In terms of the purposive sample, people involved in trade union education in South Africa were chosen in order to provide a picture of their experience as union educators, add depth to the documents read on the subject and to get an idea of their perspective and analysis of the changing context of trade union education. Two face to face interviews have been conducted however. Interviewees were also chosen, as much as possible, to represent different pictures or analysis of trade union education.

The interviews were semi-structured and whilst an interview schedule was drawn up (see Appendix A) this was very loosely used as the main purpose of the interview was to focus on peoples experience and personal understanding and interpretation of trade union education. Whilst the schedule acted as a guide to cover the important areas of focus for the research, it was not allowed to limit the interactions between the interviewer and interviewee and it was important to encourage the free flow of thought in the interview.

In addition to this paper being a combination of documents and interviews, it also has a base in subjective experience. This being my own experience as a union educator and as a result another information gathering tool has been implicitly used. This I have chosen to term reflective participant observation as it has been based on my previous experience as a participant in union education. To ignore this aspect would be to ignore the subjective positioning of this paper and the fact that this has impacted on both the research process and the conclusions drawn (O’Leary, 2004).

3.2 *Post-Positivist indicators*

In this respect, the methodology in the paper is based within what O’Leary (2004) would term the “Post-Positivist” paradigm of indicators of good research. It has relied on a number of indicators O’Leary (ibid) provides to ensure the research is sound. In order to ensure the dependability of the research methods have been systematically applied, interviews focussed on the same focus areas and were approached as systematically as possible in terms of semi-structured interviews. Importantly, interviewees were encouraged to give their

opinions, analysis and talk freely and frankly on the subject, anonymity was guaranteed to those requesting it in order to facilitate this process. A broad range of different documents have been used and different perspectives, both documentary and in terms of the interviews on the issues have been included in the research.

Whilst it is understood that multiple truths exist (ibid) this paper has attempted to embrace these truths, in particular in relation to the interview process and use this information to collect a broader, more nuanced understanding of trade union education.

Generallisability of the findings is not the aim of this paper, instead the focus has been on transferability of findings (ibid). The intention has been to add to our understanding of trade union education in South Africa using an anarchist lens to critically assess the role and form of trade union education in COSATU. The findings provide a new perspective from which it would be possible to infer lessons and transfer understandings to the trade union movement in South Africa and other union movements globally.

Importantly for the validity of the research, the possibly of reproducing the research would be extremely difficult because the context within which the research has taken place will shift and change and in particular, because this research has been strongly influenced by my personal experience. In order to compensate for this weakness efforts have been made to ensure the auditability (ibid) of this research, the explanation of the methods used and how these have supported the findings of the research play an important role in this regard.

4. Findings and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

Education plays an important role in society and like society different classes have distinct relationships with, experience and use of education. The bourgeois class uses education to maintain its elitist privilege and to reinforce the norms and ideologies of the class through society. For the working class in capitalist society education has played the role of exclusion, disempowerment and propaganda. Alternative education, particularly in the trade union movement, as this has been the most far reaching alternative for the working class, has played another more empowering role; that of providing access to knowledge the working class has always been denied as well as access to ideologies which purport an alternative to the capitalist system itself. For this reason, the role of education in working class struggle has played a central role in revolutionary organisation and strategy both within the union and in broader society. Trade Union education has functioned as the engine of alternative information, the heart of alternative pedagogy and the centre of education for the class.

Cooper et al highlight this in the South African context:

“Worker education under apartheid, as in other oppressive and exploitative contexts, has necessarily been about struggle: the struggle of black and women workers for access to skills and knowledge denied to them by a gender and racial division of labour; the struggle of all workers to have their knowledge and experiential learning affirmed, recognised and respected; and to be able to develop their talents to serve working class interests and social needs, rather than profit for capital.” (Cooper et al. 2002:1)

It is however critical to any analysis of trade union education, to distinguish between different traditions. Trade union education is bound to the nature and politics of the organisation in which it operates. For this reason, different trade unions, with different political objectives will perceive the role of education differently and will use education in different ways to achieve their political aims. This is true for Social democratic unions (by far the majority in present day society), socialist unions and syndicalist unions. First and foremost union education functions as propaganda, as a means to reinforce the organisation and further its working class aims, weather reactionary, conformist or revolutionary. For the purpose of this paper, it should be noted that reference to trade unions is not inclusive, the focus of this paper is on trade unions which either espouse socialist, in the case of South Africa or anarchist political positions – revolutionary trade unions.

The focus on skills training, that is on the provision of hard skills

4.2 *An Anarchist critique*

The difficulty with providing an anarchist critique is that whilst there are examples of anarchist education in practice, the only example which took place on a scale similar to that of South Africa is the Spanish Revolution of 1936, whilst there are number of synergies, any comparison would be problematic as the differences particularly in terms the ideological basis which underlay the movement in Spain which was anarchist, whilst that of COSATU is 'socialist'. That coupled with the fact that the other examples took place almost a century earlier make any comparative analysis futile.

This being said, there are a number of lessons to be learned from anarchist education both in terms of its achievements and its failures and it is this that will guide the critique of trade unionism in South Africa. Neither were or are perfect – they are human endeavours, but it is hoped that a critique will deepen our understanding of both the important role trade unions play and should play in our struggle for a new and better society. In order to provide an anarchist critique, it is important to have a clear understanding of anarchist education and in particular its approach to skills development for the working class.

Anarchist education is first and foremost anti-authoritarian and thus anti-state. It is this, which separates anarchism from all other forms of socialism/communism and which separates anarchist education from other forms of working class education. Whilst it is not the intention of this paper to discuss the merits or de-merits of this ideology, it does play an important role in terms of anarchists approach to education. In particular, it entrenches an approach, which relies on the self-delivery and autonomy of revolutionary education.

Whilst funding for these education initiatives was sourced from the class, from trade unions and also from wealthy benefactors, the understanding of education as a significant area of contestation meant that education had to be separate from the state and capitalism if it was to be revolutionary. The importance of the establishment of independent, anarchist based schools which serve the interests of the working class can be seen in the anarchist lead formation of the schools in Cuba, the Modern School in New York, USA, the schools in Spain and Mexico and the UPL in Egypt. Within the anarchist tradition there is no call for the transformation of the schooling system, anarchists set up their own schools.

What is also evident from the examples above, is that once there was a move away from this principle the schools were lost. The Cuban schools, which survived around thirty years, and

the Spanish school, which survived for nine⁷ and later of course the Spanish Revolution itself, were the exception in the cases studied, in that they were 'lost' because of state repression, the other initiatives (all in different ways) fell apart because of varying degrees of collaboration or influence by or from the bourgeoisie. The Modern School with its move away from the revolutionary workers movement in the city, Mexico with the collaboration of the anarchists in the city with the republican government and the Free Popular University of Egypt (UPL) which included in its inception members of the bourgeois classes. Whilst always done in the best faith this move from the principle of autonomy seems to provide openings for problems to arise and also have echoes in the South African context, which will be discussed later.

Very closely linked to the principle of autonomy is that of democracy and worker control. In the definition of revolutionary education the link with working class organisations and worker control, is another important principle. For anarchist education, this link is based on an implicit understanding that the working class organisation is not linked to political organisation or the capitalist political system, that it is owned by the working class. In anarchist history this has been an area of contestation. Syndicalist unions from the International Workers of the World (IWW) the United States of America and the CNT in Spain have entrenched workers participation and control in their unions, admittedly not without much debate and some compromises⁸. It is this and the anti authoritarian principle which separates anarchism from Marxism and other socialist union education. Again however, there are synergies with COSATU which will be left for later discussion.

The importance of the role of education as a tool for organising and building the political understanding of the working class is the third leg upon which revolutionary education stands. This must not however be read out of context, within the syndicalist tradition there is a great suspicion of vanguardist politics and so where the focus on education of politics and organisation are concerned it needs to be understood that this is lead by the working class democratically and not imposed by a vanguard elite. Whilst educators like Ferrer insisted that there was no propaganda in his schools, it would be naive to think that this was the case. So whilst there was a strong emphasis on worker control, it must also be acknowledge

⁷ This comment refers specifically to Ferrer's School, education particular worker education continued in the underground CNT (Spanish Syndicalist Union) until their ultimate defeat at the end of the Spanish Revolution in 1939.

⁸ See Gaylord (no date) for information on the IWW and Wentzel (2006) for more on Spain.

that of course the education took place within a specific political paradigm, with a specific political intention, that intention however must be democratically controlled by workers.

Lastly, the principal of the importance of the development of the individual, entrenches within anarchist education the link between the role of the individual and society. Society will never be truly equal and just if each person in it is not able to play a productive and valued role.

“In the syndicalist view, social transformation required the prior organisation and education of the working class, the development of its skills and self-confidence” (Wentzel: 2006:n/p). This understanding of empowerment is not singular to the anarcho-syndicalist movement but it is this movement alone which links the emancipation and empowerment of workers with a distinct vision of a new society and a strategic aim in terms of the role of education both with regard to empowerment and the reproduction of a new society.

As Ulrich points out “an Anarcho-Syndicalist paradigm, [] maintains that trade unions can and do collapse the political and economic struggles of workers” (Ulrich.2007:6). She later quotes Rudolph Rocker, a leading Anarcho-syndicalist in the first half of the twentieth century: “The focal point of the political struggle lies, then, not in the political parties, but in the economic fighting organisations of the workers. It was the recognition of this which impelled the Anarcho-Syndicalists to centre all their activity on the Socialist education of the masses and on the utilisation of their economic and social power” (Ulrich 2007:29-30).

These concerns are also raised by Tager in his assessment of the Modern School “The contradictions within the libertarian educational philosophy based in Ferrer and Tolstoy and between the school's needs and the movement's activities raised interesting questions for educators concerned with social change” (Tager.1986:411). Whilst he does not speak directly to revolution, the issue of the importance of linking individual empowerment with broader working class struggle is a key question in revolutionary education.

Drawing on the insights of Anarcho-syndicalism, this study will, within the context of education and skills development, highlight some of the problems with separating the economic and political activities of workers and how the political context within which revolution takes place, with a particular focus on South Africa, exacerbates this problem and ultimately undermines the revolutionary potential of working class education.

4.3 Trade union education in South Africa

Trade union education in South Africa has a long and vibrant history particularly within the ‘emerging trade unions’– which began with the 1973 strikes in Durban, took form in FOSATU (1979) and were consolidated in COSATU in 1985. Whilst the tradition of education in trade unions can and has been traced further back to the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) in the 1950’s and even further back to the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) in the 1920’s it becomes a strong focus of the ‘emerging unions’ from the 1970’s on (see Cooper.1998, 2006, Ginsburg.1996 and Ulrich.2007).

Ginsberg, Cooper et al describe education within the emerging unions illustrating the vibrant, community based education which took place before 1994. In particular, the many ways in which education happened both in formal workshops and importantly in less formal ways. How this education both built organisation and developed an active and skilled working class. The transfer of skills in particular, taking place both in terms of literacy programmes as well as informal learning in meetings, cultural activities and participation in struggle.

An important part of education was its ideological focus. “Within COSATU, there developed a more self-conscious philosophy of what “worker education” means within the context of the workers’ movement. Worker education had to be developed as a socialist alternative to Bantu Education and capitalist education” (Cooper et al.2002:20). This education framework carried a particularly revolutionary flavour and played a significant role in the anti-apartheid struggle.

So what happened to trade union education, what moved it from its revolutionary path, if indeed it was ever really on one? COSATU in its Special National Congress Resolutions of 1999 begins to raise the problems it was experiencing in terms of education post 1994. In the Resolution entitled Organisational Renewal of COSATU point 6 states: “We are extremely sceptical about the federation’s capacity to deliver on the proposals for education and training, gender, campaigns etc.” This is raised in the context of concerns over general delivery and the loss of experienced unionists to government.

Further on in the Special Congress Resolutions (COSATU.1999) under heading 3. The need for Restructuring the federation notes the following:

1. There are definite problems within some departments at COSATU Head Office.
There is a lack of focus caused by a lack of clarity about the role of the departments

and individual employed in the departments. Some departments seem to have a very unclear remit.

2. Whilst comrades are doing good work in the Education Department, particularly in the election campaign, the strategic role they are playing is very unclear. This is not surprising given the growth in the programmes delivered by Ditsela, but there is a need to clarify the role of the department and for there to be work-plans that address organisational needs and priorities. It is noticeable that the EXCO proposals to congress are very wide-ranging and ambitious. NEHAWU is very doubtful that the Education department in its present form would be able to achieve such a wide remit. There is also a need to clarify the role of Ditsela, and the way COSATU develops input into Ditsela policy-making processes must be sharpened up.

These resolutions speak to some of the changes which begin to occur after 1994. Ginsberg (1997) talks of a new focus on policy development as COSATU's focus shifted from that of opposition to the Apartheid state to one of corporatist collaboration in the new, non-racial 'democratic' South African State. This indeed played a significant role in COSATU's strategic engagement with both capitalism and the state. Cooper et al support this contention "There was a strong view that workers' control of their own education was being supplanted by the 'policy workshop/conference approach' of relaying information and decisions from the top down, and that this paralleled a marked shift in the locus of decision-making within the unions from the local to the national level" (Cooper et al.2002:13).

The allocation of state funds to the formation of a Trade Union College – DITSELA illustrates both the change in relationship between the state and broader trade union movement and COSATU's willingness to relinquish at least some of its control of a significant tool in the struggle against capitalism. Whilst the DITSELA board is made up of a majority of COSATU representatives it also includes representatives from FEDUSA the country's more conservative union federation. COSATU's concern over DITSELA's role in trade union education and how COSATU can influence its direction was not unfounded. Indeed there were many debates at the time about this issue and the fact that the training delivered by DITSELA would necessarily have to be less political in nature.

The formation of DITSELA in 1996 was hailed by most in the movement (including myself⁹) as a new dawn for union education. What we did not anticipate, in the post 1994 euphoria, what the consequences this would have for the revolutionary nature of trade union education. In effect, the impact of the formation of DITSELA was to have far reaching consequences, including the distancing of education from the movement and significantly, the ability to link education with the political aims of the movement.

Whilst this problem did not go completely unheeded the National Congress in 2000, along with an expression of an understanding of the changes which had taken place in union education, it is clear that COSATU had internalised the role of DITSELA in the delivery of union education. The Secretariat reported commented on a paper, adopted by the National Education Committee (NEDCOM) “on the role of the education and how education and training will be coordinated between NEDCOM, affiliates, DITSELA and other labour-service institutions and organisations”. The paper effectively divides education responsibilities in the following way: Affiliates would be responsible for foundation courses for shop stewards and for staff training, the Federation (COSATU) would run political education and provide support to affiliates in the form of training materials and DITSELA would “support the federations and deliver higher-level courses, which should be accredited where possible” (COSATU. 2000. Secretariat report).

The 2000 Secretariat Report also talks of collaboration on training with NALEDI¹⁰, the Policy Unit¹¹ and the South African Communist Party (SACP) on various programmes. With the ANC, we collaborated on the elections, ANC training programmes and, with SADTU and NEHAWU, on aspects of education policy”. Signifying an increased move of education away from direct worker control in the unions to outside and sister organisations, including the ANC. Importantly, the report also raises the problem of Affiliates dependence on COSATU for education delivery, signifying a significant lack of education within the unions themselves and one can infer based at the shop floor, particularly in weaker affiliates.

Education tools which were integral to education in the earlier years of COSATU specifically informal and experiential learning Ginsberg (1997) are neither acknowledged in Congress resolutions in the 1990’s and 2000’s nor included in strategies or resolutions. In addition, whilst culture had formed and important part of the movement in the 1980’s and of the

⁹ I was a board member of DITSELA in 1998

¹⁰ The COSATU established research union National Labour Economic Development Institute (NALEDI).

¹¹ Unit in COSATU responsible for the development of Policy positions to feed into National policy processes.

informal learning process, no resolutions have been past on this in the last two decades on culture.

These changes in the form and structure of delivery as discussed above were preceded by a change to the constitution in the 6th National Congress (1997) which signified the centralisation and diminishing of worker control within the Federation. The 6th National Congress agreed to amend clause 7.1.8, 7.1.9 and 7.1.10 which stipulated that the Education Secretary, Organising Secretary and Administrative Secretary be appointed by the Central Executive Committee (CEC). This was changed so that these positions would be filled according to normal employment procedure, by the General Secretary and his executive. This centralisation also had significant impact on the status of those appointed to these positions and their relationship with the democratic structures of the organisation which as a result of this change, became one step removed.

For education this increasing separation from organisation and working class culture illustrates both a lack of appreciation of the role education plays in organisation as well as, if not consciously, a move away from a real commitment to both worker participation, the liberation of the working class and the transformation of society from capitalist to socialist. The previous quote from Cooper et al, support this contention too, they go on to say; “During the 1990s, union education programmes became more directed towards union leadership and full-time staff, with little or no education for the ‘rank and file’”(Cooper et al:13).

The focus of Education also shifted towards legislative training on the new laws which were being promulgated by the ANC government in the mid 1990’s. Funding for this training came from government and the COSATU budget but there was no funding for regional/provincial education, this is still the case in COSATU today. Despite calls in Congress after Congress the resolution for 10% of workers subscriptions to be dedicated to union education has never been implemented (Interview:2).

So within all this, where is skills training? COSATU played a leading role in the development of the ‘New’ South Africa’s¹² Skills acts. The formation of the Participatory Research Project, which later became the Participatory Research Unit within COSATU after 1994 lead the process of the participatory development of inputs from labour into development of the acts. This process, whilst including the participation of representatives from COSATU’s affiliates, had limited linkages to the organisation, it was almost a parallel process and once the Acts

¹² South Africa post-1994

were passed, skills became the domain of the Sector Education Training Authorities which the acts established.

As Cooper argues, skills increasingly became about personal progression, the issue of skills development becomes increasingly less about the emancipation of the class and more about how to replace the skills gap left by outgoing unionists who were moving from the unions into either government or business. The movement itself seemed to forget that these skills had been developed in the unions themselves and increasingly looked towards government and other institutions to support skills development within a more formal training context.

Within DITSELA, for many years, there was a debate and in fact resistance to the issue of skills training and the accreditation of trade union education. The debate produced camps within the labour movement around the issue of skills and serious delays in roll out of education. COSATU was pushing for accreditation, a demand based, very strongly in calls from the shop floor and a legitimate desire by workers to have their skills recognised. Those arguing against skills accreditation were arguing that accreditation would remove the revolutionary focus of the movement and undermine the important informal and experiential learning which Ginsberg identifies from the movement. For Ginsberg the changes in trade union education in NUMSA placed at risk “the whole process of cognitive praxis in trade union education through which the labour movement has historically kept its dynamism alive” (Ginsberg. 1997:148). Whilst this is true, this limited focus on the issue of skills, particularly from within DITSELA detracted from the actual issue – the movement of education both skills and political from within the unions and COSATU itself.

Cooper also argues that the engagement of the trade union movement in workplace education issues “has resulted in the beginnings of a dissolution of boundaries between worker education on the one hand, and workplace training on the other, with the notion of worker education being depoliticised and losing its distinct class identity” (Cooper et al:14). It is at this point that the paper disagrees. For Cooper and many other activists in the movement, skills education is something that is reserved for the development of Capital. It is not viewed as it is in the syndicalist movement as part of a broader strategy to transform society. In an interview with Linda Cooper, she talked about how she had been running a workshop with workers and had been discussing the problems with accreditation, after the workshop she said that a worker came up to her and asked her what qualifications she had. She said that this had a big impact on her as she has had the opportunity to further her education, whilst most workers have not. It is for this reason, the right of everyone to have access to education and training that will assist them to play a meaningful role in society,

that skills training was an important focus in the trade union movement and rightly so. The problem with skills in revolution is that once the movement loses its revolutionary focus so too does its education.

The struggle for socialism becomes nothing but empty phrases about something that will happen, somehow in the future and is increasingly replaced by rhetoric adopted from the Alliance partners. This can be seen very clearly in another 2000 resolution, Ironically entitled: Taking the NDR forward and laying the foundations for socialism, which reads:

- “2.3. The NDR also means transforming the economy to meet the needs of the majority and achieve greater equality in income and ownership, through
- a. Land reform, better housing and infrastructure;
 - b. Broad-based skills development;
 - c. A higher social wage by expanding government services;
 - d. Stronger social ownership including through the public sector, nationalisation and co-operatives; and
 - e. Quality jobs for all.”

Skills, in the political rhetoric, become a demand - part of the National Democratic Revolution, under a capitalist system, the focus is no longer on transforming society but trying to ensure equity in income and ownership. Another resolution on Eliminating Corruption from the 2000 congress resolves that:

- “1. Any person applying for a post in government should be assessed on their actual skills, track record and understanding of government policy and commitment to the NDR, and not only their formal qualifications.”

Cooper et al. pick up on this in their article where they refer to an article in the Labour Bulletin in 1992 which, while discussing the move of unionists into government or business quotes a worker leader “as saying that trade unions were not only the best ‘schools of the working class’, but also seemed to be the ‘best sources of trained personnel for everyone else in South Africa’”. (Keet, in Cooper et al. 2002:12)

Whilst important and certainly progressive to acknowledge the skills people had acquired on the job, the focus of calls for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) increasingly becomes based on the bourgeois aspirations of the few, not the empowerment of the class.

When assessed from an anarchist perspective, although rhetoric of the struggle towards socialism still pervades, if read carefully in an increasingly watered down way, within the movement there is little, particularly in terms of education to suggest that this is a goal the movement continues to strive towards. If education is not embedded in a revolutionary movement it has very little chance of playing a role in terms of revolutionary social transformation.

5. Conclusion

Critiques of the New Skills system in South Africa focus on the influence of Globalisation within the South African Economy as the main driver of the adoption of a post-Fordist approach to capitalist production and skills development (Cooper.1998, Allais and Byrne.2002). For this reason the shift towards accredited training was perceived by some in the left as the cause of the undermining of revolutionary education in the trade union movement. Whilst, this is not disputed, what is being disputed is that it was this focus on skills training that resulted in these changes in trade union education. The call for skills was a legitimate working class call, what caused the problem was the actual movements shift away from revolutionary politics and into a corporatist alliance with the state and capital.

This paper has attempted to illustrate firstly, that skills training is not the preserve of capital, skills development has a very important role to play in a society beyond capitalism. The Anarcho-syndicalists were able to both appreciate this role and begin to organise and educate in a way that empowers the working class to run a new society. If not coupled with a vision of a new society and a new and empowered role in that society for the working class, it will necessarily not be revolutionary education. Peter Kropotkin put it best when, discussing the alienation of brain work from manual work under the capitalist system, he said “I do not cherish the illusion that a through reform in education [] will be made as long as the civilised nation, remain under the presently egoistic system of production and consumption. All we can expect, as long as the present conditions last, is to have some microscopical attempts at reforming here and there on a small scale – attempts which necessarily will prove to be far below the expected results” (Kropotkin.1890:9-10).

Secondly, this paper has shown by analysing the shifts and changes in education within COSATU, how the movement itself had changed its focus from struggle for socialism to the adoption, albeit incognito, of a nationalist, social democratic programme by the federation. The role of education within this, necessarily had to change from what was for the most part

revolutionary education to centralised control of a decentralised programme devoid of revolutionary political content and vision.

Appendix A - Unstructured Interview: Participant Information Sheet

For the research paper:

Love, Liberty and Learning: The Problem with Revolution, an Anarchist Perspective of Trade Union Education in COSATU

Before we begin our interview: thank you for taking the time to chat.

This research paper forms part of my honours studies and is for submission to the University of the Witwatersrand Sociology Department. The paper is due in the first two weeks of June 2009 and I will be happy to provide you with a copy. There is a chance that it may also be published on a website.

The purpose of the paper is to study the developments in Trade Union Education in COSATU from an anarchist perspective.

Participation is voluntary and you may discontinue participation at any time.

Anonymity will be respected at all times, if you wish for the interview to be conducted under these circumstances.

The interview will be recorded in notes only.

Broad Interview Questions/Areas

In this interview, the term trade unions refers to South African Trade Unions which have been termed, the new, unions, emerging unions or contemporary unions – more specifically it refers to unions which emerged out of the Durban 1972 strike wave, which later formed FOSATU and eventually COSATU.

How and when did you first get involved in Trade Union Education? Which Union/how?

Political Education

What is the current political content of union education, and what is it intended to achieve?

Is this a change from before 1994?

What is taught in political education HOW and WHY?

Changes in Trade Union Education

What do you think the aim trade union education is at present?

Do you think the aims of trade union education have changed in the last 15 years? If so please discuss.

How are these changes reflected in the content of trade union education?

How are these changes reflected in trade union education pedagogy?

How are these changes reflected in trade union education structure?

Union Education and skills development

How did union education address skills development before 1994?

How have trade unions addressed the issue of skills after 1994?

Do you think skills development is important in Trade Union Education or do you think it should be left to companies and government to develop workers skills? Why?

Trade Union Education and transformation

Would you say that trade union education plays a transformative role in society?

What type of transformation did trade union education create or support before 1994?

What type of transformative role does trade union education play now?

Thank you for your time!

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