

Taking Control of NUM: The Rise of the Communist Faction

THE COMMUNIST CADRE

The ideal type of leadership I now address is closely linked to the type of organisation NUM became as it was increasingly controlled and shaped by Gwede Mantashe, its general secretary from 1998 to 2006. Mantashe was then elected secretary general of the ANC in 2007. This internal reconfiguration is closely related to a changing balance of forces in the union, which started in the early 2000s when, after Kgalema Motlanthe, James Motlatsi left NUM. A former NUM head office employee once described Mantashe to me as a 'hard-core communist', a national leader in the SACP – a party my interlocutor described as the 'most Stalinist in the world', recalling that when Mantashe heard about the coup d'état against Gorbachev, in 1991, he 'was so happy when he arrived at work'. With this in mind, I will first consider the question: what does it mean to be a communist cadre in twenty-first century South Africa? This will then allow me to consider NUM's departure from the type of leadership described earlier, which combined administrative and organisational skills with some form of involvement and proximity with the membership base. In this configuration of the leader–member relationship, the top-down dynamic that structured NUM over time was tempered by mechanisms that allowed the base to retain some degree of worker control, which corrected the union's centralising tendency. In Mantashe's ideal of organisation, 'discipline' became the preferred type of allegiance, which was mechanically imposed on the union in line with the principle of 'democratic centralism'. While Ramaphosa and most of his fellow historical NUM leaders had never been convinced communists,¹ Mantashe was, and under his leadership NUM was brought closer to and almost 'infiltrated' by the SACP at

its top level.² This, along with discipline and a critical reduction in internal debate, endowed NUM leadership with an increasingly legitimist character. The increase in the influence of the SACP on union structures was also experienced politically in the ANC with the rise of Jacob Zuma to power. After years of marginalisation and even victimisation under Thabo Mbeki's two terms as president, those he used to pejoratively label 'ultra left' – as if it were an insult – were back in business.³

When reflecting on the ideal type of the 'communist cadre' in NUM, it is useful to start by portraying 'young communist' leaders, to keep an eye on the type of power relationships produced by age, as well as to see how these communist cadres are being politically nurtured and how they make sense of their own political involvement. Such an involvement in communism remains a choice for a minority in NUM and, more generally, in today's South Africa. Yet being a communist in twenty-first century South Africa is not perceived as old-fashioned, which significantly differs from post-communist Europe, where communist parties have virtually disappeared. Younger and older South African communists are generally more versed in politics and politically more educated than their counterparts outside of the SACP or the YCL. They generally like debating ideas, although this regularly clashes with the ethos of an organisation that tends towards discipline and submission of the younger to the elder.

An initial striking feature in their involvement is that young communists tend to see themselves as 'initiates', as communists in the making rather than as genuine cadres of the Party. Such was the case of Peterson Siyaya, a 26-year-old NUM leader who also belonged to the YCL, the ANC Youth League and the ANC. At a lunch break during the eighth Rustenburg regional conference in 2011, Peterson started a long tirade on the meaning of politics. In a typical Marxist posture, he insisted on the difference between trade unions and political organisations such as the ANC and the SACP. He explained that he was a member of the YCL but did not yet belong to the SACP as he was still a 'student of politics': 'I am not yet a communist,' he insisted. A young female leader, who was seated at our table and had been quite vocal in the plenary session the day before, asked Siyaya if he could spell 'Karl Marx' for her. At that point, the young man started to lecture his fellow comrade with a good dose of paternalism and in mimicry of his elders: 'you have to elevate your mind to the political level'. As another young female delegate at our table started lamenting that she was not going to get anything out of the conference because delegates were just 'fighting', Peterson gave her a taste of political correctness, in the style of South African communists who always strive to avoid any display of internal conflict: 'don't say they were fighting, defend the organisation, don't talk to the media like that'. This idea that one does not become a communist just

by carrying an SACP card, but that one has to mature first, applies not only to the younger generation. After he had told me that he also belonged to the ANC and the SACP, I asked a NUM branch leader in his early forties if he was a communist. He answered:

Yes, I am learning to be because [laughter] you see one needs to have a proper definition of a communist and it is a very big title that one can claim.

Q: And what is the definition for you? GT: Well it's ... I will have to go back to my notes.⁴

A similar answer was given to me by a senior Rustenburg region official: 'I am a member of the Communist Party, not yet a communist [laughter]. My understanding is that a communist is a very well advanced cadre of the revolution. I aspire to be a communist but it requires a lot of commitment and dedication. Communism is the higher stage of the socialist order we aspire to bring on.'⁵

In both cases, while a discourse is clearly being spelled out, there is some irony in the discrepancy between the actual reality of being a communist and a South African context in which the prospects of a communist 'revolution' now seem so distant. This idea of initiation, a transition from one state to another before one can claim to belong to the group, is reminiscent of what Arnold van Gennep once analysed as 'rites of passage'. Just like initiation rites in the transition from teenagehood to adulthood in societies such as the Xhosa, or in secret societies such as the freemasonry, the SACP imposes several steps before one can be co-opted by elders and claim to belong. But not all young communist cadres I met in NUM seemed to have gone through such a process of political maturing; indeed, clause 5.1 of the Party's constitution makes every South African over the age of 16 eligible for membership (before becoming a full member one nonetheless has to be an 'interim member' for one year). Different meanings are also attached to the fact of being a communist in South Africa today. When asked if she would say she was a 'communist', a young NUM leader told me: 'I think that yes, I am a communist because I believe in communist values. Communism in that there should be equal access of people to the wealth of the country, opportunities.'⁶ When asked if he was a communist, another local NUM leader who belonged both to the ANC and the SACP answered:

I am a communist! *Q: What does it mean?* MM: To be a communist it's very nice because we are socialising, talk politics ... we are not hiding anything. Like when I am having a problem, or maybe I am having an issue against another comrade, we must cough it out.⁷

If members of the SACP often seem to have been co-opted after a period of political maturing and education, becoming a member does not always depend on an individual's level of conscientisation.⁸ One NUM regional leader whom I never saw publicly display any sign of adhesion to the communist ideology explained to me that one could sign up for membership for one year or more. He had himself subscribed for five years and told me that when joining one had to pay R25. Afterwards, the monthly subscription ranged from R45 to thousands of rands, since one could decide what amount one wished to give to the Party (unemployed members pay an annual membership fee of R12). He also told me that he had joined the ANC for five years and paid a one-off subscription of R80. The degree of 'political consciousness' that one is usually required to possess before joining the SACP is thus doubled by a higher subscription fee that further reinforces the Party's specificity as a relatively elitist structure of cadres who claim to be the vanguard of the revolution. As opposed to the SACP, the ANC, in which subscription starts at R1, has always strived to be a mass party and, when this book was written, it claimed over one million members, almost ten times more than the former.⁹

There is no uniform way to be a communist cadre in South Africa's NUM and in the trade union movement. For some, such as shaft steward Bhongo Mvimvi, belonging to the SACP meant having an understanding of 'politics' and being 'between the two groups of people, the rich and the poor. I'll regard the demands if maybe the poor demand something from the rich people, the rich people will refuse ... And also the issue of discrimination it is also politics to me. Also the issue of the economy, land.'¹⁰ Belonging to the SACP for unionists was therefore also seen as being part of the class struggle. Another way to be a communist while leading in NUM was put forward to me by an Impala shaft steward who was very critical of the SACP and the ANC:

Q: Do you belong to another organisation? TM: Hence I said you know Karl Marx, I am a communist, I have a political organisation, which is not recognised but it's a leftist communist organisation in South Africa. We used to call ourselves Bolsheviks, now it's called Revolutionary Marxist Group. It is in Brazil and the USA as well. *Q: What does it mean for you to be a communist today in South Africa?* TM: For me as a communist in South Africa it's helping a lot, the decisions ... prior to 1994, we had a belief that ... pre-1994 we had programmes that would elevate black people primarily because they were the oppressed people during the apartheid era and giving them land, I mean nationalise some of the industries in South Africa. But unfortunately it did not happen; a new policy was introduced, [which included] privati-

sations. Currently we are fighting with an organisation that is in power ... which is implementing capitalist policy, the ANC. It has moved right. At that stage workers are not represented. Now South Africa is the biggest country in terms of disparities. Q: *Do you also belong to the SACP?* TM: We don't believe in the SACP because SACP has adopted a philosophy of Stalin [the Revolutionary Marxist Group is a Trotskyist organisation] ... SACP is in Tripartite Alliance with the ANC. We cannot be Tripartite Alliance with a capitalist organisation. They advocated for Nedlac [the National Economic Development and Labour Council]; it is not working for us. They are pseudo communists; they become communists when it suits them. The current general secretary of the SACP is now a minister and an MP [member of Parliament]; he is given all these benefits which workers don't get.¹¹

As I mentioned earlier, Buhlungu distinguishes between 'ideological unionists' and 'career trade unionists'. On the one hand, the former would be more 'political', 'collectivist', attached to the tradition of 'worker control', willing to 'achieve socialism' and, from the point of view of organisational modernisation, 'ambivalent' insofar as they would tend both towards 'minimalism' and some degree of 'professionalism to achieve efficiency'. On the other hand, 'career unionists' would be willing 'to make unionism a lifetime career', be 'apolitical' and 'technocratic', 'reformist' and organisationally 'bureaucratic' while leaving decisions to professional 'experts' and 'top leaders'.¹² This typology is problematic, as I argued earlier, since the frontier between these two types is highly porous and because a convinced communist such as Gwede Mantashe perfectly fits the two: he led a successful trade union and political career, is committed to socialism and worked hard to build a bureaucratic NUM.

Mantashe started his career in the gold industry as an Anglo American Western Deep recreation officer before he was fired in 1975. He was then employed at Prieska Copper Mines as a welfare officer, where he worked for seven years before joining Matla Coal and NUM in 1983. With others, he recruited 400 members or 80 per cent of the workforce and became a branch chairperson in Matla. From there Mantashe rose to the leadership of NUM's Witbank region: 'I became the Witbank regional secretary – in NUM secretaries are workers'. His insistence on having NUM led by worker-leaders is an important aspect to bear in mind, a position on which Mantashe always proved inflexible. Mantashe never stopped rising through the ranks: he became Cosatu's Highveld regional chairperson and, after leaving Matla in 1988, was employed by NUM as an organiser until he was appointed a regional coordinator in 1993. In 1994 he was elected as Kgalema Motlanthe's assistant general secretary. He became general secretary in 1998, a position he left in

2006 only to become the ANC's secretary general.¹³ Based on his career trajectory one can question whether to be a 'worker' in the words of Mantashe actually means 'working' or 'having been a worker'. Since 1988, he has himself de facto become a professional unionist and a career politician. In the last NUM national congress he attended, Mantashe gave the following description of a strong union:

One's biggest excitement, as I step down from being the General Secretary of the union, is that a strong organisation is left behind. A strong leadership permeates the organisation, coupled with a strong team of functionaries that provides a professional support to our leadership. We have built a strong and healthy asset base ... We must also acknowledge that we are leaving behind a highly contested organisation, and central to this contestation is the desire to access this healthy resource base.¹⁴

Mantashe – an ideal communist cadre – may be committed to achieving socialism but this did not prevent him from embracing and advancing ties between the worlds of unionism and the mining business. In 1995, he was appointed to the board of directors of JSE-listed chrome producer Samancor. This was no random choice since, at the time, such a move of a trade unionist onto the board of a company was not yet the norm in South Africa or in Cosatu (Numsa, who also represented workers at Samancor, decided not to join its board of directors). At the time, Mantashe justified his move by arguing that it was marking a shift in industrial relations from a 'confrontation' to 'meaningful influence' and to 'worker involvement in decision-making from the time a change is identified – to be part of developing a strategy and not only being called upon at the implementation stage'.¹⁵ The idea was to move towards 'co-determination', which gives some insight into how Mantashe was also embracing orientations usually associated with social democracy.

It is impossible to know precisely how many NUM leaders also belong to the SACP. At a Carletonville regional committee meeting I attended in 2011, the regional chairperson asked his comrades who had attended the recent SACP regional conference. Three-quarters out of about thirty participants raised their hands and he told them 'being a communist is tangible comrades'. Later on that day it was recalled that a 2009 NUM resolution states: 'Eligibility for election in a Shop steward's position and office bearer at all levels of the union **has political obligations** and therefore any nominee for elections should be a **member of the ANC and SACP or accept to join** after successful election.'¹⁶ Being a communist cadre in a trade union in twenty-first century South Africa therefore means being

politicised and politically involved. This also often goes hand in hand with the pursuit of a career in unions and/or in political organisations, based on the organisational skills, degree of political acumen and administrative capacity characteristic of South African communists.

HOW CONSCIOUSNESS RULES OVER UNCONSCIOUSNESS

When I asked him about the ideology of NUM, Mercy Sekano, executive director of the Elijah Barayi Memorial Training Centre, answered straightforwardly: 'We are very clear: we are socialists.'¹⁷ The NUM general secretary's answer was as unambiguous:

Look, we are a left-thinking union, we embrace Marxist theory, we fully understand that trade unions are formative in character, we back the SACP and we also support the ANC which is a left-lining organisation as well. Q: *Would NUM be closer to the SACP or the ANC?* We are close to both but in terms of the final destination we are much closer to the SACP than the ANC.¹⁸

NUM's socialist ideology, as imposed on the organisation by its leadership, is spread via what Antonio Gramsci famously identified throughout his *Prison Notebooks* (and especially in the twelfth) as 'organic intellectuals'. 'Intellectual' here refers to the social function of an individual rather than to one's particular intellectual capacity. In his own interpretation of the term, Gramsci indeed considered that 'all men are intellectuals' and he did not distinguish between manual or intellectual work. In Gramsci's mind, the importance of intellectuals lies in the part they play in diffusing 'hegemony'. 'Organic intellectuals' are 'organically' linked to a dominant or rising social class to which they belong ('traditional intellectuals' are considered the opposite and identified with a formerly dominant class). Gramsci often uses 'intellectual' and 'leader' as synonyms and all the members of a party are eventually, for him, 'intellectuals'. He decisively linked the 'cultural' function of intellectuals to their 'technical' skills, which, in the complexity of the modern world, had become intertwined (he referred to the 'social democratic-bureaucratic system'). While lamenting this evolution, he nonetheless insisted that the organic intellectuals of the working class had to acquire at least the basics of the 'technical general knowledge' needed to exercise command in a capitalist society. Gramsci concluded that

the mode of being of the new intellectual ... consists of an active involvement in practical life, as builder, organiser, 'permanent persuader,' because he is not just an orator – and goes beyond the abstract mathematical mind; based on techno-work, the intellectual accesses the techno-science and the humanistic and historical conception without which one remains a 'specialist' and does not become a 'leader' (specialist + politician).¹⁹

This last quote shows that Gramsci had isolated one crucial social trend in the rise of organisational expertise, which decisively brings together the techniques of administration I described in Part I with the political skills I am referring to here.

The role of white intellectuals (who were not organic intellectuals from the working class) in the birth and development of the independent trade union movement was at the heart of a controversy between Sakhela Buhlungu and Johann Maree.²⁰ This issue of the contribution of intellectuals to the trade union movement was also addressed when organic intellectuals left the unions en masse, in 1994, to be deployed to Parliament or government in the aftermath of South Africa's first democratic election. In a debate with Mike Murphy, a white student activist who became part of the union movement before he was exiled, Jabu Gwala, the general secretary of the Southern African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union (Sactwu), who started work as a 'garden boy' before he became a textile worker and rose through union ranks, foresaw a 'decline' in the union movement after the departure of 'intellectuals' to Parliament:

Look at my situation: As General Secretary I have now to take on tasks previously done by intellectuals (eg lawyers) as to what to do, by exercising my discretion across a range of factors: If a course of action is taken, will the union gain or lose, will it establish a precedent, will it undermine the relationship with the employer? The professional intellectuals I instruct do not have to exercise the same discretion, and they can disagree with me on the course of action I recommend.

Picking up on the word 'professional', Mike Murphy averred:

In my view the key intellectual capacity we are talking about here, is the ability to see the big picture, to weigh up a broad range of factors, and to plan and strategise from there. Although it *helps* to have gone to university and to have picked up technical skills (accounting, law, etc), it is not essential. Unions can hire people with these skills, and obviously it will help you to

supervise them if you have these skills yourself, but it is not essential. What is essential in my view is a practice, gained through experience, of thinking broadly and systematically about matters, weighing pros and cons, and making rational decisions as a consequence. But if you have worked in a team that *follows* this practice, then you *become* an ‘intellectual’ (in my sense of the word) over time.²¹

This issue of growing intellectuals–leaders as opposed to hiring professionals was partly solved in NUM through what I will later refer to as the ‘2004 coup’. Communist leaders and organic working-class intellectuals have now taken the lead in the union, as embodied by the examples of Gwede Mantashe and Madoda Sambatha. Mantashe is a self-made organic intellectual, a former mine-surface worker who became a top leader in NUM and in the ANC. The links between NUM and the Wits-based SWOP research institute were deepened when he became a sociology student and worked with the academics who had conducted surveys for the union. In 2008, Mantashe graduated from Wits with a Master of Arts. Madoda Sambatha, head of the NUM parliamentary pillar and provincial secretary of the SACP in the North West, described his background as follows:

I got employed in 1996 in a mine, underground, as a general worker at AngloGold Ashanti Mponeng mine in Carletonville. I worked there until 1997 when I became a NUM full-time shaft steward, then a branch secretary, then education deputy secretary in the region in 1997. I was already a branch secretary of the ANC from 1996 to 1999 and then in 1999 I was released during the local government election to go and stand as ANC local counsellor. I served from 2000 to 2005. I then became employed by NUM in 2006 as national educator, then regional coordinator and now pillar head.

Sambatha was very clear on the role of NUM and the SACP in national politics:

Q: Why did you insist on the fact that NUM seems to be a good school for training cadres? MS: The history would prove me correct. First ANC conference in the country in 1991, Cyril [Ramaphosa] was elected as [ANC] secretary general. When he left in 1997, Kgalema Motlanthe was elected as well. When the latter left in 2007 Mantashe was elected as secretary general of the ANC. It may also be one element while some individuals particularly led by the president of the ANC Youth League are very angry with the fact that comrade Gwede Mantashe is the secretary general of the ANC. It is not purely on

the basis of inefficiency, he has never been inefficient even in the ANC. He is the best secretary general that the ANC has ever had in this period, but he is the most contested one by the Youth League. You have never heard in any organisation a person told that three years before the end of the term that we are going to remove you ... *Q: And why is it so?* MS: It is not as they say because he is the national chair of the SACP: they want to use the office of the secretary general as a distribution agent for tenders. And it is difficult for them to have that access to the current secretary general.²²

Madoda Sambatha became a prime communist ideologue in NUM or, in other words, a working-class intellectual. In many meetings I attended, he was called in to speak to delegates and, almost like a preacher, to give them a lesson in ideology with a view to disciplining them. This was clear, for instance, in the 2011 Rustenburg regional conference, when he gave a speech in the name of the SACP. The situation there was tense because of stiff competition between two camps aiming at the regional leadership. National leaders clearly showed they wanted the outgoing faction to win the election and the main incoming contender, Richard Mahoha, who was running for the regional chairmanship, was regularly chastised for being divisive. Sambatha told delegates that they were not 'communists' since their conference was not 'ideological'. Such a view seems to suggest that ideology requires the kind of debate that excludes contradictions and the discussion of opposing views. Mahoha was clearly targeted: 'The problem is all of you think you have a right to stand based on the constitution. It is a right given by members, it is a privilege ... Leadership should be based on continuity and stability.' Taking the example of controversial ANC leader Supra Mahumapelo who had successfully come back after having been expelled from the union,²³ Sambatha recalled, threatening: 'In the communist party we don't charge you we expel you without a hearing.'

One key characteristic of communist intellectuals and leaders in NUM is that they usually belong to a small elite whose domination originates not only in their capacity as administrator but also in their mastery of a quasi-esoteric form of knowledge, which they use as symbolic power. As soon as one listens and talks to lower levels of leadership, ideological references to socialism are generally quite vague. In a NUM branch committee meeting I attended in 2010, shaft stewards started with a review of the minutes of their previous meeting. On point 12 of the minutes, the local education secretary, a communist, submitted a correction. The minutes stated that there were 'other working class' in other companies and he pointed out that there is only one 'working class'. He looked to me for support – a 'political student' who would, of course, disagree with the existence of several working classes, he

argued. He then went on to discuss the issue of xenophobia (the minutes read, 'Non existence of solidarity leads to this zoophobias' and nobody noted the mistake). Such approximations are common in NUM. One day, as we were having breakfast during the 2011 Rustenburg regional conference, Peterson Siyaya made a remark about the hotel's employees, noting that the bosses seemed to be whites. He was immediately corrected by his elder in communism, Sithethi Mxhasi, who reframed his words in classist terms: 'Those are employees, they are white workers, not stakeholders.' Such a gap between the political culture of top leaders and that of their more ordinary counterparts is often expressed through humour, which also indicates that ideology and reality are two different things in the mind of NUM leaders. However, as I will soon show, this does not preclude the use of an ideology such as symbolic violence. During a NUM political school I attended in 2010, the last day was dedicated to the issue of 'nationalisation.' At some stage, Sambatha, who was teaching that day, introduced the arguments weighing against nationalisation and emphasised that those were arguments that 'as revolutionaries we cannot have.' Later, one participant proudly recalled that the role of the State was to help suppress the bourgeoisie. Madoda Sambatha then answered that if he wished to learn more on that he could just go to www.marxists.org and check Lenin's writing *The State and Revolution*. And he jokingly added that 'my worry if you go on www.marxists.org is that after that you will no longer be willing to vote for the ANC' because what this website says is that the State is a tool of class oppression.

One distinctive feature of the SACP and of communism in NUM is that their structure and ideology are largely elitist. In 1998, 55.6 per cent of NUM members surveyed by SWOP reported that they were active members of political organisations. Among those, 79.4 per cent said they were members of the ANC, as against only 5.6 per cent for the SACP. In 2005, a Carletonville report noted with regard to the building of SACP structures: 'we have taken a number of resolutions in this regard but there is nothing concrete happening. There are no structures in place.'²⁴ This suggests another split between NUM leaders and mineworkers who, as a component of the working class, may be conceived as a 'reference group' by communist cadres in the union, but do not necessarily see themselves as such. While NUM managed to tie workers' identities to the struggle against apartheid embodied in the ANC in the 1980s and 1990s, socialism remained a distant reality for most union members and for a majority of unionists.²⁵ This, of course, is not to say that South African workers did not develop, beyond other forms of identity such as ethnicity or profession, a distinct 'consciousness' based on their shared experience as mineworkers, which they regularly expressed through acts of resistance to exploitation.²⁶ What I wish to emphasise, rather, is the fact that most mineworkers

do not primarily view themselves as part of a 'working class,' a definition that South African communists have applied to them for a long time. From a Marxist point of view, however, the collective mobilisation of mineworkers, and their sustained solidarity in defence of interests that go beyond merely the material demands they put forward, are also illustrative of the durability of class consciousness.²⁷ NUM thus perceives political education as key in developing workers' and cadres' class-consciousness and discipline. In the Rustenburg region 2011 secretariat report, one reads: 'Only members equipped with theory and ideological tools of analysis from a class perspective ... are able to drive the national democratic revolution. This class consciousness can only be cultivated through involvement and participation in SACP structures.'²⁸ Political education in the communist sense is therefore a way not only to train people as part of NUM's commitment to education, but also to develop their political consciousness before deploying them to strategic positions. As a union branch leader told me:

We always say we are a political school, where we develop members and then allow them and deploy them to go outside and service the entire community. Get a conscious understanding of the situation of the working class, working people. I am a member of the ANC, the SACP and a district secretary of the SACP in this area.²⁹

Political education is also seen as a remedy for the poor state of many NUM local structures:

There is an emerging trend where members in our respective branches are increasingly unsure of their identity. There's a sense of not knowing who we really are, where we come from, what we stand for ... It is because of this state of affairs that there are fights and dirty campaigns for positions at all levels. Comrades are not concerned about acquiring knowledge and understanding of the organization, but more concerned about being leaders of the organization ... We may sound controversial, but it is sometimes important to ask much questions whether shop steward's induction courses, advance courses, political schools should be a prerequisite for the elections.³⁰

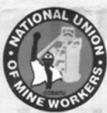
NUM therefore regularly convenes political schools and it often does so jointly with the SACP. Despite statements on the need to educate the membership, participants in political schools are usually limited to a handful of local and regional union leaders. In September 2009, one such school comprised a number of 'cross-cutting

activities' centred on the question of 'The Role of Trade Unions in the Working Class Struggle'. More specifically, it aimed to examine 'how classes are formed', to analyse 'the source of the conflict between the two main classes in society' and to explore the nature, purpose and history of trade unions.³¹ In 2012, Madoda Sambatha and Malesela Maleka produced, respectively for NUM and the SACP, a joint NUM/SACP political education programme. A 320-page volume, it gives an idea of the type of theory proposed for political training, as well as an idea of its elitist dimension. In addition to classical Marxist texts and programmes of action of the ANC and the SACP, they proposed summarised and full versions of writings from Lenin, Stalin, Mick Brooks, Rob Sewell and others on questions such as historical and dialectical materialism, the State and other adaptations of Marxist–Leninist theory to the South African and African contexts.³²

Communist ideology, as conceived in and applied to NUM, turns into an implacable disciplinary machine as soon as it identifies enemies to fight not only outside but also within the organisation. In the latter case, the divide between political friends and foes is masked behind the opposing labels of 'conscious' and 'unconscious' members and leaders. This hint at enmity rarely targets enemies by name but instead refers to them as a vague and unidentified threat, which in practice makes the Schmittian label 'enemy' extendable to any form of internal or external opposition.³³ Faced with rejection by their own members in the platinum belt from 2012 on, NUM leaders did not respond with self-criticism. Rather, they denounced a plot by enemies within and without NUM. Four days into the Marikana massacre, NUM general secretary Frans Baleni stated the following:

There are those dark forces who can mislead our members, make them to believe that they've got extra power to make their life to be different and overloud. An unconscious member is as dangerous as an enemy. We call our members to develop their class consciousness. In this journey without a sharpened class consciousness we will trip and fall.³⁴

In a later radio interview, when questioned on his call for 'decisive' police action during the August 2012 Lonmin strike, Baleni coldly responded: 'Decisive action only means to ask law enforcement and prevention of loss of life. Any loss of life is regrettable, our country, our Constitution does not permit anybody to take lives be it the police or be it individual workers.'³⁵ Figure 9.1 provides a good illustration of how NUM leadership responded to the strike of its former members at Impala (this document was also translated into isiXhosa). This reduction of the strikers and ultimately of Amcu, a registered trade union whose new members had been NUM



RDO STRIKE LEADERS REFUSE TO CO-OPERATE WITH NUM

After NUM brought to an end an illegal six weeks strike at Impala Platinum Mines and it has committed to represent the striking employees to realize their demand. Unfortunately silly games by strike leaders are frustrating the process. Subject to the level of violence introduced to the union and the workplace, it has become difficult to carry the work of the union at Implats. All NUM Offices across Impala operations are closed down because the RDO reps have confiscated office keys. Without access to fax machines, e-mails and telephone calls.

This has hampered the work of the union, cases at the CCMA and the workplace have stalled and people are dismissed.

NUM meetings are consistently disrupted and often not allowed to take place. NUM leaders are undermined, assaulted and injured in mass meetings of the NUM.

While NUM is negotiating with Impala on their behalf, they have displayed a tendency — foreign to NUM and those they claim to represent — of violence, intimidation and false demands.

We have no option but to conclude that the strike leaders are paid agents of a third force and sooner or later it will come up into the open. We took liberty to invite them in negotiation with management and they display caricature like behaviour that management will never listen to.

NUMs view to negotiate for everybody on the salary adjustment issue is rejected by strike leaders. We strongly believe that Implats has reopened negotiation process. NUM maintains that adjustment must benefit every employee working for Impala Mines.

NUM POSITION

- We call for RDOs to appeal to the guys who claim to represent them to return the keys of NUM branch offices to elected NUM Shop Stewards.
- NUM operations be allowed and members continue to enjoy services rendered by the Union such as case representation, conducting accidents inquiries, collective bargaining etc. **The actions of the strike leaders will result in people not being compensated for injuries.**
- We call on our members to defend the NUM and its constitution against forces of darkness, who are geared to destroy the workers parliament and its achievements.
- We call on RDOs strike leaders to stop intimidating and assaulting NUM leaders and members. Workers must be allowed to continue holding their normal mass meetings without fear and intimidation or any form of disruption.
- Memorandum of understanding entered into between NUM and Implats on wage discussion must be observed, and that restoration of stability and normalization should be of priority to the process.

NB: Therefore, until the above have been adhered to, NUM suspends the discussions with immediate effect. Workers across Impala Operations must be aware that we are trying by all means to carry on their mandate despite the current state of anarchy at Impala Mines that has reached a highest stage. The NUM does not and would never condone lawlessness in whatever manner it is exercised.

RDOs should be aware that the work of the NUM is not only salary negotiations. We are responsible to oversee that government legislation that we have fought for is followed by the mine i.e the mining charter, pension benefits, housing, health and safety, education, employee shared schemes.

The RDOs must be aware that their actions are closely monitored by the police and sooner or later they will be prosecuted. The NUM appeals to its members not to participate in any criminal activities, but assist police investigations, as the police are closing on those who killed innocent people at Impala.

Poor demands will never be achieved and management will never give in on poor demands. Don't be fooled.

Figure 9.1: NUM flyer to Impala rock drill operators on strike, 2012

Source: Pamphlet collected by the author at Impala Platinum mine, Phokeng, 26 April 2012. Reproduced with permission.

members, to criminality was also supported by the SACP, whose general secretary, Blade Nzimande, declared: ‘Comrades, we need to distinguish between a trade union and a group of vigilantes. Amcu is not a union and has never been a union. The best way to describe it is a vigilante union.’³⁶ NUM leaders eventually targeted enemies within their own ranks when, referring to Cosatu’s internal divide between supporters of its president and its general secretary, Baleni declared after a union central committee meeting: ‘The CC concurred that the NUM did have enemies within ... Once you eliminate the enemy within, you are left in a stronger position to deal with external forces.’³⁷ As I have shown in this section, internal enemies are generally first disqualified and labelled ‘unconscious’ from a communist perspective, before becoming the target of implacable administrative discipline.

MANTASHE’S IDEAL ORGANISATION: A DISCIPLINED NUM

The combination of elitism and communist infiltration of NUM described in the previous section was ironically illustrated in a union press release responding to alleged accusations by Amcu president Joseph Mathunjwa against NUM president Senzeni Zokwana. According to the press release, the ‘ill-informed and professional liar Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (Amcu) president Joseph Mathunjwa’ had declared that ‘NUM President Senzeni Zokwana serves in an entity called SAPS Bureau’. It is not clear whether Mathunjwa meant that Zokwana was indeed serving the ‘SAPS’ (the South African Police Service) or whether it was a slip of the tongue, but NUM nonetheless decided to correct it thus: ‘NUM President Senzeni Zokwana is the National Chairperson of the South African Communist Party (SACP) and a member of the SACP Politburo. We think that Mr Mathunjwa was referring to the SACP Politburo.’³⁸ Such an exchange provides an ironical reminder that NUM was organised, disciplined and one could indeed say ‘policed’ by its communist cadres under Gwede Mantashe’s secretariat.

The wish to build a disciplined organisation led and organised by a limited pool of leaders is as old as Marxism–Leninism. It lies at the heart of the opposition between Marxists and anarchists, which materialised in the conflict between Karl Marx and Mikhail Bakunin during the First International. While acknowledging the former’s ‘immense’ contribution to socialism, the latter, and other European ‘revolutionary socialists’, had identified and condemned Marx’s political views, which tended towards subjecting the ‘proletarian masses’ to the leadership of the Party hierarchy and to an ‘aristocracy of intelligence’.³⁹ Lenin later confirmed this last trend through insisting on the need for leaders.⁴⁰ This need for leaders with technical skills and

leaders with authority was later reasserted by Stalin, who, in 1934, wrote: ‘we have accumulated a lot of authority, we now need leaders.’ The distinction between cadres and leaders was an important one since cadres’ submission to class-conscious leaders with a political view was conceived as a means to short-circuit the peril of bureaucratisation.⁴¹ Once the leaders are ideologically established as legitimate, the rest of the organisation is expected to be disciplined and unconditionally agree to their vigilant leadership. The organisation – the revolutionary Party or, in the case of a NUM with a communist leadership, the trade union – was seen by Lenin as a new form of centralised organisation adapted to the psychology of factory-trained workers. The Party was conceived as a weapon rather than as an arena for debate, which would have jeopardised its action. In 1905, Lenin hardly accepted the existence of the soviets and he made sure they were controlled by the Party: in the Communist Party, the principle of ‘democratic centralism’, which Rosa Luxemburg condemned as a ‘regime of barracks’, then became the key organisational principle. Through it, leaders were centrally elected and subsequently enjoyed virtually full power over the organisation. This top-down principle is still alive in organisations such as the SACP and NUM, as well as in other South African trade unions and in the ANC. It was inherited from the years of exile in which the SACP had a major influence on the top structures of the liberation movement and when underground activity imposed tight organisational and secret decision-making mechanisms. Democratic centralism implies that upper structures make decisions that are then automatically applied to the lower level in a military-like fashion. In NUM, discipline is thus equated with order and the orderly functioning of the union. The crucial evolution here insofar as the internal functioning of NUM is concerned is that its bureaucratic tendency, which was aimed at building a functional organisation (as discussed in Part I), was intensified by the political understanding of bureaucracy and discipline and its consequent practice under the leadership of Gwede Mantashe.

‘Discipline’ is a well-entrenched organisational principle and practice in NUM. When asked whether he thought his was a disciplined organisation, Baleni explained:

We are a very disciplined organisation of the left. Q: *And how is discipline achieved, what does it mean?* FB: We have priorities; every year we’ve got a Central Committee and then we have a Congress; we’ve got our National Executive Committee so we have common structures to run, it must run very effectively and ... we must interact with our members to an extent that we do a survey every three years.⁴²

Discipline also becomes a verb when the organisation ‘disciplines’ those it deems to have stepped out of line. The NUM constitution is often quoted as the source of discipline in the union, as if the rule of law were a self-fulfilling process. As I will soon show, however, the constitution and its amendment are at the heart of political conflict in the union and it has also become a tool for disciplining reluctant leaders. Organisational discipline and respect for rules are recurring features in structures of the Tripartite Alliance. In 2010, Cosatu’s general secretary, Zwelinzima Vavi, had publicly denounced the erring ways of Zuma’s first presidency, including the presence of allegedly corrupt ministers in the Cabinet. The former NUM general secretary and now ANC secretary general, Gwede Mantashe, had then pressed charges against Vavi on the grounds that he had publicly criticised the president and undermined structures of the Tripartite Alliance. Charges were eventually dropped but, despite his trade union background, Mantashe proved particularly intransigent. Key to understanding his behaviour was the fact that Vavi, who was expelled from Cosatu in 2015, had publicised his views in the media – in violation of the principle according to which organisational matters should be dealt with internally. If Vavi had gone public, however, it was because internalising contention had proven vain and remaining silent would also have meant accepting that secrecy prevailed on an issue relevant to all citizens. I questioned Baleni at the time and his answer provides a taste of how democratic centralism operated in the union and, more generally, in Tripartite Alliance structures:

Any disciplined cadre is bound by a collective decision so if a decision of my NEC [National Executive Committee] is taken, I might not like it but I have to implement that decision and I must not pronounce on that decision. So if you would move with your emotions then you’re not disciplined, you must make a case there before the decision is taken. Once a decision is taken you must implement it.⁴³

Discipline is therefore a difficult issue in an organisation such as NUM: it is supposedly an objective principle, but in practice it is generally enforced by those who have more power against those who have less. Moreover, it sometimes proves difficult to know whether internal tensions are the result of interpersonal relationships or based on political and programmatic divergences. The principle of debate was officially promoted in NUM:

It is always tempting for leaders in a revolutionary organization to characterize all [op]position to their program as acts of counter-revolution. In general

terms, we should be tolerant of members' opposing views, as long as they pay allegiance to the constitution, principle, vision and seek to modify the program of transformation or even express a retrogressive school of thought shared by a given constituency that should be treated as a legitimate expression of the organizational social or political contradiction. One basic principle of collective leadership is cultivating the culture of open debate within an organization ... If we suppress the spirit of open debates within an organization, and then we shall continuously treat each other with the suspicion to an extent that when a group of comrades gather and chat to each other then an immediate conclusion that occupies our mind constitute a clique.⁴⁴

However, in Rustenburg, a notoriously ill-disciplined region where corruption cases are regularly exposed, the secretariat report to the 2008 regional conference warned:

Lack of discipline is a hindrance to the progress of an organization. Comrades elected to constitutional structures who misbehave should be handled in a structured way in accordance with the provisions of our constitution. There are comrades who are engaging in sinister activities pushing their own agendas and we must warn them that their time is running up. They will be isolated and dealt with aggressively.⁴⁵

The problem, as we shall see, lies in the definition of legitimate and illegitimate behaviours and opinions. The definition usually belongs to those in power, with the union administration at hand to enforce their decision. It is important to understand here that the ascent of communists in the NUM and in the Tripartite Alliance structures was based on their unmatched administrative skills, grounded in a mastery of organisational processes. These are then easily turned into political assets. In the course pack distributed to participants in the leadership development course I attended in 2011, Baleni listed what the qualities of a general secretary and his deputy should include:

- Must have the ability to read and write.
- A good political administrator.
- Result orientated, honest and a visionary.

Ability to detect weaknesses and alert the team in order to rise to the challenge.

Must be knowledgeable about the union and educational expectations.

Skilful, patient, passionate, tactful and self-motivated.

Good in compiling records and presenting reports to the appropriate forums and structures.

Must have financial and budget monitoring ability.

Ability to analyse various situations.

Must have a clear political stance, which is not contradictory to the union profile.⁴⁶

In possession of such skills, the 'communist cadre' with political consciousness ends up having full control of the organisation and finds himself in an ideal position to rise through its ranks. This, of course, is not exclusive to NUM: in political or non-political organisations, administrative positions may appear less political than others that are more exposed to public attention. However, the supposedly neutral activity of a bureaucrat – organising – is often turned into a strong foundation for a political career, as illustrated by Mantashe's trajectory. This is discussed, as I have already mentioned, by Weber and Michels in their classical works, and the fact that NUM produces formidable organisers was instrumental in its gaining importance within the ANC and in the Tripartite Alliance. Moreover, in 2004, Gwede Mantashe fostered reform of the NUM constitution, officially to combat bureaucratic tendencies. From a political perspective, however, he wanted to secure the position of his heir. As his successor, he had chosen Frans Baleni, a leader who, just like him, had started work in mining and had experienced all levels and types of responsibility in the union. Baleni was, for instance, in charge of the organising department in 1993 and an extract from his activity report shows how versatile he was at the time, attending meetings in various mining companies, in Eskom, as well as in NUM.⁴⁷ Under Mantashe, the orderly functioning of the organisation was technicised a great deal as shown by his description of his own achievements, which interestingly intertwines political and bureaucratic loyalties:

In the past three years we built and improved the capacity. We have built a secretariat team based on the network of regional secretaries. Our success in building regional secretaries into a secretariat team led to what we wit-

nessed in the regional conferences, that is, these comrades being attacked as 'LOYALISTS' of the General Secretary. We can confidently submit to this congress that we have not built a team of loyalists, but an effective machinery that is hands-on ... Among these regional secretaries we have a team of worker-leaders who have political leadership, administration skills and managerial capacity ... In 2000, we were grappling with the tensions of full-time office-bearers and regional coordinators in the administration of regions. We can confidently submit that we have overcome these tensions. We are now dealing with operational politics. We cleared the operational relationship. The regional chairperson is the political leader of the region. The regional secretary is the operational and administrative leader of the region.⁴⁸

THE '2004 COUP'

A few years before Mantashe stepped down as NUM general secretary to join the ANC leadership, the union was more organised and disciplined than it had ever been. It was not necessarily working better, but Mantashe had turned it into a powerful machine and had successfully managed the transition to a new generation of NUM leaders:

The 2000 National Congress marked the total change of guard ... The Motlatsi/Ramaphosa team ultimately handed over the leadership baton to the second generation of leadership. This in itself posed new challenges, wherein a number of comrades did not believe that there could be a National Union of Mineworkers beyond the original team of leadership. Many, consciously or unconsciously, worked for the new team to fail. There was commitment and drive to succeed. Swimming against the tide translated into determination. We worked hard to put up monuments of success.⁴⁹

The 2003 national congress was the last in which Mantashe was elected to head up NUM's administration. After three terms in office, he considered his re-election to be a vote of confidence:

Our members recognized the hard work of the NEC [National Executive Committee] and re-elected them as they were in the past term. This choice of continuity is good for the organisation. The organisation continues to invest

in developing capacity amongst these national leaders of our organisation. There were few changes that were effected by the regions ... The outcome of the regional conferences is a vote of confidence in the NEC by delegates and representatives of the members.⁵⁰

Approaching retirement as a trade unionist, Mantashe was in control of NUM but in open conflict with his deputy, Archie Palane, who was also re-elected in 2003 and whom he wanted to substitute with his protégé Frans Baleni, then the union's education officer. Although Mantashe claimed 'the union is not a monarch', he carefully planned his own succession, as point 2 of his report to the 2004 special congress, entitled 'succession planning', shows. It is worth quoting this document at length:

We would like to remind the delegates that in 1994 the current General Secretary [Gwede Mantashe], who was the National Organiser at the time, committed himself to dedicating 10 years – after the 1994 elections – to the labour movement. That 10 years ends in 2004. On the strength of the pledge he declined going into parliamentary politics in 1994, 1999 and 2004.

In 1997, as a way of taking this approach forward, we had a detailed debate on what the succession plan of the union would be. We concluded that the union is not a monarch and, therefore, cannot have a list of names indicating successors to the current leader at the time. The best approach, we concurred, would be to invest in a pool of cadreship from which leadership would then emerge. The democratic processes would continue to be used as a tool of electing leadership.

We took this debate forward in 1999 by reminding ourselves that in our succession planning we must always seek to strengthen the principle of 'Worker Control'. This principle is about workers in the sectors we are organising in, members of the union taking control of the organisation and determining their destiny. The election of the first worker general secretary in 1998 [Gwede Mantashe], on the 16th year of our existence as a union, was acknowledged as a positive development and a breakthrough. We opened the sensitive debate of the role of intellectuals in a trade union, an organisation of workers. We made a distinction between a trade union, an organisation of workers and a working class organisation like a communist party. We highlighted the danger of intellectuals using their intellectual capacity as a source of power. In such a situation workers get relegated into being mere ballot papers. Ideally, members must develop to a point where they can occupy strategic and technical positions. This debate must be allowed to

continue openly within the structures of the union. It must be elevated above rumour and whispering.

This raises the question of whether we have not reached a stage where our constitution should expressly stipulate that, only members and former members of the union can stand for elected office – including the Secretariat ... This debate must help deal with the reality of the current General Secretary [Mantashe] being unavailable for elections in 2006 ... The culture of debating succession openly in the organization must be inculcated. It will help our organisation arrest the trend of succession being a pure function of cliques and groupings.⁵¹

The question of succession was therefore framed by Mantashe in such a way that he could claim to be putting democracy and the sacrosanct principle of worker control at its centre, while at the same time relegating electoral politics and political debate backstage. His suggested amendment to the NUM constitution was a carefully planned move aimed at depoliticising the leadership transition, as if a 'pool' of leadership could naturally 'emerge' to fill positions left vacant, or as if worker leaders were less capable of influencing the vote of NUM members than 'intellectuals'. Mantashe's argument also went against another major NUM principle pertaining to leadership: that of 'continuity', by which deputies are expected to be elevated to the positions they were assisting when their respective incumbents step down.⁵² In the normal course of affairs, Archie Palane would be next in line, just like Motlanthe and Mantashe had been before him.

The 1997 national congress had resolved:

1. That a shaft steward candidate must have been an active member of the union or active in progressive organisations; ...
3. That to be eligible for a position of National Office Bearer one should have served the union for a period of no less than thirty-six months or have a quality record in the working class struggle;
4. Any candidate who avails himself/herself for an elected position shall be compelled to divulge his/her life history.⁵³

An 'active member' is de facto synonymous with a (former) 'worker', for one cannot belong to NUM without being employed by a mining, energy or construction company. In 1997, however, the terms were ambiguous enough to suit re-elected secretary general Kgalema Motlanthe, who himself had never worked in mining

and had joined NUM as a union employee. Gwede Mantashe brought up the issue of the role of 'intellectuals' in the trade union movement in relation to worker control because of his personal and bitter experience with them. In 1987, Mantashe had stood for election as assistant general secretary against Marcel Golding, the then NUM press and publicity officer. 'I lost by 20 votes. Marcel got 572 and I got 552,' he told a journalist, who concluded: 'it took place more than 27 [*sic*] years ago, but Mantashe tells it as if it happened yesterday.'⁵⁴ It was the first time that a staff member recruited by the union had successfully defeated a former worker for an elected position and it was a frustrating personal experience that Mantashe was not to forget. A few years later, when, after his re-election as NUM general secretary in 1991, Cyril Ramaphosa was deployed to the same position in the ANC, his deputy, Marcel Golding, became NUM's acting general secretary. There was no constitutional provision in place for the appointment of a new deputy, and since the next national congress was scheduled for 1994, some in the union asked for an extraordinary election to be held. 'By January 1992, the political animosities in the union had coalesced around the personality of Golding who was perceived as a leading member amongst those opposed to the SACP.' A 1992 central committee meeting was convened and the question of electing a new secretariat was on the agenda. President James Motlatsi opposed the option of electing a new general secretary at this meeting, arguing that the constitution did not provide for this, but Ramaphosa, who attended the meeting, said that since it had been convened to address precisely this issue, the central committee should solve the matter. After many tribulations the election was eventually held and Golding lost it to Kgalema Motlanthe, head of the education department. Golding was subsequently returned to his previous position as assistant general secretary.⁵⁵ The election of Motlanthe, however, did not solve the question of worker control, narrowly and technically understood as having been employed in the mining industry, since he himself had initially been recruited by NUM as a staff member. A City Council of Johannesburg employee in the 1970s, he had joined the ANC's armed wing and, in 1977, was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment on Robben Island. On his release in 1987, he had joined NUM as national educator, and after five years as general secretary of NUM, he was deployed to the ANC, also as general secretary.

The issue of worker control is, as I have already discussed, a difficult one to address. Can one claim that Mantashe, who, before becoming NUM general secretary, had served for 12 years as a national office bearer and 23 years in various union structures (he came to the national office after the 1987 strike) – a career trade unionist in other words – was still a worker? Can Baleni – who joined the mining industry in 1979 and NUM in 1983 and, ever since, had held either elected

office or worked for the union – be considered a ‘worker’? The two certainly qualify as ‘organic intellectuals’ but cannot be considered, by any definition, as anything but former workers turned professional activists and unionists. Questions about how ‘worker’ is defined and on the basis of what criteria one can claim to be a worker are not limited to NUM. In 2010, Irvin Jim, general secretary of the more workerist Numsa, had called for 100 per cent representation of workers within top ranks of the ANC.⁵⁶ In a 1994 conversation quoted earlier, Mike Murphy asked grassroots trade unionist Jabu Gwala: ‘Many unions – in South Africa and elsewhere – are today led by people who came into the unions as a “professional” (for example as a lawyer) and stayed on, gained experience and finally became general secretaries, etc. Do you accept that this could now take place in Cosatu unions?’ Gwala’s answer was a short and unambiguous one: ‘The issue is commitment. A leader does not have to have been a worker on a shopfloor. I see no problem with this.’⁵⁷

The control that career trade unionists and communist cadres, who claim to be workers, have over NUM is hence primarily exercised at the expense of others who may not qualify as workers by some relatively arbitrary standards, but are nonetheless competent and popular among the membership. More generally, this control has to be related to the attitude of leaders such as Mantashe and Baleni towards their opponents. A leader such as Joseph Mathunjwa, president-founder of Amcu, was, for instance, expelled from NUM in the early 2000s despite the popularity he enjoyed. One could also venture that he was dismissed because of his growing popularity in the Witbank region. After his dismissal, Douglas Colliery’s 3 000-strong workforce held a ten-day underground sit-in to support its leader.⁵⁸ Interestingly, when Archie Palane, the then NUM deputy general secretary, was sent to the coal mine, he found that Mathunjwa had done nothing wrong, but his judgement was later allegedly overruled by Mantashe. Similarly, Mantashe subsequently sidelined Palane in NUM, on the grounds that he had never been a worker. This took place notwithstanding the fact that Palane enjoyed significant popularity among workers in the platinum belt. The issue is therefore not who, among the above-mentioned names, was more legitimate in NUM at the time, but rather the fact that the criteria according to which one can claim leadership are not decided by the union’s rank and file but by those in power. If the former were to speak, it is not clear that all workers would prefer to be led by former workers, and as one NUM shop steward at Eskom, interviewed by Alexander Beresford in 2007, put it: ‘Frans [Baleni] is not a comrade because his background in terms of the union is not clear ... This guy is dicey; we don’t know where this guy comes from. It is their union now; we are no longer the union because I believe the union starts from the ground upwards, not upwards downwards.’⁵⁹

It is against this background that NUM held its 2004 central committee meeting, which, following the 2003 national congress recommendation, was converted into a special congress. Carefully planned by the general secretary, its purpose was mainly to turn Mantashe's political agenda into constitutional amendments, although several important organisational changes were also scheduled for discussion.⁶⁰ In his organisational report, Mantashe pointed to 'the entrenchment of cliques in our structures' without, however, naming those he was talking about. The 2004 special congress made one key amendment to the NUM constitution, effectively preventing 'non-workers' from being elected to leadership positions in the union. Thus the new constitution soberly specified: 'Only workers who have been members in good standing for an unbroken period of five years or who have been stewards before are eligible to stand for a position of a branch office bearer.' The same provision was applied to election at regional and national levels (at the latter level it was added that 'workers who have been members in good standing for an unbroken period of seven years may be nominated and elected into all positions of a National office bearer').⁶¹ Other constitutional changes comprised the inclusion of the chairperson and secretary of the structures dedicated to education, health and safety, and women on branch, regional and national committees. Except for the women structure, these structures were to be incorporated into NUM's main structure at the regional level too. They nevertheless continued to exist at branch level, where they are critical in addressing day-to-day issues.⁶²

From Mantashe's point of view, the 2004 special congress was more than successful: he went as far as to call it a 'revolutionary congress'. For him, this revolutionary character was 'clearly illustrated in the resolution adopted that if you want to be elected to any official position in the union such as an office bearer you have to have been a member of the union. This resolution is critical as it reflects the union's commitment to worker leaders.'⁶³

At the subsequent 2006 national congress, the coast was thus clear for former NUM general secretary Frans Baleni to take over his mentor's office. Mantashe's succession was perfectly managed from the vantage point of organisational expertise but, for all that, it did not go smoothly. Before the congress, Palane, who had been deputy general secretary for the previous eight years, declared: 'Yes, the union must be led by workers, but the liberation struggle should be fought in other ways. If someone has leadership qualities, why deprive that person? Many in the liberation movement have led the union without a background as workers.'⁶⁴ He was criticised, however, by his detractors among NUM leadership for being a 'businessman', for being 'managerial', for undermining democracy,⁶⁵ and for having 'no passion for workers'. On the eve of the congress, Palane was said to have the support of four

regions against six to Baleni. Some also pointed to ‘tribal’ divisions as Palane was not, in contrast to most of his fellow national office bearers, an isi Xhosa speaker, as well as to political divergences since he was perceived as an Mbekite (pro-Thabo Mbeki) whereas Baleni’s supporters were in favour of Jacob Zuma.⁶⁶ Palane ended up in the minority at the congress and, after having been disqualified from standing based on the new constitution, he was left with no choice but to resign from NUM. After the congress, about one hundred NUM members protested in front of the union’s Rustenburg office.⁶⁷

I met Palane a few days before NUM’s thirtieth anniversary national congress, where he was one of the only former NUM leaders – if not the only one – whose name was not on the guest list. Palane, who had remained publicly silent on his trade union background since his 2006 eviction, was now head of corporate affairs and transformation at Samancor Chrome, the world’s second-largest producer of the metal. He told me the story of his entry into mining, which, in several ways, disproves his alleged distance from both the industry and its workers, and makes his career trajectory consistent with those of well-known NUM leaders:

I belonged to the Young Christian Workers Movement and we linked up to many unions, including NUM. Then there was a position at NUM and I was asked to apply for it. But when I look in retrospect, my grandfather, uncles, worked in [asbestos] mines, and in ERPM [East Rand Proprietary Mines] gold mine. I would later recall their talking about mining, the technology and so forth. [After having organised NUM in Phalaborwa, Lydenburg, Rustenburg and Witbank, a] ... crisis emerged in Carletonville where I was sent. There it was a challenge because one would deal with real mining: depth, heat, numbers. Even though Rustenburg was big, Carletonville posed a challenge because one branch there was equivalent to two or three mines in Rustenburg. It was the time when we dealt with tribalism, workers were kept in hostels, there were faction fights. So you were not only just mobilising workers to join the union but you were also mobilising workers to orientate them that blacks cannot be fighting amongst themselves especially when we are workers. Because you had a hostel separately but when you go underground there is no underground for Zulus, or Xhosas or Sothos, you’re all there together. One of my campaigns was to demolish tribalism in the hostels in Carletonville. That created in me an understanding of what NUM is. It also informed my understanding of the mineworkers. Also, politically the mining industry was seen as a pillar of the government, and if we were able to bring down the mining industry, there was no reason why we cannot bring down the government.

His political career in the union started in 1998:

You may have heard that the current deputy president of the ANC [Kgalema Motlanthe], when he was a GS [general secretary] of NUM was asked by the ANC in 1998 to come back to the ANC as SG [secretary general]. That created a vacuum in NUM and a special congress was then called and many of the regions lobbied me to contest the position of the DGS [deputy general secretary]. That's how I came back to NUM.

Palane may not have been a former worker per se but this did not necessarily mean that the principle of worker control was foreign to him. His words are reminiscent of those of Ecliff Tantsi, whose leadership style, as I have shown, made him a resilient leader in the crisis NUM has been facing at the grassroots since 2012:

Within the union I've learned one principle: when we say workers are in control, it means before you meet with management you need to know what workers want. Before you go public on what you have achieved with management, you first go to the membership and say 'you said we must get a cup of coffee, we have got half a cup of coffee and we believe it's better off than nothing.' You don't go and address the public before your members know about it. We appreciate technology but we are not dealing with a sophisticated workforce. It respects leadership and expects respect from it.

At the 2004 special congress and the 2006 national congress, Palane presented himself as a responsible leader who preserved the unity of NUM. He also insisted on the fact that as opposed to others, he was not an easy leader to manipulate. Finally, he argued that the 2004 amendment of the constitution and its 2006 enforcement were illegal moves:

I did not insist. If I wanted to insist the union would have gone either way but I wanted to save the union because what it would have meant, the constitution is quite clear. If the congress is not happy about a particular clause in the constitution, it will go to a vote, if there is no consensus. Now there it was clear that the interpretation by the president and Gwede was wrong. And all I would have insisted is we need to go to a vote. But then you would have divided the organisation. And I said I am not above the organisation, I don't want to lead people who would point a finger to say: 'You divided the organisation.' Unfortunately what I thought was to the benefit of the organi-

sation it went the other way round because then people started paging those who were supporting me and dismissing them from the union ... I realised, if I am going to sit with the same team again ... maybe this is time for me to move on because the division would have been expressed and have remained. Q: *What was the division about?* AP: As I say you sit with your colleagues, you think that you are serving mineworkers based on the congress agenda. But people are having their career path: where I want to be five, ten years from now.⁶⁸

Palane was skilfully outmanoeuvred by Mantashe and Baleni and was left with no choice but to exit NUM. For most of the following decade, Baleni ruled NUM along with President Zokwana and, pursuing the work of his mentor Mantashe, he kept disciplining NUM at the expense of internal debate. Behind Baleni's hand, however, some still saw 'Gwede's unseen hand', as one former NUM official and SACP member once put it to me.

- the participants. A convinced communist who showed obvious support for the 'legitimist elders' on various occasions when I met him, apart from at the seminar, he told me that senior leadership had entrusted him with the mission to explore the possibility of launching a youth organ. Peterson Siyaya, informal conversation, NUM Rustenburg regional conference, Bela Bela, 29 September 2011.
- 66 A NUM employee in charge of the membership desk presented PowerPoint slides on the composition of the union's membership to delegates during the Youth Forum seminar in October 2011. It showed that more than 100 000 NUM members were young workers. In his report to the 2012 national conference, Frans Baleni estimated that about 54 % of NUM members were aged between 19 and 41. NUM, '30 years of unbroken revolutionary trade unionism struggle', Secretariat Report to the 14th National Congress, 2012, p. 34.
- 67 'The Hour of Youth Strikes at NUM', draft programme of action distributed at the NUM Youth Forum seminar, Johannesburg, 14–15 October 2011.
- 68 NUM, 'NUM Launches Its Youth Forum', press release, 8 May 2013.

CHAPTER 9

- 1 This, however, did not prevent Ramaphosa, in the context of the struggle against apartheid (during which the ANC and the SACP were banned) and during the cold war, from preaching in favour of the class struggle and claiming to represent the working class. NUM's early bias towards communism was also linked to its connection with its British homonym, whose secretary general, Arthur Scargill, belonged to the Communist Party. Note that at the time, many if not most top anti-apartheid leaders, both inside and outside South Africa, belonged to the SACP.
- 2 This dimension is linked to a clear goal of the SACP, which states that 'the imperative of communists [is] not to isolate themselves as a narrow clique, but to be active within "every revolutionary movement"'. SACP, Political Report to the 13th Congress of the South African Communist Party, 11–15 July 2012, p. 7. The strategy includes the deployment of communist cadres to key positions in the trade union movement, the ANC and the State.
- 3 For a summary of the position of the SACP within the Tripartite Alliance over the past twenty years, see Botiveau, 'Longevity of the Tripartite Alliance'.
- 4 Goodwell Tshitshiba, secretary, NUM Mponeng branch, interview, 22 November 2011.
- 5 Sithethi Mxhasi, regional coordinator, NUM Rustenburg region, interview, 25 October 2011.
- 6 NUM branch office bearer at Lonmin, interview, 26 October 2011.
- 7 Meshack Moeng, deputy secretary, NUM Impala South branch, interview, 20 October 2011.
- 8 When I first met him in 2005, Buti Manamela, national secretary of the YCL, in fact told me that 'part of our role as the YCL is to demystify political involvement' and attract the youth. This, however, does not prevent the youth organisation, which was relaunched in 2003 (the original organisation had been banned in 1950), from displaying Stalinist tendencies and the YCL was allegedly 'purged' after Manamela's re-election for a third term had been contested on the basis of fraud allegations. Manaced Mataboge, 'Purge of League's Lumpen', *Mail & Guardian*, 4 March 2010, accessed 7 July 2017, <http://mg.co.za/article/2011-03-04-purge-of-leagues-lumpen>.

- 9 Over the past decade the SACP has nevertheless dramatically increased its membership, which, at the time of writing, was in the region of 150 000 card holders. Carol Paton, 'The Meteoric Rise and the Compromises of the SACP', *Business Day Live*, 16 April 2013, accessed 7 July 2017, <http://www.bdlive.co.za/opinion/2013/04/16/the-meteoric-rise-and-the-compromises-of-the-sacp>. On the ANC, note that most members are not active members but just cardholders and that membership figures tend to increase in the period that precedes the Party's five-yearly national conferences.
- 10 Bhongo Mvimvi, full-time shaft steward, Cooke 3, NUM Randfontein branch, interview, 1 July 2010.
- 11 Tumi Mokgatle, full-time shaft steward, smelter section, NUM Impala Minpro branch, interview, Impala Platinum mine, 19 October 2011.
- 12 Buhlungu, *Paradox of Victory*, p. 127.
- 13 Mantashe, 'A Good Union.'
- 14 NUM, Secretariat Report, 12th National Congress, 2006, p. 3.
- 15 Gwede Mantashe, 'When the Rain Comes, It Falls for Everybody', *South African Labour Bulletin* 20 (1996), p. 27.
- 16 NUM, 13th National Congress Resolutions, as discussed and adopted by the National Congress, 28–30 May 2009, Gallagher Estate Convention Centre, p. 39.
- 17 Mercy Sekano, executive director of the EBMCT, interview, Yeoville, 3 October 2011.
- 18 Frans Baleni, NUM general secretary, interview, NUM head office, Johannesburg, 12 July 2010.
- 19 Antonio Gramsci, *Guerre de Mouvement et Guerre de Position*, ed. Razmig Keucheyan (Paris: La Fabrique, 2011), pp. 147, 157–158.
- 20 The two exchanged their respective views in a series of four articles and responses: Sakhela Buhlungu, 'Rebels without a Cause of Their Own? The Contradictory Location of White Officials in Black Unions in South Africa, 1973–94', *Current Sociology* 54 (2006); Johann Maree, 'Rebels with Causes: White Officials in Black Trade Unions in South Africa, 1973–94: A Response to Sakhela Buhlungu', *Current Sociology* 54 (2006). Sakhela Buhlungu, 'Whose Cause and Whose History? A Response to Maree', *Current Sociology* 54 (2006); Johann Maree, 'Similarities and Differences between Rebels with and without a Cause', *Current Sociology* 54 (2006).
- 21 Jabu Gwala and Mike Murphy, 'The Role of "Intellectuals" in Trade Unions: A Discussion', *South African Labour Bulletin* 18 (1994), p. 51.
- 22 Madoda Sambatha, NUM head of the parliamentary pillar, interview, Cape Town, 3 August 2010.
- 23 Mmanaledi Mataboge, 'Supra Mahumapelo Elected as North West ANC Leader', *Mail & Guardian*, 13 February 2011, accessed 4 September 2017, <http://mg.co.za/article/2011-02-13-supra-mahumapelo-elected-as-north-west-anc-leader>.
- 24 NUM, Regional Secretariat Report, Carletonville Regional Conference, 2005, p. 38.
- 25 This is probably in part explained by the history of the SACP, which lived in exile and operated underground for forty years and did not have open access to the working class, hence preventing the latter from receiving communist ideas and identifying as a class.
- 26 See, for instance, Charles van Onselen, 'Worker Consciousness in Black Miners: Southern Rhodesia, 1900–1920', *Journal of African History* 14 (1973).
- 27 It is worth recalling here that while in Marx's view the class struggle as the engine of history preceded the Party, in Lenin's analysis of the Russian situation characterised by the absence of a proletariat, it is the Party that implicitly became the engine of history as producer of class and of the class struggle.

- 28 NUM, Secretariat Report to the Rustenburg Regional Conference, 2011, p. 89.
- 29 Douglas Gininda, secretary NUM Randfontein branch, interview, 30 June 2010.
- 30 NUM, Rustenburg Region Secretariat Report, Rustenburg Regional Conference, 2006, p. 6.
- 31 NUM, Participants Manual Political School 2009, presented by Khaya Blaai, 14–18 September 2009. The following list of ‘acknowledgements’ appears on page 2: ‘Cosatu, SACP, ANC, Karl Marx, Govan Mbeki, Patrick Bond, Michael Leibowitz, Joe Slovo, Ben Fine and Alfredo Saad-Fildo’s *African Communist*, Vladimir Lenin’s *State and the Revolution*, Jack Rasmus, Anwar Shikh’s *An Introduction to the History of Crisis Theories*, Kwame Nkrumah, Frederick Engels.’
- 32 NUM, SACP, NUM/SACP Joint Political Education Programme 2012: Reading Material, produced and consolidated by Madoda Sambatha (NUM) and Malesela Maleka (SACP), through internet research.
- 33 ‘We can admit that the fundamental distinctions be, in the moral order, the good and the evil; the beautiful and ugly in the aesthetic order; in economics, the useful and harmful or, for instance, the profitable and non-profitable. The question that then arises is to know if such a simple criterion exists for politics ... The specific distinction of politics, to which political acts and motives can be reduced, is the discrimination of the friend and the enemy. It provides an identification principle with the value of criterion and not an exhaustive or comprehensive definition.’ Carl Schmitt, *La Notion de Politique, Suivi de Théorie du Partisan* (Paris: Flammarion, 1992), pp. 63–64.
- 34 ‘Baleni on Lonmin Killings and Violence’, video statement shot and edited by Livhuwani Mammburu, posted on YouTube 20 August 2012, accessed 5 September 2017, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1eLzskhdYwY&feature=player_embedded.
- 35 ‘Frans Baleni – General Secretary, South African National Union of Mineworkers’, interviewed in *Hardtalk*, BBC World Service, 26 November 2012. Accessed 14 September 2017, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p010pd5l>.
- 36 Rapule Tabane, ‘Amcu a Group of Vigilantes and Liars, Say Alliance Bosses’, *Mail & Guardian*, 17 May 2013, accessed 7 July 2017, <http://mg.co.za/article/2013-05-17-00-amcus-no-union-its-just-vigilantes-and-liars-say-alliance-bosses>.
- 37 Sapa, ‘NUM to Eradicate the Enemy Within: Baleni’, *The Sowetan*, 27 May 2013, accessed 7 July 2017, <http://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/2013/05/27/num-to-eradicate-the-enemy-within-baleni>.
- 38 NUM, ‘Ill-informed Mathunjwa Must Stop Lying about Our President’, press release, 19 May 2014.
- 39 See James Guillaume’s foreword to Carlo Cafiero, *Abrégé du ‘Capital’ de Karl Marx* (Marseille: Le Chien rouge, 2008).
- 40 ‘I state: 1° that there shall be no solid revolutionary movement without a stable *organisation of leaders* to ensure the continuity of work; 2° that the larger the mass spontaneously drawn into the struggle, forming the base of the movement and participating to it, the more pressing the *need* to have such an organisation ...; 3° that such an organisation must be mostly composed of men whose profession is the revolutionary activity.’ This quote is from Lenin’s *What is to be Done?* (1902), in Cohen, *Siècle des Chefs*, p. 31. Interestingly, Cohen almost identifies leadership and communism: ‘to be a Bolshevik’, he writes, ‘it is to be a leader’; pp. 419–424.
- 41 Cohen, *Siècle des Chefs*, p. 447.

- 42 Frans Baleni, NUM general secretary, interview, NUM head office, Johannesburg, 12 July 2010. Note the reference to the SWOP surveys, which in Baleni's mind are a model of consultation.
- 43 Frans Baleni, NUM general secretary, interview, NUM head office, Johannesburg, 12 July 2010.
- 44 NUM, Secretariat Report, Rustenburg Regional Conference, 2006, no page number, p. 10 from first page.
- 45 NUM, Draft Report for the Rustenburg Regional Conference, 2008, pp. 23–24.
- 46 Baleni, 'Social Governance', pp. 12–13.
- 47 Organising: 'Activity Report for the period 06–29 October 1993', in NUM, National Executive Committee Meeting, 27 November 1993, pp. 71–72.
- 48 NUM, Secretariat Report, 11th National Congress, 2003, pp. 15–16.
- 49 NUM, Secretariat Report, 11th National Congress, 2003, p. 1.
- 50 NUM, Secretariat Report, 11th National Congress, 2003, pp. 5–6.
- 51 NUM, Secretariat Report, Special Congress, 2004, p. 7.
- 52 During the Rustenburg 2011 regional conference, a pro-Mantashe leader like Madoda Sambatha did not hesitate, for instance, to criticise delegates because, instead of pushing the motion of deceased Rustenburg chairperson Lazarus Ditshwene's deputy, Elliott Moloji, they decided to nominate other leaders for the position left vacant.
- 53 NUM, 'Resolutions adopted at the 9th National Congress, 1997', 10th National Congress, 2000, p. 18.
- 54 Mandy Rossouw, 'Newsmaker: Mantashe – Baas van die Plaas', *City Press*, 23 December 2012, accessed 7 July 2017, <http://www.citypress.co.za/news/newsmaker-mantashe-baas-van-die-plaas/>.
- 55 Allen, *History of Black Mineworkers*, pp. 434, 547–550.
- 56 'NUMSA Wants More Workers in ANC Leadership', *Sapa*, 22 July 2010.
- 57 Gwala and Murphy, 'Role of "Intellectuals" in Trade Unions', p. 53.
- 58 Jan de Lange, 'The Rise and Rise of Amcu', *Miningmx*, 2 August 2012, accessed 7 July 2017, http://www.miningmx.com/special_reports/mining-yearbook/mining-yearbook-2012/A-season-of-discontent.htm.
- 59 Alexander Beresford, 'Comrades "Back on Track"? The Durability of the Tripartite Alliance in South Africa', *African Affairs* 108 (2009), p. 399.
- 60 These included the dismantling of NUM substructures dedicated to education and health and safety at national and regional levels to avoid weakening the decision-making centres. Instead, Mantashe proposed to have one or two additional office bearers in charge of education and health and safety elected to the union's main national and regional structures. Another important item on the constitutional reform agenda involved abolishing the branch annual general meeting, which posed problems insofar as it duplicated another local decision-making body, the branch conference, and caused misunderstandings and troubles in NUM branches (where the annual meeting was often done away with in practice; see chapter 4). NUM, Secretariat Report, Special Congress, 2004, pp. 4–6.
- 61 NUM, Constitutional Amendments, Special Congress, 2004, pp. 12, 14, 22.
- 62 Gwede Mantashe, 'NUM Matures to Adulthood', interview with *South African Labour Bulletin* 28 (2004), p. 43.
- 63 Mantashe, 'NUM Matures to Adulthood'.
- 64 Matuma Letsoalo, 'NUM Digs in for Battle', *Mail & Guardian*, 19 May 2006.

- 65 Eddie Majadibodu, head of NUM production pillar, interview, NUM head office, 10 June 2010.
- 66 Letsoalo, 'NUM Digs in for Battle'. In a 2008 article, Buhlungu and Bezuidenhout wrote: 'The year before this fracas became public, we conducted research commissioned by NUM on the quality of their services to members ... We were struck by the extent to which some branches and regions were openly divided. While more complex in reality, these divisions were sometimes expressed as cleavages between ethnic groups, more specifically speakers of Xhosa and Sotho. Added to this mix were issues of citizenship, since many Sotho speakers in the mining industry are migrant workers from South Africa's neighboring State Lesotho. At one branch in the Free State region, members told us that they feared for their lives, since some mineworkers were carrying guns. At this specific branch, the elections for local leadership were about to happen, and two factions competed for dominance. Indeed, the branch constitution was under dispute, since some members wanted a certain level of literacy and numeracy to be a precondition for eligibility. This was also seen as being directed at specific opponents. It seems as though "succession battles" take place not only at the level of national politics, or even in the national structures of unions, but also among the building blocks of union structures: their branches,' Buhlungu and Bezuidenhout, 'Union Solidarity', p. 264.
- 67 'Police Intervene in NUM Office Protest', *Mail & Guardian*, 4 June 2006, accessed 7 July 2017, <http://mg.co.za/print/2006-06-04-police-intervene-in-num-office-protest>.
- 68 Archie Palane, former NUM deputy general secretary, interview, Johannesburg, 21 May 2012.

CHAPTER 10

- 1 Frans Baleni, NUM general secretary, interview, NUM head office, Johannesburg, 12 July 2010.
- 2 'Opening Address at the National Congress of NUM by NUM President Senzeni Zokwana', 14th National Congress, 2012, p. 4.
- 3 Abraham Seaketso, Amcu mining house coordinator, Impala Platinum, interview, 8 June 2015.
- 4 NUM, '30 years of unbroken revolutionary trade unionism struggle', Secretariat Report, 14th National Congress, 2012, p. 79.