

## **Daniel Dube**

### **Abstract**

Daniel Dube was elected the first president of NUMSA in 1987 and held this position until 1991. This interview covers his early life including his childhood, when he started his first job in a textile factory in 1968, and finding a job in Swedish company, SKF, a year later until the factory closed down in 2007. He paints a detailed picture of what the apartheid workplace looked like in the 1970s: job reservation that reserved the most skilled and better paying jobs for whites; the way in which white workers and their trade unions reported employers who contravened apartheid legislation to the industrial council; divisions between workers based on race and cultural differences; separate amenities; liaison committees and an overarching boss whose word was final. He describes the pain-staking way in which trade union organisation was built in the 1970s and 1980s when workers were fearful that joining trade unions would mean losing their jobs. Union recognition was a battle and apartheid divisions made forging unity between African and coloured workers difficult. He touches on the unions' disinvestment struggle during apartheid, union education provided to shop stewards, the reliance of the trade unions on funding of international trade unions to support this education and the reason for his exit from the trade unions in 1991.

Facilitator: This is an interview with Daniel Dube the date is 1 April 2011 we are in Uitenhage, interview is done by Brown Maaba. Thank you very much for your time. You can speak any language. Kindly give me a background of where you were born, how you were raised and how you ended up in the world of unions.

Respondent: Well born in Uitenhage in 1950 on 11 August. I attended the local schools, mainly the Catholic school because that is where I received my formative education, primary education. I only went to the government schools when I started with my secondary education. Well I started working in 1968 in the textile industry where I worked for one year. Early in 1969 I got a job in the engineering industry which was the SKF factory, a Swedish company. I joined that company in 1969 and of course I remained with that company until it was closed down in 2007.

When I started working, like any black child, when you come to the world of work you have got a number of surprises waiting for you because usually education and bringing up in the home does not prepare you for every eventuality so when you come to the world of work, some of the new things that surprise you is (1) the prevalence use of a non home language, at home I speak Xhosa, when I go to the world of work maybe the company language is English as the case was at SKF, but most of the white supervisors would be Afrikaans speaking people in which case then when you come to the world of work, one of the surprises is the fact that you have got to start using a language, not your home language, a language you may not be very well prepared to use. That was the first surprise. The second surprise is the presence of the different race groups. Remember we were raised separately under apartheid, my school was for black children so I attended that school. I lived in a black residential area, I attended a church that was meant for the black people. But when you come to the world of work you find that all of you have got to become the members of this one organisation. You are like a community but you are a community at the place of work. Something again you are not prepared for as you are growing up so by the time you come to such a world, there is a shock that you experience.

The one other thing that you come across when you come to the world of work in my days was the actual meaning of apartheid in your life, apart from the fact that you attended separate schools, you lived in separate residential areas, but at the place of work you came across things like all the better work positions, all the better paying positions were reserved for the white people because those were the days of the Job Reservation Act. Now whether you were educated or not it was immaterial. Certain types of jobs were meant for certain race groups, like the better paying

jobs for the white people. All the management positions or the positions of control were meant for the white people, only the white people had the skills to do .., they were the only skilled employees in my time, whether you had been education, whether you had been to a technical college it meant absolutely nothing, nobody even cared about that. That was the other shock in life and its things you could not have been prepared for back at home or even in school.

Now because of the things I have mentioned, you were immediately at a disadvantage, a disadvantage that you would witness in the form of denial of opportunity. You might be an educated black person, you might be a black person that could be trained into a certain skilled type of job, but because of the Job Reservation Act, because of the colour of your skin you would not be allowed to do that even if you asked for it, because some of these things when they happened, we are ignorant, when you start asking questions and you challenge the way the things are getting done, from the answers you then realise this is what apartheid means to me but you see it in the world of work it becomes more real. I used to say the world of work in my days was a classical microcosm of the South African broader society, but at a broader societal level, some of the things lack detail. Your lack of interaction with white people when you are at school sometimes you ignore it but when you are in the world of work, your inability to master a foreign language like English for example, your inability to be allowed to get into a skilled position even if you could do or you do possess that kind of a skill but you are denied it. Then you start to understand the detail of how the oppressive system actually operates.

How did I get involved in the union movement? Once I have sketched to you just the few examples that you would encounter in the world of work, your mind starts to work. It works either in the form of “then I give up” and I “accept” that this is the world in which I have been condemned. Alternatively you may say that I do not accept this. And if you accept it then you might say, and because of that I am going to do nothing about it, you throw the towel in and that's the end of the story. I think I happened to be one of the people who would not accept that things were correct as they were, even if I did not have the power to do anything about that but inside of me I couldn't accept that as a given and acceptable fact of life.

By 1976 we had a visit by trade unionists who came to see us at work. In 1976 management did not allow them to come into the plant and talk to the employees. I was not involved, I wouldn't know what kind of a discussion or exchange of views between them and management, they would be the ones maybe to explain. But in 1977 they came back again and this time they were allowed to come into the plant and address the workers. We learnt at that meeting that the reason they were allowed in 1977 whereas in 1976 they were not allowed to come into the plant was because after they had been denied entry into the plant, they contacted the Swedish Metal Workers Union and explained to them that they would like to come into our plant and introduce us to the labour movement, to the trade union movement and that management had denied them that in 1976. Our understanding is that then the Swedish Metal Workers Union representative came to South Africa, met with those trade unionists that wanted to come to the plant just to understand the dynamics of their attempt to enter the plant and the refusal by management. Finally then they put pressure on the management of SKF in Gothenburg in Sweden

where they come from because the company in Sweden has accepted trade union rights for the employees, but they would not allow that to happen in South Africa. In South Africa of course the local management's argument would always be it is because (1) black people do not have trade union rights which was true in 1977, (2) they would say that to accept a trade union organisation would be a violation of a law of the country and they are here as a business and business is business and not politics. That's the kind of arguments that you would get.

But of course by May of 1977 the trade union organisers came into our plant, spoke to us as the employees and some of us myself included accepted the membership of their union. So that is how I came into the union. I already had been experiencing a work environment that I felt to me was not acceptable. So when they came in I would say I was like ready to join an organisation that would give us the power to agitate against that kind of work conditions.

Facilitator: but generally how much did workers know about unions at that time?

Respondent: to be honest with you, in my time when I started working in 1969 I did not know, okay I was young at the time and I wouldn't have known much about what had happened during the earlier years of the 1960s when Mandela and them were arrested and some other people went into exile because I was too young. And remember after that campaign of silencing the resistance movement in the early to mid 1960s, our parents had experienced so much violence from the state that they wouldn't even dare to talk to us about their organisation, about what they were doing. If you remember those who worked underground kept the

information on their activities so secretive that you couldn't hear a thing. So in my own days when I started working at SKF in 1969 I did not even know that there had been trade unions before that time, because even those people who were the members of those unions who were in the age of being our fathers they wouldn't say a thing for the fear of the state. As a result, although there had been unions before, we were not aware of it, we were a different generation and we had not been able to keep that link with our fathers or with our forebears who had been in these labour organisations. So to us, in my age group there was very little, from my side there was nothing, I knew nothing about trade unions. I started getting to know about trade unions after I had joined the union and we went through the educational workshops that the unions had and only at that stage would you discover that there had been unions before.

Facilitator: you also said you went to a Catholic school?

Respondent: I attended a Catholic school, my primary education I received from my Catholic school

Facilitator: that may give me a sense that you came from a well-to-do family?

Respondent: not at all, in my days, my father was an industrial worker and at the time when we were born my mother was a housewife. My mother started working as a domestic servant after the death of my father. My father died in 1957 when I was seven years old and my mother by 1959 had to find a job to keep us alive and to keep us at school. We were four children at that time. Now in the Catholic school in my days it was a given thing that the majority of black families were poor families and the

Catholic Mission schools, one of the things they did was to meet the poor families who wanted to send their children to school, who wanted to send their children to church, they would meet those families halfway. For example, you would be exempted from paying school fees or from buying school books provided you were a good mannered well behaved child and you were a good performer at school academically. Then such a family if they do not have the means, the Catholic church would make it a point that you would get free school books. It would be not brand new school books, from each year they would take back the school books they had borrowed the children in the previous year's class, because even with us we would get those used second hand type of books, we would use them but at the end of the year we would be expected to give back to the school the text books so that other children can also, who might be in the same predicament, can also be able to go on. So although it was a mission school, it was not expensive at all. We received education almost free. But of course it was dependent on your behaviour as well as your academic performance at school.

Facilitator: So you first went to textile industry?

Respondent: Yes I worked in the textile industry for my very first work here in 1968 and I worked there for a full year

Facilitator: and your impression of the place and why did you leave?

Respondent: my impression of the place, first of all, in the textile industry, although there were many people who were working there, but when I got there one of the things I noticed was the presence of the .., dust from the cloths. At the end of each day, in those days, when you clean your

nose you would find the flush from the dust of the textile material you were working with inside the nose. I would just imagine how much of it would have gone into my lungs. So I did not like working in such an environment but of course it gave me an opportunity to see what the world of work looked like. So I did not like it. And one other reason of course was that the textile industry traditionally pays lesser wages or lesser salaries than say the other industries. So when I moved to the engineering industry, Fine Wools, in the textile industry, I was earning R7 per week and we used to work a 9 hour day from 7 in the morning until 5:10 in the afternoon and you would get a wages of R7 per week and a 45 cents bonus. But when I went to the engineering industry I was earning R8.55 per week and the hours of work were much lesser, you worked 45 hours a week.

Facilitator: but before you started working, didn't you entertain the idea of going to a university?

Respondent: The reason I left school was mainly because my parents, my mother could not afford keeping us at school. Remember we were four children and she was the only bread winner in the home, and being the eldest son it was expected of me to quickly find my way to work and help with the education of the others. The eldest child born before me is a girl, my sister but of course I had to go to work so that I can help with the financing of her education as well. So I couldn't have gone to university for example, even if I had wished for that but it was impossible for me because they would have been funding for that from the family and it would have affected of course the education of my other siblings.

Facilitator: you also mentioned that, as you came in to work at SKF, it was some kind of a culture shock, people were speaking in Afrikaans and



English and so on. Did you ever speak in Afrikaans as black workers, or in English, how did it work?

Respondent: Because in a work environment, one of the things that you learn is to work in a common direction. Whether the direction is making profit for the organisation or it is making production for the organisation. I was in a production environment and we are organised in departments and in each department we would be organised into lines according to the machinery type that you are working on and each line or group of machines would be expected to produce so much per day. And as a result of that for the people working in that line, whether they are black, running the machines or cleaning the floors, whether they are white, skilled workers who were machine setters, some of them might have been inspectors as well or whether they were coloured, most of whom would have been in the inspection department. They had a specified target as a section, as a line to meet at the end of the day. In other words you had a common objective, you are meeting each other for the first time, you have never done so before but in this particular section where you are working, you have got a common objective. Whether the objective is to make the day's target, or it is to make the week's target, or the month's target but you have got a common objective. As a result of which, whether you were Afrikaans speaking, English speaking or Xhosa speaking you had to find a common ground or else things are not going to work. A common ground of communication, because everybody is going to depend on your communicating with one another, in which case then even if you were not good in any of the other languages, being a Xhosa speaking person, you would be compelled by the conditions at work in your own section to try and find a way of communicating with other work

colleagues of yours in that section, be they white or coloured, it did not matter but you had to communicate.

This means then, in a company, where a company language is English you can't escape it because your manager is going to ask you to account in English so you've got to try and learn that language as well. Afrikaans, some of your colleagues in the line or on the shop floor are Afrikaans speaking and if you want to communicate with them so that all of you can have sort of a common effort directed in the same direction. You would then teach yourself to speak their language as well in the same way that they might want to speak your language but you must remember under apartheid, a vernacular language or one of the African languages was regarded as a nonsense language and most of the time if you want to breach the gap you don't breach it in your own language you would have to breach it either in English or Afrikaans because the others would not come down to your level. You would need to rise up to their level. So indeed in the workplace you were compelled to speak the foreign languages, whether it was English or Afrikaans more than the case had been during your school time.

Facilitator: Race relations in those days at the workplace?

Respondent: The race relations were as hostile as they had been outside. Remember all of these people come from separate residential areas. They have got nothing in common. They are like insulated, you've got your own schools in your black areas, your own churches, the only time that you might meet another person is when you go to town to buy something, but you would have your own black traders in your communities which is common, where you would be going to buy a piece

of bread or some sugar. So the limitations on the interactions were much higher under apartheid situation, but once you come to work now you then have got these common objectives that you are working for, which is meeting the day's target. Then you are compelled to look into the question of race relations. At first they were antagonistic as you can expect. But in due course the conditions on the ground at the workplace would force you to swallow your pride somewhat. You would moderate your own hostility. You are right at the bottom rung of this social structure and as a result some of the belittling and undermining that you experience you give a rider, you overlook, you pretend it is not there.

But with the dawn of the labour organisations, when we could open our mouth and start speaking, when we could air our feelings, these kinds of issues, including race relations, we had to start working on. To start with it would be, just to state the fact that we are not good in mastering the English or the Afrikaans language so the other people must also make room for us that we won't be as good as they are in their own languages. With the dawn of the labour organisations, the trade unions taught us one thing, that "Unity is Strength", whether you have got these racial, language, special differences it means nothing. You have got to put your own pride as a people, or as a separate people aside in order to achieve the broadest unity of the working people. It wasn't easy to get into our hairs, but when we put it into application, when we started wanting to learn and understand the English language, wanting to learn the Afrikaans language so that we can discuss our own problems in the plant, then we were starting to undermine the racial divisions that had been imposed by the system on us.

Facilitator: But also you said that when you came in it was clear that there were job reservations and so on, one of the things that is the cornerstone of apartheid. But when you asked questions about these things, what were the answers?

Respondent: If we talk for example about job reservation, in the engineering industry, in my own time on the production lines, the skilled jobs were reserved only for the white people. You were not allowed as a black person to even carry something like a spanner because once you handle a spanner it suggests that you are going to make adjustments on the machinery, something that is reserved only for the white people. When you are challenging that and you are saying but we can also make these adjustments, the response of management, (1) would be to say that in terms of the law you may not (2) the white skilled workers that you worked with, who wanted to protect their better paying positions would be the first ones to go and report you to the Industrial Council. If an employer like SKF wanted a black person to do a skilled job like machine setting, the other white machine setters would report that incident to their union representatives who would take it to an Industrial Council Meeting and that employer that had allowed a black person to do adjustments on machinery would be called to book. He would have to come forward and explain what had actually happened.

Facilitator: But where these white people who had these reserved jobs perfect in their jobs?

Respondent: they were not perfect at all. One example of their imperfection was that SKF is a bearing industry, there had never been a bearing industry in South Africa so we couldn't have had our own home

grown skills for the bearing industry. When that company started in South Africa they had expatriates that came over mainly from England and other countries as well, to open the local manufacturing branch. They were the ones that were teaching the local people how to do the various adjustments. Even they, the Afrikaans speaking, including English local South Africans they did not have the skills for a bearing industry. They were learning in the same way that we were also learning, it's just that there were these legalities that were preventing us from learning on say a levelled plane. They were not good at all, but of course as time goes and one is exposed to a certain type of skill, you learn to master the skill, you may not be the best but you learn to do things better with time in the same way that black people also learnt.

Facilitator: and then you also mentioned that you were ..., by the time these union guys came in 1977 you and perhaps other people were like keen to join the union because of the conditions at work. What were the conditions like?

Respondent: By 1977 when we joined, when we were ready to join the trade union, (1) the salaries for the black people were the lowest, this again was in terms of the apartheid laws that black people can only be kept in the lower paying job categories, which job categories would be given the lowest pay rate. That was the one thing, the black people were earning the lowest. The second one was the health and safety question. All the black people were required to do the menial jobs, some of which were the most dangerous physically to the person, in which case then you would not feel comfortable doing that kind of job but there would be no alternative because the job that is reserved for you, if you want anything better than that then it means you are not going to continue as an

employee of that particular factory. The one other thing that was happening in those days was the dominance and the control of Afrikaans because Afrikaner nationalism that you saw outside in the country in general was manifesting in everyday life at the workplace by white people refusing to speak any language other than Afrikaans. Even where you had a company language as English, on the production line, you will speak that English when you go to meet with the managers in the manager's offices, but when you are away from the administration block, because generally in South Africa, you may have noticed that in the construction of the industries, you would find that the administration block is detached from the production lines. As a result the production lines would have their own somewhat sub-culture, in which case, in our own case was the dominance of the Afrikaans language. And of course with the dominance of the Afrikaans language comes together all the other attitudes, attitudes like racial etiquettes, it was common in my days for a black person to be called a baboon or a kaffir and nobody would expect you to answer back or to refuse to be called such. So by the time the unionists arrived in 1977 these were the kind of conditions that had made us sort of ready to join any type of organisation that would protect us against that.

Facilitator: so which unions were in the cards at that time?

Respondent: The union that came to our own company in 1977 to organise black people was the UAW, we had our own UAW, now at that stage for the white people there were already established unions operating in our company as well. One of them was the Amalgamated Engineering Union, that was the union for the whites and the other one was called the Iron and Steel (Yster and Staal) they used to call it, both of

them were white unions, and both of them were participating at the industry industrial council. Both of them had active shop stewards whose duty was to supervise the implementation of the policies of apartheid. Like for example if a person were to be given an opportunity to do a job that was reserved for white people, they would take that up at the Industrial Council and that employer would be called to book. And if of course the employer was stubborn the next thing would be the employer would see the intervention of the state security police. They would come in and say "we understand that you are working contrary to the policies and practices of the country".

Facilitator: and the leaders of this union, how was it conceptualised, people came from Jo'burg, or PE to say this is the union?

Respondent: Apparently these people had had something like two/three years of trade union organising before we met them in 1977. They would know how they got the thing started, all we know is that when they came to us they were already an established union and they were already a non-racial union although the majority of the members were black African people.

Facilitator: and for the people, just to go back a bit, for the people of Uitenhage SKF, the 1973 Durban strike it came and went without you guys being aware of it?

Respondent: We did not even notice it, maybe there will be people who will say I was aware of that, I wasn't aware of that, I was not aware of the Natal Durban strikes of 1973 not at all. It was only when I got into the labour movement that I got to know of all of that kind of a history.

Although in those days there were trade unions but they were not trade unions for the black people and most of us, myself included, we would take no interest in them because they were not our organisations.

Facilitator: when did you join the union exactly?

Respondent: it was in May of 1977

Facilitator: and the rest of the population within the workplace did they join?

Respondent: In our case yes because the people who came to organise us into the labour organisation found out that both the coloured and the black African employees did not belong to a union or were not affiliated to any union, whereas when they came to the factory, it was Johnny Mke, an African man, it was Zakhele Manasa, also an African, it was Fred Sauls, a coloured, it was Fuki Ashim a Chinese, the four of them, together with Johnny Mke, the president of the organisation who was an African too. So to us when they presented themselves they were already a mixed group of people that we saw and that made it easy for the African as well as the coloured people on the same day to decide to join the union. Not that everybody joined on that day, but that on that day they were able to recruit people from both the African as well as the coloured workforce and of course as the days went the recruitment campaign was stepped up and more and more people were coming in.

Facilitator: who was actually appointed to lead the union?



Respondent: I happen to be one of the very first leaders. We had two elderly men who had been politically active but in the much earlier years, I think it must have been the 1950s up to the early 1960s, they knew about trade union organisations, we did not. I remember one of them saying at the meeting, to us the youngsters, you boys you don't know about this, we know this, this is a good thing. Now in our days you would believe what the older people tell you and then they will talk about what in their own era they used to do as organised workers. We didn't know about that up until these union people came in and spoke to us, although the two elderly men said they are too old to lead and they would like younger people to lead and I happened to one of the very first shop stewards that were elected by the employees. At the company then we had a liaison committee. If you remember the Department of Labour in those days, because there was this movement, probably arising out of the Natal/Durban strikes, but there was this movement in some areas that prompted government into wanting to accommodate the anger I would say of the black people, and liaison committees were introduced. So at our plant there was a liaison committee at the time when these labour unionists came to us. So when we were elected as shop stewards, the next step now was for us to get on to the liaison committee structure. Now if you remember the liaison committee was made up of 50% company representatives, 50% employee representatives, but all of them were nominated by the company. So in our own case then we had now to fight so that the company would accept the democratically elected representatives to come on to the liaison committee, this is where again it was possible for us to succeed because of the international links with the Swedish Metal Workers Union because at home, in Gothenburg shop stewards get elected by the members and when company was refusing to accept the fact that we can come and serve on the liaison committee

but that we have been elected by the members. So it was something new for the company but they had to accept it.

Facilitator: so did you have to topple the liaison committee?

Respondent: we did, in our own case we did

Facilitator: and management accepted the presence of the union?

Respondent: Management at first did not accept the presence of the union, did not accept the desire of the union to negotiate things like wages for example, things like working conditions. They did not, it had to be another battle, in other words, management had to be forced, one way of forcing them (1) was to make sure that in the plant you get as many of the people on to the union as is possible. The fewer your members are the weaker you will be in front of management. Part of our strategy was to recruit as many of our people as possible. With the African people it was always easy, because so heavy was the burden of apartheid oppression that immediately the people hear that somebody somewhere can help them ease their suffering they would come in numbers, they were not a problem for us because they quickly came on board. But the other component which was the coloured component, it was a slightly different story, we have got language differences, we have got cultural differences, now you have got to try and overcome those to win their trust so that they can come over and join your organisation so that you can have a bigger membership that when you go to management, for negotiations, whether it was negotiation for recognition or a negotiation for stop facility or a negotiation for wages, or a negotiation for safety shoes for example, you needed to speak on behalf

of the largest number of the employees, so as to threaten the employer that it could lead to an industrial action if we are not getting what we want. You won't get it on the same day you would have to go to management time and time again because they were also playing their own game very well according to their own rules, but eventually you would get the management to back track on some of the entrenched positions that they had taken.

Facilitator: what were some of the challenges in the early days of being a shop steward, what were you faced with?

Respondent: There were many, one of the challenges which would seem maybe quite absurd to an outsider, was acceptance by your own people. Not every black person when she/he joins the trade union in my days knew what a trade union stood for. First of all you had to prove to the people what you actually stand for. If you say we are here to fight for the betterment of your working conditions, some sceptics would say make the conditions first better I will come and join. You would have to go and prove that for the first time we are getting a wage increase far greater than anything that had happened before. Remember in my days, when you started working, things like wage/salary increases, worked as follows. If your supervisor is happy with you, if you are a docile employee who does not answer back, who does not question what the boss said you could be given a 3 cents increase. If the employee who is causing his boss some problems, maybe he answers back, maybe he questions the boss's instruction, maybe he is not as docile in the eyes of the boss as the boss would like, sometimes the boss, even in our own factory, the boss would say to you "you think you are clever, the increase time has come, you are getting nothing from me", and indeed you would get nothing.

Equally your boss could say “and I am going to give you one cent increase” and you would have nowhere else to go for recourse. His word was final, with the dawn of the labour organisation, everybody got exactly what was negotiated for. That category of employees, if it was grade G or grade H or F, if the increase was 2% whatever, everybody in that category would get that much. It was something new to our people, it had never been like that, even at the time of increase it would fluctuate depending on how your boss was pleased with you. Later on, as a result of that, you would find that in the same category, in the same job grade, people have fluctuating rates of pay, then we had the other struggle of eliminating that. And when all of those things happened, like a uniform increase applying to all the people in the grade, our people started seeing, started to gain confidence in their representative.

The first challenge was credibility in front of your own people, prove that you can represent us, powerful as the bosses were, we did the little that we could. The other challenge that we were faced with was can you represent both coloured and African interest. Remember in my days, what was dominant was black people belonged to the homelands, and there were homeland governments that were said to be our government, whether we had elected them or not, whether we resided on their territory or not, but we were regarded as either you are Ciskeian, or you are a Transkeian. Whereas with the coloured people, because of the tri-cameral parliament, they belonged to the Labour Party, most of them that was led by Reverend Hendrickse that was participating in the tri-cameral parliament. Now they have got their own coloured leaders, you have got your own African leaders, political, religious, whatever. Do you think now you can speak on behalf of the other group? You struggle to

speak their language, you struggle to understand their own culture, that was the other challenge that we had to face.

Facilitator: how did you overcome that one?

Respondent: It was not easy to overcome it but one of the things I mentioned much earlier to you was that if we had to focus as a group of employees in a particular section, whether we were black, white and coloured and the boss expected us to produce so many components by the end of the day we had to find a way and compromise our own cultural differences. In this case we had to do exactly the same thing. In order for you to win say the coloured people who in our area are mostly Afrikaans speaking, you had to speak their language because the first way of bringing them closer to you is entertaining part of their culture and in our own case then you would have to speak Afrikaans. We had to learn the Afrikaans language and start speaking it so that they can get the message directly from you and not have an interpreter interpreting it for you rather you must learn their language. In our case we had to do that, and we learned their language so that we could be able to speak to them, so that we can be able to speak for them as representatives. In front of management again it was to prove that you are a genuine leader of both the African as well as the coloured people. For example, amongst the African people, even today if you look at the ANC, not everybody African agrees with Nelson Mandela, the majority agrees with him, the majority like him but not every black person. It was the same thing in our own case. Whenever you went to speak on behalf of your members to management, the first thing management would do to challenge you would say but we have spoken to some of the black people on the shop floor they don't agree with you. For example who

knows that he's the boss's loved one and stands a chance of getting an increment greater than his other colleagues would not be happy when you negotiate a percentage increase that he believes falls lesser than what he would have got from his boss. Because his boss now would turn around and say "ja Daniel I will still like to give you a ten cents increase but the union says all of you must get 3 percent", and indeed such an African who believes that he could have benefited more had he gone as an individual would feel unhappy. So the challenge would be, when you go to speak to management on behalf of the people, management would always raise the fact that there have been some of your people who came in and said they are not happy with the decision to give a uniform increase to all the people. And that would be a fact, you know that some of the people did go to management to say that because they know they stand a chance of getting more than the others. Some of the people had become accustomed to that because if was the culture of the day, they could easily go to their boss if they are on good terms with the boss, and say "ja boss all these years you used to give me a little bit more than the others because I also give you more than the others. Now I see that this year you have also dropped me, why do you do that?". Some people did it, so one of the challenges, to prove to the boss, the employer that you are the genuine representative of your own people and that wasn't easy. There were many others.

Facilitator: and then issues around discrimination at work, how did you deal with those issues as the workers?

Respondent: Remember that discrimination at work was institutional. I've already made mention of the job reservation act, which was a discriminatory act in itself. When I joined SKF in 1969 there were separate

ablution facilities, there were separate rest rooms for the various race groups. White people had their own rest rooms, the coloureds had their own rest rooms, the Africans had their own rest rooms. Now how can you bring those people together to speak with one voice when, even during the rest periods at work they are separated according to race. So indeed there was a lot of racism in those days and it was evident because it was a way of life of in South Africa. Some of us had accepted it as a way of life. If for example I can't speak Afrikaans or I cannot speak English, because I am illiterate it serves me very well to sit together with other people who speak my own language. I wouldn't have the difficulty of having to practice to speak or to try and listen to another person's language and sometimes it makes sense but to others it did not make sense because it entrenches racial divisions.

Facilitator: were you affiliated to FOSATU?

Respondent: yes in later years we became an affiliate of FOSATU, FOSATU was formed in April of 1979, so when I joined the union in 1977 there was no FOSATU by then. When FOSATU of course was .., in fact we were part of the people that worked for the formation of FOSATU, we were part of that group that said that among other things we need broader worker unity, we do have now our own industrial unions, but an industry all by itself in an economy made up of various industries is vulnerable, you can always be shut down by the employers who say "ja guys but you are making things impossible for us to survive in this industry", look at the other industries, whether it's the textile industry or whether it's the tyre and rubber industry, whether it's the motor industry, but look at the motor industry, the wages and the salaries are far lower than what you are paying and you are telling us that your people are complaining and yet

those guys who are earning less than you are keeping quiet. So a federation then for us was a second natural development. The first development was unity according to the various work establishments, the second one was creation of industrial unions, unions that were strong don't just go for a few members in a factory in an industry, go for the majority of the members so that you can have negotiating power in that particular factory and if you bring them altogether in one industry, then you would have a stronger voice within the industry. But when you go to the federation you want to broaden the voice of the workers across industry because the federation brings them altogether. So yes we were in the forefront of course of trying to establish FOSATU.

Facilitator: Did it pay dividends, FOSATU?

Respondent: For me it did pay dividends because first of all it gave us a bigger voice because we were different industries and we were under one federation, our power was much greater. We could then embark on sympathy strikes as well, something that was not easy when you do not belong to one body, but once you have got a common body it enables you to have others from outside your industry and once you do that you become a bigger threat to the economy of the country. So if one asks me I will say there were dividends, a lot of them. Dividend number 1 was the broadest possible unity could be achieved under a federation and we could then, with the federation, chart a common direction for the organised section of the community. We were also able, because of the federation, to have a political cloud as well. Once we had spoken the employers, the state, would listen because we would say we are not happy with whatever and we would want a change on that and of course they would be forced to listen.



Facilitator: what about victimisation as the leadership in the workplace?

Respondent: One of the challenges of course that you had was victimisation. I do know that .., let me not talk about the other companies because the other companies .., I worked in a multinational company. We always had the advantage of communicating with our counterparts in Sweden who worked for the same company. But others would not be in such an advantageous position. Like for example the people in the textile industry, if you met with Dora, they wouldn't be in a similar position because theirs was a local textile factory, the same with the people that worked for Dorbyl, who would you have met .., Mrs Makhate she was from Dorbyl, it was a local engineering factory and it was not as easy as for example a multinational company who you could expose to the mother country and of course the mother country would look at what they are doing in a particular country with strong eyes in which case they would be forced to compromise their arrogant position.

Facilitator: the problems and challenges of the shop stewards did it change with time or they remained the same throughout?

Respondent: for me I would say because the times are not static, they change, the nature of the challenges also change. I will say to you in my own time, because we were the fore-runner unions after the complete suppression of the ANC/PAC linked trade union organisations, when we were organising in the 1970s, one of the first things that we had to do with the employers was to gain recognition. Today recognition is something like a given for the unions, you just inform management that we have recruited some of your employees and we will come and represent them.

In my own days it wasn't like that, the employer would answer back in my own days (1) is that union registered and the answer would be no, then they would say "why do you want us then to perform an illegal act and start talking to you". And you had no legal recourse, you can go nowhere else, you had to find other ways of forcing them to recognise you as a representative of the people that they had employed. So that was one of the challenges that you had. Something that today is taken for granted. (2) Stop order facilities, in my days when we started, some of us, not for the people for SKF but some of us were still doing what was called hand collections because the employers would not deduct union subscriptions for union members from their own administration block, they wouldn't do it. They would say if you have members let them come to you and pay by hand so there would be what was called hand collections, every Friday union officials standing at the gate waiting for the people who said they want to enrol into the union to come up and pay their subscriptions by hand and then you would be given some kind of a receipt. So even stop order facilities had to be negotiated for which was one of the challenges that we had to deal with. Then would come the challenge of whether management would accept you as the true representative and they would play all sorts of games. Sometimes in some factories ..., it didn't happen with us in our own company but we knew that in other companies it was happening because people had experienced it in front of our own eyes where if a person had joined the union, his/her boss would make it a point that that person gets fired. They would wait for you to come in late and they would not accept your reason for coming late. You would have somebody keeping an eye on you to check whether when you are coming back from a tea break or when you go to the ablution block, how much time do you spend, some of our people used to be dismissed just for standing in the toilet for longer

than what the boss expected was natural. When you come back he would say "it was too long, you are wasting time blah blah blah" and then of course you lose your job. Some of our people did lose their jobs like that in my days. Today I hear it's not the case anymore, unions are accepted as a common feature of the South African work life.

Facilitator: so the issue of sanctions and relocation of SKF because it was an international company, was it ever in the pipeline or in the air?

Respondent: It was, in our own case, the Swedish government had passed a law preventing investments in South Africa based Swedish subsidiaries and our own company SKF was also affected by that. There was a pressure to disinvest but for the Swedish companies what the Swedish government said was there will be no more further investments in Swedish subsidiaries in South Africa. The anti-apartheid movement in Sweden was advocating the extreme position of pulling out. We had labour organisations that we had relationships with in Sweden like that with the Swedish Metal Workers Union who would say we are prepared to advocate the total pull out of Swedish subsidiaries in South Africa if we get an instruction to do so by our sister unions or counterparts in South Africa. In our own case when I was asked during a visit to Sweden, why is SKF your company not pulling out of the country, why aren't you advocating disinvestment and the pull out of the company. My answer to them was I am in support of the disinvestment campaign as launched by our liberation movement but as a representative of people I have to wait for their mandate before I can say so. And one of the reasons the people wouldn't, whether it was at Volkswagen, a German company, whether it was at Good Year and American Company, whether it was at BMW or at SKF or at Sandvik a Swedish company, none of our members in all of those

countries ever voted for the pull out of their respective companies. One or two employees might get onto a public platform and say “and I want my company to pull out of the country”, that would not constitute a mandate from the majority members, for you a representative to go out and say, and we want this company to disinvest or we want this company to pull out of the country. What they had done in Sweden as I have indicated to you, was to prevent Swedish companies from further investing in South Africa. That is all that they did, in which case it meant for a company like the one I worked for, where they were at the time when the anti-investment position was taken by their government they could not grow any further. That was the only major problem that they experienced. They could not grow any further, they could not employ anymore people, rather they were getting smaller and smaller because their product was competing in the international market. It did not matter at international market level whether you were investing in order to produce better quality, to produce more output or whatever but if your product is cheap enough and also good enough in quality the customer will buy and if it is not it won't and in our own case, our own output was getting more and more expensive to produce because our equipment we could not replace it with better more modern, more efficient equipment because of that position that was taken by the Swedish government. So yes we were affected by the disinvestment campaign and we had to answer in some cases why were we not advocating it in public as union leaders, it was because our members had not given us that mandate, supportive of the ANC's position as they were, because they were members of the ANC. But one of the things they considered was if they close their own factory, who is going to give them bread for their children at the end of the day. They did consider those things,

somebody may say that is an economic union position, the fact of the matter is that the people never gave us that kind of mandate.

Facilitator: now talking about the ANC, did you as SKF have direct links with the ANC in exile or people who were underground?

Respondent: We did not, not to my knowledge, have a direct link with the ANC, but we did know that some of our office bearers like John Gomomo for example, were the people who were linking up with the ANC on our behalf. One of the things that we had feared was opening ourselves to all sorts of abuse as well as dangers. The South African apartheid security system was very efficient, one ways of fighting with them was to have as few a number of people interacting with the ANC as possible, because the greater the number the greater the chance that one of them is going to be the bad apple and everything that you had been doing would be undermined in the blink of an eye. One of our positions was in order to avoid such, you need to have very few people that interact with the ANC on behalf of us all, John Gomomo was one, Alec Erwin was another person, but the others like myself for example I was never given a mandate to be the link between the ANC and ourselves, but we did have that link.

Facilitator: so how did you become a shop steward?

Respondent: I was elected by the people in the 1977

Facilitator: and for how long?

Respondent: I was a shop steward for 13 continuous years.

Facilitator: over the years, when you look back what do you think were the major achievements?

Respondent: For me the greatest achievement was to have a voice for the workers, the other achievement was to make it possible for organised workers to participate in the struggle for liberation, in our South African liberation struggle it can never be said that the workers did not play a part. In our case it was evident and anyone can see it and I'm definitely sure that even some of our biggest politicians realised that those are some of the major victories that I can boast of. The other one would be the improvement of (1) the working conditions of the working people (2) their social standard.

Facilitator: any failures maybe or any downside?

Respondent: some of the downside, even in my own time, not necessarily in the last few years that I am not active, but in my own time, one of the failures I think I can accept responsibility for was the failure to get as many workers in our fold as possible, by the time I left there were two major metal unions, it was us, NUMSA and the other one was MEWUSA and today I'm saying even then I believe we could have done and we should have done more to increase the unity of the metal workers because I learn today that although I had left the leadership of the metal union way back in 1990, it does not seem as if there has been serious attempts to get MEWUSA and NUMSA to come together. I left the union activism way back in 1990, it is now 20 years ago and I'm definitely sure, 20 years is too long, by now we should have been able to bring MEWUSA and NUMSA together. We believe that the policies that we have of worker control, of

strong shop floor structures should be universal. If they are not, we are failing to educate our own people in MEWUSA for example, to get to understand that these are selfless principles on which you can build today, on which you can build for the future and for me it becomes a downside that we never had the opportunity to exert as much energy in the unity of the metal workers as I think we should have done, it wasn't easy for me to see it at the time but when I am seated here today I say that is one of our downsides and I think it was a very big downside.

The other downside that I think applied then, and I can accept responsibility for even now is, there always will be a room for general workers. When you are insisting on strong industrial unions, and we were very strong on that, that is very good, but you should also take into account that there will always be smaller industries, smaller groups of people that will be forever weak and you would need to identify them, you would need to encourage them and maybe assist them in setting up structures that will go across industries. If for example I look at the plight of the farm workers in South Africa today, I say, so weak is their position vis a vis their employers, the farm workers that on their own they would have an endless struggle that would make it near impossible to improve their conditions. You need a much broader unity. They are the ones that work and live on the property of the employer, they are at the mercy of the employer 24 hours 7 days. I am saying industry based workers, urban workers should make it their duty to give a lending hand to strengthen the voice of the poor farm worker who is at the total mercy of his or her own boss, it's not the case with industrial workers, like at Good Year, like at Toyota, like at BMW, they are not at the .., they don't live on Toyota's property, they have their own houses. As a result I am saying today one of our downsides then was the inability to assist the farm workers especially

the setting up of strong general unions that would address the plight of the weaker sections of the labour community, like domestic workers. We've heard very sad stories of domestic workers who become sex slaves to their masters and there is nothing we are doing about that. And I'm saying if it had been the workers in the larger industries who are saying because of the plight of our brothers and sisters out there on the farms, this is the action we are taking, I think the conditions would have been much better. But it starts with realising which sections you are leaving behind with your industry based unions and what are you doing about those sections, what kind of assistance are you lending to them.

Facilitator: If you look at the 1980s, those were the turbulent times, the height of apartheid so to speak. Was there a link between the township struggles and the struggle of the workers in the workplace?

Respondent: for me where I am sitting, yes there was, I will make an example. One of the UDF activists who was working in our own company, Sam Hass, he was a shop steward at one stage and he was a UDF activist, I think he was in the committee that was called the Top 10, he was detained in those days there was 90 days detention. I was a shop steward. We approached management and we said to management that we do not want him to lose his job, in those days if you went for 90 days you were dismissed by your employer on the very same day, just to be arrested for political activity, in our own case we went to our employer SKF and we said first thing he does not lose his job, because we know that people who were detained were not necessarily guilty nor would they ever be charged, and of course he was never charged, he was just kept for that, it was 90 day detention, he was kept for 90 days and thereafter he was released. One thing we did was to protect his job. (2) it was to



protect his wages, together with the company we discussed is it possible for the company to pay him for the time that he was in detention and the company said no we cannot do that. After some negotiations the matter stopped there. We contacted our Swedish counterparts and we explained to them what apartheid was doing in the form of detention without trial and we said to them we have this employee of ours who has been detained, he is a member of our union but he's an activist in the township and we would like that he does not lose his job and that he gets his salary. Our Swedish counterparts in the metal union met with their own Swedish employer at the group head quarters and amongst other things they discussed, they established what became known as the Relief Fund, and that Relief Fund paid Sam Hass every week's salary up until he was released. His wife used to come to the factory because I had to go to his family and say this is the arrangement that we have struck with the company, you must come in every Friday and when she comes in she knocks at our offices as the union shop steward we accompany her, the full salary the man would have earned. To me that is a contribution to the struggle.

Let's put that one aside. There were struggles and campaigns, one campaign was a campaign for the non payment of services. Now in our own case is the rent boycott because we are unhappy about the roads or whatever made us unhappy. Then of course who is paying the rent, it is parents who work, they are our members, so that conscientisation, that campaigning for the people not to pay rent comes to the factory with the facts. We explain to the people why the feeling is that they should not pay the rent. Consumer boycotts, there were many consumer boycotts during that period. It was our duty to explain to our own members why consumer boycotts so that when they are participating it is with

understanding. Remember they had representatives that they trusted and we would make it our point that we go back to them and explain every single step of what we are doing. On top of that if there was any activist in the area, that had been arrested for example we would make it our duty to go and negotiate for their release with the security. It may not have succeeded with all the people, equally some of our shop stewards were leaders in the community and we gave them whatever support we could and for me that is participating in the people's community struggles in the people's political struggles.

Facilitator: and then how much of legal backing did the unions have at that time?

Respondent: at that time it was very difficult to have legal support. We relied on sympathetic individuals. In South Africa you did have lawyers that either were members of the ANC or were in some way clandestinely supportive of the ANC activities. We did have lawyers that had made it a point to fight and defend human rights activists, because trade union leaders, community leaders under apartheid when you defend them as a lawyer you would have to do so as recognising their human rights struggle. You can't say I recognise the fact that they are fighting for improved wages, you would recognise the fact that what they are fighting for is a human right and that is how your case could have a better chance when you go to court. So yes we did have lawyers that were sympathetic. One instance that I can remember is the shooting of the people of Langa on 21 March in 1985. The lawyers that represented those families whose members had died during that incident those lawyers had been organised and paid by our labour organisation, Cheadle, Thomson and Haysom was one of them, I can't remember the others. They were

our lawyers and they served our community. That case was defended by those lawyers and we believe that had that not been the case the situation would have been worse because no local lawyer .., you couldn't get a black lawyer who was prepared to expose himself to that extent but at least there were sympathetic lawyers and as I say this was the one firm that came forward and they assisted us in Uitenhage and of course they were our lawyers in the labour movement but they were availing their services through us for our communities. So there were few lawyers of course that could give you that kind of a backing.

Facilitator: I'm not sure whether the work population of SKF remained a man's only world?

Respondent: Well in my days when I joined it, some of the jobs were for women, in the engineering industry in South Africa it has always been like that. There are certain jobs that have always been reserved for women but the women folk they employed were coloured women, they did not employ black African women, at SKF of course with the power of the unions over the years growing we finally came to a stage where we started challenging the company to employ black women, by the time SKF closed down they had started employing black women, not because they wanted to but because of the internal struggles waged by the union. So yes there were women in the engineering industry when I started but they were coloured women, this is apart from women in the administration block which would be white women, but they were women, on the production lines it was coloured women, that was a long standing policy of the engineering industry.

Facilitator: were they part of the unions these women?

Respondent: they did join our union but they did not join the union in mass, they joined the union gradually over time, the first problem that you had was the language problem, the shop stewards that were elected were Xhosa speaking people like myself and of course they had to learn to speak and understand the culture of the people and win the confidence of the people but indeed eventually they had joined our union in greater numbers.

Facilitator: and their benefits were they assured maternity leave and other things?

Respondent: well there were benefits, remember when we started with this campaign of trade unionisation in 1977 there were no such benefits, but by the time we left we had already won benefits for example like maternity leave, at SKF there was also the paternity leave for the men when the wife delivers. Now such like benefits were somewhat ahead of the other establishments even within the engineering industry, some of our benefits were much better.

Facilitator: and also in terms of in service training, what kinds of skills require, you were running this kind of work because its work within work, all of you from high school and so on or if not most of you, did you need some skills to make sure that you actually become more polished and so on?

Respondent: Indeed we had to be taken through all of that, if for example you look at our policies, like worker control, I will use it as an example, or if you are talking about strong shop floor structure, or if you

are talking about non-racialism, if you are talking about industrial unionism. Those are things that you would not understand naturally, somebody would need to explain to you what is meant by strong shop floor unions, strong industrial unions, somebody would need to explain that. In our union when we joined, one of the cardinal things was trade union education. We had education programmes on things, simple things like what is a trade union, what are the duties of a trade union representatives, what are the duties of a trade union member, what do you expect from your members. Things like how do you go about representing your own people. Things like negotiating skills, they did not come naturally, even the running of a meeting, it did not come naturally that you could become a chairperson, you had to be trained and know what is the duty of the chairperson, what is the duty of a secretary or a recorder of a meeting and what is it that you need to put down as the record of that particular meeting. You had to learn about those things, and some of us even went up to university level training. For example we had the Wits University where some of their lecturers were sympathetic to the labour organisations. I have attended courses on labour organisation at the University of Wits that were run by Eddie Webster together with Phil Bonner and we also had in Natal some lecturers that were prepared to assist, I can remember there was a Prof. Khan, and there was a Prof. Vishnu Padayachee that used to help us train and prepare us for things like wage negotiations, to understand like how does the economy of the country work, and all of those things. They did not come naturally. So yes there was a lot of training, there was a lot of education on how we can effectively do the work that we were supposed to do.

Facilitator: in 1990 why did you leave the unions?

Respondent: I left the union in 1990 having served 13 continuous years because I did not get the support of the members from my own factory and my own region. When we went to the National Congress in 1991 I had realised that some of the people in our factory by 1990 they were no longer supporting me as their leader, they had feelings that they would like to see a change of leadership. At that stage the challenge was coming from leadership that had been active in community structures. Some of them believed that in the labour movement they can do better than what we had done, and as a result when they came in to work in our establishments they started challenging our authority. When people challenge your authority you would notice it, when you are given a mandate, you carry it out you come back to report to the people, when you report to the people they respond, we accept what you have been able to achieve for us, we do not accept and we think this is where you have made a mistake and we would like you to go back once again. You would reach a stage as a representative where you say "guys I have done the best I can, I cannot see management moving any further on this matter, I think I am now recommending that we should settle" once you start getting people who question even that, who challenge even that and tell you their representative, an experienced representative, maybe experience doesn't count that much, but once people start saying to you, "no we don't accept that you must go back and do a,b,c,d" at the time when you are saying I feel we have exhausted our mandate and I feel we can't go any further than this. Once you reach that stage where they question even that, when you make a recommendation, then it means it's time for you to go. It means you have reached a point where you cannot continue as a representative. Just imagine Nelson Mandela having to run up and down in between the meetings with de Klerk and with his own people, at a certain point he has got to say to the people,

you take your weapons and you throw them to the sea this is whether you like the weapon or not but the time for peace has come. So in my own case I felt that my authority now was being challenged, now it means it is the time for me to hand over to a new generation and indeed a new generation did pop up, people who were relatively new in the work environment, people who were relatively too young to lead, people who were relatively speaking inexperienced, they wanted to come in and lead the organisation and my personal feeling was this is the time for me to quit. So I resigned being a shop steward at SKF in 1990. In 1991 when I went to the congress I was fulfilling the three year mandate as the president of the organisation. So when I went to the congress I did not have the support of my own factory because there were by then new shop stewards. And it's the same people that had been agitating for a change of leadership, challenging my authority and things like that and of course I did not have the support from my own region, the Eastern Province region. And of course the reason I did not have that support is because some of the shop stewards that were part of the ..(unclear) delegation came from my own factory, so they had influenced their peers not to vote, not to support me and when I got to the congress, I had the majority support from all the various regions of our organisation. The only region that didn't want me was my own region and of course I accepted that, this is another sign that you have to step down, all the other people can like you to continue, but if your own people that you live and work with do not, it means it is the time for you to bow out. That's the only reason, but I saw and I read the situation and I said it has come to a point where I think I should bow out.

Facilitator: Is there anything that you think is important which should have been part of this interview?

Respondent: Maybe one thing that we have not mentioned is the foreign funding we received. Because one of the things that must be remembered, in the 1977 period we did not .., our people were the lowest paid labourers in all the places where they worked, a union subscription was not sufficient to run the organisation efficiently. You couldn't open union offices in all the towns or industrial areas where you have got members, you couldn't have offices in Uitenhage, an office in PE, an office in East London because each office is going to need equipment and staff and that staff needs to be paid and the equipment needs to be rented or whatever. As a result we were dependent on donor organisations donating funding to us. So at the start in 1977, our union's education programmes for example, had to be funded externally, one of the advantages of belonging to a federation was that it was the federation that would go out and raise funds. I happened to be part of the people that used to go to Scandinavia for example, to Canada and the United States to go and speak to our donor organisations so that they could give us more funding and we would explain what the funding would be used for. Most of it of course went into the education of the shop stewards.

Facilitator: and did it dry up at some point in time?

Respondent: well at some point yes, because as our organisations were growing in terms of one influence, in other words we were beginning to raise the salaries and the wages of our own members, on the other hand the numbers of the membership were also growing. We were moving into other outlying areas to go and organise motor workers for example who worked on the outlying garages, it was becoming more and more



expensive, even for our funders and we were learning to rely more and more on our own internal funding mechanisms via our own members that were beginning to earn better, that were beginning to be also more in numbers which means the funding pool also was increasing internally through the subscriptions of our own members. By the year 1987 that we were forming NUMSA, we had 3 major unions that had a better financial standing than other participants in the Unity Negotiations. Those unions were NAAWU, MAWU and MICWU, the others that participated had lesser funding but these they were much better and MICWU was the most solid of the three when it came to their own reserves. They already had invested in property and that was an idea far ahead of our own time. We were so militant that all of our funding went into financing the court cases against our members because our members were forever out on strike and we had to defend them and of course it drained our resources. So I think the funding, because sometimes people may not know that to begin with we had to rely on donor organisations to fund our organisations but during the course of growth we were also able to financially stand on our own. Today we are strong, and maybe one other thing that I have not mentioned was .., and we had made it our duty via our federation that we should assist other workers, myself, Chris Dlamini who was the president of FOSATU and Maxwell Xulu who was the president of MAWU. We went to Namibia to meet with the Namibian Metal Workers and we established a relationship with them. We were helping them from our own meagre funds in the establishment of their own metal union, its called Metal and Allied Namibia Workers Union. In those days their president was Andries Temba. We funded them and we worked together with them, we stayed in South West Africa for a couple of days sharing with them our own experiences, sharing with them our own strategies on how we were doing

the things down here. To me that is yet another broader contribution to the working people's struggle, to the working class struggle.

Facilitator: when you look back was it worth it to get involved in the unions?

Respondent: If you ask me was it worth it my answer would be yes, if you ask me would I do it again, my answer is if the conditions could be back to where they were I am definitely sure I would do it again. One of the things is we were never doing or getting involved with the struggle of the workers with the political struggle for liberation in South Africa because we had hoped for remuneration, we had hoped for positions, not at all. At the time when we joined these labour organisations in 1976 none of us could ever in our wildest dreams have foretold that Nelson Mandela would be free one day, never. All of us our understanding was that, just like our forefathers we were making our contribution after which we are going to die and others will take over from us, liberation, the freeing of Nelson Mandela, although everybody was .., because it was part of the slogan to say free Nelson Mandela, Free our leaders now, it was a slogan we never ever expected it would happen in our own lifetime. I remember when Gomomo came back from meeting with Nelson Mandela in Robben Island when they were talking about Talks About Talks because we had our delegation from COSATU that went down to meet with Nelson Mandela, when they came back, Moses Mayekiso told us that we are in for a surprise, things are moving much faster than we thought. Gomomo used the expression we are going to be caught with our pants down because the developments moved much faster than we had ever thought. It's only now that we realise that there was a much bigger picture, there were much bigger pieces of the game that were moving

around with the Soviet Union losing its international influence as a world power because of their own internal, economic, political, military problems, whilst on the other hand the Western countries with America in the centre were also experiencing their own pressures, whilst on the other hand we had other smaller countries like Cuba playing an important part in other parts of the world. We were not aware of that bigger picture that was unfolding so indeed when we got involved we did not know that South Africa would be free when it got free in 1994, we never thought about that and in fact I can easily say that from the day Nelson Mandela was released things started moving completely outside of our normal speed of understanding that is why so many of the members of our own communities are lost in this new environment. They do not exactly know where do we place ourselves, you can see the corruption inside government it's so prevalent, you can say this country is being controlled by nothing but corrupt people, because we were taken by a huge surprise, we never had a chance to train the next tier of political leaders in the same way that Thabo Mbeki and others were trained by Oliver Tambo, Nelson Mandela and the other older people because Nelson Mandela and them are father to Thabo Mbeki but Thabo Mbeki never got a chance to prepare his own son so that when he moves out of office his son can now take over. We never had a chance to do that. Even within the labour movement, we did not get a chance to say when we become free Cyril Ramaphosa, Alec Irwin they will go into .., and many others will go into government, local government, provincial government, national government, so let's prepare our second tier leadership in labour, we never had a chance to do all of those things because things took us by surprise, they moved much faster than we had anticipated because of course of other broader worldwide developments.

Facilitator: ja and what should have been the position of the unions after 1994?

Respondent: it's very difficult to say because I was an activist under the apartheid era which was a completely different era, it had its own priorities, and I am sure that the people of today, today's labour leaders live also in an era of their own and it's possible that some of the ideas of yesterday, my own era cannot apply in today's era because it's a free democratic era but I can say this much, today we have got a government that we put in power, we've put the ANC into power, we made our own cross, we went around galvanising our members to support the ANC policies. The second part, this government, our government, it is saying we are levelling the playing field, now the challenge for today's unions is if the playing field has been levelled are they ready to come and play because the field has now been levelled. If the field has not been levelled to their advantage, what are they doing about that, if the field has been levelled and it gives them also an advantage the question is are they coming in to play. If they are playing whose rules are they using because the playing field may be levelled and yet the teams are playing according to somebody else's rules, you will still not win because the rules don't favour you. So for me, when I look back I say it was a different era, it had its own challenges, it had its own priorities, this one is a new era it's got its own challenges, labour has got its own priorities but they have got a government that claims to be the leveller of the playing fields, they will need to answer questions like are they ready to go in and play, what are the rules like. Whose rules are they, who do they favour because rules always work like that and if they are happy then obviously one would say they are doing what they want to do. To decide for them it's very difficult, it's like being a judge over a matter that I do not

understand very well. Yes if I was a leader I am definitely sure I could comment maybe further than what I have said.

Facilitator: any closing word?

Respondent: it would be to say that South Africa is going through a transition as a country, a political transition, a social transition, an economic transition, a cultural transition and I would say I am proud trade unions have played a positive role. From now onwards it is in the hands of the current labour leaders to decide what kind of a contribution would they like to make and of course when they also go through interviews like this one that you are conducting then they will be able to say how do they feel about this current period. Thank you.

Facilitator: Thanks a lot.

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