

SIMON SONYANE

Facilitator: This is an interview with Mr. Simon Sonyane, we are in Pretoria, the date is the 9th of May 2012, and the interview is done by Brown Maaba. Cde thanks very much for your time, just give me a background for you, where you were born, just some family background, schooling and how you ended up in the unions.

Respondent: Thank you Cde. My name is Simon Sonyane, I was born on the 11 November 1957 at a place called Ladysalwon in Pretoria. From there we moved to an area, a farm called Swaartspruit. I started attending schooling at Kameeldrift Bantu School in 1967. I ended my schooling in 1973 when I was doing standard six by then. Then I started working for Pretoria City Council which is the City of Tshwane today, its where I gained experience as to how do you deal with people and oppression of workers. From there I was elected to represent workers in a Worker's Committee, but we were not allowed to negotiate about wages, the only thing we were allowed to negotiate was the pick and shovel, to tell the employer that we don't have enough picks and gumboots and all those things, but when coming to wages the employer was deciding for us, giving us 10% which is R10 on your increase.

Then it went up to 1980 where the City Council of Pretoria opened our eyes, they formed their own union which they called Union of Pretoria Municipal Workers, where they started to train certain people, the white collar employers. They trained us about what a shopsteward is. From there we started knowing about the trade union movement. Then we met with the CUSA people, which is now NACTWU, under the union called National Union of Public Service, the General Secretary of that union if I might recall was Siphso Hadebe, may his soul rest in

peace. He is the one who highlighted us about the trade unions, he said that the City Council Union was an employer's union, so you can't belong to an employer's union, you'd better join a union that is independent from the employer. That is where we left the union of the employer, but there was a rift by then when we left the employer's union.

Facilitator: Yes, we were faced with warnings, harassment, even the SAP, the police by then, they used to come and trace our movement because we were very involved in the Black Consciousness Movement together with the union. At night after hours, we would go to the activities of the political organization, during the day our activity was the trade union movement inside the workplace where we represent our co-workers, and we assisted then as shopstewards.

Then in 1990, we formed a trade union, the National Union of Hotel and Restaurant, Catering, Commercial Health and Allied Workers, which is the union that I am the General Secretary for now. Now what I can say regarding the trade union movement Cde is that really we have come very far with the struggle of the workers. By the time we were engaged in this was during those days of Apartheid, it was tough then, it was tough for people to join the trade union. Today it easier for people to belong to a union, but now sometimes there is something that comes to my mind that the workers of yesterday and the workers of today are not the same. The workers of today depend much on, really they are so easy, the platform is there for them but to join the union is so difficult for them I don't know why. During our days we used to carry out the activities, political and the trade union movement level issues. Now what we are seeing is that the playing field in the trade union movement is level for the workers, where they can easily join a union, fight for their rights. But really if they talk so tough, especially now in my

union that I am in, we represent more or less much of vulnerable workers, like farm workers, those that are working at the bush where nobody sees them, you know if in a restaurant you can easily see me that this person is there, but the person that works in the farm is there with the employer can be easily killed in that farm and its happening.

Let me just give a background about a strike that we had last year in one of Abatho in Bapsfontein. That strike, the police were involved, the employer still believes in the old system of treating workers, the workers don't have a say in that company. We went on strike for about a month for the wages, we ended up losing everything, even when we got to the labour court, the court was against the workers, believing what the employer, but I can tell you in that company workers are still facing hard times, they cannot even cough a voice, they elect shopstewards but the shopsteward doesn't have a right, we signed an agreement but the employer makes it so difficult for the worker to assess that, now these are difficulties that some of the workers in the farming areas that are facing.

In our union we were affiliated to FEDUSA, then our NEC decided that we need a small federation where we can at least have a voice. Then we joined CONSAMU and at least we are still there but things are not well as I know the federation like before, where we were the NACTWU's of that time, where we were carrying out the programmes. More or less that is the background that I can give unless if you need something that I can write, sitting down that I can write. What I have done in the courses Cde, my background is that I have done Industrial relations with Damelin Management School. In Wits we were attending at SASLO, and I was attending English school at Wits as well on Saturdays. Then in the CCMA, as you can see the certificate there, I completed Commissioner Courses in CCMA, and I say thanks to FEDUSA for

empowering me like that, to get the certificate was hard. If you can see there, its Substantive law with Advanced jurisdiction, Conciliation, Managing dismissal, Arbitration 1 and 2, that is what I have done.

Facilitator: Just to go back Cde, you mentioned the fact that you started with NACTWU.

Respondent: Yes, CUSA by then, it started as CUSA then it became NACTWU.

Facilitator: How were you introduced into CUSA, I mean you were just municipal workers.

Respondent: Yes we were municipal workers, we had a problem with our union, Municipal Workers Union, then we were seeking a union that can help us, then we ended up in the UDF offices, the liberation movement was banned by then, we then went to the UDF and advised us. Then we said lets go to Willie Theron building at the Bosman station, it was NACTWU union that had offices there. We met a lady by the name of Joyce Sedibe, the late Joyce Sedibe, this is where they advised us about the differences between the unions, employers unions they call it white collar union or yellow union. They gave us the difference between those unions and the unions that belonged to NACTWU, and then we enjoyed joining them.

Facilitator: What did you enjoy exactly for joining NACTWU?

Respondent: Their presentation, the difference saying the union of municipal workers is controlled by the employer, we assumed that the official was paid by the City Council as well, so now they said to us how will that person represent you. By then whilst that lady was addressing

us, we saw the difference. Security police came in and arrested some of the NACTWU officials for political activities, you know those underground activities, then we saw the difference, why would they be arrested and our officials are not being arrested, there's a difference there, then we followed that trend and we said we want to be arrested as well (jokes).

Facilitator: Were you aware of the fact that NACTWU embraced BCM ideology?

Respondent: Yes, the BCM and Africanism, yes there were two caps there. Then from there it's where we decided to belong to the Black Consciousness Movement.

Facilitator: What about non-racialism then, I mean the ANC line, you had made a decision to just dump that in favour of the BCM ideology?

Respondent: Well actually when we got to the UDF, I can say we were seeking advice, and then the official never took us seriously as we had a problem, to sit down with us, addressing us, as compared to the NACTWU people, they sat down with us and convinced us about the things that we were thinking about, and then they even said that they will visit our plant, you know that's the difference.

Facilitator: OK, so they showed interest.

Respondent: Yes, but look non-racialism is something that we live with in South Africa today, we cannot say these people we cant live with them, we live with them. Only the ideology is something else. You know by then, Apartheid made us believe that if you are white you are a master and if you are black and you are a slave, that is why we

decided to choose the Black line so that there must be a difference between the two.

Facilitator: Yes I see your point. Then I should guess that, that was the beginning of the new union within the municipality?

Respondent: The breaking away from the municipality union to form the National Union of Public Service.

Facilitator: Led by Blacks?

Respondent: Yes actually I can say led by Blacks.

Facilitator: Then you also mentioned that within the municipality Black people were oppressed.

Respondent: Yes

Facilitator: In what sense?

Respondent: You know when you in get in, it was tough Cde, when you get into the truck for instance, the employer would say sit at the back, and he would sit in front alone, drive the truck whether its winter or not you sit at the back. Also the question of promotion within, they will do it to empower only whites, mind you by that time you will recall that it was the National Party government, now they would go and get an old hobo in Church square, bring him to the city council and ask us to call him boss, if he talks to you he is your boss, three months down the line he is driving a nice vehicle and you don't have anything, its what we were facing, it was flawed, and the wage level was varied.

Facilitator: So what was the problem, you wanted to leave the union, I mean the employers union and they were refusing, why were they refusing, I mean I would be happy to get rid of Black people if I am White.

Respondent: For them the refusal is to say that we will bring communists inside, because they used to call us communists, we were five and shopstewards, they would say we have a communist mentality. The leaders of that union, I can tell you, they were driving us all over, by then City Council had its own security, if you do something the security will be after you, if you are carrying membership forms for the trade union so other people can join, they will be after you.

Facilitator: All five of you left from this union?

Respondent: The other one is late now.

Facilitator: Yes but you all formed this union which affiliated under NACTWU?

Respondent: Yes.

Facilitator: Was it easy then to recruit other people?

Respondent: Cde I can tell you it was tough because once you recruit, there was a hotel that NACTWU used to have meetings on a monthly basis, we booked that hotel, then officials of the City council security personnel would come in private clothes to come listen to what we are talking about, one day we discovered that this person was a security personnel, we chased him out of the meeting but by Monday when we

got to the premises it was tough, the police and everybody was there looking for us.

Facilitator: So you left your employment, were you a part time shopsteward or a full time shopsteward?

Respondent: I was a full time shopsteward working for the City Council, but by 1992 I left to form this union.

Facilitator: What were the pressing issues, you had now become a shopsteward and still in the municipality and the workers needed to see you to be driving their agenda, you were a shopsteward and you got them into NACTWU. What of the agenda, what were the pressing shop floor issues?

Respondent: The pressing issues were wages, conditions of employment, harassment that we were facing and especially for us who were leaders after we introduced that National Union of Public Service it was now tough, it made our lives very tough.

Facilitator: You are talking about harassment, who was harassing you as a unionist, the police or the employers?

Respondent: The employer would call the police, and the employer would get direct to you as well, and once you do something they would call the police, they were on top of you.

Facilitator: Was there a way out of this harassment?

Respondent: Well the way out was to fight back but not knowing where to run to, we were trying even to leave the country but not

knowing how, but we were always told other comrades left for Botswana, you know scattered around, we were trying those activities but not succeeding.

Facilitator: And wages, you also said that was also a problem, did you have wage strikes?

Respondent: Yes we did, the first strike of the City Council of the wages in Pretoria, I cannot recall the year but it was a massive one but it's where SAMWU started getting involved and then we were together with SAMWU people, then we fought that.

Facilitator: And you succeeded?

Respondent: We succeeded and managed to get the City Council to sit down on the table.

Facilitator: Also you mentioned that conditions of employment were not necessarily good, can you expand on that.

Respondent: The conditions of employment were not good, now lets talk about health and safety, you will be given an overall only, they will say get in the water and work, when the conditions were bad they would make the Black person work. During the winter they would make you get in the back of the truck without a tent or anything to protect you, you are in the back of the truck and you are moving a distance like here to Midrand, you'll get flu and other illnesses. I recall we were campaigning that the City Council put a tent on the back of the trucks, but at least today when I came this way I saw that they have that thing at the back of the truck, when I left there it was not

there, but we campaigned and they said no because the trucks used to carry cement and sand.

Facilitator: And then health issues, you talk about health that there were also problems around that area.

Respondent: Yes, around that area, that caused health risks.

Facilitator: And injuries at work?

Respondent: Well there were a lot of injuries at work, at least sometimes there was first aid available, but I recall one time I had an injury, I was cut and I was told by one supervisor to make sure that I take my jersey and wrap it so that my blood does not drip, and then they will take you to the clinic, and the clinic would tell you to go back to work maybe after two days, and you go back to work with that injury.

Facilitator: As a union, didn't you take these matters up, or these were not bad injuries, you could deal with them?

Respondent: It was bad, and one of the things that made us the union of the City council was that issue, because you would talk about the injury, tell the so called official of that union, he won't do anything about it, that is when we realized that it's true, this is the City council's union.

Facilitator: Were you able to expand the union or were you only Pretoria or Johannesburg based?

Respondent: We were based in Pretoria, by then the City Council Pretoria was employing about 14 000 workers, but from there when I left City Council our union had managed to get about 7 500, at least they got the recognition, its where we said we are leaving the union, our interest was to work for that union, but unfortunately the General Secretary didn't see it our way and we started having differences, we decided to form our own union because we were experienced, we could not even continue to work for the City Council again because of the way we were. You know when you are associated with something and then you carry out the work, it will be bad, not we know how to apply to the conciliation board, how to represent people, can't you use our services.

Facilitator: And before you left this union which was City Council based, what kind of cases did you have to deal with?

Respondent: Disciplinary hearings where I represented people, I recall my first case, I went with somebody to represent someone in a case and I did not have experience as to how to represent a person, we got to Minitoria Building and when I saw the mics and so on I started to shake, I called the chairman of the union, he was employed by the City Council as well, I said to him this one is difficult, he said I must carry on with it, I said but you are the chairman represent the person, he said no he was working for the City Council as well, but when I started I just there listening and asked for a (unclear), they chased that man away because I was not experienced enough to represent him. When we got to NACTWU they taught us that if you represent a person you do 1,2,and 3.

Facilitator: Subsequently did you win some of the cases?

Respondent: Yes we started wining them, that's why now when you win them at a higher level, you know the City Council is a big institution, you win them at the higher level, when you get to the plant, now the supervisors tell you that you think you are clever.

Facilitator: And victimization, if you are talking about that, did they victimise you?

Respondent: Yes a lot. I ended up not working, winning everything, if they say go and work with that person, they would decline to work with me because they would say I was troublesome, then they would lock us in the yard, the five of us, no supervisor wanted to go out of the yard with us, all of them said they didn't want to work with us, if they say go to the truck and take them, they would say no I'd better go home than work with these people, they are troublesome.

Facilitator: You also mentioned that other than the disciplinary cases, there are other cases that you had to deal with, what kind?

Respondent: The other cases was to look at complaints, to present this thing of, to say the pick, spade, shovel and all those things, those were minor cases and complaints, and grievances as well.

Facilitator: Ok, which included what in this case?

Respondent: Grievances, for instance when a worker is assaulted by a supervisor, you take that grievance, up to (unclear).

Facilitator: Did the workers have faith in the union?

Respondent: In our union that we started we did not believe that people will have faith in us, but at the end we saw people having more faith than they had for the official of Municipal Workers Union, and we were also employed by the City Council, but people put their trust on us.

Facilitator: And then I should also take it that there was also SAMWU as time went by.

Respondent: Yes, SAMWU started now to develop, by then when SAMWU started we did not, with our knowledge, we did not believe that SAMWU is a real union, you know what made us think that is the struggle that we came from, we thought it came from the employer again. SAMWU took over those officials of the Municipal Workers Union, then we started raising eyebrows seeing this as a problem because it was started by the people who worked in the offices, the clerks and all those people, then we started to see that we had a problem. There were two fractions, there was our union and SAMWU, then we maintained that, but we maintained peace, we believed that there was going to be violence amongst ourselves but no we maintained peace.

Facilitator: Did you lose members to SAMWU or did SAMWU lose their members to you.

Respondent: By the time when it started we were at 7500 members, when I left the City Council, our union had the recognition agreement. After we left they lost membership to SAMWU, they lost terribly to SAMWU. Now today I hear SAMWU is losing also to IMATU, IMATU is taking over and I don't know how.

Facilitator: For your union was it easy to get the municipality to sign the recognition agreement?

Respondent: It was tough brother. Look, from where we started until I left city council, the last year when I left city council is when we got the recognition agreement. When I said to the employer, the departmental Head, I said I was resigning, they even paid me over for extra two weeks to say good luck because they were not sure I was really leaving. You work twelve years, they said you worked twelve years and now you are leaving, so they said they would give me notice pay so that I leave with a clean slate.

Facilitator: So it was good riddance, they were happy that you were leaving.

Respondent: Yes.

Facilitator: Why was it easy to leave, you were there for twelve years and suddenly you were leaving and also leaving the union?

Respondent: I wanted to become a union official, and then the General Secretary did not see it that way, I am sure the subscriptions were enough for him, now he started to say you guys want to disrupt the union, I said fine we will start our own union. We went to the Department of Labour to the Registrar office, there was one old man there by the name of James, and he assisted us to register the union.

Facilitator: Ok, a new union, that's 1992.

Respondent: Yes, and he told us look, let me show you how do people of unions make money, with the R10 that you are paying they put it

together, the Johannesburg people make lots of money, make a Pretoria union, he influenced us that old man, he said we can make it and we made it.

Facilitator: And the union was called?

Respondent: It's this union now, National Union of Hotel, Restaurant, Commercial Health and Allied Workers.

Facilitator: So that's your focus?

Respondent: Yes.

Facilitator: Is it Pretoria based only?

Respondent: No, its Limpopo, we have members in North West as well.

Facilitator: When you started, was it difficult to get it off the ground?

Respondent: You know I nearly even said I was going back to City Council but didn't know how to go back because those people didn't like me. You know we used to have an old desk without a leg, we tied it with a wire, we went to British Embassy Consulate to ask for funding, they said no we cannot assist, we went to Netherlands Embassy, they bought us books at least, American Embassy paid for our courses of Arbitration in UNISA with Professor Viam. We started from the ground but it was tough, even today it's not easy, it's still tough but at least we are there.

Facilitator: So this was a new sector, the Restaurant, Hotel, it's different from the municipality. Why this sector?

Respondent: Why we changed the sector?

Facilitator: Yes.

Respondent: We did not want to see ourselves fighting our previous union that we used to love; we said even if we have differences with the General Secretary, we said lets leave that union to survive.

Facilitator: Was there market in this sector in terms of recruitment?

Respondent: Our sector?

Facilitator: In this new sector, this is 1992 and beyond.

Respondent: Our scope now is open, it's general.

Facilitator: And you managed to recruit as many as possible.

Respondent: We are trying, but now as I said workers of yesterday and workers of today are not the same. Yesterday oppression was too much, nowadays workers especially because you get youngsters who don't even know about the trade union movement, as long as they get salary, they work one month then they leave, they depend on their parents. There's one thing I was thinking about, why doesn't the government take the subject of trade unionism to the schools, so that these youngsters when they leave school must know trade unions because they are facing harassment, some you will find that they are even sexually harassed in the work place, they don't know their rights, how to defend themselves.

Facilitator: What were and still are the pressing issues in this sector, I am interested to know what is completely different from the other sector?

Respondent: It's the low wages.

Facilitator: Hotel, restaurants, the same?

Respondent: It's the low wages and some, the minister said a minimum wage for hospitality industry, what is happening, you will find in the restaurant people are still earning by tips and there is no minimum wage, and if you ask these workers because this is a sectoral discrimination, they don't know anything about minimum wage, they only know that they get salary on tips, they only know that if they get employed in the restaurant they will work for tips, now we are trying to open their eyes, but now they are not following that.

Facilitator: Is it the same in all restaurants, you work for tips?

Respondent: Especially the waiters, yes.

Facilitator: Are they unionised these workers, are they registered with the unions?

Respondent: They are afraid, they choose the young, smart ones, when you get there they don't know about unions, they will ask you more questions, what is this, why don't we know about it. They were not taught about unions for us to enjoy the union, we started this thing from the ground, and we made the union to be our school. Now these young kids don't know anything, from grade 12, maybe they start working; they don't know they have a right to voice something.

Facilitator: So in other words, they are ignorant or uninformed or they are just not interested.

Respondent: I would say they are uninformed.

Facilitator: When trying to recruit them to join the union, what is their position, some will say they are afraid of their bosses because they will chase them away, they don't even have a contract of employment. I will tell you we have one factory in Garankuwa, it's a Chinese owned company, what they are doing there, these youngsters are doing these televisions, you see Hisense, they employ these young ones, 18 – 20 years old, the oldest could be 25, their salary is R150 to R200 per week, I tell you if you go there u can cry, and if you look at the production that they are doing, they do nice TVs, we are still fighting that case as well, R150 a week, those are the things that our kids are facing because they did not know about the union. For them to come to the unions, one of them I am his uncle, so he asked me about it so I educated him about the union, so he told the others and then they came to join.

Facilitator: Is it easy then to sustain this union considering the problems of lack of interest from these youngsters to be part of unions and lack of knowledge?

Respondent: To sustain the union is difficult because you depend on subscription; you don't have a person that will say that I will sponsor you.

Facilitator: Subsidies.

Respondent: Yes, nothing else, you depend on just those things, if they left next month, even my salary reduced because people left, I have

to work hard to see to it that I keep them in the union, so you recruit and do the retainer as well.

Facilitator: Have you so far succeeded to win the cases of these workers because it seems to be that they are exploited in this sector.

Respondent: Some we win. You know what employers are doing; South Africa today is very expensive. They employers will go to, you will win the case in arbitration, they take it on review in the labour court, just to delay time, put it there, leave it there at the labour court, the case will go to court will stay up to 10 to 5 years; we don't the speedy mechanism to address these issues.

Facilitator: 5 to 10 years, is it?

Respondent: Yes, as long as, really they will put it there and say they are reviewing the matter and that poor worker will stay at home for the duration and they end up blaming the country and say the country is not doing anything for us, we are in the same trouble as before, they will think like that. When the case goes to the Sherriff, the Sheriff also wants a lot of money to go and deliver papers there and go and attach property.

Facilitator: As unions have you complained about these things so that maybe certain laws could be reviewed.

Respondent: Well normally, unfortunately we are not part of the NEDLAC because of the threshold there, but if we were part we could've raised this thing at NEDLAC very seriously, I don't know if the unions that are in NEDLAC, like COSATU, NACTWU and FEDUSA have, but I see that they don't voice these things, but I see, with my

experience that this is the problem, if you go to labour court you will see piles of files, major ones are reviewed, you win the case they case it must be reviewed, go back to the arbitration, they want it to go back, until that worker loses hope.

Facilitator: Yes, until you give up.

Respondent: Yes, I mean a worker without income for four months, you lose hope, let it go like that, the union is useless, the union is useless why did I join the union, and they will make as if the union is useless, money is a problem.

Facilitator: And these other, they are not unions, they are companies like Scorpions, Legal and (unclear) and so on, have they (unclear) from the unions in terms of membership.

Respondent: When they started it they did shake us but now they cannot shake us any longer because they don't negotiate, they represent only and at region level, they can't represent they don't have a status to represent, so the union at least we have to represent at conciliation level, maybe they can beat us when we go to labour court. I don't see them as a challenge to us.

Facilitator: And the CCMA is it effective as far as you can see?

Respondent: It is effective, but it needs to have teeth to buy it, at least if they would say that decision must be binding, not depend on the labour court only to do the binding, because if I win an arbitration case, if the employer doesn't want to pay me, I have to go to labour court, they must do it immediately in the CCMA that to be binding, so that the labour court must not sit with lots of reviews.

Facilitator: Has the hospitality sector been affected by labour brokers?

Respondent: Yes there is labour brokering.

Facilitator: How terrible or how bad is the situation.

Respondent: The worst of the situation is that, say for instance you've got this function or a big conference, they will employ about 50 people, after that conference they will say there is no job for you any longer, that conference was maybe for two days only or a week, then there's no jobs for them, they tell them to leave their telephone numbers and will call you, we will keep you on our database, when a job is available they call them to come and work for three days, now those workers don't have benefits, that is the situation.

Facilitator: So the rest of the hospitality sector, do you have problems of benefits?

Respondent: Benefits and short term work, it's a problem.

Facilitator: Maternity leave, no, nothing?

Respondent: Yes, you won't enjoy those benefits because you just work for two to three months and the job is finished, but if its something like a permanent job or seasonal work, its something that you can say I know that season we cannot do anything, but at least something is there.

Facilitator: Is there a way of pressing the employers as the unions to make sure that they employ people permanently especially nowadays when the economy is in the state of recession?

Respondent: You know I support the notion or the view of COSATU when they say do away with labour brokers but one sided, I know the comrades will go with that campaign and leave it there, not go and say you as independents or other federations join us lets do it together. Now the problem with South Africa is that if a campaign starts, we want to give it a name and say this campaign is of so and so, if it is for the workers, jointly, it would be a right campaign, because if we say this is a COSATU thing, it's just related to certain people. Although I support that view I cannot get to that, but if I am consulted and told about it, like in 1978 or somewhere there, when we fought the Labour Relations Bill, during the, who's that white president.

Facilitator: Botha?

Respondent: Yes, when we fought it, we were fighting together, like now we must come together and say let's fight with one voice. If workers can speak with one voice, we can achieve a lot.

Facilitator: The labour department, post 1994, I mean you have been in the unions during Apartheid, after Apartheid, 17 years after Apartheid, do you think that the Labour department has come to the party?

Respondent: The Labour Department to me I would say yes it did come to the party, especially on the intervention, but some of the inspectors, not all of them, they made the Department of Labour to be seen as a useless forum, because you would send in a complaint to the Labour Department and the inspector tomorrow becomes a friend to the employer, goes there even not called, drinks cool drinks with the employer while the workers are suffering, and receiving gifts from

employers, instead of doing (unclear), but I would say yes they come to the party.

Facilitator: I am not sure; you are no longer affiliated under NACTWU, this union?

Respondent: No, it's a union CONSAWU.

Facilitator: It's under CONSAWU?

Respondent: Yes.

Facilitator: Are you comfortable; are you happy, is CONSAWU effective?

Respondent: Well one would say, if we could get a new home we would be happy, so that we can raise voices. For instance if comes May 1st, you know we used to have activities, those activities we need to carry them out. Sometimes I ask myself, I say maybe I am still on the old ideologies than being on the new ideologies, because these people when it comes to May 1 they don't do anything. Now we are planning, next year we have to carry out our own activities, because all what we are told in our federation is to (unclear), Department of Labour is giving NACTWU, FEDUSA and COSATU to run the activities of May 1, but I am asking myself why cant we do it on our own, so that people will see us, they will come to us, not wait for them to say that we will give you money to do that, I mean a struggle is a struggle, let's continue.

Facilitator: The (unclear) and other forms of companies, in terms of exploitation are there some rules and regulations that are going to be introduced soon to regulate such forms of exploitation.

Respondent: I will give you an example, with the company that I am talking about, Jensen which they are doing a product for Hisense, you know they would agree to something, one commissioner, a white commissioner told us that he doesn't trust these people, if they don't (unclear) tomorrow they will turn their backs again and its true, they will go to CCMA and say tomorrow they will sign the agreement with the union, when you go to the plant they will tell you that they are not signing they are waiting for their lawyers. You will go there for six times not signing or getting anything, Chinese do not come to the party, even if we recall them as people that were oppressed before but they are not on the party.

Facilitator: My impression at the moment is that in the hospitality sector, that's restaurants and hotels they tend to employers foreigners more than South Africans, has that impacted to you as union or has that caused its own problems and dynamics for the unions?

Respondent: It does have impact on the unions because once you get there that person doesn't even want to join the union saying that he is a foreigner and they will chase him away.

Facilitator: That's the spirit?

Respondent: I recall in Kolonade I saw restaurants with 50 employees, I got inside and told them I was recruited all foreigners, they said no they don't want unions. I know the salaries they are paying to them, they are facing high exploitation.

Facilitator: Has it been always like that in the world of unions, foreigners refusing to join unions or it's a new thing after 1994.

Respondent: Well before I never dealt with foreigners but now since 1994 I see them a lot.

Facilitator: What's the way forward, I mean you find yourselves in the middle of the bridge that is collapsing.

Respondent: Yes well we are saying, it's a struggle and let the struggle continue, and we will end up still going to try and convince them if possible, but our government is now giving them work permits, they are in numbers in our country and we have to live with them and we have to try and convince them regardless of the difficulty as to how they are.

Facilitator: Are you succeeding?

Respondent: Not so much, we don't have much foreigners in our union, very few.

Facilitator: And those who joined, joined because of the level of politisation or they are not afraid of employers, what are the conditions of them joining.

Respondent: Yes you find that they got exploited at the workplace, very seriously they feel that they want a union, actually they want somebody who can help them, we told them that we can help them, we are the vehicle.

Facilitator: Whether is (unclear) or whether its unions, someone must just help them.

Respondent: Yes they want help.

Facilitator: I am not sure, you talked about farm workers earlier, are they part of the hospitality sector?

Respondent: No, it's a scope on its own.

Facilitator: So you also deal with them?

Respondent: Yes we deal with them.

Facilitator: Are they recruitable, is it easy to recruit in the farms?

Respondent: The difficulty is to enter the farm, you need to work a strategy to get into the farms otherwise you can be killed, because you enter to someone's premises.

Facilitator: Why do you want to continue with recruiting in farm workers if it's difficult to recruit?

Respondent: You know what it reminds me, if I recruit them I enjoy it, because it reminds me the extra(unclear) that I face and I feel strongly that if you help those people they will stay long with the union because they are facing victimisation, a person that enjoys benefits and other things doesn't stay long with the union.

Facilitator: So farm workers are joining the union in numbers?

Respondent: Yes they are joining.

Facilitator: And they remain in the union?

Respondent: Yes they remain.

Facilitator: And what about grievances?

Respondent: Grievances are low wages, victimisation, assault, you see in the farms some are getting killed as well, nobody sees them unless if there is somebody next to them.

Facilitator: But did you have to deal with these cases and succeed maybe?

Respondent: Yes some we succeed, at least to get a calm situation, even if we don't succeed to the end but the situation becomes calm.

Facilitator: So far you are happy with the level of your intervention in the farms?

Respondent: Yes, in the farms.

Facilitator: The workers, are they happy with the union?

Respondent: Yes, they are happy even if workers are not happy up to that level but some can tell you that since the union came there they can at least cough something out unlike before when there was no union.

Facilitator: Yes when the baas was calling the shots.

Respondent: Yes

Facilitator: Just to go back a little bit, the first union that you affiliated under when you were still at the municipality, it affiliated under NACTWU?

Respondent: Yes

Facilitator: Does that mean you automatically became a member of AZAPO or PAC, how did it work?

Respondent: When we joined there was this thing, our struggle now in NACTWU, to say AZAPO or PAC, whoever official that you get first, if its AZAPO people they would you attention so that you don't go to the PAC, so that you get the service then at the end you go to AZAPO as well. They wont tell you immediately that they are AZAPO person, but always when you are used to that official, when you ask them why they are so disciplined they will tell you that politically they are from this school, they will invite you to join them in the meeting one day, then you start to know about them and you get others to those meetings.

Facilitator: Did you join as well?

Respondent: Yes I joined.

Facilitator: Did you join AZAPO or PAC?

Respondent: AZAPO.

Facilitator: Was there a connection between AZAPO activities in the townships and NACTWU activities?

Respondent: It would depend on the block of these workers, maybe AZAPO members in Atteridgeville, then we meet there, if you stay in Soshanguve we meet there, if you stay in other places we meet there.

Facilitator: This worked well then?

Respondent: It did until 1994 where there were splits and all those things between the political organisations and other people were saying they will remain with the unions without a political organisation.

Facilitator: When you look back was it worth it to be involved in unions or your time has been wasted?

Respondent: It was worth it.

Facilitator: Why do you say that?

Respondent: You know I can say I am born and bred in trade unions, and that is why I am saying it was worth it to be in a union because I benefited a lot. Things were changing because of unions in the workplace, where conditions of employment at some stage changed because of the trade union movement, without the unions its waste, because you can't change anything without a fair representation.

Facilitator: And the future of unions in this country, looking at the whole spectrum?

Respondent: I think it's bleak.

Facilitator: Really?

Respondent: Because we are facing the situation where its tough, things are done by force, you know let me put it this way, you see capitalism is very strong now, and if the unions don't carry out the activities that are supposed to be there, I see that the future of unions in South Africa will be bleak.

Facilitator: And how do you save you then from disappearing?

Respondent: From disappearing, we need strong federations, we need our own activities that can be seen by people. We need to educate these young employees that are getting into the market about the trade union movement, some (unclear) I don't know which (unclear), because during the olden days we used to get a (unclear) from the school level, from the organisation, but at the moment these kids are not taking it seriously like before, because there was an enemy that you could see before, but now you don't see the enemy that is there, all you are told is that you must go to school and become a minister tomorrow, that's what we are saying, they must become minister somebody and be in parliament. So they must have a nice life.

Facilitator: Is the enemy still out there?

Respondent: Well the enemy today is a living wage, that is the enemy because you can see the prices of goods are going up but if you look at the salaries of people (unclear), that is the enemy, it means the economy now is the enemy of the people. For example there was this question of e-tolling, it affects the pocket of the person, the petrol as well affects the people. The rich employer will say they cannot give much money because the petrol is affecting me, and you say the taxes are affecting me and he says the petrol is affecting him, now you find we have these arguments, the economy is the enemy.

Facilitator: How do you hope to solve this problem as the unions?

Respondent: As the unions we need to carry out our way of demanding, fight goes on as usual.

Facilitator: Lastly, your involvement in unions, has it in some way affected your family, at one time for instance you left to start a union, that means no salary for eight, ten months, six weeks?

Respondent: My first wife left because of that, the second wife left, now I have a third wife, she is a teacher and she is working in Limpopo, comes home every two weeks, a fortnight, now I just say let me have somebody, the salary that she is earning is much more than my salary, now I become a boy at my own house, that affects.

Facilitator: Any closing words, anything that you feel is important which should have been part of this interview?

Respondent: No I think I have covered all unless if I forget others I will call you.

Facilitator: Ok thanks for your time, that was worth it.

Respondent: Yes, thanks comrade.

END.

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