

Elizabeth Thabethe

The interview is translated from Zulu to English:

Facilitator: This is an interview with Elizabeth Thabethe we are in parliament in Cape Town, the date is September 2010. If you can maybe give me a background of where you born, how you were raised, did you come from a rich or poor family, and how you ended up in union structures?

Respondent: I was born in Katlehong, Natalspruit at the time. I was born and bred there, I attended school there until I started working in 1978 after the uprisings. I had then to go and work at Blaster Gundle, that is where ..., raised from a family of five, I'm the third one. I then started working at Blaster Gundle. It was a company that was really underpaying workers, the working conditions were horrible that is how I learnt about trade unions. When I arrived there, this company is called Blaster Gundle today but it was called Highpack Plastics before it was eMasakeni, if you say Hoshveld for people who were working there they know the place. It was a company that employed lots of people but exploited them quite a great deal. The working conditions were bad and the wages was worse off.

I was employed as an accounts and despatch clerk. From that time up until 1993 until the elections in 1994. This is when I was introduced to the trade union movement. I was recruited by Sesi Mankosi, there was a lady who was working for Sweet Food and Allied at the time before FAWU or it was turned to FAWU I'm not sure because it was 1978 at the time. MmaNkosi then came and spoke to us a little, she had came before but then in 1981 she came back, she worked at Enterprise factory, before

Enterprise she was working for Simba in Isando. She had links with people from FAWU at Enterprise. So she used to come from time to time. She was a full time shop steward. She recruited us to the union. She informed us that we must get 50 plus 1% membership. It was difficult to get the 51% because people had been recruited in the company but they were fired. So it was a problem to convince people to join. MmaNkosi explained to us that we must join the union and we will be protected and so on. At the time we knew nothing about unions, we thought the union will come and do things for us most of the time, they will come and fight for our issues. We went through those that are light minded and close to the supervisors and some members of management. Unfortunately we joined the wrong union FAWU at the time, we were a plastic manufacturing company. After a year or so, after we recruited 50 plus 1% we were told that we have to join Chemical Workers Union which is the right one, our scope did not fall within FAWU. We went through the process again. We recruited people and joined the union. It was not easy to recruit because some people were fired before. I had a small office which I used to recruit people.

In 1982 they came to our factory and explained to us how it works etc. We were then introduced to Chemical Workers Association, the full time shop stewards was Calvin Magaleng who was working at Liquidair which was close to us in Kutando. They were able to work full time because their companies allowed them to do union work, they had been in the unions for a long time. There weren't many unions at the time, and Ronald Mofokeng, and Basna Moloi. Those are the guys that assisted us, they had been long in the unions. The other person is Pat Mabote who is late, he was a shop steward at PG. They assisted us and motivated us. Bra Wesley

Duma was allocated to us. He was very tough, I learnt the hard way under his guidance

Facilitator: Tough in what way?

Respondent: Tough in a way that when we joined the union there were problems in terms of working conditions and all that and after then when our forms were submitted, we had 50 plus 1%, he explained to us that we can now start the negotiations for recognition, agreement in the factory and also to negotiate the working conditions and wages. The recognition agreement took very long, the company was coming up with a lot of clauses, just excuses. We decided not to pursue them and carried on without the agreement. The factory was introducing the night shift for women, some women were pregnant, two of them were forced to work night shift. We called bra-Wesley. I told him the problem, he told me that he can advise us but we must tell the employer ourselves. Imagine you have not received training and you are expected to negotiate. I had no knowledge of how unions work. The only thing we did was attend meetings. That is why I say I learnt the hard way under bra-Wes. He told me that I must take the lead with other shop stewards. We had 5 shop stewards, the other 4 were men. A chair for the shop stewards had to be elected, they elected me. I didn't know what I was going to say, how to go about it, what am basing my argument on, from which labour relations law, I knew nothing about labour law. He was harsh. Ultimately I did that, I told management that they cannot force pregnant women to work night shift what if there are complications at night etc. That was my first difficult task. And then we organised stop order facilities of which management accepted, in the past we were collecting cash manually.

I then started attending trade union courses, the factory had recognised shop stewards but they were not paying for anything, I had to claim from the union. If I was away for two or three days the factory would not pay me I had to claim the money back from the union which was problematic. That was part of the struggle. I attended the course. As the chair I attended the BC??, you attend shop steward council, we were exposed to the local in Katilehong that was located at Morena Stores. I was encouraged to attend as many meetings as possible so that I can learn about trade unions. So I attended as much as I get. The problems were similar therefore I was given advise on this and that. We also asked the shop stewards to come and address the workers at lunch time to address our issues.

The challenge for me was I was not a talkative person, I was a quiet reserved person. Now that I am a shop steward I had to report back to the staff, tackle management, my personality changed to a talkative person. I had to know how to negotiate, attend meetings etc. I must say I'm thankful to be a product of the trade union movement, because to me that is the best university. The union trained us irrespective of our educational background, we were like bush lawyers and we had to know what is it that you are fighting and from which act. We are not lawyers, we are ordinary people and at the end of the day that to me was challenging. I didn't have matric because of the riots, my parents didn't have money to pay for my studies. I decided to work so that I can study through correspondence. When I left school I did not have a baby because I still wanted to further my studies.

I tried registering two/three times, it didn't work because union work was too much. I had to study after a couple of years, I studied with Unisa after

coming to parliament, the Certificate of Economics Diploma. I am trying to finish the honours degree so that I can understand the language of parliament. If you don't know economics, the officials will bully you and tell you about things that you don't understand. I will come to that later. I'm just trying to conclude this part.

The majority in our factory was women, men were few. Men were not interested in union issues because they would say they are there to work for their children. We had to .., when we had to strike or demonstrate women were in the forefront and men were always ..., the shop stewards that were elected with me had to be changed, management used to beat them up, a man called Renshaw beat them physically that is why the shop stewards did not last, they were afraid to fight back. I told him that if he ever did that to me I will hit him back "I am not your wife or a child you cant come and beat me here". Later on the team was a little bit stable.

At first after I was elected some of the men had a problem with me, most of them were Zulu and Xhosa, a few Venda speaking. Do you remember the time of the faction fights, black on black whatever. Some of them left and went home, so they were away from work, they went to initiation schools, we would handle their cases. The shop stewards resigned just when we were about to talk to the white man. What made them to respect me is I fought for them when the male shop stewards could not handle the absenteeism cases. I intervened as the chairperson and won the cases. They started to respect me and retracted their respect. After gaining their confidence things changed. Now they started calling me MmaThabethe, they praised me. So if you are a woman you must prove especially in the man's world. The one decision I took was not to have a

relationship with anyone in the factory. When I was reporting back to them some would wink. I told them to back off because I am definitely not interested. The winking stopped. There was respect now.

I started attending the shop steward councils, BEC's, training. I was trained to move up in the unions. I was the first woman to be elected as the branch treasurer of the Chemical. In the executive there was one woman, Chris Bona, did you interview her

Facilitator: the ex-wife of Phil Bona

Respondent: Yes, Chris Bona was in the union, she was the only white woman in the union, so I joined the executive. When I joined it was still FOSATU, 1981, 1982, 1983 and then in 1985 the build up to COSATU. I think I was elected after a year or two that I joined the union. I was a treasurer until when I left in 1994.

I must say I thank Chris Bona for the skills that she provided, well I was a despatch/accounts clerk in any way and I tried to pursue the correspondence story and all that. Overall I knew nothing about the books as a treasurer, she trained me, income and expenditure, log book etc. She actually trained me to do the financial statements. She didn't spoon feed me. She taught me the skill and I really thank her because she inspired me irrespective of the fact that I had no knowledge of figures. That is why I'm saying the trade union was the best university for me. I then pursued my studies with Unisa and the University of Western Cape as I'm trying to finish the honours now, it is through that education. And also training from the trade union that I was able to move on. So that was the struggle.

Then there was a problem with usage of the phone, so I was constantly in trouble for using the phone for union matters. They told me that I cannot use their phone for union matters, I had to go and look for a phone outside to make union calls. They had given me a choice after joining the union, if I join the union I must be paid weekly. They removed me from monthly salary to weekly. They now gave me a clock card so that they can track the hours I work. If I need to make calls I had to clock out and go to the public phones. Sometimes I would be out for 1 to 3 hours, or take a train to Jo'burg and come back. The manager will call me in and ask where I've been. So I would say I had to go out and make calls because you don't want me to use the company phone. I did that for a long time, if I didn't feel like working I will just go out and say I'm going to call or go to the offices in Jo'burg. The managing director at the time, Mr Andrew Marshall. He heard about the tension between myself and the manager. I was called to his office. He asked me where I've been, I told him I went to make calls. He said to me you've been away for 3 hours, I told him that I went to a public phone and have to stand in the queue. I told him Renshaw said I should not use the company phone for union matters. He then said it's nonsense from today you must use the company phone, we recognise the trade union and you are the chairperson of trade unions. They used to deduct money for the hours I was away, I didn't care. That assisted me because Andrew Marshall, the managing director, he had some knowledge about the trade union movement. All in all I was the treasurer.

I was then elected to serve in the NEC of the Chemical union as the treasurer, I represented the Wits branch in the NEC. I joined Lungu Lingisi as the only black woman there who was the administrator. The worker

leader started started with a black person, then Chris Bona, we were three women. It was tough to talk about women issues. We then established the women sub-committee in Chemical. We realised that many women do not deal with woman rights issues, at the time people used to hide their pregnancies because there was no maternity leave at the time. They would stay home for one week and come back t work. So we fought such issues and ensured that companies start the negotiations of maternity leave.

CAWUSA changed to SACAWU, he was leading in terms of negotiations of women issues, maternity leave. We thought about those issues, educated women .., we assisted them in building their confidence so that they can be shop stewards because chemical issues were designed for men only, refineries, plastic manufacturing companies, even factories which were dominated by women, the shop steward would be a male – except for Propen, sis Maude Khumalo, did you interview her? She is one of the people that you can interview.

We continued with the union struggle. At the time when we fighting for women's rights, we took it the gender sub committee. We fought until Dorothy Mogale was appointed. We were ridiculed in our the women conferences that why are bringing such resolutions because the struggle will be put on hold because of woman's rights and fair representation of women, women are exploited and all that. We took that, we applied together with Lungi, we sponsored a resolution through Chris Bona, Thoko who is late now, Thoko Mabena who was in the legislature of Mpumalanga. She was an administrator in chemical workers. We discussed with them when we were forming women sub committee in the chemical industry, we formed the branch, I became the chairperson and

handed it over to Ndusi Shongwe to accommodate other women because I was the treasurer. Ndusi Shongwe is now the MMC in Ekurhuleni, did you interview her?

Facilitator: not yet but I have her contact

Respondent: at the time we called her Gladys Shongwe, Ndosi is an African Renaissance name like Mbazima Shilowa, we used to call him Sam Shilowa, when democracy came the names changed. The other woman that you can interview is Pat Khumalo, she is the speaker at Ekurhuleni Metro, she is a former trade unionist of SACAWU. She left and started this Sexual Harassment Education Project and Mirriam Altman (she is at the HSRC) – apparently she has resigned she is joining the National ..(unclear) Commission. She assisted us a great deal as an academic at the time, she assisted women in the trade unions to fight a lot of sexual harassment etc and all those cases at work. We battled the fight with people like Rod Sikhala. Lungi was short tempered and she used to cry a lot. I asked her to stop crying in the presence of the men. Eventually a gender person was appointed. They used to ridicule us, they would shout and howl at us but we went on. Its good to see most of the women in government today holding ministerial and deputy.

I participated throughout there, in different positions, I was representing our union at the FINCOM of COSATU and I used to sit at the National Gender Committee of COSATU up until we were voted at the COSATU special conference. The 20 names that were nominated by unions to the ANC as the priority list, that they must be part of the top 100 to come to parliament, Jay Naidoo and the other people who were in the unions

Facilitator: the quota system

Respondent: ja, in that there were 17 men and three women, myself, Susan Shabangu, have you interviewed her?

Facilitator: not yet

Respondent: she was a trade unionist because she was working in T and G fulltime and Rejoice Mabudafasi. She was actually the treasurer at one stage of NEHAWU

Facilitator: the deputy minister?

Respondent: yes. So there were three women who were sponsored in that and that we're part of the 20. There was a complaint from the Women's League regarding the number of women positions in government, three women in the national list of COSATU, can they include other women. They had a meeting with people like Jay, Big Tops then at the time as the ANC big chiefs. They agreed to incorporate women from provinces, hence then we had Ses Maggie that were then proposed, they were included, and Joyce Gwadi the late and a lot of other women who came from the trade union under that process. So that led me to parliament in 1994. I had resign from my workplace and come to work. The company was quite happy because they said I was part of the problem, they felt that I was the cause of the problem because I was instigating workers. At times when we are demonstrating they would say this is not a political arena it's the workplace.

It took us 4/5 years to convince the workers to go on strike, both men and women were afraid, so we had some sit ins for the wages and the working conditions. We managed to get the money, the organisers were braWes and Meshack, Vunku, Phelelwa, Pascal Damuwi. We eventually went on a six week strike. We planned for it, mobilised, nobody tried to go to work until they agreed to our demands. It was a hectic strike, for wages and working conditions for Blasil Gundle, that was the worst for me as the leader, as the Chairperson of the shop stewards to lead the strike because you had to heed the unity. If you are a leader you don't sleep because whatever happens to the workers, or they are dismissed what am I going to do, I will be at fault. I had sleepless nights and looking for ways to intensify the campaign at the same time continue with the negotiations. We managed with the intervention of Rivuko, Calvin also came, Ronald also at the time until we reached an agreement. Our lawyers at the time, I remember Thabo Molewa, he was one of the lawyers that was sent to negotiate with us and we said no we will negotiate ourselves. We then reached a settlement without their assistance. The lawyers Chidel and Thompson, the struggle lawyers.

To me that's where I got more involved because we had to deal with political issues and worker rights etc., demonstrations whatever. One of the demonstrations that I will never forget that really gave impact was when we demonstrated against the deportation of Chris Bona. They wanted to deport Chris Bona at one stage to go back to England, they were saying she is instigating the workers. We demonstrated everyday, lunch time, all the factories. The deportation order was cancelled because of the demonstration of all the chemical companies. Vusi Mavuso was also arrested and went to jail, we demonstrated and he was released, everyday we would picket. So that was my life as a shop

steward. I had to sacrifice a lot of things, nice times and all that. I started working at the age of 19 or 20 but then I was recruited to be in the union, I didn't have time for fun I was attending shop steward council meeting, BEC meetings, NEC meetings. We used to go, I'm sure Renata told you, we used to go with a 16 seater Kombi, we didn't fly to Durban to the NEC. I would be picked up from work and drive 8 hours in a kombi. We have a meeting, the next day we return in the evening, Chris Bona will deliver all of us and go to Brixton alone. Later on we were able to fly to the different places because we had money, the subscription money was coming in. When I look at the shop stewards today they are having it nice, we used to drive in a kombi sitting uncomfortably sacrificing. We believed that we will win the struggle. They can fly to Durban, overseas etc.

I am grateful to be a product of COSATU because I learnt a lot from them, trade unionism, negotiating skills, I took the bargaining .., how to negotiate, I learnt there. The skills I am using in parliament today, I am not lawyer but I can interpret things and ensure that I can work very well. In fact the other inspiration was Jay Naidoo, because when we had to take a decision whether we accept him in the list or whatever, I also spent sleepless nights to say what am I going to do if things don't work out with parliament, I am full time here and secured. I don't know where I am going, I have only read about the place and do not know what is going to happen, at any time there can be a coup or something and this was the first of its kind in our country. So I was worried and asking myself lots and lots of questions. What do they do in parliament, what do we talk about, how do we relate with other people etc. I was asking myself lots and lots of questions. I was used to demonstrations, I never thought I will be inside parliament and be one of the legislators in my lifetime.

Fortunately our fight was not in vain, we were able to put pressure as unions, we worked together with those that were in exile, we were the inxiles, fighting the battle under the trade union banner. Underground we were recruited to the cells.

At times one had to sacrifice, one didn't have time to attend to family issues and at the time we were under police surveillance, police would follow us everywhere. During the state of emergency we held meetings in Parks, we would pretend as if we are just sitting around the park knowing very well that we were having our BEC Council. Shop steward council we were kicked out during the sate of emergency, we had to go somewhere else. Locally, Morena Stores, we had planned a stay away and they knew that we met at Morena Stores .., and we would distribute the pamphlets, the police were tipped off, there's only one door, we all had to come out of the small door. You cannot use the window because the windows are too high. They arrived and stood at the door with their guns, they gave us 10 minutes to disperse – they said within 10 minutes you must disperse, the meeting is illegal. We just stood there, there was a male comrade who was taking minutes. We started singing " here they are, here they are – she was singing). We thought we were all going to die that day. Meshack, Calvin and Ronald played a leadership role. They spoke to the police and said the place is far from the township, there were no taxis because it was after 8 pm already. We used to walk to Morena Stores and go to Goba Section, others lived in Radebe. We were also part of the local COSATU. We then decided that we going to meet at 2010, next to Morena Stores, there's a shebeen called 2010, we decided to meet there, disguise as if we are there to drink liquor so that we can distribute the pamphlets. We walked home, very few of us had cars. We used to enjoy walking. We went to 2010 and bought beers in front of us. I didn't

drink the guys were drinking beer, I had black coffee in a glass and it looked like Milk Stout.

Those are the things that I will never forget as a worker leader, we are where we are today because of those things. I resigned from the trade union and left for parliament. I came here and we participated. Jay gave us a good courage and he was an inspirational leader. He said "this government is a new democratic government, it's not only lawyers that must come in and interpret the constitution. The ANC embraced the patriotic front, everybody who were part of the MDM movement, and who were part of the negotiations. The chiefs in Bantu Stands must come around so that we form one thing. It was also important to consider experiences of all the different people and come to parliament. So don't worry as shop stewards I think you are well trained to deal with government matters, you won't be talking theory, don't be intimidated by 5/10 degrees and honours and masters and doctorates". Jay was right. The experience we acquired in the unions assisted us, things worked out better than we expected. Also most of us served on the labour committee. The revised labour relations act, basic conditions of employment, issues that are part of the labour market we were able to table them because we were like people who have had experience. We dealt with the issues practically. Alec Irwin taught us the basics of economics at the time which helped us a lot.

Parliament was boring for me, when you walk through the door you bow, you come from an active labour movement, where vigorous debates would take place. The process of parliament was completely different to what I was used to. We went there, we were mandated the people, by the ANC and we had to work within NAC policies. Jay wrote a book I

haven't bought the book yet. We decided not to be intimidated by the lawyers and professors who came to parliament. We knew what we were up against especially when dealing with the Labour Relations Act, we also understood the basic of conditions. All labour issues we found easy to deal with, those are the issues that we dealt with on a daily basis. Thanks to being a product of COSATU and the discipline instilled on me, hardworking and the fighting spirit. My youth was lot in it but I don't have a problem with that. My mother looked after my mother and sisters because I was always in meetings, as a trade unionist I didn't have sufficient time to raise her. She was 3 or 4 years but today she has grown she is 30, through their support, they looked after her when I was in meetings. My mother and father are both late, they played a key role in my development. When I was busy with trade union issues, my mother would complain and say I joined the congress, the police would come and turn the house upside down etc., it was a battle. My family was very supportive throughout. We were all taking a chance by being part of the struggle, it was more problematic if you were elected as a leader at the time, we were constantly under attack, they also knew that I can be sleeping away from home for a week or month. I was never officially charged. They would just torture us and release us. Then came 1994 parliament. I was a back bencher for two years 1994-1996 I was not elected to any of the portfolios. But in 1996 when the late Chris Dlamini was posted to become an ambassador in China. I was then elected as the Whip. We don't have shop stewards we've got whips, as far as I am concerned they are working like the shop stewards because they are representing some members. You look out for the members, represent them, if they want a house, committee work and all those things. I said to myself "jo this thing is following me, from the factories to parliament", I will

be a shop steward for life, now I'm a shop steward of parliament as a whip.

I was serving in labour, I was a whip of labour working with the chairperson, Godfrey Olifant was one time the chair and Salimani, at the time when I was a whip and these are the people I worked with in the labour movement, and Siphon, I forgot his surname. Also people like John Gumede who joined after 1994. He was also our president, you should interview him as well. His office is just here (probably same floor), he was here today, I have his number. He was one time the president of Chemical just like Calvin Magale he is also an MP, Don arrived in 1996, Don, I don't think he was not part of the first 20, I think he came afterwards. So I was then elected to be whip from 1996 served as a whip of a committee, ended up serving different committees. I also became the house whip which is responsible for the agenda of parliament and running, under the chief whip's office. I served under four chief whips, my first chief was .., at the time when I came in it was Stofile but he was on his way to the Eastern Cape to be premier, then Max Sisulu who is now the speaker, he was the chief whip that I served under. After buti Max, I know that I also served under Nathi Ntleko as a chief whip, served under Tony Yengeni, he was a whip for some time then he left, I then served under Nosiviwa Maphisa Nqakula was a chief whip I sat under her, I can't remember them all, but I served under 5 or 6 chief whips. That was the longest time because it was for 8 years I was a whip.

In 2004 I was elected to be the chairperson not a whip. I was deployed to be chairperson of Environmental Affairs and Tourism for a year, 2005 I was then deployed to be deputy minister of trade and industry up until last year elections. COSATU in 1994 was the one that was pushing our names, they

said "if you are not an active member in this hard luck you must get your five branches to nominate you". Because I was already an activist of the NAC in any way on my own right and also a member of the Women's League Katlehong, we did a lot of work with people like Mama Bertha Gxowa – her politics was influenced by the trade union because he worked for the Industrial Council. She inspired me, I had read about her in a book, the book was given to me by an old man. I read about Bertha Mashaba at the time. So I was introduced to her as Bertha Gxowa. I had read about her.

From 2005-2009, after the elections last year, I was then re-deployed from the executive to be the chairperson of Energy now. I have seen all in parliament, I think I must consider after 20 years, I am 16 years here. I am part of the furniture now. I still want to come to parliament of the democratic dispensation not apartheid. I am proud of that. I accepted. However this was a bit of a demotion, to other people, yes it is because in the Executive you are promoted, you get a lot of staff that work for you, body guards, you are chauffeur driven but its hard work. I can't talk about the job because we are sworn into secrecy, overall it is not an easy job. To me I worked for 11 years in parliament but the four years I was in the executive, it is good to talk from outside but once you are there you understand the magnitude of the job and how to run a country. The transformation, the infrastructure is not allowing you to do it, it's not conducive, the sunset clauses that we agreed to, they wanted to get all these people who were part of the old system and all that, it's not easy it's difficult. I'm glad that I'm joined by other trade unionists and SACP members now, they are here. Transformation is easier said than done, you must have the courage to change and change things to the betterment of the poor people. Fighting the gender struggle is in my heart, I've been

doing it from the trade unions, I still belong to the Women's League, that's why I was active in the Women's League, I'm burning, I worked with Mama Bertha Gxowa a lot, I worked with her at the time and read about her. There was a lady called Patricia Peterson, at work funny enough I befriended older people not young people. Sesi Patty was much older than me, her sister was a councillor, Koko. I always preferred to befriend older people I don't know why. Mama Gxowa is like my friend, colleague but a parent as well. I do have friends who are the same age as me. Older people inculcated a lot of discipline in me and experience.

So I read about Mama Gxowa not knowing that Sesi Patty Peterson, the one I am close to at work is related to her. Her husband is related to mama Bertha. I was reading the book underground, I wanted to meet this person. I said to sesi Patty, I had an account at Shirleys when I started working, I asked Sesi Patty I want to meet her and that whenever I go to Shirleys she is not there, she was the bookkeeper or stock controller. I then read about the Treason Trialists that she was one of them, with Mandela and the others. I wanted to meet this woman, she is an inspiration to me. Kgesi Lehoko who is one of the former trade unionists. When we established Katlehong because we had to do underground work, we were in the cells, mobilising people. Then Kgesi said I will introduce you to Mama Bertha Gxowa as an active mother. Mama Gxowa knows me as a customer of Shirleys, she didn't know that I am active in the struggle at work. So Ses Patty informing me that she's an activist and that she had been arrested for political reasons. When she appeared, she was so smart, I was introduced to her. I asked if she was a comrade and she said yes, for me she did not seem political she dressed very smart. She looked like an agent. With time I got to know her and accepted her.

When we started rebuilding the ANC office, the Women's League in Katlehong, someone wanted to introduce us and I told her that we met already. I joined the Women's League, I became assistant secretary of the first branch after 1990 – Mam Bertha assisted a lot, we build the branch, we had 20 000 members. I contributed the 20 000 members because I used the union office to recruit ANC members. The union office was just a cover up. Those are the good things I remember and the contribution that we did with MmaBertha. She really inspired me, she was committed to the struggle up to the last day. She had been arrested, she was also under house arrest, Treason Trialist, she had also been to Pretoria Prison, Kroonstad prison but that didn't break her.

I joined the ANC under the apartheid era and nobody is going to push me out of the ANC, I will resign by choice, I will die ANC, whoever says what to me it is not about material gain. I was not born a member of parliament, I was deployed to be a member of parliament. That is why in 1999 I got elected back without lobbying people. Once again I want to say it's good to be a product of the trade union at the time, it made me who I am today. Fighting the women's struggle, I will fight for women's rights. I always insisted that women must be represented. I never got a senior position in the unions because when the first vice president of chemical came. I was asked to stand up, I said no. I was not fighting for me as a woman, I was fighting for other women. Joyce Pekane was identified to be shop steward, she is now MPL member in Gauteng. My principle is I don't talk for myself I talk for other people, that is why to date I do not have a business of my own. I serve the COSATU NGO's. I am not interested in owning a business because I believe in empowering other people.

The other issue was, when COSATU we ..(unclear) SACAWU assisted us a great deal in the fight, NUMSA, Paper at the time, people like .., Dube's child at the time. COSATU came and I was nominated to be the second vice president of COSATU as a woman. I refused and told them I was doing it for other people. I told them to identify other people, Connie then came to be the first woman. I think I will die with that principle, not for me but for other people. To me is not about that, it's about sharing with other people but also fighting the principle. I realised the principle. When I was appointed in 2005 to be Deputy Minister. I was appointed with two other women, it was the first time DTI had two deputy ministers. At the time government was contemplating on dividing the department into two like now in 2009, President Zuma, the configuration has changed. The presidency at the time realised that it won't work because they are interlinked. You can't take trade from industry .., you will get more silo because we have got silo as of now in many departments. They then decided to have one department but then bifurcate it up with 2 deputy ministers and an additional DG, DTI. They then appointed myself and Rob Davies who is now the Minister under Minister Mphahlela and then the then Minister of Minerals and Energy was then promoted to be the deputy president Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka. I am close to her because we were working with the same. Phumzile was working with issues of poverty and alleviation and women struggles and all that. So it was linked to what I was deployed to as the deputy minister and we worked together. I didn't know Phumzile before, I met her in parliament in 1994 as MP's, she's not my friend but I was accused to be Phumzile's friend and I'm not right and I'm supporting Thabo Mbeki's camp.

People came to me and said we hear that you're COPE and you might be taken out, why don't you go to Luthuli House and ask them to

..(unclear) – I said I'm not going to do it, when I applied here I was never caucused through Luthuli House ..(unclear) and when I was put there I was called, I was told I'm appointed to be deputy minister and so I'm not going to go there and say please deploy me, I hear rumours that you don't trust me anymore you think I'm COPE, I'm not COPE I want to retain my seat. I said "no that's not my principle and I'm going to leave it as such. If it means I must lose the post let it be. The ANC has not see who am I, I'm not COPE, the work I've done from 2005 to 2009 tough luck. I can be out of the list, I can be in parliament, be a back bencher, to me it doesn't matter, I will continue, I have the morale to go on. To me it is not about the position it's about deployment and I respect democratic centralism and if I'm given orders it is the party I joined, so be it. So I'm not going to go and say Mantashe I know you, we were together in COSATU etc. etc". I said I'm not going anywhere. I believe in confronting the problem, not going outside, you will have the same problem because if you read a lot of these things, people say "politics is a dirty game", unless you experience it and see it you won't, you will think it's theory but at the same time, which other countries struggles, Zimbabwe here next door to us. ZANU PF was in power, and DC was born, MDC Changurai and within them there were not agreeing then they formed another party MDC Mtambara again. I said no I don't think I will go anywhere outside. I am lucky because I was not recruited to be COPE but I was going to have an answer even if I was recruited, and say, no please its against my principles, stay here and be part of the problem. I joined the Women's League because I had women's struggle at heart. At the time when I joined the Women's League they are constantly fighting, I said let us go there and fix if we can. I have a passion for rural women. Let us go and listen there and deal with the problems. KATORUS, we had the hope and courage that one day we will get there. Mandela and the others inspired

us when they were in jail and we contributed to the struggle through the unions. Today we are ruling the country.

We were called in Esselen Park?? That day, bra Malema said Mbeki is history. We were told that the person who is resigning is the president, the ministers, deputy ministers we serve until the elections. We left. People were surprised why did I not resign.

After that we attended a function of the heads of states, my protector Nhlapo asked one of the DTI staff that we are required to go to Mahlambandlovu. I said I did not get the message. You go there only when you are invited. So I responded by saying from here I am going to Waterkloof to my home and not where I am not invited. I didn't go. After two weeks chairpersons were announced and I was also announced as one. I took the post and did whatever I could do, I've been to the best university. I am studying for oversight reasons, especially on financial matters. It is not easy to study and work. Dorothy Mahlangu encouraged us to attend the economics course because we didn't understand economics. We now understand what is going on. I thank her for that, she has completed her honours and is currently busy with her masters.

That is the long and short of who I am here, and I'm enjoying now my back bencher life style. I don't think I will do the masters. Parliament need you to do much more research, reading and understanding models used in government and whatever, so if you don't keep on studying, you are left behind. So all in all to me I think that's who I am now, I am not going to cope, I am not going to COPE, I will stay with the ANC.

Parliament can be hectic because you're a leader of the committee and we've got study groups – you chair the study group and the portfolio committee, the whip must assist you, a political leadership of a committee to guide it in terms of the policies who ensures that the decisions are implemented or what. If a whip is weak, you end up being a whip and a chair at the same time. Ideally as a chair you must guide the meeting. Most comrades are not interested in studying. There is no interaction in parliament except in the committees. I enjoy it because it's more dialogue policy information, you can talk to a person. The other day we were talking about climate change, that is why our appointment was postponed. Climate change and energy are intertwined, and in that the chairperson asked me to .., AWEPA had invited us before Copenhagen to go and discuss as parliamentarians in the SACU, Namibia and whatever countries, then we went to Swaziland to discuss then .., they are doing a follow up to all those SACU countries now, the role of the legislatures in terms of climate change and whether all members of parliament are clued up with what is happening, they know what it is and how they are influencing their communities. To me I like more work in the communities because it is where .., I mean from the trade union times, I don't like to be office bound. Even when I was deputy minister I started a programme of "taking it to the people" there's a programme of parliament of taking parliament to the people, where once in a while NCOP goes to an area and procure the people in the area to cook and the committees come and inform parliament how they see parliament working, whether it is coming closer to them and all that, stakeholders even unions come, NGO's come etc. I used to attend all of them at the time because to me it is much more what I like because in our deployment. We were two, Rob Davies and myself. The issue that we had to deal with was how do we assist the minister, we are deputies to assist him. Before Rob Davies was

appointed as a deputy minister, as an economist he was involved in international trade. Rob was part of the negotiators for WTO, Alec Irwin used to take him along in the delegation, he and Ben Turock. He worked in that field and had an interest in it. He was more into international trade and industrial policy. That is why to date he is continuing with PAP. The minister will deal with the big business, I would deal with small business. International trade minister is overall, Rob is assisting but they can share work. I had to deal with small businesses which were difficult, supporting emerging small businesses, the survival is tight, and gender/women empowerment issues. I enjoyed working with women in business as deputy minister because the programmes that Phumzile started .., she was the first black woman to be deputy minister at Trade and Industry, it is male dominated department, white men and their grey suits and grey shoes and grey socks. We had to change a lot of things as women in this parliament. Next to the chamber women had no toilets. Parliament was a man's world, women were Helen Suzman and then came Sheila Camera and .., it was a white place, then the tri-cameral parliament there were no women, males only. Women had to go round to get a toilet, it was quite a distance because when parliament was built it was not meant to accommodate women. They had to change everything.

The story that I tell all the time in August, women's month, when we came here, white women used come here but they were not allowed in the chamber. The white guard at the entrance checked my card, and told me that members' wives or spouses go up the gallery it's only members who go in the chamber. I looked at him and asked him to repeat, he repeated. I said "why don't you ask me" it is 1994 now and there's a lot of women who are here who are not spouses, you must have courtesy of asking me then I will show you then you will know I am a member. He

apologised, that tells you how patriarchy used to be in this place. From 2005 to 2009 the three of us again were deputy ministers, the two had been deputy ministers for a long time, Susan in 1996 when Madiba was approached regarding gender equity, he appointed Phumzile (DTI) and Susan (Minerals Energy) as two deputy ministers. Susan was deputy and Phumzile became a minister which was the part ..(unclear) – that is what I was fighting for in COSATU.

As I say to be trade unionist you're trained under difficult circumstances, things were not as easy as now, it was part of the struggle, we fought for everything. Things are better now, there's a law that says you are allowed to do this and that. What we worked for during the struggle we make sure that we don't erode them, we make sure they remain as is because we fought for them under difficult battles, the sacrifices etc. I need to start thinking what I'm going to do now, whether to retire early, I've been a back bencher here, trade unionist, whip, chairperson of a committee, in the executive, deputy minister, back again as a chairperson. What else do I need to be deployed to, ambassador outside but I don't like going outside. I like to work with people, that activism of the trade unions is still with me. I made sure that I launch the programme of taking parliament to the people. I realised where I'm deployed, many of our people .., I had been in the executive for 11 years – a lot of our people do not access what is available for them, people don't know. My believe is information is knowledge, knowledge is power. You might not know that you can do something but because you don't know how, somebody will come and do it, like consultants. If you want a CC or tender, someone will say give me R500/R1000 or R2000, you don't know that you can go to DTI/Cipro and register R150 – the most you can pay out there is R250, lack of knowledge. I was deployed to make a difference in the lives of the poor

because I'm working with second economy. There's a unit in DTI, the enterprise organisation TO??, it deals with incentives, our people do not know anything about it, they don't know that they can go and apply and get assistance. When I discovered this I couldn't sleep because our people continue to live in poverty, they don't know anything about business because we were taught history (Jan van Ribeeck that he arrived in the Cape in 1562).

The labour market had a lot of challenges. Other SITA's are not operating within the law, CEO's just spend money and do not do what they are supposed to do. Our unemployment is very high and if you are deployed there make a difference in people's lives. Information is Knowledge, Knowledge is Power. DTI is one of the department that is like a first world type of department. It is known by people who know WW. DTI has got programmes that are emerging schemes that people can use to go and to these things without paying anyone. Black people are being exploited because they don't have the knowledge.

So came in and implemented a programme of checking details of people, small business people, SIDA's, co-operatives, CIPRO, those in the sector. 14 of them were assigned to work with me. I called them in one by one. I recommended that we should assist rural people and deal with poverty and underdevelopment in South Africa. They are not educated by they are good with their hands, they are skilled. Out of the 14, 12 don't have computers, one has a desk top and the other one has a desk top at home. I ask is it yours, she says I'm sharing it with my husband, the other one says I am sharing with my living partner. I asked them where do they expect rural or township people to download information about DTI, they said the internet café, where in the rural areas will they get internet. They

were not informing rural people or township people about DTI. I took them to the rural areas and we educated people about DTI, assist them how to register their companies, KHULA, co-operatives etc. I said to them if you are not interested go and work with Rob Davies. We started in Galagadi where I was a political champion. We launched the programme there. We went to Galagadi via Kimberley, the road is lonely, just trees and the tarred road. I told them that the people in the area should cook for us. They told me about a white person who has registered a B and B, I told them to ask the locals to cook for us, pap and meat. I used to infuriate everyone because I always wanted them to do the opposite of what they were used to. We assisted them to start something.

When we got to Galagadi, the mud houses, the roads are messed up with a lot of pot holes. They started enjoying the programme especially visiting the rural communities.

In all of that I'm trying to say to you if I was not trained by trade unions, my four years in DTI would not have been successful, I went back to the people because of my training in the trade union movement. When I went to rural communities I would wear a DTI t-shirt and a jean, but if I knew the royal family will be there I would wear a long skirt so that they can respect me, they operate differently. How do you wear an expensive outfit when you going to visit rural communities. The power of dressing must be used appropriately. I enjoyed working there, I was interacting with the people, intervening in their plight if they needed help and asked for feedback. The forms were so difficult to fill in, for co-operatives the form was 14 pages I reduced it to 3 pages.

The requirements were as follows: register a CC, tax clearance certificate attainable from SARS, they must have an import/export certificate, 3 year healthy audited statement. How can a person from Katlehong qualify or a person from Nkandla,. I changed the policies to suit the relevant people. I asked them to do away with healthy audited statements for 3 years because you cannot get that from the entrepreneurs that are trying to survive, import and export certificate, they can only have that once they've been to the exhibition, they can only get that once they have orders. We changed the policy and I got the DG to sign. We also did another one in India. They gave us a discount to display South African artefacts. I instructed them to carry on, I invited 13 entrepreneurs which cost R1 million for the India market – women in the majority and men who are dealing with .., Mamonala who also does nice plates, the beadwork and most South African artefacts. All the products were bought. Our exhibition won second place in the whole thing, we were competing with Thailand and China. They thanked me for the vision. Those were untapped markets. It is doable if there's determination. Again it depends where you were trained. Any other questions/

Facilitator: no this is more than enough. This was very helpful and very detailed.

Respondent: that is my life as a former trade unionist and now as a member of parliament. I am now busy with energy issues, we have energy challenges, etc. There's nothing difficult one needs to read and understand the sector. In government, in ANC there's no time for induction, you just hit the ground. I was much more comfortable in labour because I came here, it's something I know, I don't need to research anything, or get to know labour market trends. I came here and went on

and contributed. I did economics after Dorothy encouraged me. That came in handy – DTI deals more with economic issues even small business. So if you don't have a clue you have nothing, they will lie to you. To me it has really empowered me and I encourage other people to do the same. Also as citizens economy affects them one way or the other. The price increases of oil, etc. it affects ordinary citizens. They don't understand that these are determined worldwide, global issues not the South African government only. If there's a change in that, and the cartels which are busy with oil prices, this will affect the food, and other things. Economics is everywhere even in your home and at the workplace. People say economics is a boring thing to study

Facilitator: actually if you can't manage your home economics then it means you can't handle anything else, if you don't know about kids, bond, school fees, saving and so on. Budget is important. Thanks that was very detailed. I am so inspired by you

Respondent: is it, it's possible if you have a goal and a vision its possible to do things

Facilitator: ja

Respondent: I like what Mahatma Ghandi says, be the change you want to see in the world, you, you must first believe in yourself. When I joined the trade union movement it was not fashionable to join trade unions, it was a matter of life and death, they knew that unions were linked to the banned organisations and they are pursuing the struggle because the organisations are banned. So you were identified because you are in a union movement and then they start following you around. It was a risk for

yourself and your family, it was a big risk and we did it for the cause of the struggle. Madiba can be the only one who says if I can contribute my life who are you ..., I am going there – re ya ya, whether we die or not. A lot of people are claiming now, they got things on a platter because they are connected. Solomon Mahlangu said his blood will nurture the tree of freedom.

I remember one day we were here in Cape Town, the conference which was banned, the anti-apartheid movement conference which was banned, we were already in Cape Town. Others were sent back from the airport. I think it was 1988. We were already in Cape Town and could not go back. We were at the hotel, the Grand Parade. When I came here now as an MP, I remembered that I came here whilst I was still working for the union movement, when we were struggling, there was this conference. Calvin Magaleng was turned back from the airport. Ronald, Don Gumede and others we were already booked at the hotel in Cape Town in Sea Point. We were stuck there and didn't know what to do, we have the union t-shirts and COSATU jackets. When you go out in the streets they arrest you. So we were confined and had nothing to do on the day, flights were cancelled so we had to find something to do. We went and bought cheap t-shirts at the market. We shopped wearing someone's BVD's. We bought the t-shirts, went to the hotel and went to Table Mountain. It is that time that this guy from the trade unions who was sold by the workers, he died, he was from NUMSA from Natal. He was close to Harry Gwala

Facilitator: Sifiso?

Respondent: he is dark and tall, older also, he was the president of NUMSA, I forgot his name. He was the president of NUMSA there's Dube also who spoke non stop, we also had Rod, Calvin was turned away from the airport, and other COSATU members. We all sat together and had dinner but pretended as if we didn't know each other. He was very close to Harry Gwala. I forgot his name. The first day when they banned the conference, he is the one who told us that we are all stuck, we won't be able to move, we should not go out nor go back to where we come from. Apparently the system heard about the conference and they are threatened, they think we might take resolutions that might shake the government. So there was nothing we could do. Two years later we discovered that he was a spy for the government, he was on their payroll. We all couldn't believe it. He admitted because he had no choice. So we all realised later on that he was the first one to know because he is part of the system. He alerted us all. Whenever the police questioned us they had all the information, they even had the minutes. He recorded the meetings. Mkhali, Thembinkosi, he was active at the chemical union, he used to be at the department of labour. He is the one who gave us the information he was from the Eastern Cape. We survived the period and witnessed the new dispensation. I believe it's a struggle. It's a pity we cannot document what happened, we are not writers. Jay Naidoo also wrote a book recently.

Facilitator: look at Jay's book and see the writing style and so on, you can write something.

Respondent: I am glad that you are doing this research. I was interviewed by Malehoko for the women in the trade union movement because she says women's struggle is easily forgotten, everyone is

interested in people like the late Gomomo, he was the president of the union, Chris Dlamini and Jay Naidoo, they are not focus on women who were also part of the struggle. He has completed in PhD, he was dealing with women's struggles. He gave me a copy of the book and unfortunately it was the time of DTI, I haven't read the book. He interviewed a lot of women in the trade union movement at the time. He also encouraged us to write books because what you are telling me now, you can write a book in terms of your life as a woman, trade unionist and as a woman politician. And that would assist others who come after you. People think you are in the gravy train, people don't know that you actually fought and at the time that you fought you never knew that you can be deputy minister, you can be chairperson, you were fighting the system and making sure that we are all liberated. The problem is we cannot write

Facilitator: if you retire maybe you can get time, it's not difficult, it is difficult but you can finalise your book with 5/6 autobiographies and see the writing style, you can put something together, get someone to advise you on how you change your paragraphs and so on, how you structure certain things.

Respondent: no, we survived the system, participated, still members of the Woman's League and now I'm a member of the PEC in ANC.

I forgot to mention something that happened at work. Because I was having my own office and I was interacting with whites, I was purported to be a spy and .., in fact after I stopped signing and started clocking because I identified myself with the workers, I moved from monthly salary to weekly, and all that. The company came back to me and said how

can we promote you, to give you extra money. This was common during the apartheid era for companies to offer people who are active in the unions a better salary so that they do not belong to the union anymore. The company came back to me and offered me a better salary and job on condition you leave the union. I said to them I can't, I didn't want to sell the people out. I refused three times. The workers heard about it and then it was rumoured that I have accepted. We didn't eat food or drink tea during meetings because the workers would think we had sold them. I encouraged everyone that we should eat with them.

At some stage there was a plan to assassinate me. I was going to be killed the week of ..., they didn't know my schedule so this confused them, I used to go to training for shop stewards. On the day they knew I was around. I was supposed to be assassinated on Thursday after work. Tuesday one of them told me, a man came to me and told me. He asked me to close the door and windows. "On Thursday you are going to be assassinated", I asked by whom, the firm? He said it's us, everyone things you sold the workers because the firm has offered you a lot of money, you've been offered a car and you accepted meaning that you are selling us out. And then I asked him why am I still a shop steward. He told me that everyone says you have accepted. So he told me not to come to work because they are going to wait for me and shoot me. He told me the details. I told him that I did not accept the position. I then wrote a letter to the union office and resigned from the union. I indicated in the letter that apparently the workers are planning to kill me. The union office called a meeting. The organiser was called and informed about the situation. We met at lunch time and talked about it. The matter was cleared. Apparently they had collected R50 each and the assassin

wanted R2000 to kill me. The union informed the members that should anything happen to me they will be blamed.

Two weeks later another meeting was called. I withdrew my resignation. People have a way of escalating bad news. That is the experience of being a shop steward and at times you are really tested.

There was another incident, Maki Skhosana, they killed her and only discovered after she was killed that she was not an informer. People do not check the right information they just act on hear say. I accepted the apology and carried on being a shop steward until 1994. One of the things I will never forget in the struggle is that you trust people but they can turn around and not trust you. Now we are okay with Woman's League and PEC – at the last conference I did not accept a position to stand at the provincial level of the ANC while I'm deputy chairperson of the Women's League and also at the time, I was nominated by some provinces to be NEC at Polokwane Watershed, my phones were torn apart. Thabethe did not quality. I know who did that. I am happy where I am, deployed ANC province in the West Rand and I work with some of the comrades who were in the trade unions before, in the mines they are still active in the ANC. The struggle continues. All in all I am grateful to have been a member of the trade union movement – I am a product and I am forever, wherever I go I say this that I am product of the trade union movement. My foundation was build by the trade unions. I will not forget Sdumo, he taught me the hard way to be a leader and how to negotiate, I did that under tremendous stress

Facilitator: is he still alive?

Respondent: yes, Bra Wes is still alive, he retired in the unions and I believe he is in Matatiele. He had a house in Nhlapo, the wife was a matron at Natalspruit Hospital, they were trying some business at home. So ja that's that about my trade unionism

Facilitator: that's very detailed

Respondent: You haven't interviewed Don?

Facilitator: not yet, he is here in Cape Town

End

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