

## **Dusty Ngwane**

### **Summary**

This is a clear, wide-ranging interview that covers Ngwane's life from his first job in the mid-1970s to his employment by Colgate in 1979 and his involvement in the trade union movement from 1979 until 1991.

Elected a shop steward in 1979 for the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU), he describes clearly the apartheid workplace and what was needed to transform these workplaces. He elaborates on the struggle for recognition and collective bargaining at Colgate, how the union encouraged a nation-wide boycott of the company's products, used pressure from international trade unions as well as the Sullivan code to win their demands. As a national leader in CWIU he was included in Fosatu and affiliate international visits to advance Fosatu's disinvestment stance.

As the Fosatu chairperson in the Transvaal region he elaborates on the various campaigns taken up by the federation: 40 hour week, May Day, June 16, living wage of R2 per hour. He also remembers the oppression of the 1980s and 1990s including the funeral of CWIU Andries Raditsela who was killed by police as well as his role in averting clashes between Inkatha hostel dwellers and the community.

As a Fosatu and CWIU office bearer he was involved in the unity talks that led to the formation of Cosatu and came up against trade unions that were critical of Fosatu unions for their inclusion of whites.

After 1994 he turned down nomination to go to parliament choosing instead to give more time to God. He took up an organising post with the SA Typo Union where he developed more knowledge around employee benefits. He later returned to his former union, CWIU now merged and called Ceppwawu, and subsequently moved to Num to the post of social benefits officer. At the time of the interview, he held the position of Acting head of social benefits.

Facilitator: This is an interview with Dusty Ngwane we are in Tsakane the date is the 26 February the interview is done by Brown Maaba. Thank you for your time. You can either speak English or Zulu or any other language. Just give me a background of how you grew up, the kind of family you come from, how you ended up in the world of unions?

Respondent: I was born in Brakpan location in 1956, I was brought up in a, it wasn't so much of a middle income family but ja we were struggling like everybody else who was struggling in the township. My father was working in a factory the same as my mother. They were not earning that well. I was fortunate enough that they were able to pay for my education until I did my Form 4 which is standard 9 in Ilakula and then I went to work for Ellering Holdings for a couple of months. I then left and worked for Shoe Corporation in Isando for almost two years then I got a job at Ego, when Ego was opened and there I only worked for about 13 or 14 months and I left Ego in December of 1978. In January 1979 I started working for Colgate/Palmolive, in that March of that year I was approached by an elderly guys at work requesting that they want to show me an office where we can be able to get resolutions to most of the problems they were having at work. So as we were shift workers, when we knocked off at 2 in the afternoon, then they took me to 7 Fines building in Benoni and that was a FOSATU office, which was in 7 Fines building, Voortrekker street in Benoni.

At that time we joined TUACC which was the Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Council because the branch of the chemical workers in the Transvaal branch was not yet established. So we had to be recruited into

TUACC and the early founding companies Chemical Workers Industrial Union was Piggot and Maskew that we found there and Reef Chemicals, then Colgate/Palmolive and then we formed this Chemical Workers Industrial Union then we had other companies like Cheeseborough Ponds and like going up. I served in the union as the office bearer I think I was the Transvaal Regional Branch Chairperson during those days and I was also the chairperson of the union in Colgate/Palmolive. We went through a period whereby .., we recruited in Colgate and applied for a recognition. During those days there were no stop order facilities, we were collecting money by hand. I would have a receipt book, people would pay and I would give them a receipt and then take the money to the office. But when it came to union recognition there was a very big struggle. The personnel manager at the time was a white guy by the name of .., he is late now, Dyson. He was a member of the Chemical Industries Industrial Council, he was the chairperson. Colgate being a company that has been manufacturing soaps and the like, detergents was also a part of the Industrial Council, with the result that what the company wanted was that, they first refused to recognise us and they tried to channel us through the South African Chemical Workers Union at the time, which was a union that was led by Dan Tau and we refused because we felt that we needed a union of our own choice and of course in those days we heard about liaison committees and which were not effective in terms of advancing the interest of the members, so we had to find a body that would be able to really advance the interest of our members.

So when we pushed for the recognition of the union, the company was using delaying tactics. Now Colgate being a multinational company and through the involvement of FOSATU at the time, there was a lot of pressure

that was made to bear on an international level. At the time there was an International Confederation of Trade Unions (ICTU) at the time and we were getting support from them. There were also other people who represented investors in America which was also an anti-apartheid grouping which was also supporting us. The company said that they can recognise us for ..(unclear) and toilet issues, and they demanded that for collective issues we have to go through the Industrial Council. We refused to go to the Industrial Council at the time because the structure of the Industrial Council was such that the agreements that we arrived at were policed by agents of the Industrial Council and the agents were mostly whites who obviously had no interest in delivering on behalf of black people. This resulted in us declaring a dispute against the company and during those days there was an industrial conciliatory system, a system used to resolve labour issues and we went through to the conciliation board to negotiate the agreement. As we were negotiating it was clear that the company would not want to have negotiations at plant level. Then unfortunately our paths crossed, we then called for a boycott of the Colgate products, this is the time we were saying we are putting a squeeze on Colgate products. We squeezed Colgate like you've never seen. We campaigned, we had an overwhelming support throughout FOSATU, throughout communities, we addressed various church organisations, we addressed NAFCOC during those days in asking them to support our boycott. The boycott was truly effective with the result that the company gave in and we got the right to negotiate wages and working conditions. The company insisted that we must maintain 50% plus one, in those days we didn't even understand what 50 plus 1% meant. Chris Bonner who was the branch secretary at the time explained to us what it meant, that as long as we maintain the majority we will be able to

negotiate, we were not worried because we knew that we will always maintain the majority in the company and we did.

We continued with the negotiations for wages and working conditions. We had an agreement with the company which gave us the right to have shop stewards, monthly meetings with the company, we were able to discuss the problems we had within the company. It was not plain sailing because whatever we wanted we had to fight for it and we never stopped giving the company pressure in terms of the issues that we needed resolved. The pressure would be within the organisation itself and also internationally.

Through the union I had different experiences of travelling abroad to attend congresses in Germany of the German Federation, I also went to Geneva, Switzerland to testify in favour of sanctions against transnational companies in South Africa and there we were given more time and we even got a standing ovation. I was with Don Gumede who is now in parliament, he used to work for Unilever in Durban and I used to work for Colgate/Palmolive here in Johannesburg. I remember out of the presentations we made in favour of sanctions, and people would ask us that are we not scared that if the companies left the country we will have no jobs. We told them that people are suffering even though they have jobs currently and we are used to suffering. There wouldn't be much difference if the companies left, this will bring pressure on the government and the result will give us the freedom that we want. With the companies being in the country, instead of them pushing for political dispensation for the majority of the people of the country they are funding the homeland systems which is not the systems that are carrying the legitimate voices of the people. We have our leaders that have been incarcerated, and

were calling upon these companies to assist us with the release of our leaders but all that is falling on deaf ears.

We were also asked another question, whether we will be able to have the necessary expertise to run the companies if they had to leave and be set up by us. We then responded that we run them over weekends and on night shifts, so we will not have a problem running the companies. Mostly on night shift and weekends senior management is never there only the foremen and we make sure that production is done.

I also participated in the organisation within the Unity Talks that gave birth to COSATU. I was involved in the talks representing FOSATU because I was also elected as the chairperson of the Transvaal Branch of FOSATU at the time in which case it gave me one year exposure into the central committees of FOSATU, into congresses of FOSATU, I also sat in the National Executive Committee of the union as the deputy president of the organisation. It really gave one a lot of exposure into FOSATU as such and into COSATU particularly when we were negotiating establishment of COSATU up until when we had the COSATU launch in Durban.

So there has been struggles that we've been involved in which have benefited the labour movement in the country. Recognitions, Henkel when we were pushing for the release of the political prisoners in the sense that we would call for stay aways, we were involved in all those. Out of the expertise and the experience that I had in the union. There was a time when Andries Raditsela passed on and we were in Germiston to make the necessary preparations for the funeral. When we came back we found that the "Zulu" hostel dwellers, where there's a mall now, they were used by the regime as vigilantes and they had gone into people's

houses and killed people etc. That very same evening, because of the street committee process we took a decision that nobody goes to work we are all going to go down to the hostel, surely we did. I remember very well, I was with my late friend who used to work for CCAWUSA at the time, the late Abbey Ramalope. When we were out there, there was one guy that really had the strength to raise a white cloth and moved over to be with the SA Defence and told them that we would like to talk to these people. They said fine, we must have five people from the community and they will also have five people from the air force. He came and gave us that information. I said to him let's go, so Abbey and myself we moved out and three people from the community also joined us and we went for negotiations. Those were tough negotiations. We negotiated directly with Major Crawford who was leading the Battalion this side. The hostel was removed on the very same day because we said all the hostel dwellers must be taken away by buses .., buses were no longer getting into the township because they were vandalised because of the vigilante thing. So buses came and took away the hostel dwellers. The people had to leave and immediately after they left we started battering the hostels, and as a result the hostel was raised to the ground. Tsakane is the first township in the East Rand that had a hostel raised down to the ground and as a result we then thereafter did not have a hostel up until now.

Getting back to work thereafter, I called a general meeting to inform the members what transpired because it was a community issue and people had to know what was happening. As leaders we were accountable to the members and as such we wouldn't do any activity without reporting what has happened. And we reported what transpired. The people were very happy particularly our members that were hostel residents in Vosloorus because they stood up to say it is quite good that we gave

them the information, or the report back because their colleagues who were living in the Tsakane came to them to say that they need to do reinforcement so that over the weekend they must come and do more mass killings in Tsakane. These guys were saying they will not do that because we have got our leaders living there and they called us to a meeting and we know what you have been doing, you were used by the boers against our own people, as a result we are not going to support you. So that was the end of the violence. Unfortunately we had to go and bury Andries Raditsela, it was a massive funeral. The guy was gone. Something remarkable happened on the day because what happened was the trains were no longer passing Dunswart, they were not coming through because of the scores of people that were coming down, the train had to turn back at Dunswart. Then the taxi association in Tsakane came to inform us in church, they used their taxis to go and pick people up and bring them down. There was a very strong alliance at the time during those days. We had to go and bury our cadre and that was it.

I then, I was in Colgate until 1993 when I took a voluntary retrenchment. What happened was whilst I was in the union, immediately when our leaders were released, I felt that one needed to change the direction. I then went into training at work, I headed the training department, I realised that the training that I was made to look into was not going to empower our people, we had a problem of literacy, problem of skills shortages. Those are the issues that were supposed to be addressed, then the company offered me a voluntary package. I left Colgate in 1993, I then conducted the first elections that we had in the country. I was the district monitor for Brakpan, having lead monitors and ordinary monitors that were working under my supervision. I ran the whole elections in Brakpan, we had successful elections. I then went to join a union by the



name of South African Typographical Union. The union is not within the COSATU stable rather, it's within FEDUSA. It was predominantly a white craft union and with the opening of the country and the release of our cadres, they had to start making a move to be seen that they are within the ambit of transformation, encompassing black people. I gained a lot of experience in that union in so far as the employee benefits are concerned, retirements, knowledge of retirement funds, knowledge of medical aid and knowledge of funeral covers and home loans and then in 2001 I went back into CEPPAWU. I rejoined CEPPAWU where I worked as an all rounder. I was an organiser and as an organiser you deal with all issues, labour relations issues, employee benefits, employment equity, skills act issues and because of the expertise and the knowledge I had acquired in the COSATU federation at the time, before I was retrenched, one was able to handle all these issues and of course the back up experience that I got within the South African Typographical union, because I joined them in July 1994 until December 2000. In January 2001 I went to join CEPPAWU which was a merger of Chemical Workers Industrial Union with PWAU. I worked for that union until March 2006 when I got a job with the National Union of Mineworkers as a social benefits officer, co-ordinating the mining sector and I'm still with them. Currently my position is Acting Unit Head of Social Benefits Unit. I am co-ordinating retirement funds within the three sectors of the union, I am overseeing the co-ordination thereof which is in mining, construction as well energy.

Facilitator: Just to go back a bit. You mentioned that you were born in Brakpan but somehow you ended up in Tlakula, what happened?

Respondent: In Brakpan location we only had a secondary school which ended in Standard 8 at the time, if you wanted to go beyond Standard 8

(J.C.) you had to go either Daveyton or Kwa-Thema so I came to Kwa-Thema for my Form 4, I went there in 1974.

Facilitator: Also you mentioned that you only went up to Form 4, any reasons, or did you just choose to leave?

Respondent: Well I chose to leave even though there weren't that much pressing reasons because at the time I had a girlfriend and she had a baby and my mother was taking me through schooling, I felt that it would not be fair for a single parent, my dad passed on in 1966 so between that time my mother was taking care of me. So I felt that I needed to plough back, so for those reasons I left school. Of course in 1979 we moved from Brakpan to Tsakane because the location was demolished.

Facilitator: You changed jobs from one company to another, you ended up at Colgate for a longer time?

Respondent: It was just looking for greener pastures, and with Colgate, it was, even though I was from Ego, at Ego I used to work shifts and Ego was just around the corner but the problem was at Ego I used to work weekends and shift work as well. At Colgate it was shift work but Monday to Friday, Saturday and Sunday I wasn't working. If I had to work over weekends then I felt it was paid as overtime. Maybe one would have stuck with Ego but the only problem was that Ego was a South African company. There was a time whereby the company gave us salary increases and we were not happy with that, as a result we all congregated in the change room, as we were busy discussing I was very much vocal, the foreman came in and he could see me in there discussing with the people. He asked if at all we were going to come and

work, I said we will be coming to work, we just finishing our discussion. After about an hour we finished our discussion and went back to the plant we started working. The next day I was working nightshift, afternoon, when I was just walking around, I used to just go to work during the day. Our personnel officers, a black and a white one had come to visit me what had happened, why did I do this, and what was happening and I told them that we were not happy with the salary increases that they gave us and that we were discussing what would be the best way of dealing with this in order to make sure that we get the attention of management on the issues. One also had friends in the township who were involved politically and had been terribly brutalised by the state and one was very conscious about working for a South African company one might not be able to have a very good platform and protection in terms of pursuing the political demands of the people of the country, hence when I got a job at Colgate being a multinational I felt that one would be able to have, if at all there will be international pressure that will have to be exerted on our country at least one was working for a multinational company. Little did I realise that I was working for a devil of a company, not devil as such, but the fact that the Americans themselves were staunch supporters of the apartheid regime in South Africa because they were protecting their own interests. But ja, we were able to advance until where we were in 1990.

Facilitator: You were talking about Ego, was there a union there?

Respondent: There wasn't a union at Ego at the time, we were just workers and the fact that we came from the same township. It was mostly Brakpan old location, Kwa-Thema and Duduza and we were all young during those days, well we knew one another. We were working

across the whole company and people knew other guys that were coming from Kwa-Thema, other guys that were coming from Duduza, the same in our plant, so you know, with that splinter of Brakpan old location guys, we then had to discuss that when we get to work in the evening, before we go to the plant let's get all the people together and start talking to them. There was that confidence because I would be able to relate to guys that came from Brakpan old location working in other departments, inside the meeting and knew very well that they were not happy about what was happening and they had discussed it with their colleagues in their plants and as a result we had that unity. There wasn't any union at the time, that was in .., I started working for Ego, it was in 1977 September until December 1978.

Facilitator: and the working condition there?

Respondent: Well the conditions were terrible. It was surface mining but surface mining in the sense that I was working in the acid plant, the plant was just barely open, it was not closed up, when it was raining we could get a shield in terms going to the nearby change rooms. We were working in the plant, the acid plant had pumps whereby if there was a problem with a pump you had to go and check what was happening and because of that we had a roster which was burning pirateslary?? and with that burning  $\text{SO}^2$  gas was released which was put through the converter to be converted to  $\text{SO}^3$  and going through a cyclone and to demystify the gas through water and then it is mixed with water to form sulphuric acid. So if  $\text{SO}^2$  gas was released somewhere along the track, the inhalation of that was not very good health wise. We didn't have good health and safety methods, even the health and safety committees that we had in the various industries in the country like we having today.

In those days most of the things were dependent on the foreman. If there was a problem the foreman would be alerted. I remember a colleague of mine from Wattville, there was a shut down and because of the fact that there was no suction of the SO<sup>2</sup> gas through the whole productive system, then it blew throughout the SO<sup>2</sup> stripper and as a result there's a fan in that thing, it blew the whole gas out and one of our colleagues inhaled that gas and he nearly died. We had to pick him up and take him to the foreman's office who called an ambulance to take him to hospital.

The main reason I left it was weekend shift work and we were working with boers, I didn't like working with them because I associated them with the oppressive regime and that they were agents of the regime themselves. We had a meeting in the evening and then the next day the personnel officer came to see me and inquired what was happening, why were we having a meeting. So I felt that we were not protected, not very long one would be taken in and given a good hiding.

Facilitator: Now talking about the boers, what about issues of racism and segregation at the workplace?

Respondent: Well that was happening, we were working with the coloureds, they came from Payneville, the coloured got preferred jobs vis a vis the Africans. Very few of our African brothers made it to the control room which was almost seen to be the "larnie" job. Most of us were working in the plant. At some other time we went for training in Welkom, in another plant that was operational in Welkom and when we went there Africans were made to sleep at the hostel in the compounds and the coloureds were taken to a beautiful safer place. In fact the mine had

organised a house for them because they've got houses out there and every morning they had sandwiches. We had to queue in the kitchen and eat there even in the evening and we raised these issues with our foreman, why must we be separated and these guys sleep on the other side. The foremen told us that they are not aware why that is happening, they also came in there and they were offered a place and therefore they cannot say anything, but clearly they knew that the company was doing that because of the segregation. Toilets as well. White people had their own toilets, Africans had their own toilets which was not conducive. Even though we were sharing the toilets and change rooms together with the coloureds, we had separate toilets.

Facilitator: Moving over to Colgate, the situation there, how was it?

Respondent: The same thing happened in Colgate, we had the separation of ablution facilities but then at Colgate it was different. What happened is, during the recognition campaign, we normally had meetings with people coming from overseas via COSATU delegation and sometimes you will find that people came on a fact finding mission here and will be able to relate what is happening and then there was the pronouncement of the Sullivan Codes. And one sat down to look into Sullivan codes, they were aiming at eliminating apartheid in companies. Then we familiarised ourselves with those as shop stewards, we informed our members of what the codes are aspiring to achieve, but it wasn't plain sailing you understand. We still had segregated facilities at work, the canteen was desegregated. But what these whities did was they always brought their own lunch boxes, as a result they would eat in the factory and we would go to the canteens. Of course lunch times were separated, guys from the main block would come in at 1 and we would

go into the canteen at 11 in the morning. Obviously the menu that was served was quite different. When you bought lunch at 1 it was different to the one earlier on. Toilets were segregated as well during those days. We had to fight our way in in going into those toilets. I've got a colleague of mine, Kaizer who lives here in Thema, he was a shop steward as well. When we were pushing the Sullivan Principles, he was working at the boiler house and then we said listen guys, we told them that we as members we don't go and use these facilities, our members are not going to use these facilities. So we started using the white change house. The foreman went for him and told him "you can't wash here", the workers then called to come and see what was happening. When I got there I told them that in terms of the Sullivan Principles, the people have a right to wash here, but of course we had to vacate. The next thing we were in the HR office, the personnel manager at the time and the guy who was heading HR was a Jew boy, Jews are understandable in these issues. We had sat with him and told him that this can't happen, eventually they had to accept. But it wasn't plain sailing, then we challenged issues of skills training, Africans were relegated to low skills in terms of training. We were not given exposure to skills that would make us to be able to contribute positively in the country, it would be skills that will be able to make us run an enterprise of Colgate as such and the elevation of black workers into managerial positions only ended up as foremen. Now one was always fighting with our colleagues that we should not take up positions of foremen because those positions were created by the National Party in 1948 when it was canvassing for votes to say all those that were not literate, if they vote the national party they will permanently have positions as supervisors and foremen and of course even in the company those positions were given to those guys that were members of the liaison committee in the earlier days. We had to push for bursaries for training. During those days we

came across a situation whereby roles were not defined where one could be able to be trained in terms of being able to meaningfully contribute within the upbringing of the country, mostly the training that was done was just to capacitate one in terms of if you did not have Matric you would study towards having Matric and then look into tertiary, or what career can you follow through tertiary. Now for some of us because the struggle was not over, and we still saw the education system that was aimed at making us to be able to communicate with our so-called white masters. We felt that that was not education meant to liberate us, but it was education for domination, as such we concentrated more in building the workers' movement which is what it is today and making sure that we fight for the advancement of the interest of the African workers.

Facilitator: When you left Ego you were not in the unions but when you got to Colgate you became aware of unions. When did you exactly become aware of the importance of the role of union?

Respondent: Well like I indicated, these older guys, I didn't even know what was happening in the labour fraternity but these older guys came to me during lunch break and told me we can see that there's some potential in you and we want to take you to another office whereby you will be able to open up the doors for us. I said but you've got people that have been here for years ..., they said yes it's true but we saw something in you. And then when I went with those guys, that's when I started joining the Trade Union Advisory and co-ordinating committee or council and where I met Petros Pheko, bra-Piet, I mean he's done a lot in terms of conscientising, in terms of mentoring, in terms of going forward and showing that you don't have to be scared, when we fight we've got to fight fully, we don't have to retreat. So that's when I became aware of



the trade union movement. One didn't know anything but Bra Piet was always there to explain, I would ask him questions and he would guide me. He would tell me that we must fight for our rights in the workplace, we have to elect shop stewards because we can't rely on the Industrial Council system because the agreements are being policed by agents who have got no sympathy towards African workers, as a result we have to elect shop stewards which will then take over and control the shop floor.

When I became a shop steward together with other shop stewards on the shop floor, we then started taking over the shop floor and of course there was unhappiness even though resistance couldn't be led to the fullest because our foremen were white people, there was nothing they could do because this was a multinational company and we had the Sullivan Code and ja, one was able to take over because we were able to challenge the disciplinary measures that were made against our members, we were able to bring grievances against our foremen, we were able to say when we felt that we were being racially discriminated against, we didn't feel very much reserved on that, we were able to do that. And ja also bra-Piet made me aware that we are not only fighting to change the conditions on the shop floor, we have got to advance the experience and the education that is learnt within the trade union movement into the community because we have got to fight to change the political system in the country, this is the vehicle we will be using to change the political system in the country and of course.

Facilitator: you also became the chairperson of FOSATU Transvaal, what were the challenges that went with that?

Respondent: It was mainly recruitment, issues of negotiations of better conditions, I mean you have to remember we had unions like MAWU which is NUMSA today and those unions were also having .., in fact all the FOSATU unions were having it tough because we were formed against the back drop of there were .., the industries at the time were negotiating through the Industrial Council and we had to break that. So that was a challenge that we had. The other challenge that we had is that when these unions were seen to be growing, Inkatha also formed UWUSA and we had to move into the hostels to convince our members that UWUSA is not standing up to defend the interest of the members and of course the issue of taking up campaigns. FOSATU was campaigns oriented, so we had various campaigns: the living wage campaign; 40 hour work week; those were the campaigns that were really at the forefront and if one was an office bearer of an organisation you had to make sure that you expand yourself to where ever in order to make sure that those issues are attained. And of course we were involved in negotiating across the industry, if at all in a food company they were having problems, because of the experience that one had, having negotiated and working for a multinational one would go in there as an office bearer of FOSATU to go and assist with the negotiations and making sure that things become right for other people. So there was that moving around. One was fortunate because at the time one was working shifts, and working night shift I would be able when I knock off at night, I would be able to assist in the morning and go to sleep and go back to work at night. When I'm doing the afternoon shift I would go to the union office to make sure that correspondence is attended to or any other issues that needed to be attended to and attend to it. We were entrenching worker control to its fullest.

Facilitator: But were these workers recruitable or were they worried that they want to care about their families?

Respondent: They were recruitable, people were always saying we want a union like the Colgate Union because we really stirred the country, so people were interested, they were recruitable. We recruited heavily, we didn't have problems. Even UWUSA in the Transvaal it didn't grow as much as probably it would have grown in Natal even though we had Zulus who were within the companies. These guys were working along the metal industry and the textile industry and the chemical industry and during lunch breaks we had meetings where we would discuss these issues with members. There were rallies that were organised in order to give motivations to members so that they can understand what is happening. And of course even during those days when we had campaigns like: boycott Colgate campaign, we addressed mass meetings, 40 hour work week we addressed mass meetings, living wage of R2 a day we addressed mass meetings, and where there has been successes we also have to have mass meetings of informing people about how far we have gone and what are the successes, it's possible in their companies, and of course within the structural meetings because we had shop steward councils as well that were able to discuss problems of shop stewards in various locals, and also strengthen them. And of course there was solidarity, we used faxes in those days there were no emails, bogus calls that had the right to make calls at work in terms of trying to pressure management in companies where they were seen not to be aligning themselves with what the demands of the members are and of course guys like Chris Dlamini played a crucial role because they would take their HR guys and go with them to those companies and go and negotiate. They did that in many companies, in the Boksburg area they did it even at

Colgate, when Colgate was refusing to recognise a union and Kellogg is an American multinational and it had already given recognition. They did that also in Langeburg and it was a company falling within Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union during those days which is FAWU today, so there was an interchange of leadership in that manner in order to ensure that we advance the interest of the members.

Facilitator: You also mentioned that they were UWUSA of course they were members in some of the factories not most of them?

Respondent: ja

Facilitator: was there no tension between UWUSA members and COSATU?

Respondent: not at all, well I mean we didn't experience it that much, we sort of, as FOSATU shop stewards we always wanted the domination of the shop floor and we would advance to make sure that we dominate the shop floor and where we have recognition agreements, that agreement would be between FOSATU union and the company and as a result even if there would be UWUSA it would be UWUSA in terms of UWUSA being spoken about, if they had members those members had no power or no forces, because they would have been UWUSA members simply by virtue of the fact that they are from Kwa-Zulu they are members of Inkatha but here they know that their union is this one and their employers are here.

Facilitator: You were part and parcel of the negotiations of the formation of COSATU, what were the dynamics and the challenges of the formation of COSATU at the time?

Respondent: Mainly it was the ideology, we also have unions that are from NACTU, non racialism versus Black Consciousness, Africanism, that was one of the dynamics. The other area of dynamism was the issue of .., when these other unions have to come in, people had positions that they felt they have to hold on to and but then through negotiations it was a question of when unions come together and then people will go for elections within the unions themselves because I mean if you had like Food and Canning coming in to join in Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union it would be one union and once it is one union then the workers there, out of the constitution that shall have been negotiated will be able to elect leaders in the manner that will satisfy the constitution of the union. Fortunately enough in the chemical we didn't have that much of a problem because the unions that were in the chemical industry are still there even now and are within NACTU, they were very clear that as we proceeded along, that they are not coming in then they stayed out. But mainly the challenge was the ideologies and the challenge of people not wanting to relinquish their positions and control within the unions that they were having.

Facilitator: How did you deal with that, were they ever resolved those things?

Respondent: They were resolved because we did have other unions coming in hence there were mergers within the federation and the establishment of COSATU and of course another thing which was critical was the adoption of the name for the new federation, COSATU was there as the name and as the other colleague correctly put it that COSATU was SACTU in reverse and if people were seeing that they were against that,

but I mean out of discussions and debate eventually we had to come up with COSATU.

Another issue was the issue of non-racialism. Of course the guys of NACTU were seeing non-racialism to be exclusive of whites and I know very well that FOSATU unions at the time were accused of being led by white people but we had to make clear that the involvement and the inclusion of whites in the organisation was in no way taking over the running of the organisation because the organisation was run by workers in the form of shop stewards because one of the policies of FOSATU was worker control which has been imported over to COSATU that they are worker control, that COSATU unions should be worker controlled, how far true that is existing today, ja. I laugh about it.

Facilitator: I'm not sure whether at Colgate you worked with women?

Respondent: no during those days it was men only, women were in the admin

Facilitator: so they were not part of the unions?

Respondent: No, I don't know now whether they do have women in the production.

Facilitator: you were also a shop steward at Colgate, for how long?

Respondent: when we started this thing, when we were recruiting, I was elected a shop steward and chairperson in 1979 a position I held until 1991, I've always been a chairperson, year in and year out when elections

were held, they said it clearly that this one does not move out of the position as the chairperson and in the wage negotiations, we were having wage negotiations on an annual basis and it was five a side, the union five, the company five. Chuki Mamadi and myself were the main delegates in the negotiating teams, the other three we would alternate them on bi-annual basis – the three would negotiate for two years and then another three, throughout Chuki and myself were always permanent negotiators because that's what workers demanded that we should not be changed we should remain. Chuki was very good with figures and of course .., he was also studying and assisting with these strategies and stuff like that and of course we complemented one another. The final decisions all the time were made by members when we go for report backs. I mean we worked hard. Out of our alliances overseas we requested agreements which were entered by Colgate with other unions in other countries and we were comparing the wages saying we want to earn the same like the American workers and we would take this to the members and translate them to the members that a person who is doing this kind of work like driving he is earning so much in the US, when translated into South African rands it is so much. We would say in America the workers are getting so much doing the same work and we are earning less, therefore let us fight to get to that level. People felt that the union was there to make sure that their interests are represented in an effective manner.

Facilitator: but when you look back, your role as a shop steward, what would you say were the most outstanding achievements?

Respondent: it was getting the workers' unity, being able to deliver on the demands of the workers, being able to ensure that unity is always intact,

being able to bring about change in the country today because without the involvement of workers we wouldn't have been able to bring about these good changes that we have today, there were pains I must admit but they are worth it. I remember when there was the unbanning of the political organisations, some of my comrades came to me and said "look it's pay back time you've got to go to parliament", I said no I made a pact with the almighty when I was going through all the issues in the union, remember the country at the time was under the security system. I said Lord if you can keep me until we get our own freedom I will go back to serving you and I had to make that decision, that choice and I couldn't renege on the pact that I had made with the Almighty and I said guys you can go and enjoy yourself. And also to me the release of the political prisoners I had a hope that workers would be free, and up until now workers are not yet free. So it wouldn't have served the purpose, my going to parliament wouldn't have served the purpose of freeing the workers in the same manner that they would be freed in terms of the issues that we won on the shop floor and those issues to be guaranteed in terms of the agreement on an annual basis and seeing improvement on an annual basis moving on happening. I am not seeing that happening within the political system that we are having in the country and I'm glad I made the right decision of not going to parliament, I'm still in the labour movement. I can tell you this, which is something that the late Chris Dlamini used to say that "no country will be free until the workers are free" and that's a fact.

Facilitator: what about victimisation, you were in the forefront and so on, hatred at work those sorts of things, did those things happen?



Respondent: Ja they did but we had a very strong union, our members were exceptionally strong. There was a time when I .., when we were fighting like you've never seen, we've always been fighting for the recognition of the members and their interests, when we were pushing strongly on the Sullivan principles. These guys when we arrived at the clock cards, I found a paper written an organisation called ASWSA – “Dusty you black kaffir we will get you” – I took that and went to a general meeting and said guys this is what is happening, we went to management and sat down with them and asked management to explain what is happening and the company came out and promised me protection to make sure that when I am at work nothing happens. And then the workers said if at all happens to him outside the workplace as well we will hold the company responsible for that. Fortunately nothing happened. Victimisation just to ensure that if I want to go to union meetings the company would say I haven't been on the shop floor, I haven't been at work for quite a number of days and we would argue on the basis that I'm a shop steward and I need to attend these meetings and if at all they were having an attitude it would take a general meeting to come and tell them that he will be going to that meeting then of course I would go. Because once workers stop working the production suffers and once the production suffers then the company listens. Even though those were unpaid leave one didn't mind because one was doing it for the benefit of the struggle. Of course promotions at work when there were better jobs like being a plant operator and I would apply. When you are a plant operator you have more time to yourself and where one could be able to advance the interest of the organisation but the company would simply turn you down. I once applied to become an artisan, despite the fact that I had passed the aptitude test they turned the application down, I applied to be a plant operator they also turned it

down. In those areas if you are an artisan you walk across the department and you talk to people, you check the machines and when you are a plant operator you are seated and you can move down and talk to people, the company was worried that I will be conscientising members more and more as a result they denied me those opportunities until it was very late where the managing director, he would pretend to be on the workers' side because of the fact that he had to make that *toenadering* between the union and ourselves so that whenever there were problems they can support soon from the union in resolving. Then I became a plant operator and then from there he decided to move me out and became a full time shop steward, I then became the first time full time shop steward ever within the Chemical Workers Industrial Union as well. I was doing trade union work and paid for by the company.

Facilitator: and this whites based union (SA Typo Union) that you joined in 1994 would you say you left some mark there and moved over to ..?

Respondent: definitely the marks that I left here was that the union is a union that has got a policy that they won't go on strike, they have a policy that when they negotiate militancy will not be applied, but when I came in, and in fact the worker control is not known in that union, so when I came into that union, for the companies that I was organising within in Johannesburg, I started inculcating the spirit of worker control, making them understand what does it mean when you say worker control and as a result when you go and discuss issues that affect them we would ask for a general meeting to give a report back. And also with wage negotiations make them understand that they can be able to make demands and that we can sit down with management, negotiate and come back for feedback at all times, and that we can also challenge

companies on issues that are happening, be they grievances or the unhappiness on the shop floor and also being able to represent workers in disciplinary hearings, things that were not happening because of the fact that that union also came from a background of the Industrial Council and as a result when the Industrial Council collapsed the companies and the unions had an agreement that the companies will continue to recognise the conditions as they were during the days of the Industrial Council and that the union will also support the companies and those mainly related to wages and the way in which wages were increased on an annual basis and of course there were minimums for each and every job that was done in the industry and of course a pre-negotiated increase that would be kicking in on an annual basis and you would find that those were still lagging very far behind in terms of matching up with the industry norms in so far as salaries of members were concerned. And as a result when I came in and started bringing that culture of negotiating the wages and working conditions, of standing up to defend our members, of making sure that we also demand a stake in terms of training and advancement of black people into becoming machine minders, its in the printing industry and a job of a printer has always been a job that has been handled by white people and we started coming up and saying we want our own brothers and sisters to become machine minders as well because those are high paying jobs as well and they are highly skilled jobs as well. So then we pressed that through the printing college people must be taken in for training so that they can be able to acquire the skills and be able to get comparable wages in the industry.

Facilitator: Post 1994 what should have been the position of unions? Which direction should the unions have taken after 1994?

Respondent: you mean direction in terms of?

Facilitator: there was this quota system, you also talked about it that a certain number of workers should go to parliament and so on but other people were opposed to it..?

Respondent: I think it was good that some of our members went to parliament, there's nothing wrong with that because what we wanted was to influence the government into really encompassing the working class demands within the economic system of the country, and that was okay, what changed was the fact that, I've been sitting with my colleagues that are in parliament at some other time when they are in recess and I said to them "guys these are resolutions that were taken and you know that we believed that issues of workers must be central to any government planning so that we can be able to alleviate poverty issues, skills issues and income categories etc., why is it this not happening". Then people will say to me, you can stand up and say this is the resolution that we have as labour you will be told "thank you very much, that is labour's resolution, now we are going to tell you what the ANC's resolution is and please remember this is an ANC meeting". You can see that the issue of alliance is not benefiting the working class, even to date. I think that's one of the reasons I'm glad I'm not a politician, I'm a trade unionist. Be that as it may we wanted to make sure that workers are in control, workers take the lead that we change the economic system to socialism but the way in which our government is delaying us is unbelievable.

Facilitator: and the most pressing issues for unions today, you are still in the union structures?

Respondent: ja I am, well there's still issues of income disparities, issues of skills, issues of housing because we've got to convert hostels into housing units, issues of transport subsidy, you have people coming from their villages into the mining area or into the industrial areas and you will find that for them moving out of the hostel because it is not very much conducive then they have to rent places in the township either they have to erect mkhukhu and the like and they have to commute then you know we demand those issues of transport subsidy for the people. But clearly income disparities, skills, employment equity, and women empowerment as well.

Facilitator: you mean has that not been attended enough or it has never been attended to?

Respondent: they not being attended to they are part and parcel of transformation and transformation is not sufficient and as a result because there's no transformation of the industrial area or of the area of production, as a result those disparities still exist. Transformation only happens where it benefits capitalists. We have African brothers and sisters that are brought in as BEE and you find that their thinking and mentality is pure capitalist. And I mean these people haven't come out in the same manner and groomed by trade union environment, trade union discussions, trade union resolutions which were always aimed at backing the working class and making sure that we have those disparities. And also another pressing issue is the issue of rural development, it is still lacking behind because we still have our members retiring into the villages they came from when they came to the urban areas and the villages do not have infrastructure altogether, for a person to be able to withdraw R1 010 they have to take a taxi and pay R40/50 to go to a town where they will

be able to draw in excess of a R1000, we can't allow that kind of a thing to happen, electricity is not there, running water is not there and I mean without electricity our kids cannot use computers in their schools. So those are issues that are still central to the demands of the workers. We are still demanding change to those issues even within the companies we are working for.

F; One other thing that you mentioned was shop steward training which you received from Wits or the other institutions that supported the unions. Was this form of training effective?

Respondent: yes they were effective, we had Paul Benjamin, Halton Cheadle, Phil Bonner Eddie Webster, during the school holidays they will take us for three weeks and we would go through the labour study courses and those would cover the creation of a divided labour force, the history, that we had to come off the land to work in the companies, how it happened that companies should be set as they are, issues of mass production. Quite a lot of issues including political issues as well with regards to when we demand equal pay for equal wages, what that means, when we demand upgrading of the places that we're living in, what it means. When we came here in Tsakane there was no electricity, there was the bucket system, there was no running water in the old location, water was fetched at a central point in the streets and most of the roads in the old location were not tarred which is still the same today here in Tsakane. When we came we had water but no electricity and we used the bucket system. Clearly we had to challenge those issues and the fact that we were living far away from where we were working, we needed to have houses closer to our places of work in order for us to be

able to commute easily. Those issues on their own were political issues, they were political demands and to date we don't have them.

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

Respondent: Maybe you should leave me your number so that if I remember something I can always call you and give you the information.

Facilitator: Any closing word maybe?

Respondent: No broer, I think you guys must really push for the struggle of the workers should be part of the curriculum in schools because if you look at the youth today they don't know what we went through, they don't understand anything about trade unionism. I am looking at the way in which youth is being used in employment, in various sectors of the economy, these people are only looking at what is there for them. You look into campaigns, the holidays that were fought for, 1 May, 21 March, 16 June, I mean the very same youth today go for bashes on those days. People died for those days to be recognised and this is the history of South Africa that should not be forgotten. The kids should know about this history so that they can be able to understand we only have political freedom in this country we are still fighting for the economic freedom. The economy is not in the hands of the people, and we need to redirect that back. And also to ensure that the working class in this country must really regroup themselves, we must regroup ourselves and take over the control of the government. I was saying .., when there was the uprisings of service delivery, that the government should give the issue of service delivery to the trade union movement in particular COSATU and there will

be service delivery. We've been delivering on all issues in the country including making sure that we make ANC to be the government, we've provided infrastructure for the government to make sure that we have campaigns where ANC and as a result they were able to be in power. Where people have not been happy with what has been happening within the municipalities, we mobilised the forces to be able to stand up against the unjustness that was done by the white government and as such we have been able to deliver, I mean we delivered on an instruction from Lusaka to say we've got to bring labour to form a very big federation which is COSATU and we in COSATU are very happy that we are there and other people are out and we are still trying to pursue them to come in. One exciting challenge that will be coming through labour which is the challenge that is facing retirement funds in the country. The government needs to provide a growth path in the country is so far as infrastructure is concerned, in so far as agriculture is concerned, in so far as green economy or green warming is concerned and it needs money for that and it said labour must start looking towards utilising or towards earmarking some of those projects or some of those growth paths in so far as investing retirement fund monies in there and it's also looking at creating a national social security fund which will be a fund that will be a fund which will be looking towards the retirement interests of all workers in the country because currently not all workers are covered within the retirement funds and once all workers are covered then there will be revenue for the government to provide for all the deliverables that they've got to deliver. I still believe that labour must stand up and take its rightful place and lead, we have sort of abdicated role and we have successfully led in the past, we still have got to do it, we have shown that within labour there is enormous power. If we stop and do what we do now because we want money then things will stop.



Facilitator: thanks very much for your time. I will give you my number.

**END**