

Musa Bhengu

Facilitator: This is an interview with Musa Bhengu, we are in Durban, the date is 17 October 2012, interview was done by Brown Maaba. Please tell me about where you come from mfowethu?

Respondent: Basically my background I'm from a small town in Durban called Chesterville which is closer to the city. My beginning in terms of the whole situation with the struggle started very early during the school days, that was the time, if I recall well early 1972 at school when the SRC's were introduced and I was elected to the SRC. Prior to that one was very active in sports, I used to be a well known soccer player in the township and was a captain of a team. So I think the issue of leadership started when players selected me to be their captain. This then went to school where we firstly had to defuse the issue of the prefect and then there was this introduction of SRC's, who should not only represent schools only but also to take an interest to students as well. I got very involved in that. At the time I wasn't not so much involved up until some guys were deployed by the ANC to assist us in terms of assist us in terms of understanding the activities of the ANC and the role that we should be playing in transforming the community. At the time the ANC was banned, we operated under SANCO or other civic organisations which operated strongly and the campaigns which were organised by the ANC we disguised under community demands. The significance of our role started when there was a campaign which was held in Lamontville, the closest township to Chesterville. *Asinamali* Campaign, we boycotted rent. In those days townships were paying rent, so our challenges were the same, so we worked together. In those days we had people like Baba Msizi Dube, Xundu etc., those people used to come to our township, we held underground meetings with them and this is where one was educated to understand *mzabalazo* in the broader sense of the struggle we were faced with. At the time most of the information was restricted to us, we didn't know what was really happening. Slowly one started being exposed, at one stage we were taken to an area called Hammersdale, this is where we were developed in terms of understanding the cadres, how we should behave, how to treat our

enemies, and I think one began to understand things differently. I think the system of education took another dimension in terms of how we see it, and that's where things started got out of control. At the time we were too loose and were unable to find a way of getting good ending results. We went on a campaign to look for teachers who were anti-students in terms of the student demands. We ensured that such teachers were removed from school. That was the beginning, the rest is history in term sof the community. I then moved, under severe pressure in 1987, but during 1982/83, the soldiers were attacking schools whenever we had a campaign against removal of the principals, they would be there to protecting the principals and teachers. This is when the A Team was formed, you might have heard about it, it worked very closely with the system.

There was a campaign to remove a principal that did not support the demands of the students, everything he did he was using the attitude of the system. We proposed that he be removed, he was from Chesterville, very well known, he was a boxer and trained boxers, he was a famous sports person. There was a young boy who drove him around, he went to the same school with us. He had been stabbed at some theatre show, *Okwethu* so he couldn't walk and drive properly, so this young boy was driving him. So one day in one of our strategic meetings in the toilets, strategising on how to remove him, he resisted to resign. So his driver told him that there was a campaign that he be removed. On that day the driver did not come to school. The information escalated and that the person who gave alarm to that was the driver .., he could not come back to school because we all knew what he had done. A group was formed in defence of the principal. This is how the A Team was formed. Even some big brothers who used to be sympathetic to him because he was a very famous person started to support him. The group escalated and then the soldiers and police supported the principal. The A Team did not have more than 20 members but they destroyed the township, they were very strong. They had the protection of soldiers and police, they could target anyone they thought was a culprit or leaders at the time. Most of them were eventually killed in their sleep. Some shot broad daylight, so that was the environment we lived in. So all of us had to run away from the township because we were targeted. I had to move to

Tongaat and hide at a friend's place. At that time I could not go to school for quite some time.

Eventually my brother in law found me a job in one of the oil companies, Caltex and later changed to Chevron as it is called today. So this is where my involvement with the trade unions started. I joined them in 1988. At the time I had not completed my diploma, Saltana. After finishing my Matric I did not complete the diploma. I worked there as a temp, labour brokers of these days for a period of eight months. I travelled by train to Tongaat. At the time I wasn't exposed a lot to Chesterville. I then started developing by attending trade union meetings. Although at the time things were a bit different, there were people called councils who dressed in white coats when they had to visit management offices, management did not want them to make their chairs dirty. They were forced to wear white coats and acted as interpreters. They told us that they represented workers. The only thing they did was to translate because they understood English. So there would be report back from top down, nothing from workers, it was only a one way street. When people raised questions they were not listened to. They would report to us what the bosses said "*o baass bathe*" we had to accept everything from the *baasses*. Our views were never taken into consideration they would tell us who are the bosses in the company. Things went on like that until we took over. We survived, some of the people who worked there used to live in the hostels. Some were staying in Cleveland, some in Kwa-Mashu, Wemmer etc., so they used to warn us because they were members of the IFP, very strong members of IFP. They now started to say you boys are bringing politics into work, this has nothing to do with politics, these are our demands as workers, so don't include your politics.

Now we started introducing a way of proposing demands, in a certain platform and if there's resistance we must stick to what we believe in not barge. They were not comfortable with us, they told us that we cannot fight when we are asking or proposing – they wanted us to show that we are pleading, we could not accept what they were saying to us and we said we are making the demands and we wanted benefits. Conflict started, in 1992 we were removed because of our

militancy. We were then targeted and the company started reducing us, they failed, we survived. I think this is where we learnt, I think at that time there was an educator Siphon Ntshapa, I believe he is the one who groomed me. I started spending a lot of time with him, he introduced me to many things. Do you remember CWIU merged with PAWU, so from that .. – I think at the time the general secretary was Rod Crompton. We identified him, the head office of the Chemical Union was here in Durban, so everything was done here. So I was given more exposure, I was developed. Because I focused a lot on the petroleum industry, I was tasked to do the research on multi national companies because they were confusing. We know that they were multi national but there was no head or tail to the companies. There was a guy called Dave Jansen who was a student at University of KZN, he worked with us on a project together with Sakhawo Zakho who was the co-ordinator of the petroleum sector. So we had to go and do an understudy. This started with Vuyo but unfortunately he left the union and Sakhawo Zakho took over. We then did a lot of research to understand the petroleum industry, at the same time the history of the trade unions in terms of other countries ..., and that's where one started to know what is happening in the industry.

Again I was re-elected back to being a shop steward, this time at a senior level who became a leader in the area.

Facilitator: In the same industry?

Respondent: Yes in the same company and over and above that in the union I was then elected as Chairperson of petroleum with the exposure I had with the research. Things became clearer and I was more exposed on negotiations, this is when we started demanding Central Bargaining, do you remember the campaign, we were behind the centralised campaign. Before the campaign we introduced a benefit, the workers scheme, investments for provident fund. We were part of it as well. We embarked on campaigns that strongly worked on ..., companies used to introduce their own provident fund which at the time was called the Pension Scheme. You

were restricted to take the whole package, but a certain amount would be released, restricted to you and your wife was not extended to your family/nucleus. So we challenged those rules and when we realised that this cannot be changed, we formed our own. This is how the NPC came into existence and then we introduce CNPF particularly in the chemical industry. So I was behind the campaign. We went on strike and it was eventually accepted as it is now today. The same thing happened with the centralised bargaining council which was the same thing, in the 1980s we met a huge ..., actually driven by the federation COSATU at the time. We also gained from it. I then started to be involved. So I was more involved on the negotiations at a national level, as the chairperson of petroleum for quite some time, up until ..., I think that was in 2000. Employment Equity was then introduced where transformation had to happen. I was deployed there. I therefore could not carry on as a shop steward. The position was a bit senior, one could not hold two positions at the time, but I still participated as a member. I was then deployed to Cape Town and I concentrated on employment transformation.

I worked there until 2008. I want to say that transformation was successful because the company was dominated by whites and Indians. We transformed the company. A number of African guys were employed in finance, logistics etc., became African guys. What really played a role was that a guy was deployed from Texas, John Home, who came to South Africa to work with us on the project. So she supported our idea. He stayed in South Africa for almost three years. The transition took place successfully. Just when we thought everything is done and sealed – the employer came and conducted a restructuring which targeted us. I then had to leave the company because of this. We were retrenched. The people who were given better positions during the transformation also resigned because they said the situation was unbearable. We brought in a lot of graduates to join us so that they can assist us in transforming. Unfortunately they left, I was then thrown out.

I then joined SEPAWU as an official. Knowing my history and my involvement in the unions I did not have problems. I was retrenched in 2007, in 2008 there were 6 vacancies and I applied for one. I applied and I managed to get a job. I spent a

year, the following year I was deployed to the Education Department. I was based in Mandeni, Zithebe. I would come and do the education. In May 2010, I was appointed to deal with the Coastland on education. Coastland would be Free State, Cape Town, KZN, Bloemfontein, those were the areas I covered. Before I was appointed the year ended, there was a regional congress. They elected me as regional secretary which is the position that I am currently holding.

Facilitator: Just to go back into your school activities, you said that you were involved in politics in the township, Chesterville. And thereafter how were politics introduced to you because things were underground then?

Respondent: That is why I indicated to you that at one stage we took to Hammersdale and that is where most of the trainings, that will always be undercover and not necessarily exposed to the place where we used to stay. So you will be transported and attend most of the activities there. At some stage we were sent to Lamontville and again Umlazi there was .., it was very for all projects to be run in Chesterville, Chesterville was concentrated on because of the situation and the .., they would always prefer us to move away from Chesterville. So most of the work was done underground. After that then we were able to sort of go and attend classes like for an example Diacona, it will be given another name and we will be attending a different course. So people would be deployed and we would go to Diacona and attend most of the classes which had more to do with cadre mentoring, leadership in terms of empowering yourself, skills. At the time of the A Team we were taught how to use ammunition because at the time we needed to defend ourselves. So that took place in Lamontville and Clarwater, that is where we went. There was some grounds where they would train us. But for leadership most of the training took place in Diacona.

Facilitator: Personally what were your intentions, what did you want to do after Matric?

Respondent: Basically, the influence is your parents. My father was strongly involved in politics. There was an old man at the time, they called him Champion, he was involved with people like Simelane, we had councillors. Do you remember there was a campaign of elections and all that? My father was behind that. To be honest with you I did not learn anything from my father because he always discouraged me to get involved. He believed that this is for the old generation and he felt I am still young to be involved. So I got nothing from my dad. My brothers were better, they took me along to the meetings. I would say the involvement in politics was not influenced strongly by my parents, more than my friends that I grew up with and my brothers.

Facilitator: And then you landed at Caltex, which later you were involved in transforming but it later went back to ...? The nature of it in 1988 when you joined it, what kind of a world was it?

Respondent: This is a funny story because at the time it seemed rosy, you could not sense what was underlying. The segregation was bad, chairs had non whites, blacks etc., the municipality buses were clearly defined according to colour. That was the environment where I worked, we had separate canteens, blacks and white. When you go into the canteens, the black canteen half a loaf of bread and maybe some palony if possible, and you know a chicken that was boiled. White people ate decent food, cheese, decent food and things like that. That is how the environment was. When you move into the work environment, we had separate gates, for office staff, give them priority and this was clearly marked. The environment was that you might dirty the office staff if you do not give way to them. So it affected you psychologically. Even parking, black people with big bakkies were not allowed to park on certain parking bays. The segregation was there, so you were fighting something that you could see.

At one stage we campaigned that we wanted to go and eat with them. We fought with them and said if you don't want us to eat with you, make the canteens to look

the same. They said it would not be a problem and that we eat too much, they assumed we are okay with a loaf of bread. That is how the environment was. And at the time the older generation did not see anything wrong. So for us it was not easy. Merit increase was an issue. After five years service you were given a Parker pen for your loyalty. We then transformed that into money/value.

Facilitator: And the introduction of unions at that time, what did it take to bring unions on board because ..?

Respondent: If I can say, the culprit, unfortunately may his soul rest in peace, comrade Senzo Mpongose, he was the champion of bringing the union. What I was telling you did not necessarily link to the union. It was our standing point that we will not affiliate to any union just to address things

Facilitator: Just your concerns?

Respondent: Just our concern with the current structures, up until comrade Senzo, who was there at the time, fought and encouraged us to face the employer and introduce the union. At the time the organiser who was servicing the Petroleum sector, Pat Horn, he is still there, she works for a street kids association, but she still works there. She happened to be a white woman. They were a bit soft for her in some instances I must admit because when she left there was resistance. They would even carry her briefcase – but they would not approve the union. They were willing to accept and be sympathetic to her than the union. So I am saying, strategically because of the dominance of this, they wanted to use her. She played a major role. So in 1989 we re-introduced the union so late. What the employer would do is immediately when you talk about unions they will promise you everything. They will say no no, let's not bring the union, we will ensure that everything that you want is addressed. But in 1989 we succeeded to introduce the union.

Facilitator: So that was CW

Respondent: Yes

Facilitator: And the recognition agreement?

Respondent: The recognition agreement was then .., it took longer, there was a number, resistance as I said, it took long but ...(unclear) very strong on that and he brought along road?? committee and then they managed to push for that. I think we managed to get that in 1991 if I am not mistaken, the settlement, I might be wrong with the dates. We realised the recognition agreement at the time.

Facilitator: Did people join in mass, you said that there was this older generation of men, some of them linked to the IFP and now you have this union? Did they jump in?

Respondent: Yes they did jump in slowly those because at that time they didn't realise that unions are associated to the ANC and other political formations. They only wanted to resign later, they joined in numbers I must admit, when we started to talk about campaigns and that the ANC is going to be involved in that, they said no what has that got to do with us workers. This is when they started to say this is not what I joined. That was the time. But there was conflict because Senzo was very vocal. He would insist that if you work here and you join COSATU you have no choice but to join the ANC. We informed COSATU that they need patience, if they get involved with us they will gradually transform and be empowered. The dominance was the guys from Umlazi, the ones living in hostels were from Inkandla and those areas, hence some of them were in resistance. They were not big

numbers they were very few and extremely vocal. The other thing they did is when Inkatha introduced their union they never joined it.

Facilitator: And then when you took over as a shop steward, what needed to be transformed there because you were now a shop steward, and now it was your burden to see to it that the shop floor issues are directly addressed?

Respondent: Sure, the one thing I ensured that we do is to make sure that elections become democratic. When we were pushed in, during the elections there was no competition, there was no democratic exercise, it was a matter of are you brave to take on the job because most of people thought it was scary. There was a chance that you could lose your job. So immediately they realise you are a shop steward you were automatically in danger of losing your job one way or the other. They will attack you, your supervisor will be on your neck, if you go to the mens they will report how many times you went and you had to explain why. When you become a shop steward they will start showing an interest in everything you do, too much calls etc., the union office will always call, we had no cellphones at the time, you would be monitored. It was a difficult task, so obviously because of this a proper election will not be held. It will be a matter of who is brave to accept the appointment.

Later on when the recognition agreement was signed, we were now recognised, we now have an office where Musa can operate and keep his files. Whenever there are visitors a shop steward will be called to meet with the visitors. This then became attractive to other members, it was also an opportunity to be exposed. Then the idea of democratic elections started to come into place. We would then advertise when the term of office change and people will elect their own leaders. This then started to be exciting, people showed an interest and would lobby members to elect them, this was around 1995, after 1994.

Then we introduced wage negotiations at a plant level, that's where we started. Even though the company later .., I think we were late to join centralised and the petroleum industry. Employers resisted a lot. We were involved in terms of formations of wage negotiations at a plant level. We then moved nationally because the company was national, we would then negotiate at a national level. We will then formulate our regional position, we would caucus with other regions at a national level. We then had a structure which was co-ordinated from a national perspective. At that time Bheki Ntshalintshali, he knows me, we came together, he is the former member of the CW, he was at that time Petroleum co-ordinator, and some other guy who is now a commissioner, I forgot his name. He later took over as the petroleum co-ordinator. So those were the people I used to work with. We were well grounded with those people. As shop stewards we had our own meetings, general meetings. After I was elected chairperson of petroleum, in the Allenview area, the industrial area and most companies there are petroleum companies. I went and negotiated with all the petroleum companies, I requested all companies to give us a schedule of shop steward meetings. I initiated this with the assistance of other shop stewards in their various sections. The structure was in place, we would use the platform to discuss issues that affected us in our respective plants, we would escalate the information in this platform. If there was a problem we would march if necessary until our demands are met. Eventually the areas were defined as national key points where you can't strike.

The Minister, comrade Mdladlana wanted to design, in 1998 there was a strike in the petroleum industry where we froze all the garages. I was leading petroleum nationally. There was a meeting which was called by comrade Mdladlana on a Sunday to suspend our strike and that's when we wanted our structure to be defined as an essential structure. He used his capacity as a cadre within the ANC to say that comrades you cannot allow a situation like this, you are running the country and things cannot be like that. KZN was dry, people were unable to move around which suspended the functioning of business and .., so we had to sit in that meeting. It was tense but also a highlight. When one sits and looks back I think 1998 was one of the successful strikes we had in our struggle in the petroleum industry. I can tell you, if you do some research you will find this information: Our bargaining tools SEPAWU is

petroleum because they are strategic by nature. So when we negotiate they will always ask us not to settle too soon, we must hold out longer.

So we've been talking to PEC??, to say if we can have SATAWU, SEPAWU, NUMSA, GARAGE, all on strike, what will be?

Facilitator: Now the strategy to retrench you from Caltex, I'm sure it was well orchestrated by management?

Respondent: Sure

Facilitator: It kind of defused the union internally?

Respondent: Sure

Facilitator: Did it leave you frustrated and others who were involved. I would say at that time you remember I was on the committee dealing with transformation and employment equity. So after we had transformed successfully, I must also say that the guys that we brought in were not properly groomed in terms of what we wanted to achieve, so all they had to do was to bargain for themselves, they didn't understand the bigger picture. So when they were required to assist with something in most times they were not available. They were afraid to take management on. I would say we didn't get a lot of assistance from them. They had no chance of surviving because the company started using Indians, they are the ones dominating now. The senior manager now is from Pakistan. Caltex is a multinational company, they deploy anyone within the structure to go into any country. Hence the guy from Texas was also deployed. Prior to the guy from Pakistan, someone was acting, an Afrikaner, van der Merwe from the Free State. So they worked well with him and he

supported the idea, we resisted it, we challenged it .., unfortunately we remained suppressed. The matter was referred to the Labour Court but the problems that came out of that, when the issue was raised they said for us, because I was no longer a member of the union, I could not raise the issue. They would always insist that you join the union in your own accord, but they would not treat you like that because you are in a senior post. After we challenged this at the Labour Court, we were told if you claim to be a member you should have been consulted with other members of the union, your consultation was treated separately. So they came up with a number of strategic ways of doing that but at the end of the day the matter was taken to the Labour Courts, we lost with the lateness of submissions because we first had to apply for condonation, which took about two days. If you understand the how the Labour submissions work, the prospect that becomes the centre then the lateness. So it did not even take two days given the prospect of success into our case but we lost. I do sense that the guy that was running case, even himself was not honest – I only realised this later when I analysed it, when we did the review. If we had taken it to the High Court it was going to be very costly. 9 of us were retrenched.

I am saying the retrenchment was strategic because the position I held was filled with someone else, right now as we talk.

Facilitator: But then did you find yourself in limbo or did you find a job immediately?

Respondent: No I was in limbo for almost a year, it was terrible

Facilitator: Regretting?

Respondent: In a way I couldn't because I think I was grounded. I know my struggle, I know what we have achieved ..,it happened at a time when my family

got involved because I was married at this time. So my wife's tears at home .., and fortunately she was an educator, she could support during the trying times, and the kids would start to notice as young as they were .., daddy is no more moving up and down, he is always at home, he is always reading and whatever. At that time the family would be sad, there was a lot of tears. That was a sad period in my family, we were strong. Here I am.

Facilitator: So you joined SEPAWU as an educator?

Respondent: As an official, as an organiser for a period of a year up until I was then appointed by the regional secretary, the late comrade Elias Dlomo who passed away last year.

Facilitator: You were appointed as a regional organiser or provincial organiser?

Respondent: At SEPAWU we don't define it on a regional basis, you just become an organiser. What happened is they had pillars, you co-ordinate so once you are co-ordinated you then report directly to the regional secretary on the pillar you co-ordinate. It's either health and safety education or you name it

Facilitator: And what were the challenges of this new job, of being an organiser. This was something more or less outside Caltex into a broader scope of SEPAWU?

Respondent: It was, the advantage I took is that because I had been a shop steward before, I knew it all but I really came into the office I started to realise that I am now lost. It's something different, if I have to lead cases now, a closing argument, I had no idea how it was done, I would make noise as a shop steward and I would design it, refer to certain clauses in the Labour Relations Act then I found

myself wanting. But then again there was a support system that ..., officials supported me, I would spend time with them, I would go along with them but I must say that there was no systematic way of doing things within SEPAWU, when you join you find just had to find your way. Sometimes the comrades would be harsh to you and say you joined, you are getting paid so you must go and work. So I sat down with the secretary, and the guys who had been here for long, for instance comrade Morris Khoza who has been here for long, Lerago Thamaiza, regional secretary, they would joke with you, tease you but at the end of the day they will teach you something. They empowered me, I learnt a lot from them. With an environment which was isolated in a rural area, where there's a need and the people are patient, you won't find people who want to check whether you are knowledgeable or not. The people are co-operative because most of the time they didn't know. So you would learn quicker. They had confidence in you as an official, even if you doubt yourself, you recovered easily because they would give you your space. Here people are exposed, right from the beginning if you cannot interpret the Act they will tell you that you were lost in the meeting. I read a lot and this really helped me a lot. Comrade Dlomo instilled a culture of reading in me. Whenever I asked him for advice he would give me a relevant document to read and ask me to report to him if I didn't understand. If I needed information or advice on something he would simply give it to me in reading format to go and read and come back to him if I do not understand.

Facilitator: The challenges of SEPAWU in the province, you are sitting at a different level now, as regional chief?

Respondent: Yes it is because you're sitting as a manager, a person that takes control, I have to account to all the activities, it is very challenging. We're dealing with human beings, people are sometimes in a mood to work, sometimes they are not. But to you they will always appear as if they are working. So you are the one who must design a mechanism that will search beyond what they tell. At the same time we are in the struggle, we're comrades, we believe in defending the vulnerable workers. At the same time, you find comrades taking short cuts. For

instance we have a board where we write our whereabouts. Everybody must declare where they are. Some people would be at the same company for the whole day. I know that if you want to address a general meeting in one company it will take you 30 minutes. He will write that company and go for the rest of the day. So those are some of the challenges. We all sit and have our monthly staff meeting and I will show them where they had all been the previous week. I ask them we cannot be seen to be cheating, we are cheating the workers, our very black people. These people are paid very little salaries and they are still able to pay their subscriptions, the least we can do is look after them. Their subscriptions are paying our salaries, that is how we are able to put a plate of food on our tables. So I always reduce it to that level. So the level of challenge starts from there and escalates to the resource within the organisation. Our organisation for the past nine years was declared in our congress as being in war, a war of leadership and the score is always 4/2, you will find 2 vs 4, 4 vs 2, it has been an ongoing thing. Now if you don't find the support from the leadership at a national level, it then affects the region because one way or the other, this region will sympathise with certain groups in the camps, the factions and escalates. Once people know that they are inefficient, they have a believe that they are defended by the national structure. They do these things deliberately, and nobody can touch them, if you do, they will take you on. So those are the challenges that I have. It is complicated. If you work against them, they will make you belong to a certain camp – if you seem to be against what they are doing, you are definitely anti them.

Facilitator: You are either for or against?

Respondent: Yes. Changes will sometimes happen if you raise the issues at a general meetings, workers talk strongly, then they start to realise .., and workers will say we will address this one ourselves. We cannot tolerate a person who's sit in the office and does nothing, then things will start to change. Once they realise that you are using that against them, they go there and influence the very same workers. Those are the challenges. Now we are going towards the end of our term, so the current language is if you do this I'm not sure whether I will retain you or not .., so

whatever you do right now, it's a matter of principle, if you believe in what you believe in you will not care about what anybody else thinks about you. That is the reality of our challenges when managing the region. Sometimes you need to go out of your way, get involved. Someone told us that they had not seen officials for the past two years. When you go and investigate from the responsible person, he responds by saying they have not asked for a meeting. How are you servicing them? "I call them and find out how are things and they tell me it's fine". When you investigate you realise that the shop steward wants to run at the next elections and he wants to retain the position forever because there are some benefits to that. So in some instances, he would isolate the official and say everything is fine. He would be covering the official and himself. A person like this and his official would ignore the term of office and inform the workers that the union has no problem with him and then he retains the position. It is unfortunate that some of the people on the ground are ignorant. They don't get involved in communities, they don't even understand that the biggest problem that face the unions is the AGM's where workers meet, either your union or COSATU at large. The shop steward councils are for shop stewards but are not limited to shop stewards. It is seldom that you will find an ordinary worker attending that to understand the campaigns, they rely on shop stewards to give them information. So in terms of how the union functions, they depend on the shop stewards, what the shop steward tells you is right, who are you to question the shop steward.

Facilitator: The shop steward is always right

Respondent: He is always right. So that destroyed the democratic exercise of change within the company. Shop stewards do not assist members with anything, they stay for long terms because workers are not aware. At the moment we are doing an audit of shop stewards, I want to monitor them myself. I am coming from the training department, I used to do the an audit to check whether I've covered all KZN shop stewards. What I want to do now is I want to ensure that all shop stewards have gone through the process, I will need the assistance of the official.

Facilitator: So where to now then?

Respondent: As indicated, from now on until February next year I will be doing an audit, to identify how many shop stewards do we have and introduce an independent structure that will monitor. The organiser will be there but will not be alone there, there will be a back up, just for the transparency and the independence of those who want to vote. We have identified that shop stewards and officials can befriend each other. On 7 March 2012 when we marched for the labour brokers, most of the companies affiliated in our affiliate did not go out. We were able to establish this through the research and investigation. We discovered that most members think that they have a representative who represents us therefore we don't have to all go out to march. Members believe that representatives will represent them at the march too, talking the boss's language.

Facilitator: This is now driven by the shop stewards?

Respondent: Yes. I will give you a particular incident which happened in Richards Bay, our president comes from there. He is the one who told me. The employer was willing to release the shop steward to go to a march with pay, as long as you keep the workers here. That was the deal. This simply tells you how much this has affected the organisation. I don't think we will overcome this overnight. We all have to be reviewed in the next congress next year. If you penetrate in their areas of their comfort you are making yourself an enemy to the situation. But then what do you do if you want to see transformation taking place. You have to do it, put your head on the block and get it right. Those are the realities.

Facilitator: SEPAWU has it been affected by the labour brokers?

Respondent: A lot but I can tell you in a few areas where you least expect, for example in Port Shepstone. You started to see a change. I saw the agreement and I was invited, the employer told me that he is making an undertaking that people who have been working under labour brokers (at Singisi Saw Milling), when we highlighted that there is going to be an amendment. One way or other you are faced with it, you either do it now or later when the situation is worse. The employer agreed, we went for a caucus. When we came back he appointed the guys from 1 February the guys are employed permanently. The problem is, some of the people are old although they will not benefit for long, they at least have hope. In New Castle, I took over from someone who was supposed to set up a local. In SEPAWU a local consists of 1000 members for you to employ an official and have a local that is functional, and a leadership. Up until now we sitting at 616, we cannot move, we get members who are labour brokers, they are employed today, tomorrow the employer closes off and they are paid off that is the end. They are employed today tomorrow they are dismissed.

In Port Shepstone we came close to 800, we employed an official with the aim that we will grow. It gets worse. Those are the challenges facing us because of the labour brokers. At one stage we were sitting at 21 000 membership, now we're sitting at 15 621 and it's the figure that I checked at the previous NEC which was held in March. Next week we are doing an audit of our membership because we might have an Executive Meeting next month. Our numbers are obviously no longer 15 000, there's been quite a number of retrenchments. If you go for negotiations and you knock them off, they have won. You know about the latest one, we are currently co-ordinating a retrenchment of 440 at Sappi Tugela, they are closing PM4, a section that employs about 440 people. This is because of labour brokers. The companies retrench and replace the workers with the labour broker. It is affecting us more than before, it's worse for us. That's what has reduced our numbers.

Facilitator: Will there be an end to this labour broking thing?

Respondent: Yes for me, I think even if we don't appreciate the amendment ..., personally I don't support the way it is designed. It does not assist us in any way. It allows them to contract them for up to 6 months, and then cut them off. But in the area where I saw the success, a commitment was made. The definition of core functions and the business is the one that must be a stepping stone. We're going into our PEC next week, with the current attack, we relate it to this Marikana ..., if you can see, as I come to the office I am told that NUMSA members are going into an unprotected strike, against the instruction of the union. It's escalating. Now any heroes, who call themselves super heroes today, emerge and call the shots and they dominate and say to the members, the union has failed you. So labour broking is a worse situation, we have failed the people who are employed as labour brokers, we failed them because of the laws of the country. Now we've got these super heroes who then tell them, at any given time, unionism will not take you anywhere and we are here, we were going to demand and we get it. But when they lose out they come running to us. We will be rushing to CCMA because they were not affiliated to these people, they were just super heroes. So there are side effects to that one and this affects us seriously. I'm glad that it is top of the agenda in our PEC next week Tuesday.

Facilitator: Has COSATU lost some direction in a way, considering these wild strikes?

Respondent: No, to be honest I'm not going to put this into COSATU. I would say ..., yes I can say that in some instances some of the affiliates, not necessarily COSATU, although COSATU has ..., there's a formation of the affiliate. We have let COSATU down in the way we do things. Things have changed in our organisation. We driving luxury cars, we live in the suburbs, we're isolated to the environment where workers are. We don't understand what are the demands of the workers today. So I think the finger must start pointing at us, than pointing to COSATU. We need to define COSATU through the affiliate and through the leadership. I take the blame for this, we should be in the forefront and we are the ones who have let the workers down. The intervention of the so called super heroes is because of vacuums that we created as the leadership, isolating our members. I've just told you about members

who have not seen officials for the past two years. What happened between the two years. It starts with us, from official to us as leadership.

Facilitator: So somewhere in the system you guys have lost it, as affiliates, as unions?

Respondent: Exactly, the simple thing I can ask you is what the method of servicing members that are unique in the federation? If you are saying define service, go and ask the question in the survey. Define "service" to me, how do you define it, how do you service members. Take two affiliates, ask this question and see what answer you will get. That is where the problem is. Service to some of us is just making a call. This is what you have promised the members when they joined. We said we will be there whenever they are being attacked, we will be there. Now in general meetings they don't see the unions, also when they are being attacked, retrenched, demoted etc. The official will say I will come when I have time, my diary is full for this month. The next thing the person is dismissed, he was suspended for nothing, it's us. I am being honest. Do me a favour, go and ask two unions to define service for you. See what answers you will get and give me a call.

I am going to raise this at our next PEC. That there shouldn't be a difference in terms of how we render service, it's common. But for us it is not. A union like NUM, to come back to question, whether are we falling apart as a federation, yes we are. Look at NUM, the last time I checked at the congress they had 310 000 members. How are they serviced? One official is supposed to service 20 000 to 28 000 members, which is quite a lot. This is where my point is to say in that instance then I can answer you to say that is where we are ..., COSATU is not ensuring that we account because at the end of the day the flag that holds high ..., and as a result you're quite right, that is what is being concluded in the papers these days. They look at federation which we contribute to. It's us. We want to grow, we even steal from each other because we want to be as big as we can. The problem is how do you manage the members. We compete when we go to congress, how many seats you got but how do you service those seats. This is how we kill the union. If we were

there these kinds of incidents won't take place. Come to KZN, how much have we seen. After Marikana, wild cats strike, even SEPAWU is faced with it. It's happening and I don't see it stopping. It goes on. Now tell me if you are not in a position to visit your members for the past two years .., people call and ask that we must come and sign the agreement let alone service them. The shop stewards negotiated the agreement but he cannot go to sign it. The members ask him to come he tells them he can't make it, the official is fully booked. What does that mean to the member.

I must confess that when COSATU is attacked, we are the ones who caused this. We know what is going on, we are contributing to the challenges

Facilitator: You letting it down yourself?

Respondent: Exactly

Facilitator: Is there anything else that you think is important that we did not talk about mfowethu?

Respondent: So far I think we are confident with our federation and I think that after the big headlines about the congress, comrade Vavi being replaced and this and that.., I think things are getting back to normal. Now it's only Mangaung. From KZN we believe that democracy must take it's own centre court, but for us we see the position .., why don't you change. Polokwane resolution was made. If you follow the Polokwane resolution, if we have diverted that, yes then justify it and then there must be change. But if Polokwane has in one way or another follow, but delays in terms of resistance .., the ANC government is challenged in court left and right. Anything you do .., when you try to lead you are challenged. I am not trying to defend the government of the ANC, but the reality is that everything you put your effort to .., is going to be challenged. Which country can you allow such a situation.

You deploy someone to a certain position, they will question his competencies of him being deployed there, for whatever strategic reasons. So I'm saying for me, up until we go across Mangaung, ja I think .., or organisations, the federations and the affiliate of COSATU will not find peace if we don't fine tune in Mangaung. So all we have to do now is to look at the success of Mangaung. However there has been terrible tendencies in unions where interest is more in leadership more than working for members on the ground. You want to be there because you want to enjoy the fruits and the benefit of being there but not ensuring. So that's something else that we can add to say it's becoming a challenge. People who join unions today join to get paid, you know when are employed to be an official, you work on unfixed hours. You can start at 6 because the company starts at 7, one hour is for a general meeting at 6 in the morning, and 7 they start to work. In the afternoon they might want to say the shift that starts before 6 they want to meet at 5, you go there, it means you will be working outside the hours of work. You are compensated for that. This does not happen? No. These are the challenge we are faced with. This is my first term in office, I'm still expected to learn and be mentored. Our GS is unable to empower me because he is under tremendous pressure. He can't mentor me as a new regional secretary – I have to find my way, I must say it's not easy. Nothing is prescribed in the union, when you come in the morning you must create your own situation, whether you're doing it well there's no one to say you're lost, all what you do consistently signing agreements. You know when somebody brings an agreement and you're against it, he looks at you and ask what do you want me to do. He will say go and re-negotiate, this is out. They say Nobala (this is what they call us) "remember this is a mandate from workers, what are you asking me to take back and to whom". They will ask you should I go and tell workers that you don't want this to be signed? You can see they are asking for a high increase, you ask the comrade if they can't educate workers what their original demand is. Can you believe that if they say they want 5% even if it is .., he says what must I do, they don't want to strike. You end up signing something you do not believe in. This guy has been getting a 6% increase for the past three years, now he is getting 5% where is he going to get the minimum wage where he can make a proper living. That is the trauma that we are faced with. Refusing to sign is a delay for implementation to increase, the next thing, the employer comes back and say I am not paying you back, you delay signing. Who do the workers run to? The reasons were justifiable for

delaying to sign. But in return it makes you look bad, they invade our offices and say the difference of the back pay must come from us because we refused to sign, the employers have refused to give us to back pay us because you didn't want to sign. So we are suffering with the increase and the backdated payment. So every time he comes, you just sign, agree. But is there any justice to that. We have what is called the strategic committee which sits nationally – to pave the way. Naledi Projects does the assessment, they give us the inflation figures and what to bargain on and this is a mandate nationally, you cannot go beyond this. There comes 4,3,5 .., comrade this is out of our boundaries. They say that's what workers want. So those are the challenges.

I personally do not see myself growing because I don't know what I'm doing right or wrong, I apply my mind based on my experiences and share with other colleagues, comrades from other affiliates and I sit down with them and, especially Jayvee is on the 25th floor, he has been in the organisation for almost ten years.

Facilitator: Which one is this?

Respondent: Jayvee, he is the provincial secretary for SATAWU, I'm sure you gonna meeting him, so he's a person that .., he is on the 25th floor, he is the person that in some instances I consult with him and then rely on Zet, Luzipho as our provincial for COSATU. I spend time with him, we've been through difficult times together. So that is how you get assistance. Those are areas that I think we need to design, the responsibilities and the duties of regional secretary, so that you know what is it that you're supposed to do.

Facilitator: Thanks very much mfowethu, let me release you.

Respondent: Thanks very much

END

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