

Tembekile Henington Vena

Respondent: Like I've said Brown my name is Tembekile Henington is my English name, my father named me. My father had a friend who was called Henington, he used to work at Good Year, him and my father started with Good Year from the beginning, Good Year Tyre and Rubber. This is where he met his friend who was called Tembekile. According to my father his friend told him that the name Henington was found in his father's book/diary, apparently there was a king who came from America, who was an adventurer. So his father gave him this name, so he liked the name and then my father named me. My other name Tembekile also was my father's. I was then given another name by my aunt, Nomvulane Jamda, Jway, that's it. Otherwise I was born in 1954 on 9 September at Kirkwood, my mother's name is Nothobile, Emily is her English name. In 1959 my father brought me to come and live with them as a family in Kirkwood. We lived there with his four brothers, it was homely. There was about 18 children including his brothers kids.

I arrived here in Uitenhage in 1959, I was still very young and started schooling in 1960. I was very tiny, at the time before you can start school in the mainstream, your hand had to reach your ear, sometimes it would take up to three years before your hand reaches. Then you can start at what was then called the small Sub A, then the middle A and then the bigger A, more like kindergarten, then I started schooling after three years. I studied here in Uitenhage at the Dutch Reformed Lower Primary school that time. I then proceeded to SEK Mqccayi which was at Langa int hose days. I then continued to Elimakaya High this is where I studied up to Form III. That was in 1973, in 1974 I could not proceed with my studies because of family problems, financial problems, I could not proceed to do my standard 9 and standard 10,

(Form IV and V it was called in those days). I then started to work at Bogwana South Africa for a year, that was in 1975. In 1976 I found a school in Hilltown, Hilltown High school. This is where our political leaders like Tata Mandela, Buthelezi and Mugabe studied

Facilitator: at Bofor??

Respondent: Yes at Bofor, where they studied. I started working there in 1975, then in 1976 there was a strike in Hilltown, during the uprisings. Because we participated a lot in the strike, we could not go back in 1976, in 1977 we were kicked out of Hilltown High school, at the time there was a slogan "Liberation Now, Education Later". So after this we all decided to look for work. In 1978 I started working for SKF on 28 March 1978. On my arrival at SKF I was introduced to Daniel, he was an old man who was involved with the ANC at the time. So fortunately I started working in the training department where he also worked. So in that week there was a General Meeting to elect shop stewards, at the time they had liaison committee. When I arrived there they were in the process of building a trade union movement. They didn't even have a name at the time, we were organised by a gentleman called Foki Ashim, he used to be with NUMEROSA in those days together with Les Catledust??.

I was elected as the vice chairperson of the branch in Uitenhage that very same week with Dube as the chairperson. We were elected with others that we worked. I was then again elected as a shop steward in the turning department, I was also asked to represent other stores nearby and in far away places etc., there was a young man called Sam Bahase who was close to me. I also took over the tool room and other smaller departments that were close to the turning department. I was appointed in the turning department as a machine operator. At

the time you would not start as an operator, there was a place called Swarfing Area, all black people had to start working there. Swarfing was the lowest job, the place was filthy, you had to carry the machine with a trolley which had to be cleaned at the back in oil because it was so dirty. The job was considered to be a punishment to black people at the place. It was the lowest job at SKF.

We continued working at SKF and then in 1978 we decided that we want our union to be recognised by SKF. The second problem we had was with the Industrial Council whereby we wanted to be registered; we felt that it was not fair for us to work for a company that was not registered. The other thing was in SKF employed mostly coloured people. Whites were considered first then coloured people and black people were considered the lowest at SKF, we saw this as a challenge because the other races were closer to white than us black people, it was the way things had been done before and were continuing in that same manner, if they were hiring the ration would be one black person, one coloured and a bigger number for whites.

One of the things that I want to talk about is how we solved problems we had as a union. In SKF as I have said before, our challenge was in terms of race, and the fact that we come from of a history of liaising committees, people who were in these committees were dependent of white management and decisions were being taken by the same management, on the other side we had a challenge of coloured people who were very close with management. If you were a black person coming up with a solution to the oppression, they would be the ones who would go to management and tell on you. What helped us was that we did everything out in the open, we didn't hide anything, we organised members, secondly we took up cases, it was for the first time in SKF history that a case is taken up by an independent union

which hasn't even started to negotiate recognition, we saw that if we want to succeed we needed to challenge people's rights first so that management see us as true representatives of the people because what the liaising committee used to do was that if you as a worker has been wronged, but you would end up being the one who is being disciplined for speaking out of turn and having to apologise whereas they should be the ones apologising. These were the some of the things that we wanted to do away with, a person who has wronged another should be the one that is taken to task, they should be the one being penalised and brought before management to resolve the issue. During that time our HR was De Beer, he was the one who represented management more than workers, that was one of our challenges as well, and we wanted to expose these things.

Our strategy was that we should embrace those who were representatives of the liaising committee as well, we wanted to try and unite whites and blacks, some of them we made them shopstewards because we wanted to make sure that we demolish the liaising committee, we didn't want anyone who would get between us and management. Coloureds and some black people ended up being embarrassed to be seen in association with the liaising committee because at that time there was a spirit of reconciliation inside the factory. This made people scared to be seen associating themselves with management.

We raised the standard of the shop floor, the most important thing was to build a strong shop floor by giving people insight about the trade union and what the main purpose of the union was, which was fighting for worker's rights and wanted to diminish the power management believed they have over workers. We took a resolution that our success would be measured by winning cases because if we didn't we were

going to be seen as in the same league at the liaising committee. We would have general meetings where we would discuss these cases and research each case so that when we meet with management about the case we have information about it. You would sometimes see that management didn't have a strong case, we would make sure that we have supporting documents for example a white or coloured person's case that is similar to the one that we will be addressing so that we can argue that the worker we are representing will receive the same treatment that the other worker received. That made management see us powerful enough to challenge them when necessary and not act like the liaising committee that didn't challenge them at all.

The other way in which they were able to overpower the liaising committee was that they would pay the liaising committee members more than other workers; if for instance an ordinary worker received 5 cents the liaising committee member would receive 15 cents. Trying to combat this we proposed to them that increment to be one across the board. The liaising committee members were very unhappy about our proposal and fought us on it. We wanted all these things to be included in the agreement. During that time we had something that we called a house agreement which all the factories had, it said if you are in a certain union you must stay in that trade union. We also did away with that as well by organising across the board, whites, coloureds and blacks. It took us a while to accomplish this as well; we wanted to make sure that white people see that our people don't just get fired over something that could be fixed by the union and management. People started leaving their union leaders one by one. I remember we got more than four white members, that was history in making during that time, they were not satisfied with the way their

shopstewards represented them in their cases, so they chose to come to us so we can represent them. Can I get some water.

Facilitator: You were still talking about the four white new members.

Respondent: Yes, we got those four members and that caused other white members to come to us in big numbers. The other thing that made us successful was that we worked together with our local office and the regional office, we would discuss the case together and then make sure everything is tabled properly, we would even ask for an adjournment if we see that we still need to work on it more, unlike the white people who discussed it once and then live with the outcome. These are the things that made us strong because inside the trade union we had a lot of information at our disposal and also the training that we used to receive. Getting more members in to the union especially white workers really made us stronger, and that also made sure that management not regard us as a union for black people, so couldn't say when we were representing a white worker that we are only a union for black people. Our union was representing every worker who worked in our factory. One of the things that we focused on was health and safety, during that time it was difficult to get equipment; we had to fight to get things like hearing aid, gloves, overalls, etc. We didn't see these challenges as problems, they made us more powerful because people could see the difference we were making, having these things that they didn't have before because of the trade union. If we had members who had cases we would call them in to what we called a table, where elders like Mr Titi, Mr Phongolo and Mr Kopi, would condemn the members act and tell him you don't do things like this is you are a man with a family, for instance if a person came to work drunk or maybe if men fought inside the factory. This table of elders was very effective because sometimes you

would find that there is a case of people who fought at work and the penalty for that would be dismissal, we would argue for them and tell management that we have a group of elders who deal with such behavioural issues, so we would like management to pardon these men and leave them to face this group of elders. We would give them penalties, things like if a person was drunk then his punishment would be that for six months he must never be seen drunk, so the punishment would be that for six months a person must not be found doing what he did. So this group was giving them punishment which was linked to the policies of the company. The strategy around this method was to try and take over discipline, you must remember that these people are coming from a background of liaising committees where they are not give a chance to discuss matters but are just punished with the maximum sentence. So there was a lot of anger in people and fights would break out, and people would use whatever equipment they would be using to beat up their white counterparts. We often won cases like these because we taught discipline in the shop floor and this gave dignity to the union.

Another thing I can talk about is accountability. During that time if we had gone out to meetings we would come back and report to members what transpired, report if there are any changes in policy. For example, with the NUMSA commission, after we attended Numarosa, we would make sure that members are fully briefed because at the end of the day they are the ones paying membership to the union and we would end up in trouble with NUMSA if member say they were not briefed. So accountability gave us power over other trade unions. Whites had their trade union, so did coloureds and we established our own trade union that didn't discriminate according to race. So this trade union would carry us from 1978 up until now, we

didn't know what happened in the future but we wanted it to survive beyond liberation.

Education was one of the important things during that time, because people after finishing school they would go work and all they heard about was PAC and ANC and the National Party during that time, as well as other small parties like Labour party which focused more on politics for coloured people. Our union's challenges were democracy and non racialism at the time, we didn't have these things, and we had to fight to gain these things. We could not gain them just by talking, we had to do something to show members what we meant by democracy and non racialism. This would be easy only if we educated people on these issues. People had to be taught about these things so that we can have a union that can sustain the struggle of a black person. We wouldn't be able to do this without political education that focuses on accountability, non racialism and democracy. Although accountability and non racialism are the pillars of democracy, but during that time we could not discuss this with a person without having taught them what this meant. We had to lead by example as well. We had to make sure that we get people to the level that we wanted them to be in.

We built our union at SKF, it was strong. Now our challenge was, we had this organisation, people were being trained, the shop floor was getting stronger, the awareness was getting stronger, and we were able to show white people where we were going. Those who were our enemies, like the liaising committee whose sole purpose of destroying the black person was demolished.

Now another challenge was going outside to other factories which had not been unionised yet.

Facilitator: They needed to be unionised as well.

Respondent: Yes they needed to be unionised. We delegated people like Daniel Dube, they worked together with the region. Our main focus was to unionise other companies. Another clever thing we did was that we should not establish general trade unions, we should not group all companies under one banner of trade union so that we don't leave any stone unturned. We went into engineering, we formed the auto sector and a motor sector.

Facilitator: There were two?

Respondent: Yes these were our sectors. Inside NUMSA we had engineering and motor sector. We organised companies like Magogwane, GKV. We organised people like Lucky Dendile, these were the people who were organised by us and Daniel, people like Anona maybe you are still going to interview him as well, we found in Magogwane people like Jackson Kgalo, (not clear) I wanted you to speak about people you had seen.

Volkswagen was getting stronger as well, while we were moving forward with our union they were doing the same as well. We worked along with Jurie Harris and John Gomomo, this is a story that is linked very much to Volkswagen here in Uitenhage. We grew our membership. We met a challenge that we could not avoid. People wanted two rand an hour. Companies like Magogwane, GKV, Volkswagen, SKF and Bosal Africa were the strong ones here in Uitenhage. We had a national standard in the engineering sector. The demand for R2 became stronger in all factories. We worked with Les Catledust and Gloria Bhele during that time. The companies went on

strike, one by one, but at the end they all went on strike. When we met in the shopsteward council we found that as new people in the union, and the fact that we had this massive strike. The only tactic we could use was to involve mother companies. We would liaise with Sweden, (not clear) was going liaise with Australia during that time, GKV was a South African company and VW would liaise with Germany. This helped us because our head office under the leadership of Freddy Sols, made it easy to communicate with Sweden. We had a person at that time that was based at mother plant; his name was Yoral Johanson who helped us very much. We were able to get R2 an hour because of the help we received overseas. SKF and VW received the R2, Gogwana didn't get it but reached a settlement. We knew that GKV which was a company from South Africa wouldn't budge but at least we were able to settle on something. This victory made us very famous and respected by our members. This did not happen only here in Uitenhage, but I am relating to you what happened here.

We were now popular on the shop floor, it strengthen confidence in us because people knew that when they request things they want and need, we are able to fight for them and win. During the strike, others had casualties but ours didn't. This was caused by the cooperation we had with our head office. After that we saw a rise in numbers of members in the trade union in terms of branches and companies. People were now approaching us themselves instead of us going to plants to canvas for members. They would come to our local offices to join the union. We would categorise them according to their line of work, like auto sector, farming sector, food and canning. There were a lot of other small companies, others we didn't know and others were owned by the same person. The workers would tell us about how oppressed they were in these companies. We decided to classify people according to the nature of their companies, we had organisers

who worked with members, we didn't want them to join any existing unions but wanted to classify them according to their industries. With food and canning, we would phone Cape Town and tell them that we have new members for them and ask them to come.

We had challenges with farming, because it was very difficult for them, they were employed by individuals, they would have to come to us and then go back to his boss. If an organiser would go to them they would get fired. We had to step back because trying to help them was getting them fired, so we ended up dependent mainly on government, the constitution and the labour relations act. It was a way to defend them.

We grew in membership. The things that made people aware of us was that we as shopstewards would leave our factories and go out to organise. Organisers couldn't go out because they had a lot of work in the offices which needed their attention. We were defending people on the shop floor, the organisers were building the union, we only met with the organisers in workshops over the weekend. If you tried to secure a meeting with them you wouldn't be able to get them because they were busy going to factories where they were called in to organise them. In everything we did our priority was our members, because by getting one member into the organisation, for instance if you had 999 members and you get that one member, the database increases and the membership grows.

We grew in numbers, during that time the union was not strong because of its finances but because of its membership. During that time black people didn't have a mouthpiece in SA, the trade union was the only one. We had to hurry up and organise members so that we can be able to challenge bigger things like politics because we

were representing a bigger number of people. We built our organisation in different ways. On the one side we were being pursued by the system, the government, and on the other side its management, they only want to realise their target at work. They focused so much on targets that they didn't give us time to be able to function.

There were also members, we had to go and organise and others were complaining, we were also getting new members. We had quite a lot of challenges. I will never say they were problems because if we saw them as problems, trade unions would have been a failure today. Those were challenges and we took them likewise, how, by working together in the union life. It is the one thing that made us stronger, if we were unable to solve something we would refer it to the local office and if the local office was unable to solve it as well we would take it to the regional office. We were lucky because our regional office was also our national office, so we were lucky in that way here in the Eastern Cape, because we could take a decision in a (not clear), and we would have results, we didn't have to wait for Johannesburg.

We would leave work after four but only get home around 12am and 1am, we were building the organisation. Seven o'clock in the morning we would be clocking at work, we didn't complain because we knew that we were building the organisation.

During that time, as I have said we built these organisation, how was communication, I think that is one of the most important things. We formed local meetings, where we were supposed to meet once a month but we were meeting everyday, from 5pm up to 10pm. What happened inside these meetings, we would discuss new members according to each factory, line by line, the problems they experienced from certain individuals and from the opposition. We discussed their

problems at length and try to see how we can equip them to confront their problems. We only wanted one thing, numbers to grow. That was one of the things we spoke about in local meetings. We also discussed cases, looked what type of cases we had, we concentrated on cases that had been won because they were helping us to learn from them moving forward and refer from them. We would also look at the new cases, we were not very settled in other companies yet and we were not sure whether the shopstewards can defend the workers on their own, so we would meet with them and discuss the cases and learn from our discussions so that he/she can be equipped to handle the case. It would be nice to hear that at least one person won, even if the other ten didn't because it was victory to the workers of South Africa.

We would get reports of how management is treating us in the companies.

Facilitator: Where did you get reports from?

Respondent: We would get these reports from shopstewards in the local office, because these were the challenges we had. In other companies like GKV, there are white people that won't budge; we couldn't give full responsibility to the shopsteward, we needed to get help from local or regional office. Our aim was not to get individual victory but we wanted a united victory.

The way we measured if what we were doing was effective was that the report backs we came back with to meetings, people were hungry to hear what the local office is saying. You would swear that the local office was in the plant, who is local, it was run by shopstewards for the shopstewards and for the workers. They had put their faith in the local office because if the shopsteward didn't have a solution to a certain problem he would tell them that he will consult with the local office for

help. You would find that if there was a victory from the local office, you would hear everyone talking about it in town, taxi ranks, townships. For instance if at VW there were people who were threatened with being dismissed and the shopsteward would bring the case to the local office for advice, and the local office would discuss the case and come up with a solution. This made people to recognise the work of the union. We then received trust from people. I said to you before to build education and democracy is not just to talk, you have to do something you have never done before. Our challenge during that time was to bring new things to the people of South Africa, things like organising across the board and things like bring in new unions in the industrialised industries we have.

Another thing I want to talk about was the worker control. If you look at all that I have been saying, and looking at the local meetings and what the workers were saying on the ground were saying about what transpired. The workers would be asking what the workers decided on last night about the problem we have. This is what we called worker control in unions. By then we could not do things that were not satisfactory to people because we would lose the future of the people of South Africa. Worker control helped us with discipline, I spoke to you about this, how you build discipline. VW and Bogwana took the same directions, when a member has done wrong they would be called to the elder table, that was part of worker control.

I will tell you one best story, at SKF we once had a problem because of a mistake that was done by our HR. To cut the long story short, he was called in front of the elder table.

Facilitator: For just one mistake?

Respondent: Yes, he was called in and he apologised and humbled himself in front of the people and they forgave him, everyone shook hands. This meant one thing, victory to the people. He was representing management, but we saw it as management apologising to us and shaking our hand. This worker control was not only something that we talked about, we entrenched it on the ground. If a worker next door does something he is not supposed to or he says something irresponsible, he will be reported, if a local organiser is out of line, he will be called in to come and explain himself to the workers and that will be corrected and move forward.

The manner in which we worked with the local office made us realise that we own the local office, it is ours. It was not something that was sitting there. Workers would leave the office and go listen to the problems experienced by other companies and not only theirs. Workers then used their skill to make paper for meetings, they would volunteer after work, men and women, different factories. It didn't matter which trade union you were part of, we were one. The other advantage was that we were all using one building; all the offices were in one building. We saw each other as one. Workers would get into buses and go around collecting other workers, organising people to a meeting. If there was a VW, we would all get together and not only shopstewards, if we are all sitting as shopstewards and there are people who were not, we wouldn't chase them away and say they are not shopstewards. Everyone was welcome because we wanted everyone's input because we wanted to save workers. So worker control was working effectively. Organisers during that time respected worker control, they knew that if they are talking to a shopsteward they are talking to a lot of people, it was evident. If you were talking about Sam Makhaya, everyone on the floor new who he was, there was no

organiser that wanted to be reported for a mistake. We came from that kind of culture.

At night we would be ducking and diving security forces because they wanted to know what we were up to. If you had a meeting in the factory and find that you were taken can by security the following day, they would want know what you were talking about in the meeting. We were stronger because we had nothing to hide, the only thing we were doing was organising people to join the trade union.

We now had to get together with other unions to build and national union. We had MAWU in Transvaal, we had MICU that was between PE and Cape Town, Johannesburg and Bloemfontein. We got together and formed an organisation called NUMSA.

Facilitator: This is where NUMSA started.

Respondent: Yes that is where it started. We elected a president and a vice president. In the region I was working the in regional structure, in the executive. When we went to join NUMSA, unfortunately our treasurer resigned. Then I then took as treasurer until NUMSA structure was completed. We started building up NUMSA, it was now in the national level. Transvaal had mainly blacks and Cape Town mainly colourdes, when you look at the national level, central executive committee you would see South Africans, diversity. That international link we had automatically incorporated to the national structure. (not clear)and IMF were all part of this new national body, because this national structure also had to have their international partners as we on the shop floor had international partners. This is one of the things that strengthened NUMSA, if we had a strike these international links helped

us so that we don't have to wonder who is who and where they come from.

After NUMSA was operational, we received things that were very beneficial to us, things like education because at the end of the day we were a growing union. We used Wits University for training shopstewards, we got Phil Bono, Eddie Webster, Alec Erwin, Shiddle, Niel Thompson, all these people were training us. Shiddle concentrated on legal issues training, so that we know what to look for in cases, we also used him when the union had cases, he would help us if we had problems. The wider trade union history was taught to us by Alec Erwin and Phil Bono from Wits.

When the education department was established, Alec Erwin was appointed to lead the department. I was then elected in the Eastern Cape as a forerunner that was going to coordinate education. We worked with others in other regions, I was working between Cape Town, East London, Durban and Johannesburg, helping each other to build the organisation. We didn't get big egos for doing this kind of work, information was key so that we can be equipped shopstewards. One of our aims in equipping shopstewards was to equip leaders for today.

During that time it was quiet from the politics front, so we decided to do the work, now politics are thriving so there should be a difference of the current leaders to the previous leaders, they should be trained according to what they should be doing in the trade union. After NUMSA was established we saw a rise in numbers of membership. We became powerful.

In 1989, we were going to a NUMSA executive meeting in Johannesburg, on our way back I was involved in a car accident, it was the 12 June 1989. I was in Livingston for about three months, my right arm wrists was fractured, my lower (not clear) fractured, and my right fema bone. So I stayed in traction for three months. I stayed for another five months at home, I started working in 1990. When Mandela was released I was still at home in pain. I watched it on TV because we didn't have a TV at home.

After that I came back to the factory, I was the chairperson during that time and Mr Dube was serving at national, so I took over from the factory. We elected another committee, Sydney Vena, Sam Harsner and others were in the committee. From then on I was not directly involved in the trade union. So this story is from when I was first employed in 1978 until 1989 and then 1990 I was sick and then returned to work at SKF. Then in June 2007 SKF closed down and we retired and we are now residents in this township. What I did now, I have registered with some farmers, so I am now a farmer. When I became part of this group of farmers, they elected me as a secretary and then I took them to go register with the municipality and government so that we can receive benefits. So now our goal is to have our own agricultural business. So we are looking forward to expanding and not only in agriculture and farming, but in other ventures as well.

What you see there are the reasons why SKF closed down, let me read some for you. They called us in December 2006 to tell us that they will be closing down in 30 June 2007. This is what it says:

These are the possible reasons to close the Uitenhage factory, relates to the following:

- the factory is currently only operating on five sheets over five channels and hence completely under-loaded
- the major part of the machine (not clear) is in excess of forty years in age
- the factory is far removed from supplier, resources and mainly (not clear)
- the factory is far removed from markets, i.e. western Europe.
- the low loading resulting in a high cost fixed structure making the factory unprofitable as an entity.
- due to high cost structure, unable to compete profitability in the domestic and certain segments of export markets, forcing the company to transfer production to low cost producers in the SKF group.

These are the six main reasons that made us part ways with SKF.

Facilitator: Were you expecting this to happen.

Respondent: This is not something we were expecting per se, all we knew was that we have old machines. During the time we were still shopstewards, we didn't hide the fact that the machines were old and therefore that could translate to the closure of the company because we could not meet the quality standard that was needed at the time. Secondly, they wanted a better quality which was called Q55 and we were from Q6 quality – Q55 is better quality than Q6. So we had to explain these things to them in time. We could see these things but because we were not in decision making, we could only raise them. When they decided to close the things they sited as reasons were things we had raised a long time ago. The only way we could get out of SFK during disinvestment was because of the workers, we were helped by others outside and we told them that we are aware of what the disinvestment is but we are still inside the factory and we want jobs. That caused loss of jobs, our first retrenchment was in 1980. Then

around 1990s, 1995 there were sporadic retrenchments. This was not entirely caused by the economy, the other reason was that we couldn't carry the load, we had targets which we couldn't meet because of the quality, and there was a lot of work that would be returned because of the quality which was not up to standard. We were losing, we were back to square one. These are some of the experiences that I can share with you while I was in SKF.

I think you need a break, can I make you juice?

Facilitator: Yes thank you.

Respondent: We arrived here in Kwanobuhle in 1995, I was fired from SKF, no it was 1975 when I was fired in Hilltown, in 1976 we were here already for here for about eight months, it was in the old Kwanobuhle where we had a home. During that time I was not working yet, I was fired in 1976 and then I started working again in 1978. Around 1990 we started a programme in SKF for people who wanted to study, others didn't get a chance to go to tertiary level, people like us, and we also wanted to go to tertiary. SKF accepted our request. We started in UPE and the sent us to PE technikon. We worked and also studied at the technikon. In 2002 we graduated. I was doing production management course and then I did Btech. Others did Btech in quality, we wanted to be diverse. Our aim was to run SKF, not because we were just thinking about, we were there it was ours. I left SKF after thirty years and other were there longer than me. We were enthusiastic because we knew that we would have to start from lower management and then we would work our way up. But at the end we wanted to run SKF, there was no reason why we couldn't do that, we had been there for a long time, we went to tertiary and studied.

So, this place we are farming in, I said we should go to business with our farming and not be people who only farm and eat. We should sell our produce so that at least, we have old ladies there who were born in 1929.

Facilitator: Are they still farming as well.

Respondent: I want them to see themselves as owners, they fought for this while they were still you, that is what they dreamt of, they wanted to do great things at this stage in their lives. They also wanted to be counted amongst other people, they might be invisible right now, but I know that they will also be called shareholders, infact they are already shareholders in that company. At the end they are going to own, something they never thought would happen for them.

I do this because I believe that I still have that challenge I had in the beginning. There are still other people who need help here, not only people who know nothing about trade union. There are people who do not know that now we have got the rights. We can sleep tonight not shareholders and we can wake up tomorrow as shareholders. So I am trying to say, I would be very encouraged if that this hope I have to see these elders having their dreams coming true. I want to say it was not only just SKF, NUMSA and COSATU that I built but I also built something after retirement for the people of South Africa.

Although time has rushed passed us, but we are still counting them as our milestones. Where there are people there should be someone else who is willing to help others to get out of poverty. They must also see you struggling like them, see you doing things that they do, at the end you will see yourself fitting in with them and they also see that they can trust you. Before you called this morning I was there in the fields to check on them.

I received a call from a guy from Sweden called Jonas Slolane, I don't know if you've heard of him. He called requesting an appointment with me for Thursday, he wants to interview me for the history of trade unions, especially in SKF and the relationship between SKF and Sweden, from the inception of the union up until the 90s. He got my name from Dube. When he phoned, I was still telling them that I didn't manage to go to the fields with them because I have an appointment with you at 2pm. They asked who you are and I explained to them who you are and what you wanted. These things give you recognition from the people you work with. At the end the relationship that I build with you today, tomorrow it will be easy for you to talk to me. We can both be able to talk about challenges we are facing and get information and help from each other.

Facilitator: (Izandla ziyagezana).

Respondent: Indeed. We are trained to talk, if you have a glass of water you can talk until the sun comes out. I think I am finished now unless you still have other questions.

Facilitator: There are few questions I have. In Hilltown, was their strike combined with that of 1976, or was it just a coincidence?

Respondent: No, let me explain this to you. In Hilltown there was something like an uprising, before we arrived. Their politics were shaping towards a certain direction. So when we arrived 1975, we got there to a pot that was already boiling. We arrived where Steve Biko had just visited. There were people from Grafreinet where Robert Sobukwe comes from. There were us from the Eastern Cape. There was a group from Transkei where the PAC was very strong. All of these people in this pot made this pot boil easily. When the call for June 16

arrived, it was accepted immediately. Hilltown was already boiling and was ready to erupt. We were in a general meeting and there was a question posed, why were we sitting there while other schools were out, the question was asked by a comrade from Grafreinet. That discussion lasted for about a week, we were not agreeing on whether we should also go out on strike. Ultimately a hall burnt down, then the main building which we called quadrant where there was an office, staff office, bookshop and the library, so it was the heart of the school. Downstairs the laboratory and the mathematics office burnt as well. Hilltown was one of the institutions that was well equipped. These building that burnt were the heart of the institutions. The link was there. If the students agreed a week earlier, the school wouldn't have burnt. Their refusal to go on strike caused the burning of the school. There were activists who worked underground, I was one of them. During that time the institution was run by whites who were soldiers. I remember that one of my teachers was a soldier and he used to come to class wearing camouflage. We were told that he was in training, so he would teach us and then go to training. So this is what was making the students angry, to see a person that belongs to SADF that we hate teaching us in class. We felt we were going to be products of SADF, these were all things that were building up emotions. We also didn't like the fact that in that institution there was never a black principal, it was always a white person. There was a link with 1976 nationwide. The question was asked because in one of our cells they asked why we wouldn't we join people who are trying to fight for our future, for the same Afrikaans that we didn't want. We were taught by the very same Afrikaaners, they were better than us because we were even taught by the very same Afrikaaners. Because the institution had burnt down, it as closed temporarily. After these buildings had burnt and we were sent home, students who came back to the institution were selected to

come back. I was one of the students that was not selected to go back. That is how the Hilltown strike happened.

Facilitator: You also mentioned that you were the vice chair of branch in SKF. What were the challenges of running that branch.

Respondent: One of the challenges, remember it was the time of Daniel Dube, a very strong person in those day, and still now infact. One of the challenges that I had was to maintain that very strong base that we had in SKF. So the advantage I had was that I was not from the shop floor when he left, I was directly involved in a leadership position at local level, regional level and national level. So the challenge I had was to maintain that strong base. Another challenge, as I have said to you before was to save people's jobs at SKF because not even once were people happy, it was like any other factory where people meet with problems on a daily basis. Another challenge we had was to build the trade union inside the factory so that it gets stronger than before. We wanted to get shopstewards from all people who were inside SKF, white and coloureds as well to change the face of SKF. We succeeded in doing that. So I can say that I faced. The other challenge was the ever ending negotiations with companies on wages. The person who would shape the way the negotiations for wage increase were going to go was the chairperson. So everyone including shopstewards and organisers was looking at the chairperson to give direction. I said before the question of worker control was very much respected. So everything that had to do with the factory I was running, I was the first person they had to consult. To keep international links, success of any factory during that time depended mostly on international links. We needed to respect each other, because at the end of the day we would be jeopardising the future of the workers on the ground. As I had said before that this was a chain that started from

the floor, to local, to regional, to national and international. We had to maintain that link.

Facilitator: (not clear) the coloured workers how long did it take to win their hearts.

Respondent: It was very difficult for the first time. I remember when they first join, I can talk about the grinding department, they were working as operators and their problems were the same as problems black experienced. Their supervisors and managers, the challenges they experienced in that department were very much the same. They were the easiest to grab. The assembling department was a different story, ninety five percent of the workers there were coloureds, there was not even one black male or female there. Those we were able to get were the ones who were educated, for instance we had Margaret Pienaar who spoke IsiXhosa because she grew up in Transkei, she was one of the people we used to get them to come to us. We had another Swarts lady who could also speak IsiXhosa because she grew up her in Xaba section 1 with black people. She did not see a difference between her and black people. They were the first ladies to join us, they were insulted by others for this. There were also ladies from the grinding department, they joined because they were expected to operating the machines although they ladies. The problem was concentrated in the assembling department. It was difficult because they would join and then leave again. We were able to keep them because if they had a problem we represented them and not say we can't because you left us yesterday. It took us a long time to win them over. We were able to penetrate diplomatically through our management, because upstairs we had an advantage because our boss was Schindler from South America although he was German by birth. Then we had a Swedish guy who was a managing director.

Through them, when there was a mistake done by a supervisor or manager we would report them immediately. If we had recruited and our recruitment failed because of intimidation, we would go report them. So management ended up scared to touch our members and they became comfortable inside the union. This is one of the reasons why white people could join freely. We had another one who was very funny, a watch guy who married a coloured lady in SKF. This coloured lady was a NUMSA member and married a white guy. We supported this and we used that. The mistake of other white people gave him a name because he married a coloured gal. That is what we used exactly that. He recruited his friends as well, he is one of the white people who joined us and he was still our member when the factory closed down. We now had a big number of whites who joined our union.

Facilitator: Were the white people willing to work under you as black people.

Respondent: Yes they were. After 1990 it was evident that they were doing it freely, discrimination was no longer there. For example we used to have different changing areas and canteens for whites, coloureds and blacks, we were all integrated now. So this made it easy for us to win over white workers.

Facilitator: In terms of the strike is there at strike that was outstanding that you remember.

Respondent: There were many strikes in SKF but there was only one external strike, the one for R2. This is where we were locked outside the gates, so I would say this was an outstanding strike because it was an eye opener even for those who were coming from the history of liaison

committees. They saw that we can challenge management; they saw that we were locked out but we all came back. This one was unlike the ones that we used to have for wages, we would only go and sit at the grass and rectify the matter and then go back to work. Luckily at SKF there was not even one strike that we lost a job in.

Facilitator: Would you say that in 1994 there some changes in the labour division to the advantage of the workers.

Respondent: After 1994?

Facilitator: Yes

Respondent: In terms of?

Facilitator: In terms of labour laws.

Respondent: After 1994 we were lucky most things that we were fighting for as COSATU even before 1994 were the ones that were transferred to the labour laws, it was our demands. Secondly I had said to you because we had worker control, people already knew what we as COSATU would take and send to government for them to change the face of labour relations. Through the report backs we were working with national structures, we had first hand information on what was coming, so our people had information too of what to expect. We were able to make demands on what we had contributed; change was there in terms of the labour relations as well as respect from the white people. So now we as workers we were fighting for what we knew was there of which was not difficult, it was after 1994, it was our government and what we had wanted. Secondly this was done with people who had experience in negotiating with management.

Facilitator: Do you ever regret getting involved with trade unions.

Respondent: No, not at all. The time with spent learning about black consciousness, it was our university that helped us build trade unions that were fair. I say these were not problems but challenges. Now when we look back at those challenges, we see ourselves as South African worker and we have victory. So I cannot regret what we have built and maintained. There is a question about maintenance, if I were to look at the difference between the then worker control and the worker control of today, I have doubts. Looking at what is going on now.

Facilitator: What is the difference?

Respondent: If you look at after 1994, people thought things were going to be served in a silver platter, the decision that they thought there was no need to control and maintain. If you build a house for twenty million, and didn't put aside money to maintain and people to secure that house, you have wasted twenty million. So what I see happening now is exactly like that. People come to me and say things were wonderful during your time than what we now see on the shop floor. Go to VW today, you will be amazed at what is going on. You can see that the worker control is no longer there. Organisers are telling workers and shopstewards what to do, we were telling the organisers what to do, we would tell them that they need to organise this and that for that factory and we would ask them to give us their diary for the week. It is no longer like that, no one knows what is going on, people are sitting in their own local office, and there are no report backs. You don't see that worker control anymore. So I can say that is where the difference is. That maintenance is not there, people think

because this is our government they don't need to do it, they do not know that the trade union was formed for their rights, inside the factory and outside. Now if you concentrate only outside, you are losing at the factory, you must be strong on both angles. They are they same struggles, inside and outside. Today people are complaining about services, what is the struggle about. People in the factories and are saying we no longer have challenges in the factory or we no longer have a shopsteward. They are still struggling on both angles, and I would say it's because they have lost worker control, if they had worker control they would be able to control their councillors. The very same workers are sitting at council, municipality and area meetings, they must control their problems. So it should be people that know their worker control, they would just transfer that knowledge and build better communities about what they have done at their factories.

Facilitator: Were there other methods that were used by workers rather than strikes to deal with employers.

Respondent: There was lot. At SKF, we knew one thing that they didn't want was people going on strike. They wanted their record to be clean in Sweden; they didn't want to be seen as treating people unfairly by head office. It was our weapon, we would use that. We would phone Sweden and tell them what they were doing to us. We would also do go slows and sit-ins in those particular departments that had problems, we would also have plug-cards to show our dissatisfaction. We would also organise the press just to make an issue about things. This helped because they didn't want to be seen as people who treated workers unfairly in South Africa, because we were the only manufacturing plant for SKF.

Facilitator: Just as a last question, your take on labour brokers, what is your view, should they go or should they stay?

Respondent: I once gave this a thought. I think they should go, what rights are they upholding for the people, where do they feature with my employment. It's the same thing, a company employs someone to employ me, why not employ me directly so that when I demand a higher salary they can give me, why waste money because they are running away from expenses of hiring me. They should go.

Facilitator: Is there something that you think is important that we have not talked about?

Respondent: I think because I started talking, I raised things that I thought you might not know, from when I grew up until my working SKF, until now. I think from my side I can say when you look at trade unions in the Eastern Cape. The history I was telling you about is almost the same as the history a shopsteward from Port Elizabeth will give you, because of the link I was talking about. We had regular meetings. We would be in PE every day. My kids were not raised by me, they were raised by my wife. I was busy with trade union work, I would only get home at night. They never saw me at home, there are only two kids that I raised, the last two, Ntombovuyo and Ayabulela. The others I didn't spend time with them, they would be with their grandmother or with the mother if she was not at work. My wife worked at (not clear). We were unfortunate with one of our children, my daughter she was that greeted you just now, she was diagnosed with Leukaemia, she was admitted at Red Cross hospital for thirteen months, she is now in clinical period under the same doctor that referred her to the specialist. She is studying although she still gets complications which stem from the illness.

Facilitator: Your last words.

Respondent: I am happy that our efforts for our country, are recognised by someone. Coming and talking to me about our efforts. There was a lot of other people I haven't mentioned who helped us, an endless list of people in SKF who gave us support. They didn't build me only, they built us all as leaders and they built other people. I want to thank you for setting this up so that we also get an opportunity to tell our story of how we were treated, how we tried to better ourselves and how we succeeded. I was not a shopsteward because I wanted to but because I was elected by the people. Dube and I were lucky that we were shopstewards for all that time and we were never removed by the workers, we were re-elected because of the commitment we showed. We worked and went all over, Uitenhage, Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg, working for other people and building the union so that when the liberation came we would be remembered for the efforts we put in, and the struggle for workers. There are men who have since left this world, people like John Gomomo and others who died working for this trade union. During that time we had a vision for a tripartite alliance, although it had complications, our vision was that the ANC would never be strong on its own if the tripartite alliance is not strong; the other part that will make the tripartite alliance is a strong worker. I want to thank Wits University because it was like our second home. We were there every third month for a workshop, we would also hold some of our congresses there. The intelligent men we talked about at Wits paved a way for us to get educated. We are who we are today because we let them train and educate us. These people didn't discriminate against us because they wanted to save us from the dangers of apartheid. Wits University is one of the universities that played a pivotal role in building trade unions in South Africa. I am

happy to hear that you are also working at Wits because it shows that they didn't say their work is done after we were liberated and decide to concentrate on books. It is there to build because the stories we are telling are stories that will be read in books in a few years down the line. I also want to thank my family for supporting me through all the days we worked until I got injured, and supporting me through my recovery. These are things we cannot change. I also want to thank all the men we worked with, we worked very well together, people like John Gomomo, Les Cattlebury, Gloria Belu, those were women who were not afraid of anything, they paved a way for all the women who can say whatever they want to say without fear. They were not women who ran and hid under the pots when the police were doing raids, they faced them head on.

There was a woman who we worked very well with, I forget her name but she was Phil Bono's wife, I don't know if she was called Michelle,

Facilitator: I think it was Pat.

Respondent: Yes, Pat, I want to say they played a very big role because they supported their husbands from day one who would sleep where we slept, training us. They also ate what we ate. If we bought Kentucky on our way somewhere, we would all eat the same food. If there was only bread left, we would share it amongst us all. Eddie Webster and Daniel Dube were the men we can safely say played a big part in the building of the trade union. You asked if I had a last word. I want to thank you, I wanted to prepare but I thought, what am I preparing because I was there. So I related to you I didn't prepare, I just looked at the years in their sequence. I also thank the department of research; I wish them well for the future. We also wish that our history will be written, I know there were books written before

us, but there's a gap for during the struggle and after the struggle. We have to see on paper what we would be proud of, the work we put in. We as shopstewards we can stand up and say this is what we did to build this trade union. No today's trade unionists, what would they say they did, would they be able to say this is my story, looking at twenty years to come in the free South Africa. I want to wish South African workers and the citizens long life. This government is standing because of the citizens of South Africa. I wish that the voice of the workers under the banner of COSATU will always be heard. I wish your research well, that it might be able to answer some of the questions that I put forward. Thank you Brown.

Facilitator: Thank you.

END

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