

## **Rusty Moagi**

Facilitator: This is an interview with comrade Rusty Moagi, we are in Geluksdal in Brakpan, date is 31 March 2012, interview is done by Brown Maaba. Comrade, thanks very much for your time. You can decide which language you want to speak, English or Zulu. Give me a background of where you were born and how you were raised, schooling issues and how you ended up in the world of unions?

Respondent: I was born in Painville on 11 August 1952, I think I started school in 1959. My first year at school for the first grade then it was Sub A, I went for Sub for 6 months then I was promoted to Sub B the following six months. The following year I went to standard 1.

Facilitator: Really?

Respondent: Ja. Then I went to do my Primary school at Kgotso Primary school in Painville. I went to Nkabinde for you know you had then the higher primary (interruption) – then in 1966 I went to Kwa-Phakama High School which is now known as Tlhakola, and then I completed by JC in 1968. That's the formal education that I had.

Facilitator: The famous JC?

Respondent: Ja the famous JC. My first job I worked at Suzman, didn't work for long there, I went to Travena, I went to van Leer, I went to South African Board Mills then, I went to Grinaker, I didn't have a long stay in one firm because of my mentality. My mentality was ..., I was opposed to all those things which were happening during those times which are linked to apartheid, suppression of workers. So the longest

service I had was in Ivan Johnson from 1982 to 1990. Chris Dlamini recruited me in 1981 at home, because I want to believe I was identified by Vivi Masina, then he started patronising the shebeen at home, he was just sizing me up I think at that time but eventually he made his move. They wanted to recruit Ivan and Johnson which then was under Food Beverage, Food Beverage was a splinter from Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union, so they wanted to bring them back on board. I took the challenge and like I said I started in 1982. It took us something like a year with other people who were helping me with recruitment, like Selina Madlopa. It took us something like a year to gain full recognition of the union

Facilitator: Of Sweet Food?

Respondent: Yes for Sweet Food because we were competing with Food Beverage and that took a form of a strike. And for my employers it ..., they were surprised because they couldn't identify me because I'm using my name Rusty which is my nickname. They didn't actually know who is Rusty. So they only discovered when we went on strike for a recognition. My journey of the union then began to start in full. I was given a task to recruit people from Excelsior Bakery which became a success, Bailey Morethotsane became the Chairperson at Excelsior. Then another task I was given was Jabula Foods, that's where I met Zandile Nkosi in the process of recruitment.

From that time, it was more the question of building the union, but also significant, when we recruited it was myself, David Maseko from Kellogs and Chris, when they recruited SAB, our target there became Isaac Mahlangu because he was on the shop floor. The rest of the people we were speaking to were in managerial positions. So from our side that's how we recruited South African Breweries. The rest in the union was to serve in structures like BEC (Branch Executive Council), Regional Council up to NEC level, because another significant thing is when we were doing these unity talks, that's where I first came across Cyril Ramaphosa, because NUM was an independent union and the task ..., I was deployed with Jay Naidoo then on

the Unity Talks, Chris would come also on board on that. One also significant thing that happened during that era was the stay away of 1984 which was in April 4,5 and 6 in 1984, which was of course instigated by then COSAS. COSAS did not have the capacity to make the stay away to materialise and then COSAS approached FOSATU then. Then the decision I think was taken at Lacton House but we held them back that we need to organise workers, it became a success. Subsequent to that that's when people like Bangeliso Siholo were detained, Chris Dlamini amongst others were detained, I don't remember very well but I .. - but other people from the CUSA??, they also became big teams, people like Biro Shokane, they became victims of that.

In that year, I think we were in the process of having an NEC Meeting. We went to Ipelegeng, we had an NEC, we did not change the status of people in the NEC and when we came back from the NEC, something happened. That was the first time I had a confrontation with the security operators. Jay, they left us, because they were going to Natal, they left us as Keloggs, we took a car to Kwa-Thema only to find that there was a road block and Mr Maseko then had a sticker "Release our Leaders" because we came from the NEC and that sticker gave us away. We were taken with Maseko, detained, briefly. Maseko was released earlier, I was released later. That is how the security operators dealt with them.

Maybe one of the highlights in the process was the launching of COSATU in 1985 at Westville University, that's one of our highlights in the process of the struggle. From 1985 then the rest is history. Like I said that I worked up to 1990 but after 1990 I got involved in the Civic Movement. So I would say that.

But maybe I need to mention the .., I don't know whether it will link also with, because our struggle was not kind of separated because when we were strongly in the CIVIC movement, when these guys were bombed, the Congress Motswenes of this world - I was still in the union then, because congress did not want to say other things to Chris because Chris was our leader. That came as a shock to us, but we

found out later that it was Mamasela who was responsible for bombing of these boys in Kwa-Thema, Duduza and Tsakane, the Thokozane Mkhize's of this world, Thokozani is still around, he is one of the victims. And also there was an incident, although I don't remember very well, we were initiating the CIVIC movement because we were still working at the time. We had what we called then Kwa-Thema Residence Association. We started that immediately after the Putco strike I think if I'm not mistaken and also there was an issue where the taxi association wanted to increase fares and we were in the process of taking them on. I became the secretary of Kwa Thema Residents Association. Then I wrote a letter to them and I didn't give them my address, I was saying "no we will meet at the hall". The letter was published in the African Reporter, unedited. Then I knew that Monday I'm not going to survive the security branch would be on me, because they mentioned that the letter has been taken to the police, it was never edited that letter, where I was making the proposal also saying that you know Putco happened, we don't want that to happen, let us talk to these people.

They took the letter to the police according to the press statement, then I knew that Monday I will not survive and it was just like that, they picked me up. There was this guy, because the incident when we came from the NEC, I was interrogated by Mr Koetzee, and on the issue of the taxis, Koetzee came with another guy called Koekemoer, that's how I met Koekemoer. They took me to Nonqai, but fortunately on that Monday we were supposed to have a workshop around Provident Fund, somewhere in Springs and the person who was going to conduct that workshop was Don Mkwanazi. From my release from Nonqai I went straight to the workshop. Everything was back to normal and when I went to work, they inquired whether I was detained, I denied, because already I will be off on that particular day. So maybe those are some of the highlights that come to mind.

The other thing that comes to mind is when there was contestation between IWUSA and our union, where there was an explosion at Sharpeville, is another highlight that happened because somehow these things were related. It's another highlight in the process. Zandile came under a lot of harassment from the police to an extent that

she had to hide at the hostel, being a woman but hid at the hostel. And of course that capulated in .., there was also another guy from Sharpeville who was killed, he was the Chairperson, I don't know if Zandile mentioned her, the Ntuli boy

Facilitator: She did

Respondent: Also that was a hard time for Zandile at that time. I would say that would be about the highlights in our .., especially in our region, the other incidents I've mentioned. I've mentioned COSATU, I mentioned the launch of FAWU, also it was a highlight for me, we were at Athlone when we launched FAWU, the following year in 1986 we launched FAWU, bringing other unions from .., what was this thing where Ray Alexander belonged to .., is it .., African Canning, ja that became a highlight. The convenor of that unity was Amos Masondo. That's one other thing I can remember. Basically this is what I can recall from where I'm sitting. If you have questions you are welcome to ask me.

Facilitator: You mentioned Congress Mtsweni?

Respondent: Yes

Facilitator: Did you have strong links with him or with them?

Respondent: Ja we did as the labour movement locally, we had a strong link with COSAS, one of the other things we were strict on was discipline, we would also collect money and look after learners who are destitute to make sure they've got uniforms, to make sure that the family is fed, we would collect maybe something like R1 within ourselves every Friday so that we should look after these COSAS boys, whatever their needs were, related to school/family, so we had very very strong links

with them. But above ground the link was not visible for security reasons. Our main concern was that we didn't want them to get involved in any criminality that is why we took over. So we had a very strong link with them. Anything that had to happen in Kwa-Thema we were also aware what's going to happen and what's not going to happen. But we were never in the forefront, we were always in the background, and also you know trying to help them to take caution. I think also ..., another significant thing that happened, was it 1985, when the State of Emergency was declared, constantly burying these young people on a weekly basis. The last burial I think we were burying around 15 of these learners because of the turbulences that were happening around Kwa-Thema, that's where we took a decision that we've had enough, that we are not going to continue, we are fighting a losing battle and the message was given to the boys that the only way you will fight is to match a man with a gun and it's time to go. And that was it. The whole thing stopped. Most of them went into exile, people like Pepsi Mahlangu, Malombo, I don't know his official surname he was staying in Mzuma when he passed away, people like Frans Thankge that's how they went underground, they felt they've had enough we are not going to bury anymore, it's time to go. We contributed to the exodus of 1985.

Facilitator: Just going back a bit, you mentioned that Food Beverage was a splinter from Sweet Food?

Respondent: Yes it was

Facilitator: When did that happen and why did it happen?

Respondent: I think this is the history that I got when Chris recruited me, that when they started the union, it became Sweet Food but for maybe it could have been a question of power, who holds which power then the union split, that's how Food Beverage was formed. So now it became a problem that you have two unions in the same industry and that kind of weaken the power of unions or people within a

certain jurisdiction. And also I think to some extent there was a question of ideology there, because at that time the ANC was banned and all the other organisations. So there was the question of ideology. But whatever it was it was a question of contestation that we are taking back our members. That was around that. And also I mentioned that at the time you had CUSA and FOSATU, they were stand alone federations.

Facilitator: So what happened to Food Beverage in the end?

Respondent: I can't precisely say because for me I left .., the trade union thing for me, the chapter was closed in 1990.

Facilitator: Just to go back you finished your JC and started looking for a job?

Respondent: Yes

Facilitator: Didn't you have plans maybe to study further or you just wanted to work?

Respondent: No the conditions that were prevailing at that time were such that once you have JC Qualification you can go and work, much as I had the wish to proceed my conditions were not very much encouraging. I remember I did not even end up.., I did go for a week for Matric then I pulled back because if you don't have resources, you don't have .., one of the major things for me was books. I must go to school and have the necessary books needed. So my conditions were not very much favourable, as a result I left school. The desire to learn never died, it was always there. If I'm in the union we would have workshops, in the factories if there are any other things, for instance for that reason I will say I did study Industrial

Relations at Wits Certificate Programme, I've done Community Leadership Training Programme at Wits, which was informed by my desire to learn. So I was not totally discouraged, and also I would say my present activities where ever I am, that does not in any way stop me from doing any other thing because if I were to IRPL whatever I've learnt and my experience is far more above Matric. So over and above that, I would also say that maybe if we believe in destiny I do not regret because the path that I've travelled has actually made me what I am. Maybe I also say the knowledge that I have, where ever I have the opportunity I will always impart it. So basically I don't regret that I do not have a profession or what. That's my life, that's how it went but the desire to learn has never stopped. Because right now as I am I'm working as a consultant for Matthew Goniwe School of Leadership, Governance, I am training school governors, that's one area I ventured into and I'm at home I'm enjoying it.

Facilitator: You like it

Respondent: Ja I like it, it's education related, all my activities now are mostly education related and of course there's this new trend of co-operatives also in education. So my focus is always on education, for me it has become a passion.

Facilitator: The challenges that you faced if there were any during the Unity Talks?

Respondent: The challenges that we faced, there was a meeting which I attended with Chris, the one I mention Ramaphosa. When you listened as a person from the shop floor you could notice that the negotiations were at a high level, and also the ideologies came into play, the power play envisaging who is going to be what. You could see from my analysis that it's just around that. But the basic principle that workers should unite there would be no negation because ..., I remember when Chris gave me an opportunity that I should respond, sighting that look I carry a mandate from people and fortunately I've got a person who is from the shop floor. I just told



them that if it was for me, if the Unity Talk was only based on shop stewards COSATU could have come out more strongly at that time than it did. Because on the floor we would be speaking the same language with people who are on the floor, we know what we are up against, it would have been easy to say right we are doing this and the rest of the things would be technicalities.

Facilitator: But you mentioned that it was becoming clear that certain people had to occupy or wanted to occupy positions?

Respondent: Ja for me that was my analogy because the negotiated at a higher plane, not where it mattered on the ground. That for me should have been to say the shop stewards should have been taking the lead in the Unity Talks. For me the outcome I see it could have been better than negotiating at that level because as workers on the ground we knew what we were up against. Basically for us we're saying, the more we are strong the better for us.

Facilitator: But in the end the Unity thing worked well?

Respondent: It worked well in the end

Facilitator: No regrets or problems?

Respondent: No regrets, COSATU we put it on the map of this country.

Facilitator: You mentioned that you had connections with Congress Motswene, did that translate into connections with the ANC underground and in exile?

Respondent: Ja it did, I was not aware myself because you know the way Chris operated, he did not want to give you a lot of information. It's something I realised later what my role was, because amongst other things which came into fruition, was when you had to harbour people you don't know, you get them safety places, you ask them no questions after that they leave. That was a realisation that here we are playing another role which is beyond the union role. And also the link that we had with the learners and all that. For me and also they say you cannot be a worker if you are not a member of the community. For me the picture became clearer that what we are doing is far more than confined to the union because our struggle is intertwined. So it came to our realisation. And when this issue of the underground into play, I don't have a doubt in my mind that my recruitment was deliberate by Chris, he knew what he was going with me and I was a member of his cell, it became very clear to me. Much as he never confirmed it, but it became clear that what was his agenda, he had a very clear agenda as to how he is going to play the game.

Facilitator: So you did receive people at any time?

Respondent: Ja you would be told people are coming, you do as you are told, you ask no questions, you find a safe place, you harbour that person, that person goes you ask no questions, as long as it came from Chris and say this is what needs to happen, you don't ask any questions because we knew then that the stakes are too high. So you do as you are told you ask no questions, that's it. Which brings me to the whole question of military veterans that "who are the military veterans, how could Mkonto We Sizwe operated without having a network in the country, and if there are benefits for military veterans, who must benefit, what is the criteria?". For me I am not bitter about all those things, the special pension fund I tried that one out, it didn't work out. For me I feel I achieved my political freedom in my lifetime and the life that I'm living I'm happy with it, the activities that I'm doing I'm happy with them. for me it's the wisdom that I got from all my activities which I'm sharing with other people that give me pleasure.

Facilitator: I'm told within COSATU and maybe FOSATU were those who were against taking the struggles to the townships. They wanted worker struggles to remain worker struggles?

Respondent: Ja the element was there because the element from my understanding, it was from the intellectual part within FOSATU that we should remain workers, we should not evolve into politics. I remember we had a workshop sometime, it was in Germiston, I think it was one of the professors from Wits who was addressing us around that issue. At that time we were supposed to meet, later on on that day, to meet Terror Lekota and Popo Molefe and when Popo and Terror came it tore them apart and it was a real issue, that now this gap became clear that there are two moves here, the workarist move and the revolutionary move and then subsequent to that, Terror and Popo came to Kwa-Thema and then Chris organised a clandestine meeting so that we should be properly orientated of what this thing is all about. Then it became clear from that point and we had to go back to our own colleagues to say what happened in Germiston was not supposed to have happened, we should have been left so that these guys must address us so that we must understand. But by that time we were already brain washed and became hard on them. It came as a realisation that now this is the agenda and then that thing unfolded from there.

Facilitator: What was their position, Terror and Popo Molefe?

Respondent: It was very clear that it's the ANC, they didn't mince their words

Facilitator: Where did you guys go wrong in Germiston, which position did you adopt?

Respondent: We adopted the position of the workarist and nothing else. They came after the meeting, that's where the contradiction happened. On the one side the intellectuals are saying it should remain strictly a worker movement, you should not mix two things, but as an after Terror and Popo came it was a totally different thing. Then they had to do their homework and come back to us now, and say this is what it is. That thing of workarist is not going to work because how are you going to realise your political aspiration. So the struggle is intertwined, you cannot divorce one thing from the other. It's inter connected.

Facilitator: You started the union at Ivan and Johnson?

Respondent: Yes that's when I became active, like I said I was specifically recruited for that.

Facilitator: So before that there was no union at Ivan and Johnson?

Respondent: When I came in Food Beverage was there recognised.

Facilitator: And how strong was it at Johnson?

Respondent: When I came in, they had their footing, they were covered. But one of my approaches was to say that if you want to engage a person get in, I got into Food Beverage as a strategy so that I must know their strengths and weaknesses. I was not a member per se but I would say I would love to go, where are you going, I attended their conventions etc., I made sure I go in there, I want to see what they are doing, that was my strategy and when I came and said "now it's time to move", all the people, the shop stewards most of them were around me. I said now we are

going this direction because of this reason. It was a hard fought battle, it took us one year, it was a long struggle to get recognition.

Facilitator: Why was management refusing to give you recognition when Food Beverage was operating already?

Respondent: They were very comfortable with Food Beverage and our perception was that Food Beverage is a sister union, because while I was at I and J at that time, from what I learnt from them, all the negotiations ..(unclear), at no stage there was a strike, so the perception was that it's a sister union. So it's not going to propel the struggle of the workers.

Facilitator: Was Food Beverage an independent union or it fell under ..?

Respondent: It was an affiliate of CUSA

Facilitator: Okay, so BCM linked?

Respondent: Ja, there is that element you know, Biro Shoka

Facilitator: So eventually you were recognised as the union after a year?

Respondent: Yes we did get full recognition as Sweet Food, later FAWU

Facilitator: But what needed to be done, you were now recognised as the union, you have the right to operate at I and J?

Respondent: Ja, we had a recognition agreement

Facilitator: And what needed to be done then which was not done by Food Beverage?

Respondent: I think the first year we negotiated there was a strike, there was no question about it. Every negotiation of us had an element of a strike, it became a norm, that we don't conclude any negotiations without at least going on strike, it became a norm

Facilitator: Why should it be like that?

Respondent: You know as workers we believed that employers will not readily give you anything on a plate, you need to show some resilience in order to make some gains

Facilitator: What were the demands of the workers during the strikes?

Respondent: Demands were money related, others had to do with rights, such as maternity leave, big issue, because the majority of the people working at Ivan and Johnson were women, so amongst rights that became a strong issue when women had to get four months maternity leave, then others, then came things like compassionate leave, things like striving for the provident fund. Those were real

issues to say we shifting the gold post towards this way, those were some of the critical issues in terms of our negotiations.

Facilitator: Did you often succeed?

Respondent: I think eventually that's where, maybe if you may say COSATU ended up with Provident Funds, because it was industry based, it was ranging at every level and also taking into account that industry for us, we had plant level negotiations and every plant had to negotiate it's way out. Now we will say people like in Benrose they had an I and J, Roodepoort had an I and J, would come together informally and formalise a strategy and demands so that employers find that all our demands are the same because that became our strategy that if we win maternity leave, they must win, if we win paternity leave they must win, if we win compassionate they must win. Because if they see our demands, as the biggest plant in Nuffield, the rest they will just have to follow suit, you agreed there, why not here. But because of teh numbers at our plant, that was a basis of strength, the rest, the Roodepoort they were smaller in numbers, distribution we do cucumbers and all that. But the strength lied in our plant, but we had to have the same strategy.

Facilitator: And the working conditions at I and J?

Respondent: I think we brought about a lot of changes when we came in, but I wouldn't say generally they were bad working conditions. I wouldn't say the conditions were bad, but the only thing was the level of payments. I and J had a history, having taken over from McKorniky Brothers and everybody thought that the lowest paying firm was McKorniky Brothers, that was the history, that was the major challenge. But I think we did make some gains because if you had to make an analysis today in the food industry you will find that there was a shift, you wouldn't say if I work in I and J today which is McCain that Keloggs is paying far more better than McCain, you wouldn't find such a situation today.

Facilitator: And safety at work, at I and J?

Respondent: No around those things we did not have much problems but I remember the one specific which was a problem was the, where people were mixing spices, that's one area we had a concern with, but we did eventually win that one that the people who mix spices they should be ..(unclear), in terms of health that's one of the challenges. The other challenge in health was that of the freezing conditions people worked in. Although there was protective clothing, but later on even if I was not there it became clear that those people were affected by the freezing conditions, generally froze because things were quick frozen, you had people who worked in minus 18 degrees, the forklifts, they are packing, they work for one hour, but generally in the plant itself where the vegetables are processed is generally cold. So it did have an effect on the health of the workers.

Facilitator: Did the union do anything about that?

Respondent: After I left I'm not sure to what extent what the union did because if you look at other unions, where they were speaking about this sickness about asbestos, you will find most of the elderly people who worked in Ivan and Johnson had problems with their joints, I'm not sure whether this was taken up or not. I don't know as I'm speaking to you that if they were to look at that thing and trace back why these people all have joints problems, it will come down to the conditions they worked in. This came up with elderly people who worked there for a long time, they came up having problems with their joints, especially in their legs, hands because of the freezing conditions they worked in. So they were gradually affected. But to my knowledge nobody has challenged that, like the asbestos people.

Facilitator: But benefits wise were you okay as workers?



Respondent: Ja I think when we came in with Sweet Food we made a lot of shifts, but there were some positives when we came because there were some sort of bursaries for children and workers.

Facilitator: Okay, really?

Respondent: Yes that was a positive thing which the workers took advantage of, that children who progress in school the employer offers them a bursary. I remember at that time, before I left I was working as training officer, I remember that I got a boy from Kwa-Thema to go and do Microbiology, but I negotiated that, but I was negotiating from another sphere, that you've got the monies there, look at this boy he's got this, he's been accepted in KZN for Microbiology, later on he might ..., you can put the condition that if he succeeds he works for you, microbiology is related to our industry. But there was some form of flexibility, it depended on how you approached a thing, how passionate are you, like myself I said I'm passionate about education, I will do anything to ensure that a person gets education if I have an influence.

Facilitator: Ja, which is wonderful. But the majority of people who worked at I and J were women?

Respondent: Ja, the majority were women

Facilitator: Were they active participants members of the union?

Respondent: Active, very active because they formed the majority

Facilitator: so there was no holding back on their side to say ..

Respondent: In fact, I for one I learnt something from them because the first strike that we went to for recognition, I remember I arrived a little bit late, they were in a change room, there were about 19 women, I was the only man, the 20<sup>th</sup> because I was the leader and people were not sure what is happening. But I told them "look here, now there's no turning back, these guys know that we're going on strike, they've been informed one way or the other". I said the 20 of us are going into the plant, we will sing and probably we will come out with the rest of the workers, if we do not succeed, I am prepared to take the blame as the instigator then I can be fired. That's where I began to respect women, that once they make up their mind to do something there is no turning back, that is the strength I admired about women, it's something I learnt that if I work with women, once they decide to do something they go for it 100%, they don't speculate, they just go in blindly and say "we are going to do this" and of course that was the pillar of our strength, without those women there's nothing we could have done.

Facilitator: Yourself, your political activities, did it affect your life, your social life, family life?

Respondent: Ja it did, it did affect my social life because when it comes to my spouses, it did contribute, my first wife we parted because of my activities, I could not have a steady relationship because of my activities, but once I went over that ..., I managed to settle, it did affect. It had a very negative impact on your life especially when it comes to partners, because most of the time you are in meetings etc., and the very fact that our union was dominated by women, that on its own was a negative thing to women, that you are always with women, they shop stewards, you are going to Cape Town, you going there they follow you. Women always had that negative aspect generally.

Facilitator: Access to literature?

Respondent: Ja within the union of course there was a lot of reading, because Jay would make cuttings of newspapers that you must be up to date with what is happening and you would be getting banned books, like for instance the A,B,C of Social and Political Knowledge, Moscow ..(unclear) Press, that would be the kind of literature you would be reading. And the others it might be something that you came in having read, because given the conditions it was .., you had to read people like Ngungi Wa Tiyongo, that no you are on top, all these things that has to do with struggle you had to read although some of them were banned. But you we were exposed to that kind of literature. Like I said, that would be a literature and the other thing that I mentioned of course is that I for one I went to Wits, I wanted to find out how do these people think, to do Industrial Relations because if you don't understand how these people work, maybe you are shooting yourself in the foot, what is their terminology because you become stereotyped, you don't see things .., you see things from only one angle.

Facilitator: And your relationship with your employers, as a union leader?

Respondent: I think it was that of mutual respect

Facilitator: So no efforts to victimise you or to corner?

Respondent: Ja they would be ways to say "look here man we can organise a business for you, you get a garage etc.," you would get those subtle ways for bribery, very subtle, you would always be exposed to that if you are in the leadership, there's no way you can run away from that but you have to take a

position, "is this going to help you in the long run or not" so you have to take a decision, but those they will always be there.

Facilitator: Did the UWUSA conflict affect I and J?

Respondent: Not so much because .., you mean in Jabula

Facilitator: No I mean in I and J

Respondent: No it was not affect us, it was predominantly in Jabula, it was anchored in Jabula in all our, as far as our food union is concerned it was anchored in Jabula

Facilitator: and how did you survive from it as I and J?

Respondent: One of the things I remember while there were those processes, it had to be decided by vote, that who becomes ..(unclear) it headed that, and I as the recruiter, I had to come back and address people that this is your choice, it's either you go for that ..(unclear) you win and if you lose then you know what is going to happen, but it was decided by popular vote, the recognition of..(unclear) and that was the end of UWUSA when Sweet Food gained formal recognition.

Facilitator: And the move from Sweet Food to FAWU was it an ..(unclear – there was some disturbance) advantage to Sweet Food?

Respondent: Yes for the industry it was an advantage, like I said we had Food Beverage, we had African Food and Canning, and Sweet Food, those were the major unions. But from forming FAWU, African Food and Canning came ..(unclear) for the unity, but we did make some in roads into Food Beverage. Because if you look at Coca Cola was predominantly organised around Food Beverage, but we came out with Coke which was one of the major constituency in the Food Beverage, it was a positive for FAWU as a unity structure, to unite workers within our food industry.

Facilitator: During the formation of COSATU, Chris Dlamini became Deputy President..?

Respondent: First Deputy President of COSATU

Facilitator: As FAWU were you happy with that?

Respondent: For us it was a compromise (there's some disturbance) for FAWU, we were still Sweet Food when ..(unclear) we only launched FAWU ..(unclear), for Sweet Food it was a compromise position for us, we had to look at the power balances, because we were also reluctant that Jay should become the general secretary, but because of what was happening, Cyril Ramaphosa declined, we wanted him to become the general secretary so that we can retain Jane. No but he declined and Jay had to come on as .., they actually nominated him to become the general secretary and for the presidency it was a give and take situation, you know Mr Bagae it was just an honor for him, he was a very old man, but because the way the thing was structured, it was a given ..(unclear) but from our union he should have been the first president of COSATU, that was our mandate.

Facilitator: that was your mandate, so you were more or less disappointed?

Respondent: We had to compromise, but the workers were not happy, we had to convince them that if you go into such things. The other thing is, we were a very small union, we didn't have the power of the vote, our power was in presenting our case, that was our strength, but in terms of numbers we were badly outnumbered, but we came out there with Jay, we came out with Chris, given that we're small number, compared us to Metal and Allied Workers Union, they were a bigger union than us. But our positioning in terms of presenting our case, we were very strong, that's what made us to have a voice in COSATU. It was more our strength of putting our things across, rather than numbers.

Facilitator: And you said that Cyril refused to be the first secretary general of COSATU?

Respondent: That was our aim, we wanted him to become the secretary.

Facilitator: Why did he refuse do you know?

Respondent: For us we didn't feel comfortable that ..., if Chris was leading us, at least we should have retained Jay, one way or other, we felt comfortable, we nominated ..., we didn't mind if Cyril became the general secretary and Bagae, at least we had Chris, but we didn't want Jay to ..., it was not our position that Jay should go.

Facilitator: So you wanted to retain him for continuity, for other reasons?

Respondent: We wanted to retain Jay for continuity

Facilitator: But they both left?

Respondent: And how did that affect Sweet Food?

Facilitator: Not much, it didn't affect us, maybe we didn't calculate properly because they were senior members, one way or another, the communication will always stay intact there, the relationship that we have done, the jealousy of what we have worked for very hard will always be there, our fears were maybe for that time, but it did not affect us. Because what strengthened us is when we went for the Unity Talks that actually strengthened us because from Food and Canning we got Peter Malepe with some form of experience, he was coming with the experience. So we were not disadvantaged per se, but the Unity Talks helped us to strengthen the union.

Facilitator: And come 1990 you decided to leave I and J?

Respondent: It was a technicality also because at the time I was working as .., I was no longer active on the shop floor because of .., there were always dynamics going on, I stopped being a shop steward I think a year or two before then in 1988 there was a vacancy of a training officer and I went for it.

Facilitator: Training officer within FAWU?

Respondent: In the factory itself, I went for the training, like I said education is my passion, my things relate to education

Facilitator: So you left your post of .., ?

Respondent: By that time I was no longer a shop steward, I was just an ordinary member of the union because I was working in the engineering department per se, so I was no longer a shop steward, then I had the opportunity that I could go for any other post that suited me, that did not constitute a conflict then

Facilitator: within the company?

Respondent: Okay. So when I left there was a technicality of that they needed a person who is technical but I was more on the generic and I think also what contributed to that, was the release of Nelson Mandela. If you can go to the archives of the African Reporter, when Mandela was released, there was a body guard there, that guy, we looked alike, it did not go well with members. They could not believe I am here but I am also there. I had never met that guy up to this day, he was Mandela's body guard, because I was wearing spectacles at the time. If you took that paper and looked at it and me at that time we were one person

Facilitator: Really?

Respondent: So I think for me that contributed, that this guy is too much for us, let's find a way of pushing him out of the union. I remember that picture distinctly it was in the African Report, if you go to the archives, after the release of Mandela you will see that. That picture gave me .., I think so. Unfortunately I've never met that guy, it would have been nice to meet him to know who he was. It's just that thing of looking alike.

Facilitator: Ja, so you were fired or you just left or what happened?



Respondent: I was retrenched, I opted for retrenchment, I was offered a post to work in the supervisory level but I decided I am not going back there, so they retrenched me and we parted ways and that was that.

Facilitator: So you never looked back into unions?

Respondent: I tried to find work in the union but I was unsuccessful

Facilitator: What happened?

Respondent: For me it was a question of, you know sometimes if you are not a person who patronise people, sometimes you don't make break through because you don't patronise, you speak your mind. Sometimes it works negatively against you, but even so I do not regret, I think it was a nice position to take and I still maintain this position even today, it's either you respect that I can do something, or you don't, don't expect me to patronise you, it's a matter of principle. I don't like to patronise people, I want to earn respect. I don't like this thing of patronage, for me it's self defeating.

Facilitator: So you went into, straight into Matthew Goniwe Institute?

Respondent: I became active in the Civic Movement

Facilitator: In the township

Respondent: You know in the Civic Movement we ended having, those Civic Associations having regional structures, we ended up with SANCO at the end of the day

Facilitator: So it was still worth it?

Respondent: Yes it was still worth it with the experience that I had, it was worth it to make a contribution and also there were elements of education in those things because you know the structures were like regional services councils. Because one way or the other these people knew that we will eventually go to a democratic country, we would go to workshops such as regional planning and so on, they will organise such workshops. You would get other workshops will be organised from another angle like local government, people like Mathole Motshekga, would come in and workshop us in local government, to prepare for what is coming. So there was a lot of .., some form of education one way or another because we were moving towards the democratic dispensation. So the Civic Movement played a very important role, because some of the people who are in parliament today are from the Civic Movement, like Lechesa, they were interviewing him the other day, Deputy Minister of Rural Development, he is from the trade unions.

Facilitator: is he from trade unions?

Respondent: From the Civic Movement, he served in our national body of SANCO.

Facilitator: I don't know whether you still follow union politics, what's your take about unions today?

Respondent: My take for unions is not on. I want to raise something with you, I don't know if you can keep it confidential, can I say it on or off the record?

Facilitator: Well it's up to you. I would like to say it off the record

Respondent: I would like to say it off the record, but you've got the recorder on.

Facilitator: Why don't you talk about it after I switch it off?

Respondent: Off the record, my concern about unions is ..(unclear) investment ..(unclear), that to what extent do they benefit the very people who put the ..(unclear), those people are not shareholders. That is my primary concern. The second concern, I'm not too sure as to what kind of training is taking place because when I assess shop stewards I see them as people who are not informed, in terms of legislation and lastly, from where I come from, we had a principle that we are worker control, I don't believe the unions are controlled by workers, for me it seems the executive is in total control from where we come from, I don't seem them being that very much effective. I think other things are playing themselves out, like the labour brokeraging, where you find people working for ten years temporary, for me as a matter of principle that should not be happening, and to be saying that we are so developed at this time but we still have rife exploitation.

The other thing which is not on for me for unions, is the whole question of outsourcing everything in the industry, to some extent in some cases the core business is outsourced, for me that's not on. That is weakening the union because these contractors, the strength is steadily being eroded. That's the only concerns I have. More than any other thing. I would like a scenario where the shop stewards really know their story. And also to make differences when it comes to conflict of interest and conflict of rights because in a conflict of rights, where your rights are being

infringed, there are recognition agreements or collective agreements. For me there's no need to go on strike because you go to ..(unclear) – I can sign one for SADTU for instance, when I make my analysis, SADTU when it negotiates it's always about money and also the approach, I'm worried about their approach. You cannot negotiate on the basis of percentages, because that makes the gap between the managers and the ..(unclear), it's opening the gap. You should rather focus on one band, like for instance our focus for education we are going to focus on PL1, you don't negotiate for the rest. That will be able to close the gap, but the way it's been done now, because a person who is a PL4 like a principal and a PL1 is opening a gap, a huge gap, I don't think it's right.

On the question of working conditions, also for me it's a concern, I'm focus on SADTU this time that the workload should be a key issue, that where you work you should not be frustrated most of the time. Teaching 40 children in a class, for me they should be saying we will negotiate a local drop down of children in the classroom. For me that should be the case. Also with the OBE, I know what it is because I'm a trainer, that there's no way you can actually handle 40 people when you do OBE. For the Department of Labour the maximum is 20. I attended colloquium where we had a Canadian delegation around education, they told us that their average class is 22, for me SADTU should reduce number of learners is in the class and I think that aspect is being neglected, because it has to do with what you do on a daily basis. Those are areas I am not impressed with.

Facilitator: So when you look back, the tenure that you spent at I and J, more or less 10 years or so, as a shop steward, what would you say were your outstanding achievements as a shop steward?

Respondent: For me it was a process, and also if I make an assessment, my assessment will always be the feedback of the people I've worked with, the respect that I get from them, the many instances that "you know that, you found us earning this and that" for me when I look back that is my assessment that when you have

been with people, you have done things, what do they say? The respect that I command for my former colleagues because some of them were elderly people mostly. This is the feedback I get, that is how I measure, that I've made a contribution for the workers, but it was part of a process. Always, assessment you will be saying what feedback do you get from people you have assisted, that actually tells you whether you've made a positive contribution or negative.

Facilitator: And the low point during your stay there at I and J?

Respondent: The low point is, there was a time where I actually faltered. The conditions were such that we were saying .., we were being forced to work on the 16<sup>th</sup> because we were working in the maintenance department. At that time I had a final written warning, and I had to defy going to work on the 16<sup>th</sup>. I turned around, my reasoning at that time was that I'm going to be fired, the majority of the workers are not here, what are my chances that I will survive, then I told myself "no" and I had another shop steward, this guy came from Kabankulu, I convinced, contrary to the mandate of we people working "no we must come to work", if I don't come to work I'm fired, I know that, that was a low point for me and turned very ugly for me. I was taken to task, the union took me to task by not adhering to the mandate. That was the lowest point for me which cost me my leadership but it was resolved after I explained, but it caused me being at the head of the leadership, but I still remained within the union. But I think that on itself began to determine my exit. Like I say I will always say to people "we are not holier than thou" you can't be right all the time, in your mind you are right, but it might not be so with people you work with. That was my lowest point, but for me that was a lesson, that to surrender or to acknowledge and also not fight from a position of weakness, that's one thing I've learnt out of that, that if people in the majority are saying you are wrong, you need to accept that and confine yourself to that, don't try to say "I am .." because you're fighting against ..(unclear), that's what I learnt, where ever I am, if I find myself in that position I am just going to humble myself and that will help me to survive because people can be very nasty, you can do 99% good you do 1% bad and then they will ostracise you for it. So that's the lowest point and also it was a lesson to me, those

things are always there you must never say never, all good is over rided by only one incident, it becomes over rided.

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

Respondent: I think for me, like when we had our telephone conversation, the gap that we have in our area of 1984/85, that history for me is something that needs to be documented, in my analysis it was worse than 1976, what we went through and also you will remember that from 1960 when there was The State of Emergency, after that period the first State of Emergency was imposed again. For me, I think we have lost .., that is not captured for me, if I was a journalist, if I could write, it's one thing that I will wish, that the history must be documented.

Facilitator: Okay, it's a crucial period

Respondent: Ja it was a very crucial period, for us, basically in the far East Rand

Facilitator: Ja that's true, things were hot then

Respondent: They were hot because they called it a total onslaught, the boer said so

Facilitator: Was it worth it to be in the unions when you look back?

Respondent: Ja, it was worth it, you know sometimes when people raise issues about the youth, I say because we would say in the unions then, we will sit around in the shebeens there, "Mandela will be released in my lifetime" they will tell you you are dreaming but that achievement was there. In my lifetime Mandela was released, we gained political freedom in my lifetime. So when young people say they want economic emancipation in their lifetime, to me it makes sense that every generation must determine its own destiny. For me, mission accomplished, the rest is a bonus.

Facilitator: Any closing word maybe?

Respondent: To you personally or to the process?

Facilitator: To the process?

Respondent: I think it's very important that you should conduct these kinds of interviews, I know many people like myself who have made a contribution to this struggle, but we don't feature anywhere, this will be good for the history of this country, the people who are unnamed, who are faceless, there are so many of us. And also I was reading the article by the ANC about the kind of cadres they have, maybe it will help if they can look back where they come from, where are the people who made the contribution, what are they doing now because we've got a lot to impart to the youth, there's a lot that they can learn from us. I will say this interview has given me the opportunity to say whatever happened, I am not the only one, there are many of us and unfortunately some of us have passed on. So all this will be lost if nobody documents it.

Facilitator: It's true, great comrade, thanks for your time

Respondent: Fine, pleasure.

END



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