

Mbuso Ngubane

Facilitator: This is an interview with Mbuso Ngubane, we are in Durban, the date is 18 October 2012, interview is done by Brown Maaba. Comrade thanks very much for your time. Just kindly give me a background of where you come from, your upbringing and how you ended up in unions.

Respondent: Basically I'm from Duzuma township here in Durban and I grew up at Inanda, called Inanda Newtown here also in Durban. I was born by the parents who are married, they are still alive as we speak. My father is an archbishop in a church called Dobion in Zion, so I grew up in Zion, I was part of the congregation, the church congregation

Facilitator: The church congregation?

Respondent: The church congregation and as a young fellow, when I was doing my primary school, I did my primary school at Senzezihle at Nduzuma at the time where I was doing standard 2 is when I became passionate about my participation in the struggle. So this is where I became .., at the time we were called Reps, we were not called SRC at the time, we were called class reps and so forth. And then when I was doing standard 3 I then joined COSAS and I continued as a member of COSAS. When I went to standard 4 I then became the KZN Provincial Secretary of COSAS. I led COSAS at that time in the province. And I must say that I drew most of my interest and passion in the township at Inanda because Inanda was a township dominated by Inkatha Freedom Party at the time it was called Ikatha Yenkululeko Yesizulu and we actually observed how they operated coercing our parents to join even when there's violence they would coerce our fathers to join them in that kind of violence in their defence and the student uprising, particularly which was motivated by the Kwa-Mashu students at the time. So Kwa-Mashu, Nduzuma,

Inanda all of those students will collaborate and actually go in the township so that's when I really started observing really this is where I belong.

Then we led a lot of struggles at the time under the COSAS banner, especially as a provincial secretary by then of COSAS I had an office space at the ANC Provincial Office where we would also be able to interact with the provincial leadership which was there at the time. The current President was at the time the chairperson of the province and others I can name a lot of, whom I would interact at that level. So that's where I ..., then continued. At some stage I had to go to Johannesburg, in actual fact we would go to Johannesburg attending the national meetings, NEC meetings of COSAS and when we were doing that we would also be mixed with SASCO comrades who were leading SASCO by then. Comrade Dweli in the ANC Youth League by then, we would have some joint workshops at some stage, at some stage we would meet with comrade Dweli for making some input even outside meetings. Then thereafter I was deployed by SASCO as the general secretary of SAPSA, SAPSA was the SRC association for colleges, but I think before that I also led the Kwa-Mashu SRC, I was also the secretary of the Kwa-Mashu SRC where we mobilised the entire students across the three, particularly the three townships, Kwa-Mashu, Duzuma and Inanda. But then I became general secretary of SAPSA, I was based in Pretoria, studying at Thuto Matlhale Technical College. So as a deployee of SASCO of course that's when also I continued to be exposed in politics particularly across, in terms of the alliance politics and also even here, in the province I used to work closely with the leadership of SADTU at the time as part of advancing our courses, the student leaders.

Then I continued working as a general secretary. After that I think from there I then became the Kwa-Zulu Natal Provincial organiser for POPCRU, without me being a police, without me being a police, I was never a police, I was never employed by government. And I remember there I was a young fellow as compared to other candidates, I was the youngest in actual fact. I was threatened because people as we were in the waiting room, people were sharing their experiences in the unions, people who had been there in the unions, former this and that and myself I was just

from school and I wasn't sure whether I was going to be employed. I must say unfortunately I was employed as the organiser in the province in POPCRU. I worked in POPCRU and I remember when I came in POPCRU comrades were just looking at me as this young boy and were keen to see what I was going to deliver and I think I came at the right time, when POPCRU was very weak in the province. Branches of POPCRU, most of them were disillusioned. They had lost trust in the organisation itself, there were serious issues with regards to service, poor service to members. There were members who were seriously aggrieved and it was so difficult because (1) I had no one to introduce me to those comrades in terms of taking me through the branches, so I had to go on my own and I would be confronted with this kind of an attitude and some would not even want to talk to me, others would just say but what are you going to talk to us about, you are too young. But I had to really display that I've been there in the trenches, I know what we are dealing with here and eventually I did work and they admired my work across the province and I think amongst other things, I was very disciplined. I used to be very close to my provincial leadership to a point that they actually involved me in most of the things that they used to do because of my discipline as an organiser and I made sure that my loyalty is with them at all times, even during difficult times they would rely on me, they will even deploy me to strategic company/members who seemed to be aggressive or whatever because they knew that I would then present an organisation position rather than trying to be .., you know at some stage, some organisers not being strong in terms of defending the organising and the leadership. So I think that's what helped me to grow because it exposed me to most things which they might have sidelined me or excluded me on those things and it might have limited me in learning a lot about the unions, particularly public sector unions, the dynamics that exist within the unions. And I think that's where I draw most of my experiences in terms of the union because that was the first union I worked for. I think I worked for POPCRU for five years if I'm not mistaken.

And then in between I continued to be an activist, I continued to be an ANC members as I used to, I continued to be a member of the SACP and at some stage I was elected as the deputy secretary of the YCL in the province and was elected deputy secretary of the SACP at the district level. So I continued with my activism

whilst I was an organiser. After that I then joined NUMSA and for me it was a question of understanding that the manufacturing unions, the unions that are actually at the centre of our struggle, on the basis that they are confronted with capital every day and therefore they are able to deal with very diverse and dynamic situations which would expose me to grow further. When I joined NUMSA I joined as a local organiser, meaning it was a sort of a demotion and I remember they asked me in the interview that they asked me why I applied for a local organiser position whereas you are a provincial organiser in POPCRU and I had to clarify them that for me it is not about demotion or not but it's about me being exposed to a different environment where I will be able to contribute towards confronting capital and I think there is a serious difference. Over time I realised that there's a big difference between the public sector unions and the manufacturing unions in terms of the nature of issues that you deal with on daily basis.

Then as time went on, I then did my work, I did my work very well, attending to issues and in the course of doing that, worker leaders particularly from some of the local of NUMSA they then started to notice my work and notice me as a character also and at a particular time they then came to me and proposed that I ..., they want me to ..., they see me as the future regional secretary and for me it came as shock but also my worry was that why did they have to choose me out of other organisers who have been there in NUMSA particularly you had already organisers who would have had about 10 years of service in NUMSA, others 15 years of service and so forth. But it became clear that the worker leaders were clear and you remember that NUMSA is a worker controlled organisation. So those worker leaders made their choice, then eventually I think at the time I had about ..., I think at the time I was only three years in NUMSA when I became the regional secretary.

Facilitator: From local to regional?

Respondent: From local organiser to the regional secretary

Facilitator: Didn't that cause its own tensions within?

Respondent: Normally it would cause tensions, for instance it caused tension on the basis others believe that the then regional secretary they wanted him to continue, others who were organisers before me in NUMSA they thought that it could have been them, I'm young, what do I know about NUMSA because what I know is about police and so forth. But the point was that workers have spoken which was good because for me amongst other things which I learnt over time since my days of COSAS I've never campaigned for myself, I've never lobbied for myself, it was always about the people coming to me and I've always said look whenever I contest a position it should be on the basis that there are people who are behind that, there are people who have noticed that I should be doing that which I think has assisted me over time, even when I'm under attack, those very same people come to my defence because they know that it is them who actually saw me as their leader rather than myself going to them trying to influence them.

I must say that in my first NEC, I made a mark, during lunch time leaders from other regions they confessed that look we think that now we've got a leader in KZN and we are happy so far with the contribution that you have made it's as if you've long been sitting in the NEC which was also a compliment that boosted my confidence which is some of the things that as human beings we need from time to time to be told when you are doing right and to be told also equally when you are wrong. And I must say that at the same time I've been influential at the COSATU level in the province, in actual fact that started when I was still an organiser in POPCRU because as I said the leadership in POPCRU would deploy me even in some of the meetings and amongst others they would deploy to COSATU to sit. But then COSATU had an RSC it did not have a PEC, so I would even sit in the REC's of COSATU at the time and I would sit and deal with some of the issues and the leadership of COSATU knew me. And as a result I was one of the strategic comrades at the COSATU level. Even now, so similarly in NUMSA I can proudly say that I am one of the anchors at NUMSA when it comes to strategic matters, I know that my name will be there or I will be involved as part of the Think Tank in contributing in whatever strategic matter that needs to

be dealt with. And basically this is how I am, this is who I am and I a person who listens mostly, which assists me, I am patient, I listen to comrades, I don't rush to respond before I give them the space to talk and I think that's what also made me to be able to resolve the tensions that you were asking me about, ..(unclear) national congress which elected me but I then, my attitude was that before anything else, my priority was to unite the region because I knew that if I failed to unite a region I would have failed the NUM and amongst other things was to make sure that the regional leadership which is the ROP is firstly united itself so that when you go to the RSC you will be able to unite the RSC as a collective and it cascades down to locals. And I think we did that successfully even though it was a process but we did that successfully, because of passion and listening to comrades and also exposing the comrades because you sit with comrades in structures but our backgrounds are different. Others find themselves sitting in the structure for the first time, and for that you need to make sure that over time you also educate them in the course of dealing with the dynamics that we are confronted with as an organisation, as an individual leader, as a collective leadership which we have done successfully. And I think that has also made us to be re-elected uncontested in the last regional congress because comrades could identify improvement and could identify the level of unity that was build within the organisation which we continue to do, and I think that it's one of the weapons that we have focussed on. So briefly I think those are ..., then I continue to sit in the CEC, I continue to sit in the NEC, I continue to sit in the trust which is the highest body ..(unclear) of NUMSA, I sit as a board member in the Trust which also indicates the actual trust of the union in me as a leader. So those are the .., so that's the brief. Of course I am married with one child and I don't believe I will get another one, I think I'm happy with the one I have I love him, I will love him so much. So I fear that if I get another one I will be unable to split the love. I am not sure how others who have more than 6 how do they do it, that's my fear.

I must say also I'm a simple person, I'm an outgoing person, I've got a lot of friends even most of them are not even activists, what I like about them is that they're able to engage with issues across the board and at some stage I become challenged and I think it's good for me because it makes me to actually understand the realities

because should I spend most of my time only within the ranks I will not be able to understand what is taking place outside the structures. So this exposes me to the realities so that we understand - the movement is confronted with in terms of realities, in terms of how people look at ourselves. I grew up in that environment, with the tradition of .., so that you don't hate people on the basis of their descending views but you give yourself time to explain some of the things that they might be missing about our movement and the broader objective of the ..(unclear) and our ideological stance in terms of our own communist ideology that we continue to advance. I mean there was a challenge on why do you want to nationalise and they will still representing the capitalist of the world, I think that's what I enjoy about sitting with them because I then find time to explain to them and the more I explain to them it means they will also be explaining to other people who might be misunderstanding. Most of the time people seem to be taking what the media says and what the spectator says rather than getting deeper into what we stand for as the movement.

Facilitator: Just to go back, you mentioned the fact that you came from a religious family and now you are involved in politics? What was the position of your parents about that?

Respondent: It was difficult at that time especially when I was still at school. Remember you are child, I'm a boy in the family, your parents want you to do this and that and you want to go to politics. They want you to go to church, at that time you want to attend a branch meeting of the ANC or want to attend a meeting of COSAS. I remember at some point my father was threatening me, he wanted to beat me just because he won't get me to go to church on one of the Sundays but I knew that he was not going to beat me because he had never beaten me before and I've always respected him without him beating me. But the point was that I had to clarify to him and say this is why I should be going. And at times we watching TV, the news, we will have serious different views, especially at the time when there was violence, there were a lot of talk shows, so we would differ seriously on those issues. And also including the bible itself, we would argue a lot about the bible and I came

to a point where I said I am not convinced about the bible, I am not convinced why must I go to church if I am not convinced that what is written in the bible is what I should be following. But this has not been a good situation. But what I can tell you is through my life I've never had any conflict or fight with my parents, we've always respected them. You can imagine some people will say we are not in this talking mood, I've never experienced such a thing, they've always been my parents, they accepted me as I am but notwithstanding that they still have a hope that one day I will come to church and be full time in church. And I think I understand their position, they are leaders of a church, they will want their kids to be exemplary, they would want their kid to be seen and so forth, but unfortunately life is something else. Ja it was never an easy thing but I think if such situations comes and you continue to respect whilst you make a point politely and patiently I think it assists a lot.

Facilitator: And you mentioned that you were involved in Kwa-Mashu COSAS activities, but you don't come from Kwa-Mashu how did that happen?

Respondent: How does it happen that I become one of the leaders of the Kwa-Mashu, these townships are closer to each other and you would have a student who reside in Kwa-Mashu attending school at Ntuzuma and vice versa, Inanda vice versa and we happen to be experiencing the same or similar situations in terms of the challenges that confronted us, political challenges confronting the students at the time. You remember there were agents, Sinyoras, those Sinyoras were the same Sinyoras that would go and attack students in Kwa-Mashu, same Sinyoras that would go and attack students at Inanda, same Sinyoras that would go to Ntuzuma. And also in terms of the IFP warlons, which was also the same IFP warlons that used to attack all of us and at the time you remember that there was a decision, they called us to say there shouldn't be a student who wears a uniform of a particular school. So we ended up wearing the same school uniform which was grey and white for boys and black and white for girls. And therefore when they attack us they would attack everyone. And also what we also understood was that the struggle was not a struggle for where you are residing or where you are schooling, but it was a national struggle, it was about the national liberation movement and we needed to

join forces and make sure that in terms of the campaigns, in terms of mobilisation, whether you mobilise the students or whether you mobilise a society it should be about a co-ordinated effort so that you are able to gather the numbers at one point to be able to advance on ..(unclear) matters we were dealing with. So we would travel from one school to another and also the same thing that when we wanted other schools to join us when we maybe commence a particular campaign we will have to go from one school to another and one school to another to do that. And as we do that we then get to be known by other comrades from other schools and we then saw a need to say .., so that we are able to defend ourselves, we need to have .., and so that we are able to contain all SRC's because SRC's were really a fundamental pillar of the student movement. So in that sense we needed a centre that can actually co-ordinate all activities of SRC's and we build that Kwa-Mashu SRC and that's where we got elected.

Facilitator: But what were your future plans after Matric did you intend to go straight to the unions or you had other plans in mind?

Respondent: I want to tell you one never thought of going anywhere, why I've always thought my future is within the movement, but I've never thought of the unions, I was just thinking about the ANC because at the time the ANC was closer to me and I was working as COSAS leader which makes to be based in the ANC offices and so forth, because I felt that .., even today I always say to people, even to my friends, that I was so lucky that immediately I found something that I'm passionate about unlike other people who just do the work for the sake of getting a cheque at the end of the month. And among things I was never an excellent student at school. So I have been a hard worker all the time and when I found my passion I said this is where I think I belong because this is what I do best, so that's why I'm here. So I think that ..,so on the question of unions, I think at the level of SASCO that's when I then realised that unions were the way to go in terms of grooming myself as a person but I was just thinking how was I going to do that before I could get employed because ..(unclear) on which I could be an employee somewhere and become a shop steward and then I can grow from there which it did not. So when

the opportunity presented itself, because I saw a .., (interruption – noise from outside). When I was told about the adverts, that there were adverts, there's a comrade called Jomo Khoza who then said why don't you apply. I said but do you think they will employ me, he said no apply, try your luck. So I tried my luck. So basically I think it came at the right time where really I was thinking what is it I was going to be doing and I found myself being full time working for the movement. The opportunity presented itself at the time whilst I was still struggling in my mind how was I going to do that because at the time I was from Pretoria as a general secretary of SACSA, back into Durban, trying to re-organise myself in the province and so forth, so it came at the right time.

Facilitator: And in POPCRU, well there isn't much that we know about POPCRU other than what we see on TV. From the perspective of the unions what is it that the members of POPCRU are faced with which we are not aware of as the public?

Respondent: I think at the time, I might not necessarily know now, but at the time POPCRU members were really confronted with the challenge of promotions. Where promotion .., there was no clear criteria even though it was there in black and white, but when it comes to implementation of promotions certain officers would simply select some individuals and give them promotions and others you would find that .., and those you will find that they've got lesser service as compared to the others, and others have got longer services you find that they are still stuck on the same ranks which was frustrating most of them because it meant that in terms of their career pathing it presented a challenge. And I should think that also at the time, there were serious issues in terms of a number of policies were supposed to be amended in terms of .., there were safety regulations that were there so that they are in compliant with the democratic society which also frustrated them at the time. And also both your Correctional Services and police they were down grading of the benefits that they used to enjoy in the past. For instance if you look at the Correctional Services they used to have guaranteed overtime, and out of those guaranteed overtime they will earn the amount of money that they will even say maybe buy cars through the money they generated out of overtime. Others were

able to pay their bonds with the money generated by overtime. When the government cuts the guaranteed overtime, it meant that their lives were going back, were reversed in a way because the money that they used to pay the instalment for the car is no longer there, so they must find other ways of maintaining the cars and their bonds. And then the question of the SAPS amongst other things, was the question of transport. They were guaranteed that they will be collected from their homes with the government transport and be taken back after work. All of those privileges were cut. The question of medical aid, in terms of the contribution they used to have a free medical aid, thereafter the contributions were now increasing which also was imposing serious challenges on them. There are a number of issues which really as changes were brought they seemed not to be the changes that will actually improve their lives, but it was changes that downgraded their lives which posed a serious challenge in POPCRU itself as an organisation as to how are they supposed to deal with such issues at the time where we thought that this is our comrade who are now in government they will then improve the conditions instead of downgrading the work conditions.

Facilitator: And how did the union deal with that one, because members lost their benefits, medical etc.?

Respondent: The union was very strong at that time in dealing with those issues. You will remember that the union at some stage took some marches on the street and even there were ..., the union was criticised that why police would be allowed to march, and so forth, it was ..., the union found itself in the middle that society could not understand that police will have to take the street. On the other side the members will also be losing hope in their leadership whilst we've got our leadership but we are losing these things, forgetting the dynamics that were existing at the time, that the union was sitting in the negotiating forums, dealing with, defending those issues, but the problem was that the government at the time was really introducing those changes regardless of what the leadership of the union was raising at that time. So it was the test of time for POPCRU at the time.

Facilitator: One of the other things like thinking that POPCRU is more like a different sector here, people involved, the prisoners, or the criminals in distress, an element of counselling from the side of POPCRU, was it ever considered for its members?

Respondent: Ja POPCRU did raise those issues especially at the time where there was high levels of police killings, which really affected most of the police personnel at the time and which resulted at some stage police also committing suicides. So the casualties at some stage of their family members and so forth and so forth. That was also one of the critical issues which were raised and indeed the government responded. There were facilities that were put in place even though they are not that much adequate but there were measures put in place in terms of members were able to access such a service, so that they are able to deal with those issues. Because really it was frightening because even within POPCRU itself, you would have found some comrades getting to be physical to each other on the basis of the descending views which when you look at it deeper you could see that it's not only about the issues at hand at that particular moment, but it was drawn from that kind of daily experience that they found themselves having to witness the killings of members of the society and at the same time defending themselves from the attacker and at the same time their fellow police colleagues getting killed whilst on the line of duty together with them which really posed at some stage also their families not being happy about them to continue being police because families would also develop fear and they will .., and you find that you don't have a choice because you also want to earn a living at the same time. So there were those difficult dynamics that contributed in their state of impatience, some of them and that's why POPCRU at the time also made an emphasis on the question of professional counselling having to be in house at the SAPS so that they continue to provide the service.

Facilitator: And the working conditions for POPCRU members, police and prison warders is there anything that can be done about that, or are they on their own nothing can be done?

Respondent: There are lots of things that can be done. For instance the question of ensuring that their rate of pay, their salary scales will have to be improved because if you've got a police that cannot afford a bond of a decent house then it means that that person will not be able to be more focussed. You've got a police that is deeply indebted it means that you are running a risk because this person at the same time, the kind of work that he is doing, the nature of the work that he is doing frustrates him and if you think that the other party ..(unclear) on the basis that he cannot provide basic for his/her family then it does have a direct impact on the society, that when they are supposed to attend to criminals they will then think twice because of all of those issues. And because you remember in the past they used to live in hostels, they were not called hostels but they were called barracks, but with this democratic government they did away with barracks, people will have to be given an opportunity to spend time with their families. That on it's own it's progressive, but there must be assistance towards, you cannot just be chased away from the barracks and not get particular assistance to ensure that they acquire decent houses for their families. The other part is the question of ensuring that it shouldn't be a bigger number of police who do not stay with their families because there is also a problem when they migrate, it has to be a reasonable number, it has to be a systematic way of doing that because the more they are far from their families it also does contribute to a number of issues that result in them being maybe not being able to properly perform their work or end up committing suicide.

Facilitator: Why did you leave this sector, were you tired of POPCRU when you left?

Respondent: No I was not tired of POPCRU. The point is, as I indicated earlier on, I realised that public sector and manufacturing sector unions are different. And if I can tell you, it is difficult to be in the manufacturing union as compared to the public sector especially because when you represent the public sector unions, nowadays particularly ourselves, that you sit with your own comrades on the other side of the table and they're able to understand some of the language that you speak and when you also come and want to meet with them they know that they have to meet with you ..., if you raise a particular demand, even if you don't actually get the

actual demand, but there's that maturity in educating you unlike in the manufacturing, you go to a company you find that it has got ..., maybe it's a family business, when you get there they say "who are you we don't want to talk to you" then we have to find ways. People are employed through labour broker. You must always try and recruit and they are scared because they will be dismissed the following day, you mobilise them, immediately they are targeted they are dismissed, you are back to square one. You must build confidence to those who are remaining and so forth and as I've said you are confronted with capital every day, so it's about brining capitalist there, it defends it's interest everyday at the point of production. So that on it's own presents a difficult in your daily duties and so forth, whether as an organiser or as regional secretariat of the union in the manufacturing units. So it's quite different and for me I think that I took a correct decision because I get challenged everyday, whether by the workers themselves or by the employers which I think for me makes me to actually grow and it bids very high level of confidence in me as a person because when I look back I find myself having being tested in a number of ways, on daily basis, whoever I meet he challenges me in different ways. And in that ..., it ..., also it's about contributing toward ensuring that we continue to advance class politics because I think also that also ..., but also I've realised that manufacturing unions are the champions of the class politics which is fundamental if we were to advance our own plight of the working class because I think of a time people tend to forget that our struggle is about class and if you are here, you are reminded every time, capital reminds you by the things that they do to you, you realise that indeed you are living in a class society and therefore if you want to achieve a classless society we needed to wage a number of campaigns that could actually pursue that kind of an agenda – in contra with capital or on daily basis so that at the end we achieve that classless society which is advanced by all of us in the movement.

Facilitator: Any downside of working for POPCRU?

Respondent: I don't remember any downside, as I said it was my first employment with the union I regard it as a union that has taught me the basics of unionism and I

think that for me I will always admire them for having contributed to what I am today.

Facilitator: When you took over as regional secretary of NUMSA were you able to ..., I mean you've never been a worker on the shop floor, were you able to bridge the gap between yourselves and the shop stewards of the region?

Respondent: I think I've done that and I must say that others had doubts solely because of that, to say but this fellow has never been on the shop floor, but I must say that I do have the experience in the shop floor. When I was in high school during school holidays I used for a company called Baileys in Pietermaritzburg, it was producing, it used to produce furniture. And I was working in a department called assembly department. So if it's June holidays I would go there, December holidays I would go there. That's when I got the experience of what does a factory look like, what are the dynamics, I used to sit in the canteen, I used to listen to the older people telling me some stories, they will tell me about a certain manager, this manager this and this and that. And I must say also again I was the youngest also at the time in that company but it was only during those days. So when I then became the regional secretary, some of the people would say but he does not know anything about the shop floor, factory, shop floor and so forth. I never responded to that. I've never shared that experience with them to say at some point I did work in a factory but what I always did was to produce the work, that's what I told myself that I must just produce the work as I continue producing the work that's how I'm going to build confidence in them, rather than telling them, responding because responding can just be a mere argument which will not take us anywhere. And I can tell you that for instance, during, in some of the companies where I really made most of the comrades to believe in me was when they embarked on illegal strikes and when they expect me to come and say go back to work. I would say comrade this is wrong and so forth, explain the law and so forth but more than that I become a leader to them to say but I think that your demand is justifiable, so let me talk to the employer. And I will be able to negotiate the demand whilst they are in the illegal strike, even if the employer says "look we will not negotiate whilst they are on

illegal strike, so they must go back to work then we talk" but most of my time I will be able to negotiate whilst they are in the illegal strike and they will get ..., we will secure an agreement and further to that I will also be able to either reduce the possible sanctions for them having embarked on an illegal strike or they will not be disciplined at all. So that kind of quality work is the one that made them to actually believe that indeed this is the person whom we can trust, that can take the region to another level. And I think that's what even today the comrades can identify that indeed we have taken the region to another level. We've taken NUMSA to another level.

Facilitator: And when you took over as a regional chair of NUMSA, what were the challenges, what needed to be done in this region?

Respondent: I think as a regional secretary when I took over (1) was the question of ensuring comrades understand firstly the organisation, it's culture, its objectives and the broader movement and further be able to understand that we are not just a gumboot's union, we are revolutionary union meaning that we must strike a balance between us, between our struggle, between the workplace struggle and the community struggles together with the gender struggles which I think was lacking at the time and in doing so it had to be a process in explaining all of those things, but also in bringing about some of the debate and the campaigns to make sure that we balance all of those issues and the other issue was about ensuring that, comrades don't only understand the sector where they come from but they should understand the sectors across NUMSA because of all it's sectors: engineering, motor sector, your auto etc., because if I come from the motor sector and I only understand issues from the motor sector it then compromises the principle of worker solidarity amongst ourselves. But if I understand what you are confronted with in another sector, I will then be able to be in solidarity with you. I think with that we also did very well.

And then the other thing that I set again was to make sure that we understand ourselves as comrades beyond the meeting, beyond the board room which also is quite critical because it then makes you to understand the different characters

amongst ourselves so that we are able to deal with the issues in a manner that focuses on the issue not on the person, so that your ball .., focus on the ball rather than focussing on the man. We should think that was a challenge and we have also managed to do that which resulted in stimulating debates because if you are now focussing on the ball, it challenges you to think and as you think you are able to debate rather than attacking an individual on the basis of descending views.

Facilitator: And of these different sectors of NUMSA, engineering, motor and others, which is the most challenging sector?

Respondent: The most challenging sector is the motor sector, on the basis that we've got petrol attendants in the motor sector. And you recruit them today and even when you recruit them is not easy, for instance is not easy to recruit them during the day because they are busy, cars are coming in and out and they must attend to those cars, they can't just stop, their bosses are here – they are shouting at them. So it means you must recruit them in the evening. By the time you come back they are dismissed he is now employed in another garage. So it means you must recruit him again because it's a different employer. And across the motor sector, ..(unclear) are earning less, their ..(unclear) are so low. As a result it means that as a union you always have to try and see how you improve their conditions which is not an easy thing to do. And the manner in which their main agreements, how it is regulated is also very difficult to some people because it talks to a number of work that is being done there and you have to understand it in terms of because .., especially when it comes to grading them, if you go to a ...(unclear) manufacturer, there are a lot of things that you have to understand so that even if the agent has not graded them properly, but as a leader you should be in a position or as a shop steward you should be in a position to understand, to see that or to notice that. So it's a very dynamic sector. So for me, is the number one sector that is complicated in NUMSA compared to other sectors.

Facilitator: And the working conditions in these different sectors, are you satisfied in the region?

Respondent: No we are not satisfied, especially because employers continue to undermine some of the agreements that we have signed with them. They continue to ..., not taking the workers serious. For instance if you talk to the issue of Employment Equity, employers are not keen addressing employment equity. You find that there are employment equity committees but there is no work that is being done, the status quo continues to reflect in these companies. The question of the skills development again it's a serious challenge to a point that they only focus on training people on the forklift and HIV and Aids, they don't put them into a clear programme that can talk to the succession of the company itself, so that you see some of the comrades growing from the shop floor and heading those companies, which we think is critical for us if we were to achieve what we want to achieve as a country in terms of the economic transformation.

And the question of the disciplinary proceedings, also another part. Most of the employers continues to apply discipline as a punitive measure rather than as a corrective measure, where even at some point the chairperson of the internal disciplinary hearing he comes with a mandate to dismiss before he could even hear the case. He does not become impartial which we think is also incorrect. The question of being impatient from the side of the employers that whenever workers, for instance they will go into a protected strike, then what they will do is they will want to pick up some things to use against them so that they end up dismissing them which we think is also things that we look at as a challenge confronting us and confronting these sectors. So as NUMSA we continue to be unhappy with some of those issues.

And then of course on the question of the wages, again if you look at these companies, they generate a lot of money ..., if you look at their social surplus it amounts to millions and billions of money but when it comes to sharing they don't

share that social surplus with the workers who have produced that social surplus but they share it only amongst themselves. They give to the shareholders as a form of dividends amounting to millions of rands and give it to managers, senior managers, directors and so forth as the performance bonuses, even if the company is not doing well they will still be giving the performance bonuses, and you wonder why, whereas when workers demand a reasonable 15% annual increase they are not given such an increase, which we think that one on its own poses a challenge because a number of our members do not have decent housing and companies are not providing any subsidy for that. A number of our members do not have medical aid, the company do not provide any subsidy for that and that on its own is a challenge to us, it is a challenge to these sectors because it means that you've got the society and you continue to have a society that is not able to improve it's livelihood. It means that even the future, for instance they continue now, what also the employers are doing. They continue a large number of employees through labour brokers or contract work. And those people will not be able to buy even the current weather one room or four roomed house meaning that they will still be staying at home with their parents, with their siblings and so forth and forth. Then the society that we are building is not the society that we anticipated, it's not a healthy society, or it simply means that you do not have a conducive environment to make sure that our kids they grow under a particular guidance because once all of you are here and no one is seen to be .., everyone has got an authority because once all of you are old and you still stay at home with the kids, it means all of you .., everyone takes a decision, everyone has got authority and it confuses children. And also die and it creates some conflicts amongst family members and that on its own results in a very bad growing experience for the children whereas you expect them to be responsible parents in future and they will not be able to do that if they've not been able to acquire the societal values which are accepted and which has always been accepted in the society for them to be able to transfer it to their own future kids.

Facilitator: Talking about labour brokers, do you think you gonna win this one, as NUMSA, as COSATU?

Respondent: Yes we are optimistic that we are going to win it. We have realised at some point that there's been a gap ..., we've been staggered in terms of fighting against labour brokers. So we managed to advance in the last COSATU National Congress meaning that we are going to now re-start the fight and confront the labour brokers. But another thing which is a challenge is our own comrade whom we have deployed in parliament who are party to the ownership of the labour brokers which we think also it renders our campaigns weak because they are the same people who are supposed to deal with it, who supposed to take a decision at the level of parliament and so forth. That's why we shall continue to fight because when we fight we shouldn't be apologetic about it, we shouldn't be thinking that we are fighting the ANC, we are not fighting the ANC but we are fighting the individuals who are there, who are deployed who are not doing their work, who have betrayed the working class. It's about the betrayal of the working class because you cannot accept a situation where you are a member of parliament coming from the same people who have been crying about the slavery under the labour brokers but yet you continue failing to do away with labour broking. So that's why we have said as NUMSA this is a class war and if it is a class war we shouldn't be waiting for anyone whether ..., whoever, whether it's a minister or a president, we shouldn't be waiting for everyone to fight this battle but it must be fought by ourselves on behalf of ourselves, so that we remain ..(unclear).

Facilitator: The issue of nationalisation, what's NUMSA's position, or does it not have a position on that?

Respondent: We have a clear position on nationalisation and we are drawing it from far because you know, you know the mistake that people do is they call for nationalisation as ANC ..., it's not an ANC call. It has been the COSATU call, it has been the SACP call, it's what Carl Marx has taught us and as NUMSA clearly we are unapologetic again about that. We want the country to nationalise the commanding heart of the economy so that it benefits its citizens. And we have done serious studies on these things, for instance in the mining industry on its own, in the last financial year it has generated R160 billion as a surplus. And we have then

said if they were to provide RDP houses at the value of R50 000 it means that we could have built about 3 million houses. Now that kind of money is in the hands of the few whereas it has a result of our natural resources. You continue to have our raw material being taken outside, and it comes back for consumption and it comes at a very high price whereas we should ensure that there's a beneficiation in all of those natural resources so that we are able to create jobs for our own people. You continue to have, for instance we've got metal which trades through the ..(unclear) parity pricing which we think is ridiculous because it cannot be that now we buy our skill in dollars as a country and the next thing it's to be expensive on us, it makes cars to be expensive, and any other things that is manufactured through the metal. So these are the thing which are simple examples which justifies why we should be nationalising. Our country continues to be unable to redistribute the land on the basis that it cannot afford. So why can't we nationalise so that we get the money to do that - but at the same token we have also said, the land distribution should not be at market value because indeed the history tells itself that when people took it they took at a market value at the time and the country without its land that country has no future because we will not be able to use the same land to feed its nation.

Facilitator: In terms of safety in this industry, the metal industry, are you satisfied?

Respondent: We are not I think it's one aspect that I omitted. It is a serious matter where, because at times we find that some of the workers are made to work with a very dangerous chemicals without proper protective clothing which we think is a matter that needs to be looked at. Some of the workers are made to work in very unbecoming conditions whereas at the same time they are expected to produce the work and these things tends to .., even been fair to buy the department of labour, the inspectors have been failing us on this question. In some instances even the ablution facilities are not in a state where they respect the dignity of those workers. Even if you look at the mere canteen you find that the canteen is so dirty, or the changing rooms are so dirty that they possess some very serious hygienic challenges and in some instances they are made to work with dangerous machines, and for instance if there's something or if a machine is stuck they forced to put their

life in danger whereas the company should have done something about it. So it is a matter that remains a challenge to all of us. And in actual fact NUMSA National Congress is one of the issues that it has really looked at and it took some serious decisions and we believe that even at the level of the Department of labour, there is a lack of expertise on that front and there is a leg to enforce the regulations on that front and which we think is quite critical that we look after our members, after our employees but government will have to assist us whilst also helping ourselves, we will have to beef up our capacity as the unions so that we've got more people, a bigger number of employees who've got expertise who can also deal with those because I think that also even from our part, it's an issue that in previous years we have not been keen or prioritising, given that it's one of the present priority challenges that we should be looking at.

Facilitator: Retrenchments, labour brokers and other problems have they reduced your membership?

Respondent: I must say that the retrenchment especially during the global recession, even now there is a global recession, but when it was very high 2007/8/9 we saw our membership declining as a result of the massive retrenchments, retrenchment that you could not stop even though we took people for re-skilling and so forth but the fact of the matter is that people were getting retrenched. The numbers did decline but I must say that we have recovered from that because whilst they retrench others were getting employed but also you still got unorganised workers, workers who have not joined the union which we have recruited and NUMSA membership has grown even more than the figure that it used to at that time, before the global recession and we continue to grow, I mean as ..., I remember when I became the RS we had about ..., I we had about 32 000 membership if I am not mistaken, today we are talking about ..., the captured membership which is about 52 000, so it must tell you that we have grown ourselves, I'm just making an example about this region alone. But we had to devise some strategy to do that, it was an automatic growth, we had to devise some means with, we had to invest effort and resources to do so.

Facilitator: So will you still be financially viable over the next 200 years?

Respondent: Ja NUMSA has got reserves, NUMSA continues to grow, so NUMSA is a very breathing and alive somebody, there are no threats as we speak, we continue to expand our staff complement, we are creating new positions which have never been there in the past, we continue to improve our offices, we continue to add more campaigns and you know that campaigns need a lot of money, so indeed we are .., and even if you look at May Days in NUMSA leads in terms of contributing in terms of resources and so forth.

Facilitator: Your strikes the last few years have they been successful?

Respondent: Yes strikes of NUMSA have been successful, I must say we have been very much successful, for instance we have always managed to secure a reasonable percentage for our members. And I think we are leading in terms of security a double digit in terms of the annual increases and also we have also managed to put on the negotiating table the fight against labour brokers hence you will find that some of our agreements have got a phase out process of labour brokers and also if you look at the manner in which we have been mobilising, if NUMSA goes on the street, and some comrades will ask you whether have you been joined by other affiliates of COSATU, whereas you will be talking maybe only about one sector of NUMSA because we have never combined the sectors. So because numbers are so important on the street for you to demonstrate to the employer that indeed what we are putting on the table has got an ownership of the workers themselves and we think that on it's own has actually made us to be able to seal the quality of agreements that we've sealed, and we seem to .., and one seek to improve from the current agreement so that we secure more benefit for our own members.

Facilitator: Are there problems that you at this particular region that you regard as unique and only for the Durban region?

Respondent: I think obviously you will always have the unique challenges, that would differ from one region to another, that's given, and I think one of those is that the region is vast, a vast region and it becomes so difficult to reach our members more often as we would have expected, so it does pose some serious challenges. And in NUMSA we've got weekly shop steward councils at a local level in our local offices and you find that in some of the areas we are unable to do that. We then .. by the time we attend to our members, the damage would have been huge whereas if they were able to meet on weekly basis we would have managed to attend to those issues as quickly as possible, which we think those are some of the challenges that unique in KZN, but also given the history of some of these smaller towns, employers in smaller towns they still live in the past and they don't want the union at all. They don't realise that the presence of the union actually co-ordinate the workers themselves. So if you go to these small towns you will find a serious resistance from the side of the employers which is unique if you were to compare with some of the regions which does not have those smaller towns or does not have semi-rural areas.

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

Respondent: No I think for now I'm fine, unless you will call and check if I thought of anything else.

Facilitator: Any closing word?

Respondent: I think one is, NUMSA remains the hope of everyone in the country, especially because we continue to remind everyone about class politics, and it continues to challenge everyone and we think that by so doing others have chosen not to understand us deliberately and we challenge the capital, we challenge our liberation movement, we challenge SACP itself because we believe that the SACP belongs to the working class and that the minute we feel that it does not do what we expect it to do we challenge them. We challenge ourselves. In NUMSA we bring extreme left, we bring rightwing, in some of the meetings so that they can challenge so that whatever we come up with on our own in our own structured meetings we would have considered some other views and some of the realities and so forth. We continue to think and think very hard and that on its own makes us to be more committed to our own struggle and continues to remind us of our plight as the working class and within that on its own NUMSA indeed remains the hope of everyone in the society.

Facilitator: Thanks for your time

Respondent: Ngiya bonga kakhulu baba.

END

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