

## **Manne Thebe**

Facilitator: This is an interview with Manne Thebe we are in Kimberley, the date is 10 October 2011, interview is done by Brown Maaba. Thank you very much for your time. We can speak Sesotho or English whatever you are comfortable with. Kindly give me a background as to where you born, how you were raised, schooling issues and how you ended up in the world of unions or politics.

Respondent: I was born on 14 March 1959 and I was born and bred in Kimberley, Galeshewe. For me is that I grew up in Galeshewe but I was actually nurtured by the community, nurtured in the sense that every person who met me, and I'm troublesome was able to tell me what is right and what is wrong. So I can't say that I was only groomed by my parents, I usually tell people that I was groomed by Galeshewe, the whole community. The unfortunate part is that I was too short to attend school, in those days they didn't look at the years, they looked at the height, so I started schooling at the age of 9 at Sol Plaatjie Lower Primary School, that's where I attended school. What happened is that I went to school but there is this one thing which I usually don't forget, that when I was at school, I entered a competition and this competition was supposed to colour a person who was milking a cow and I was doing Standard 2 by then. I was called at the assembly to say that look you are the winner of the competition of colouring a person who is milking the cow and colouring the cow, but I didn't want to accept the thing which was given to me because I said to them for me it's not fair, that people who also coloured the cow and the person who is milking didn't get anything, I am the only one who is getting that then I started crying. Because for me I didn't agree that people must be told not to be part of this, which I was given a present, if I was given I thought that all of us should have been given presents because all of us took the initiative to do something, made a contribution towards the competition. I couldn't have been the winner if there was no competitors and I believed that the competitors must also receive something. I don't know why did I think like that, that's what happened.

Then I went to the higher primary, at the higher primary, I wasn't troublesome, but you see when you grew up you grew up into groups and what happened is that at this stage it was in the 1970s, 1976 now and we usually had to, if we knock off from school then we go to burn tyres, throw stones, whatever we believed wasn't ours was damaged, and that was the period of the 1976, I was in Standard 5 in 1976. So the fortunate part is I wasn't arrested, so I continued with my schooling up until Form 1 in Sol Plaatjie Higher Primary now, lower primary ended at Standard 2 and Sol Plaatjie Higher Primary started at Standard 3 and up until Form 1, because I did Standard 6 and then the others, then went to St Bonifas, which is in Galeshewe but on the other side of the township in West End. When I arrived at St. Bonifas, we were not allowed to play certain sports, I was a javelin thrower at school and I was always the winner when it came to competitions. I was throwing javelin and I was also throwing short put, those were the two things which I did but I wasn't successful in throwing the short put, but I was successful in throwing the javelin and that's why they call me .., I must be from the Zulu clan, that's why I can throw the javelin, that's what happened, because the other schools they .., usually when I come they knew I am going to be number one when I throw the javelin, but in St Bonifas we didn't have that, so I didn't throw javelin, I didn't throw short put. They wanted us to play volleyball, but I didn't see volleyball as my kind of sport. I preferred then to go and play soccer. By that we had the boys and girls departments separately. So from the 1980s we were attending the boy's department.

I went from that standard up until, I recall when I reached Standard 9, JC, junior certificate, my classmates used to say because you are not in the A class you are in the B class, then you must be the one's who's going to get a C. They said you must see to it that you get the C. But I said you can't tell me what to do because all of us are supposed to be in the same class, all of us need to work harder than the A class because the A class seemed to be the brighter ones. So we are in the B class. But the Almighty blessed me I did get a C.

I went to Standard 9 which was Form 4 then, then I went to Standard 10 which was Form 5, but trouble started in Standard 10. What happened is that at St Bonifas is a

Catholic school, and they said to us when we were in Form 5, Standard 10, saying that look the school doesn't have money and that was that period when the, I don't know what they called that thing ..(unclear) gold plait/diamond things. They said if we don't have money and the money of the school is depleted can't we sell that thing of the Pope. Then ..(unclear) Bless for me, Bless for me but we said no but we don't have the money and that time they were taking the money from Italy to Brazil, when we said they can sell that diamond and the gold whatever it is that thing. But we were told that is Bless for me. During the process we continued, I'm sure it was in the middle of the year then these young ones, who were in JC, they wrote the exams at the end of the year and they succeeded. But the unfortunate part is that they received E's and EE's and the principal of the school was saying this is not quality, they need quality, they need people who are getting D's and upwards, but we said they are your products, they went through the same things which we went through, so you can't dismiss them to say that they are not good product. Then we started not going to classes, the Standard 10s, then we were dismissed.

The unfortunate part is that my mum was alone, my father died in 1977, and in 1980 I was in Matric and I was dismissed from school in 1980 and my mum was a domestic worker. Those were the difficult times. And then 1981 we were told to go back to school, but we didn't go to school because .., you go to school in the morning and then 9 o'clock you are told to leave, so I didn't succeed, I didn't get my Matric in 1981, because I was chased away, I was dismissed so I accepted that, hard luck.

In 1983 I still remember one old man came to my mum's place and the old man said they are looking for a person at the garage, the name was John Rowland Motors, and he asked me if I'm prepared. I said it's fine I can go to John Rowland Motors, then I was hired as a stock clerk working in the parts department. During that period I was elected as a shop steward, 1983 for NUMSA. And then after the elections of NUMSA, I grew in NUMSA and was elected as Educator/Co-ordinator in the local of Kimberley as a shop steward. While I was still the local co-ordinator on education, I was then elected as a Regional Treasurer of NUMSA which gave me the opportunity of attending the Central Committee of NUMSA. So I went on and because I was a

bit disturbed to say that I'm unionist but I didn't have Standard 10, then I went back to school, nigh school. What was strange, I didn't have an option to attend full time and I wanted to complete my Matric within a year. Then I was advised by the Northern Cape Technical College and then the Moremogolo Technical College, at Moremogolo I was doing Accounting and I was doing computer and then at Northern Cape I was doing English First Language, Afrikaans, Business Economics, Mercantile Law. Those were the subjects which were recommended to me to have a Matric. So when I grew up and did this I received a certificate – they called it Commercial Matric.

I continued working for John Rowland, continued being a member of NUMSA, the unfortunate part, in 1996, the company then, John Rowland Motors closed but then it was Roderick Nissan. When it closed it was Roderick Nissan, it was no more John Rowland Motors in 1996. So in 1996 while I was still at home, I was approached by, Mate Ndubula, he was the administrator for COSATU. He told me they are looking for an organiser at South African Municipal Worker's Union, that was in 1996. So I applied for the post and I was interviewed in 1996 but there were problems, after the interview I wasn't told whether I succeeded or not because the then secretary of the organisation wanted his friend to be the organiser but he didn't succeed because the then president of SAMWU, I forgot his name, he was staying in Port Elizabeth from SAMWU. The president called to say because of the results of the panel of the person who interviewed, I must be the one who is going to be hired. So I was hired on 15 April 1996 by SAMWU. So I worked for SAMWU as an organiser up until 2004. Then the organisation decided to reshuffle and then I was told to take over the part of education. So I became the educator for SAMWU in 2004 and worked as an educator for SAMWU from that period up until 2009 July. 2009 July I applied for a post at Head Office of SAMWU as a skills development officer, I didn't succeed. And then there was also an application for a post of educator/organiser for COSATU, that is in 2009 July, I was interviewed and I was informed at the end of July that I was the preferred candidate to be hired as the educator/organiser for COSATU. So I started working for COSATU as an educator/organiser on 1 September 2009 up until today.

I haven't worked for any .., you see I've been in the union for .., I've been shop steward, going on and on up until then.

On my political side, I am still a member of the South African Communist Party. I joined the SACP in 1990 and then after the unbanning of the party, during that period, we, myself and Mzambo, I forgot his name, he was the chairperson and then I was elected as the Treasurer again in the SACP of the province. But at that time we were only seen as a committee which was facilitating the launch of the party in the province, and was mostly accessed by a guy from NUM, I just forgot his name he is now based in Gauteng. I was also assisted by Godfrey Olifant and Manne Dipico, those were the guys who guided me on what I needed to do as a member of the Communist Party. I didn't continue being active in the Communist Party, I only served my term as a Treasurer but I'm still a member of the party.

The other parties that I a member of is, I joined the African National Congress, I wasn't active as I've been active in the Communist Party because there were ways where I didn't see members of the ANC operate because we were not informed of the meetings and I just act when I am called upon during elections, during activities of the ANC, I will always be called to assist at the Provincial Office of the ANC, as a member of the Mobilisation Team, usually I'm in that thing. I also assist in training counsellors, because as a trainer I facilitate the trainings of the councillors of the African National Congress. Those are the things which I'm doing, I'm not physically present in the branches, but I'm physically present in areas where my skills are needed of the African National Congress.

Facilitator: Just to go back. You dropped out of school in 1980, your dad had passed on, your mother a domestic worker. How did that affect her?

Respondent: yes. One needs to be honest, we were fortunate to have a very strict father because my father taught us that if you want to know what is family, family is

this unit in the house, this is family and each of you need to look after each other. Fortunately we were not expensive, we didn't demand anything from my mother, it depended on what she had and I wasn't that materialistic in many ways. So we succeeded being a unit going through that process. When I passed my JC certificate, my father used to say I would like you to be a teacher. I then requested my brother, the elder one, Kealeboga Thebe to say that can't you take me to Betswana Training College in Taung to be a teacher because I don't know my father might have seen something in me to be a teacher. But he didn't agree he said he doesn't have the money to take me to the training, to be a teacher because you're drinking too much. So I didn't go to the training centre to be a teacher. So I continued instead with my schooling.

So fortunately for us we grew up in a very knit family which was difficult but the difficulty we didn't feel because we were very knit. People used to look at us as a very strange family because there was no father, they thought of us as being promatic??, because there was no father, the mother was there and the others were always there, they didn't see what they saw in their families. One old man once came to me and said your family is very strange because you're not fighting among yourselves, my family is fighting amongst themselves, and you don't have a father, you only have your mother, but you're not fighting. But I said I'm not sure what is it that we need to fight over, because for us we are just my mother's children and we need to see how we survive in this difficult times, with my mum having her own problems as a domestic worker and ourselves, it was going to be very difficult for her to cope. But I lost my mum in 1999. I was already matured enough, I was 40 and I'm now 52 as I'm sitting here. So those times were difficult but we succeeded as a knit family fortunately.

Facilitator: and your first job was in 1983?

Respondent: yes that was my first job at Rowland Motors

Facilitator: your impression of the workplace this is the early 1980s?

Respondent: Look in my situation I was seen to be the troublemaker at work, because the manager felt that I was always seeing to it, when there is activities like ., we usually wore black on 21 March and go to work, but on June 16, we didn't go to work. The 1<sup>st</sup> of May we didn't go to work, that was in the 1980s because we believed that the 21<sup>st</sup> of March should have been a holiday, the 16<sup>th</sup> of June should have been a holiday, the 1<sup>st</sup> of May should have been a holiday. And those were the problems I was charged with. I was charged for actually disturbing the workplace. But these things happened because we believe that those should have been the holidays which could have assisted us as workers in that period. And when it comes to promotion I was not promoted because the manager said that I was always out of the workplace, they didn't see why I need to be promoted. One of my colleagues were promoted to be a sales manager. I was stuck in the stores as a storeman. So for me I just accepted to say that I believe that the rights of the workers must be defended and for me as a worker I must see to it, if they elect me I must be exemplary. I didn't smoke, I didn't drink up until now I don't smoke, I don't drink. So I didn't just stay at home for nothing, so they can charge me and those charges were lying there for a year, every time they expire I continue again. So those were the problems they had with is that I wasn't problematic by not going to work, I wasn't problematic by not doing my work, I was problematic by assisting our members to have their rights. So those were the problems.

There were also the provident fund, you have a the black provident fund and the white provident fund, the Barlow Provident Fund, the money was contributed by the company and we were getting lesser than those who were in the Barlow Provident fund. So our fight also was that we want to be part of the Barlow Provident Fund because we are all Barlow Members at Roderick Nissan, so we didn't see the reason why can't we be members of the Barlow Provident Fund but we didn't succeed. We fought but we didn't succeed, I don't know whether it was the laws of their fund or what, deprived us to be in that section, but what was strange was that coloured people were in that same provident fund.

Facilitator: your political inspiration where did it come from at that time?

Respondent: When I was at school, I believed that people in the community saw that school as something which was ..., because we were called Communists, our lecturers were white and they were not from South Africa in the 1980s, so all those who attended school there, were seen to be Communists, with Communist thoughts and that was not the case. And in those areas one was seeing the different themes happening in the township. The other thing which actually assisted me is acting in the dramatisation of activities in the locality. I still remember the Bokala, he was the one who was doing this drama, but he was attending St James, and then we've got Spider Sebolai, the drama was *The Slave* and the other one, *Mahlabathini*, those were the dramas which actually developed me into seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, to see the difference between what is right and what is wrong, those were the issues which actually assisted me to go up in the process, and reading of the ... In the 1980s, Joseph Leeuw was arrested, and then I ran away to my aunt in Riverton, Riverton is somewhere 22 kilos from Kimberley, where you have your water purification scheme, where you have your water, where they purify water from the Vaal River to come to Kimberley. So I ran away to stay with my aunt. While I was there and he is arrested, we grew up together, he is my father's cousin's son, and I was informed that your brother is saying that you were together during the burning of houses of the detectives and other people whom are seen as informers. I was a bit a worried because I was saying to myself if they come and take me my family won't know what happened to me. So let me go back home so that if they come and arrest me at home, then my family will say he was arrested by a certain policeman or he was taken by a certain policeman. But when I came home he was released from being arrested so I don't know what happened because the others were arrested. We had our problems where 10 of them were arrested, I recall Manne Mokgwasi, Ben Fanie, Hlatswayo, Neville Motlabakwe, that list. You will get that list from those who were arrested. But most of us were .., in that period of the 1980s were Black Consciousness, Liberate Your Mind, those type of slogans, One Azanian One Nation, those were slogans that were used. So most of us were Black Consciousness, so those guys who went to jail were jailed for more than a decade.



So we were not arrested, one of my friends, I call him Tosh Tlhomelang, went to exile, I didn't believe in going out, I believed that the war is inside, he went outside but he didn't come back up until now we don't know what happened to him. I am not sure because I went to the family and said look I want to know what happened to Tosh, I was told by the family to say leave that thing out, it's something which we don't want to open up. It seems there are problems with what happened to Tosh and maybe the believe that if they open up it will be a can of worms, so they requested me not to continue pestering them, wanting to know where my friend is. Most of the time when we were supposed to go and burn houses at that time, I said to them I don't want to see myself among more than three people because I want to be arrested that it's either you, or you're only two, it's enough and myself, if the three of us are going to be arrested I would know who actually informed the police, but if we are 10 I won't be able to know who actually informed the police what we were doing because the place which we were using was one of the old age homes in Galeshewe, as you go into Galeshewe they call it Nyati Highway, there is an old age home where we used to go and do whatever we did, petrol bombs and other things. I said to them I don't agree, when they usually come to me at night to say we are going now to plan for bombing and burning, I said how many of you are there, they say it's a group of us, then I would say no, I wouldn't go, I would promise to pitch and not pitch because I didn't believe in mob psyche, I believed in a number of people.

Facilitator: Okay in general, as you guys were growing up, what is Sobukwe to the people for Galeshewe, what did he mean to you guys?

Respondent: I didn't know Prof. so well, I only know that he was a lawyer and Prof. was assisting those who were arrested and guiding those. I never visited Prof.'s house neither did I ever visit his home, even when he died in 1978 I think, I didn't go to this funeral because .. – you see the difference in the township is that, one was growing up, you have your Black Consciousness, you have your ..(unclear), you have your Communist, so there was this confusion of ideology. When you grew up you didn't know which wine to take, so that was the period of when Prof. was there.

We assisted the ones, let me explain also the other portion. We assisted paying the fees of those people who were arrested in the 1980s, while I was working I went to play for a band, to raise funds for those who were arrested and the Phoswa, I don't recall what it was called, maybe you can get the information of who the lawyer was. The money was raised on a weekly basis because the police saw us as a band, they didn't see us as a political band raising funds to pay for the funds of the lawyer. So what we did is we raised funds and paid the lawyer, Phosa or Phoswa something like that. So those were the things we did to try and assist where ever we can.

Facilitator: and your election as a shop steward in 1983 how did that come about, surely you were a youngster amongst older people?

Respondent: I'm not sure why they elected me, because for me then I was an introvert, I was an introvert because I came into a workplace and here were these elders and they ....., maybe they saw in me leadership qualities which I didn't see myself and among all those who were there, I was elected as a shop steward. I didn't ask them why they elected me because I was new in the company and they were there in the company. I was representing two garages, because it was John Roland Motors and Roderick and Cooke, two garages elected me as shop stewards. I don't know why but I was 23 when I started in 1983

Facilitator: and the challenges at that time being a NUMSA shop steward, still in the early 1980s?

Respondent: As I said, the problem was that .., it was during the apartheid era, as shop stewards we were seeing to be the trouble makers, and as shop stewards you had to find a way to survive in this jungle of being oppressed by the employer then, those were difficult times because you were oppressed if you go outside, and you were oppressed if you are in the workplace. So both areas you will see yourself as a

person who needs to always fight for whatever you need in life. So we had to do that, we had to fight our way out of the jungle of apartheid and oppression.

Facilitator: at that time, were the workers willing to join the union?

Respondent: those were the most militant times of unions, I say militant times because most members, even if they were afraid to join, but they participated in union activities because if you were joining any union you were dismissed at the workplace and we didn't know how to defend the dismissals as young ones. So those were the difficult times, where people wanted to join but people were prohibited to join because the apartheid and the employers then didn't give them the opportunity to be part of the union. But I believe those were the most militant times of unions because meetings were always packed, activities of the union were always packed, the marches were packed, the stay aways were supported. All those things were always successful compared to now. Now, I still remember what the old man Mandela said when we were liberated in 1994. He said when you approach problems of this government of mine, you must approach it the same way you approached the apartheid government. If you feel that our government is not doing what they are supposed to do, you must do the same, but unfortunately for us we felt that it seems as if now we are free, we don't have .., we are not going to have challenges because those are comrades in government who will be able to minimise the conflict in the workplace will be minimised, the challenges which we encountered and that didn't happen. And the marches now are not as successful as they used to be in the 1980s, even the strikes you need to force people out of their workplace to come and join the strike which is not good, because we believe that people need to see what we are fighting for and people need to see that there are those who are unemployed need to be employed, so we are fighting for those who are unemployed because we believe there is employment in the country. Because if we stop working overtime, and people are now crazy, people just want to work overtime. We say look for you to just get rid of overtime, let those who are not working work the overtime and then you work the normal time. Not now. I think we are too materialistic mostly and we find ourselves in this ..(unclear) of capitalism,

where we can't actually find our way out. So those are the problems we are having now. We want to enrich the rich, we are working overtime and we are working again our time and there is this thing which the nurses are doing, if they get their leave they are going to work somewhere else in the hospital. You need to rest but you're still moonlighting. So those are the things that tell me that it seems as if we are ..(unclear), we don't see ourselves as people who used to share things, who used to be one, who used to continue living but seem to be that all of us go steadily forward. I think maybe it's because we don't have the common enemy anymore. That's the problem and its very difficult for us to come collectively knowing that your aunt is a Mayor, your Ompie is a Treasurer of the town, your uncle is a Minister and you need to fight, and you are afraid to fight because you will be biting the hand that feeds you. So those are the challenges now. The approach for us to go forward is very difficult based on that, that people are afraid to fight their uncles even if their uncles are wrong, people are afraid to take up issues. Say for example your aunt is a Mayor but there is this service delivery problems within the township – people even if they want to get into something they are not getting into something wholeheartedly as we used to just go in in the 1980s, those are the difficulties, the common enemy is gone, but I still believe we still have a common enemy. We still have a common enemy because we've been bailing out banks with our money and people don't see that as a common enemy. In the process of people getting bonuses of more than R500 000 others getting bonuses of more than millions. As an individual ask yourself, Checkers, Ackermans and the others and Eskoms and the others, a person saying that he wants .., that guy who was dismissed by Eskom saying that he must be given R85 million, now you find yourself wondering what happened to us, why are we now greedy, becoming greedy because we never used to be greedy, we used to find our way out of this with the little we are having and we feed our families. Some of us who didn't go to university but we did get a bit of education, fortunately for us we were also sent to UCT to do education by SAMWU then in 2006 until 2008. Those period I was sent to UCT to do Education, but the difficulty is that we don't have a common enemy, so it's very difficult for us to go forward.

Facilitator: it's confusing

Respondent: Honestly, but if we can just identify a common enemy we will be able to go forward. Privatisation is also one of these enemies which we need to fight, labour brokers is also one of the slavery, those are the areas which we need to focus on as unionists.

Facilitator: your activities, you then became the local organiser of SAMWU in 1983?

Respondent: SAMWU, because I was a shop steward of NUMSA, I've never been an organiser for NUMSA

Facilitator: you wanted to be an organiser for SAMWU, you applied for a job

Respondent: yes I said approached by Mate Ndubula who was the then administrator of COSATU

Facilitator: and the challenges of being, that's 1983 or so, of being a local organiser what were you faced with, what are the challenges around you compared to other provinces?

Respondent: This is a very small place. There is a stage when I was supposed to attend to a retrenchment which was my retrenchment and I was blank in 1996 when the company closed down, I was supposed to handle retrenchment and I couldn't but that was the time when I inquired from Arthur Mogale, he was the then organiser for NUMSA. Arthur Mogale came to assist me in dealing with my own retrenchment because I found it very difficult to represent the company members, who were members of NUMSA because they were white, they were coloured. You see, because we had a close shop agreement, the close shop agreement says if you join

a company you must belong to a union, whether you belong to a white union or a black union but you must belong to a union, so the close shop agreement, in the motor sector, assesses us, but in the other areas there was no close shop agreement and you still remember the shops were too small so the other shops didn't have shop stewards, the retail didn't have shop stewards. So those were also the difficulties, as a member of NUMSA you also need to defend the workers who were not in your sector, those were our difficulties. And as a shop steward, who was also, I should have told you, you was also a local secretary of COSATU, you had to build what they call units in order for us to be able to have information from this different ..(unclear) and different workplaces. Like for instance you will have to look at what is it that we can have in a cluster of workplaces, then you will be able to say to one of people from this cluster of companies, you will be acting as a shop steward for all these places around you because of the problems we had that we didn't have the capacity and we didn't have the numbers and we didn't have the right to have shop stewards in those areas. So the person who will be acting as a shop steward for them to be able to inform us as a COSATU local they problems they are encountering.

We also had meetings on a weekly basis, what is not happening now. In the 1980s we had COSATU locals every Thursday, 5 o'clock we go to, we stay there up until 7 o'clock and then you go home. Those assisted us in dealing with the challenges of the different workplaces, of dismissals, of retrenchments of other challenges in the workplaces. So those are the areas which I believe assisted us in those cases in dealing with the challenges.

Facilitator: and then the formation of COSATU in 1985 did that more or less shape or change the manner in which things had to be done now as they changed from FOSATU to COSATU?

Respondent: it assisted because the slogan of COSATU was practicalised in the province so that when you had problems as an affiliate of COSATU, "an injury to one

and injury to all" was a practicalised type of slogan. So the assistance of other unions in dealing with this problem of an affiliate was assisting and those were where employers had to take a retreat in order for them to fight us because we were now in numbers, no more in small numbers but in large numbers. And the other affiliates would have joined in in the programmes of whatever affiliates are having problems and they call upon other affiliates to assist. Now is if you call affiliates to come and assist, the people who will be there is your organiser and the secretary and they say NEHAWU was there, SAMWU was there, POPCRU was there and there were only two. So "an injury to one is an injury to all" is no more the same

Facilitator: practical?

Respondent: It's not

Facilitator: But then in the 1980s the support of the township if you call for stay aways?

Respondent: You see that's why I said for us ....., when you go to the taxi operators that's why you never heard of taxis being burned down because the then operators of taxis saw that we were one, whatever we did as one, because if we don't defend our jobs, they won't be getting anything. So because they are fearing us between the town and the township, so they were always assisting us to say that if members of the union or the community saying that if members of the union are not going to work then also we support them. And we didn't burn schools, no, we didn't burn libraries, we didn't do that. We just said to ourselves, we folding our hands and it worked for us because we didn't disturb the movement of communities. If you want to go to town you know that you are going to foot it out there is no taxi, but we didn't smash your stuff. So in that way you did get the support of the community. There were times when we had to wake up in the early hours of the morning, 3, 4 to check on those who are going to work, to tell them look you can't be going to work

while we are having the stay away because of the challenges we are facing as employees and as community members, you need to support us because if you go to work you give the impression to the employer that there are those who want to work they are pressurised not to go to work and you must be part of us because we believe that if we unite as a community and the workers we will be able to overcome the challenges of the employer.

Facilitator: you joined in 1996 as an organiser, that was post 1994 era, maybe the grounds have shifted because of 1994. What were the common challenges then being an organiser in that particular era? You were there from 1996 to 2004 that's a long time.

Respondent: the unfortunate part is that people now, if they are supposed to go to meetings they will tell you that they need to get money to get to the meeting so that they can catch their transport. And if you tell people, look we need to have study circles, we need to have debates in order to .., they don't see that as priority to assist them to deal with their workplace problems because that period was for us very difficult because organisers in the area used to have Organiser's Forum, and networking where if you are having a case, all of us will be coming together and discuss the case and maybe dramatise or role play the case, so in order for us to be able to see what is it that we are going to approach, but 1996 up until that time things went into a lull, as I said it seems as if people believe that now the government will do everything for us, the government will have a pro-worker approach but go to workplaces now, you are still having the same problems, up until now, people are still dismissed, people are still harassed, people are still retrenched without any pay, people are still being taken into positions and then dismissed without any pay. We are still having problems with the Department of Labour where the inspectors doesn't go to workplaces to check on whether the employer comply with the Act, those type of things are a difficulty for us to handle because we are no more united as we used to be.



Facilitator: do you mean that the inspectors are not doing their job?

Respondent: the last time when we inquired about why is it that we are having the problems of health and safety in the workplace, people being dismissed without their salaries, why are the problems not going to the workplaces. We were told that the unfortunate part is that they don't have the numbers, the number of inspectors are too little to cover all the areas because for you to go to one town from here, the furthest is 1000 kilos from here, it's Port Norloth. And you see it's not clustered like your Gauteng where you can take a taxi from here to another town, not even workplace, from here to Roodepoort, from Roodepoort to Germiston, you see it's easier but that's why they said no in their case they don't have the numbers to deal with the problems in the locality but they were in the process of doing that. I don't know when is it going to happen, but that's what they said, that's what the head of department said.

Facilitator: As a SAMWU educator, what needs to be done. You came into the sector and you had support you become an educator. What were the priorities in terms of location?

Respondent: One had to deal with political work of the organisation. I also had to train shop stewards in SAMWU, I also had to deal with what they call workplace skills, your workplace plans, everything in the municipality. So I had to liaise with people in municipalities, to check whether the implementation of the work skills plan are actually implemented or is this skills plan only on paper and they are not practically being done by the municipality. Those were there difficulties, where people are seeing programmes in their skills plan but these things are not implemented. But I think the downfall of most of these things, is ourselves, because people are the workplace they don't prioritise education and training. They focus on promotions, they focus on other things which is not part of what we were trying to do because we were saying that focussing on the work skills plans will assist you. You do not need to fight for promotions but these will come gradually. But people are too

much in a hurry to go to the top and it's very easy to fall down. This is the part they forget. So during that period that is what I was supposed to do, deal with Health and Safety at the workplace, where people don't implement, then I will have to fight with them to say that what is it that needs to be done. I believe that people within the municipalities, when I was the educator, they were the ones who needed to inform us of the challenges around health and safety and other issues which affect them, but that was not forthcoming. But we succeeded in training shop stewards, we succeeded in having a little bit of political work, where we had our provincial education forum meetings, before the PEC committee meetings. So the proposal was always that before any Provincial Executive Committee Meeting there must be a political workshop or discussion on the first day. So that also assisted us with the political work in the province.

Facilitator: And in all the union structures you worked for, the ratio of blacks vs coloureds, vs white ..?

Respondent: let me start off by SAMWU. When I was in SAMWU, the municipality Sol Plaatjie had three unions: SAMWU, TIMU (which was coloured only and then we had IMATU which was whites only. So those were the three categories of .., if you want to join a union, if you're black you're going to join SAMWU, if you are coloured you are going to go TIMU and if you are white you are going to join IMATU. Coloureds saw themselves as closer to whites, so whenever we had challenges within the municipality they clubbed together to form a unit, so it wasn't easy for us deal with the problems in the municipality.

In most cases all the town clerks who are now called Municipal Managers, by then they were called Town Clerks and were white and we didn't get joy out of these whites because as a black union you had to fight for everything, even if you asked for a paid up time off so that we can have training courses, we fought up until we had an agreement to say that shop stewards need to get 15 days off so that they can be trained. The other one which we are still struggling, I left SAMWU without

succeeding to it, it's the Health and Safety Reps who are full time, up until now it's still a challenge. And for me, I believe there needs to be Health and Safety Reps in every municipality where they will be able to assist, not fight, assist the municipality to look at the Health and Safety issues, up until now there is no health and safety reps who are full time in the municipalities, those were the struggles which we fought but we didn't win.

Facilitator: and today the issue of labour brokers, is COSATU going to win this fight?

Respondent: I believe we can, you see, if those who are hired by labour brokers are prepared to fight, then we will be able to deal with the issue of labour brokers because most of these people who are working for labour brokers are not unionised, most of them. So if one they can join the unions we will be able to identify which area can be targeted to fight the labour brokers and one is not sure because as we are fighting this battle, maybe among us, in our affiliates, there are also labour brokers, all families of ours are labour brokers. So those are the difficulty in finding out why can't we ban the labour brokers. You can't be saying to people that you are going to be hired for three days and you still want that person to contribute to the GDP whilst this person is living from hand to mouth. I still believe that we can win this battle, with the batting of those who are not members of any union but who are working under the scourge of labour brokers because for me is just something that shouldn't have been there and government should have just said no to labour brokers. What is the difficulty of government? I don't know because I don't see how are these people assisting us to job creation. That is slavery in another way because these people are working their body, mind and soul but they are not getting a cent out of it. I am sure we will be able to win the battle.

Facilitator: do you think the government will come to the party fully?

Respondent: you see maybe as I said it seems as if some of them are labour brokers, themselves. You can't be having a difficulty of having your aunt working for three days for nothing and you just keep quiet. Maybe one will have to .., I tried finding out, some labour brokers are our people. I don't have a list of their names, but I think that's the difficulty because they are the ones who actually promote labour broking because they are labour brokers.

Facilitator: lastly the challenges that are faced by COSATU firstly in the province today and then nationally how do you find them?

Respondent: we have a variety of campaigns, we have the wage campaign, is the one where we are fighting for better salaries, better wage for our members and I still believe that campaign is right. We also having a campaign around corruption in general whether in unions, whether in private companies, whether in government, that is a campaign which we really believe we must see to it that we win because corruption is stealing from the poor and we in unions also need to, among us, if there are not those who are corrupt, not to point fingers to other people but not seeing what is happening amongst ourselves.

We also have a campaign on electricity because for us electricity affects all of us. As I go out of this office and go home, I'm a community member, I'm a resident of that area and the challenges faced by the community are challenges facing me. So I as a member of COSATU must remind myself that whatever happens in the township I'm part of that, as I go out of the workplace and the wages I'm getting needs to assist me to get affordable services within the township or where ever I stay, it's those areas which I think we need to handle.

We are also having in the province, the acid water from the mines that we haven't taken up as we are supposed to. It's one area which we need to also look into because they are spoiling the environment, these mines and they are not

rehabilitating after mining, some of them, these small diggers are not rehabilitating the ground after mining and that is one area which is really disturbing and we have to look into. It also reminds us that we need ground water and if that acid water can reach our ground water, then it means that we won't be able to survive because some of our families are using these windmills to get water from the ground and if those mines are going to spoil or cause the water to mix with the water from the mines, then we are going to have problems. Those are the areas which COSATU is looking at and finding as challenges which we need to take up, but with the assistance of civil society, we can't go it alone honestly.

Facilitator: In terms of that are there NGO's around Kimberley, do you have that kind of support or are they non existent, where do they stand?

Respondent: we have just started to locate some of the NGO's in Kuruman, your John Taolo Gaetsewe District to link up with them and deal with the issue of the abuse of women and children programmes which we believe we need to do and then also look at the others who are dealing with the schools. So we are actually looking at campaigns to look at what is it that we can do as COSATU, adopt a school and then assist the schools fully fledged in doing away with their problems, in doing away with their challenges of kids who are coming there with knives and everything, you see those type of things, where teachers are not on time, where schooling is not taking place, where there are no libraries at schools, where there are no laboratories at schools. Those type of things brought them to the fore so that the communities and the newspapers and all those who are always saying that we are not doing well, to say why are we not doing well in the schools in the townships. So those are the areas which are ..

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

Respondent: I've said a lot as my memory serves me. When I was with the Communist Party as a Treasurer I still remember before Chris Hani died, we operated from the boot of Mzambo's car as the Communist Party and I remember Chris coming to me saying you are the Treasurer of the party and you need to see that you are organised and travel to the areas to organise, you have an office where you are going to get ..., and we were getting R1 000 per month, office, travelling, and everything you need, stationery, everything you needed you had to get out of that R1 000 and we succeeded. Unfortunately, I'm not sure what happened to ..., when he came, people waited up until 9 o'clock and he had a meeting somewhere and had to fly from that or drive from there and come to Kimberley, people waited for him and it was packed, Galeshewe Arena was packed in their numbers, they didn't want to go they waited for Chris Hani to come and it was a joyful night because he came and he spoke to us and we were happy and unfortunately in 1992 10 April, one will not forget, we were preparing ourselves in the office, we were having a office, Potgieter's building, busy preparing ourselves to see to it what is it that we need to do, how are we going to raise funds so that we can be stable and not want money always from head office and we receive a call the he is killed and he is dead. That was not good, that actually destabilised us and it was really something which one was not expecting by then because we saw him as somebody who was – he was approachable, he was not aloof, he was very approachable, he was prepared to talk with you, he didn't sleep in town. When he arrived he said I am not going to sleep in town, I'm going to sleep in the township and we had to see to it that he goes to the township and he sleeps, that was Chris. And we're happy that one did cross paths with him.

We were fortunate, Charles Ngcakula, when he became the secretary, he didn't mind also to drive to Kimberley with his Mazda Stationwagon, he didn't mind to Kimberley to come and assist us, including Geraldine Moleketi and Jabu Moleketi, they were prepared because I still remember we had a political workshop on dialectics and the materialism and what is that we need to approach, what etc., all these things were bombarded, we were still blind we didn't know these things and they were from exile and they would come and bombard us with these things

Facilitator: literature

Respondent: it was nice because we survived in the process, that's one area which I won't forget. The other portion was also, when the old man Joe Slovo was supposed to come to us in 1995 he died and we had a banquet, he was a Minister of Housing, he had prepared a banquet to say that we were trying to raise funds, he died. It was a blow to us in the province.

Facilitator: Any closing words maybe?

Respondent: I thank you, one was not expecting that one day in your lifetime you will be able to raise these issues because this is not written history this is something which is there, where people have been focussing on politics only, trade union, nothing, forgotten and I'm happy for the research which Wits is doing because that will assist our kids to say what is it that was done during the period of our forefathers and our fathers so that you must have work. Maybe they can tap into that history and continue in order for them to be able to survive in this world.

Facilitator: thank you very much for your time

END

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