

**STANLEY YISAKA – 02 SEPTEMBER 2010**

Facilitator: This is an interview with Dr Stanley Yisaka, we are in Athlone in Cape Town, the date is the 02<sup>nd</sup> September 2010 and the interview is done by Brown Maaba. Thank you for giving me this time, you can talk either in English, Xhosa or Zulu.

Respondent: Thank you I will.

Facilitator: Could you please give me background of where you were born, how you were raised and so on and the nature of the family, was it a lower class or middle class family and how you ended up in union issues.

Respondent: I was born on the 13<sup>th</sup> March 1955, I was born in Paarl, Mbekweni is the town. I went to school in Paarl and further went to complete my matric in Queenstown, I came back and further did my studies in UWC, I could not finish my studies in UWC, so it was there for a year and a half or so. After school I worked for Mbekweni municipal council, I worked there for plus minus ten years, I started in 1980 to 1990. While I was in Mbekweni municipality, the workers there didn't know anything about trade unions.

Facilitator: Really.

Respondent: So actually through my studies and through my involvement in the political gardens outside the work which I was involved in, CCB I was a secretary at that time, and then I introduced them to the trade union, which was SAMWU at that time. I worked for ten years in that municipality and from there I was dismissed because of my involvement in trade unionism, and I was charged with

insubordination because I couldn't handle that white person from the Free state who wanted to only listen to what he was saying. We then embarked on a strike and the strike was about wage increase, the people at that time were getting peanuts, the conditions of employment at the time, especially at that place and especially because of this person who came from the Free State. I was in the forefront in fighting that battle, they then earmarked me and I was charged, there were three charges which they brought up, the charge was insubordination, for not listening. They used to call me like when you have lettuce and tomatoes, so they said I was spoiling other workers. So I was represented in that charge by comrade Roger, who brought you here and eventually I was dismissed. The union wanted to take it up and appeal and I told them that I didn't have an interest to go back because of the way that person from Free state was treating workers, the conditions of employment and other things. I was involved in the struggle at that time and I was arrested under the state of emergency, I stayed in prison for plus minus two years. So all in all I had all these things in my head and I said I was not going to subject myself to this kind of treatment by this person, and then I told comrade Roger, he wanted to appeal on the issue, I said no I was unhappy there and he should leave it. There was a vacancy for an organiser in SAMWU which I applied for, fortunately I was appointed. I started in SAMWU in March 1991; I have been in SAMWU since then.

Facilitator: Just to go back you said you went to UWC to study, when did you go there exactly and why didn't you finish.

Respondent: I went to UWC after, my incarceration as a political prisoner in Victor Vester was in 1987/8/9 and I was studying as a social worker and I was specialising in social science. I couldn't finish because I was working on the other side and I was doing classes after

work and at that time I was still staying in Paarl and I had to travel all the time by train, so it was difficult for me to get to classes in time, so I just decided to quit. I had also started a family at that time, so I decided to concentrate on family and work at the time and later on I can study.

Facilitator: You said you finished your matric in 19..

Respondent: I think it was 1987.

Facilitator: At that time that was the height of apartheid, the conditions in Mbekweni and Paarl area.

Respondent: I was involved in the student uprisings in 1975, at that time I was at school in Queenstown, I still remember in school when it started

Facilitator: 1975

Respondent: Yes 1975, when it started, all those students who were coming from Cape Town were told to leave and not complete their studies and go back home, otherwise if they don't go back home their homes would be burnt down with their parents inside, we had to leave although we didn't have money to go back home but we told ourselves that we would go and stall a train, others managed to get to Cape town and others didn't, we managed to get inside the train and the guards came in and we had to go out and go back. I was involved in that struggle and continued after school, I was involved in SACP as a Secretary of youth at that time. In 1985 to 1987 I was arrested for political activities and was in Victor Vester for two to three years.

Facilitator: But at that time ANC was still underground.

Respondent: Yes it was UDF, we were busy with the activities of UDF, we used to come to UWC for meeting, in fact it was formed at that time, we were dealing with political activities underground at that time, the ANC was outside the country at the time, it was still banned. We told ourselves that we were going to work inside and make the state ungovernable so that political organisations can be unbanned and people come back and release Mandela, all those we were involved in, and we had this Release Mandela campaign that we were busy with, so I was quite involved in those things.

Facilitator: Other youth, what were they up to, the percentage of setup that was involved in the struggle at the time in terms of Paarl and Embekweni.

Respondent: Embekweni was one of the well organised places, you'd remember the plan that was called the Mandela plan, so we had that structure, the youth more especially at that time were very much involved and our parents were the ones who were saying why we were getting involved in those things and what happens if they arrest us or shoot us. I believe that the unbanning of the political organisations like ANC, PAC happened because of the struggle of the youth at that time to engage the government to make the country ungovernable together with the pressure we put, sanctions and other things that actually made the political organisations to be unbanned.

Facilitator: You said you were arrested in 1987?

Respondent: 1987, I still remember that that's when my kid was born, I was coming from hospital with the mother at that time, we had just stopped in front of our house and I was getting out of my car with the

new born baby and here comes this Nyala, the big things the police moved around in, here come these police and they were with one of my friends that we grew up with and went to school with who was now with the police as a constable, he was the one who was pointing us out from our houses, so that was actually what we called a traitor. So I was taken away leaving the baby, for two years not seeing my baby and when I came out the baby was already walking.

Facilitator: Oh my god, what a struggle. What were you charged with?

Respondent: We were just picked up because we were involved in political activities, we used to at night, you see Embekweni was infiltrated by all these white special constables and these old apartheid forces, special branches and a number of these nyalas were just around patrolling and we couldn't even breath. We would hit these vehicles and run at night when they are patrolling, we would even dig deep on the roads and put some kind of zinc over it so it looks like the road is still smooth, and when it comes and tips on it then we would hit them with petrol bombs and stones and everything else we could get so those are the kind of battles we fought with the police, then they declared a state of emergency and we were picked up.

Facilitator: So was it detention without trial or something else?

Respondent: Yes it was detention without trial, we stayed there for 13 months and they released us for about two weeks and picked us up again, so we were there again for another year.

Facilitator: And the conditions in prison, what was going on in your head about your future and so on?

Respondent: In prison we were kept aside from criminals, we were treated like political prisoners, it was in Victor Vester in fact it was before Mandela came to Victor Vester we were in there, and we were released, in fact by releasing us they were preparing for Mandela. Conditions in prison are never good, it's a cell and its cement, they give you a thin mattress and two blankets and you sleep on it, you get food which is also not good food, but it's a bit different from criminals but its still not good condition, you don't get TV and its only certain days during the week maybe on a Wednesday, they open up the library and maybe on Saturdays you can also go and pick up books. When your visitors come they can leave you money but they check the money, when you want to go buy you can just pick up what you want to buy and you can give them the change. We were together in once cell, Trevor Manuel who was the finance minister was in the cell with us with other comrades, we were keeping the spirit going, when they would open up the cell during the day and we would sit and look at history together, teach each other, you know this thing of each one teach one, so we were doing that.

Facilitator: So you came back in 1989.

Respondent: 1989 we were back from prison and then we were still busy with the political activities, we never stopped, and then I said let me find a job because the municipality dismissed me after I came out of prison because while I was in prison I was still employed with them, they even came to me in jail asking me to resign, I told them I can't because I was in prison, I got back and they still wanted to dismiss me and I told them there's no way that they were going to dismiss me, the union also intervened to protect me.

Facilitator: You said initially that there was no Union in Paarl?

Respondent: Yes in the municipal sector, there was nothing.

Facilitator: How did it happen that it was formed, what did you guys do?

Respondent: What I did, as I was much involved in the political activities and we were teaching each other, I knew those gatherings that workers are supposed to belong to a trade union in order to avoid the abuse and bad treatment from employers and then if they get a union they will always be protected, so I took it to myself and I took initiative and we had to go because SAMWU never came there, so I said we had to go and find out where these unions are, we set up a meeting, four of us put money and then I went with one other friend went to see the unions, we didn't tell the other workers but we went to where the unions were. We first phoned, in fact it was a workers library in Salt river, we used to go there and I met some of the people and talked to these people about unions and more especially the municipal sector, they referred me here and I spoke to the comrade, the comrade at that time, the General Secretary was John Ericson and the other one was Mel Brown, we spoke to them and they said they had been trying to get to Embekweni and didn't know how but nonetheless welcomed us now that we were there, he asked us to start engaging with them. We were given some times when meetings would be held, and we would be representing Embekweni in the meetings. We went back and set up a meeting to inform workers that there was a union and we decided to set up a meeting and called some of the comrades to come down and address the workers. So workers started to believe the union is the right place to be.

Facilitator: Was there no resistance from some because they were afraid that they would be fired?

Respondent: We had to work hard to make them understand that the union is there to represent them and little by little people started getting used to the fact that this was the right thing to do, we used to even take some of them to come and attend meetings here in Athlone, the union would tell me to hire taxis so that we can take people to meetings then they would pay them when we got here, so those who would attend the meetings would go back and tell others that joining a union was the right thing to do especially because there was that guy who was very abuse, I used to call him a rooineck whity, so all comrades joined and they decided after they had joined and felt that they had a strong presence. The following year we decided we would join the national week strike but we decided we would have our own little toyi toyi outside and we marched around the municipal offices and put up demands. They called the police but the comrades were in spirit now and they wanted to be in that strike, we marched and didn't even notice the police were there. We moved to the township and marched to garner support of the people, I think it was the first time they saw that a trade union could do something like that, the comrades who joined us were people who believed in what workers were fighting for and were members of other unions as well. Our march ended up a big march and the employer was told that we had support in what we were doing, so that is basically how we started our trade union Embekweni.

Facilitator: So you took the position of the chairperson?

Respondent: No I didn't , we elected a committee, I was a shop steward.



Facilitator: Why didn't you take the charge of the whole thing because it was your baby?

Respondent: No the workers are the one who should lead, I believed in that. We didn't have a committee, it was just a standing committee that started the whole thing and all of us ran the whole thing and didn't have positions, we would run this thing we would get to a point where everyone belongs to a trade union then the organisation would decide on what to do in terms of positions, but then the organisation decided to elect a shop steward.

Facilitator: The challenges of being a shop steward, what were you faced with?

Respondent: In the workplace itself there were some members who took time to understand that the trade union is there for them and sometimes you would have a member who signed up but at the very same time always have a link with management, and management would use that opportunity to make that person a supervisor or something so that that person will always have allegiance to management, so when you come here the same person who is your member would start giving you orders to disperse people and there will always be a grievance and you will have to deal with that, those are the kind of challenges because you speak to your member and your member gives you all these details and now you tell yourself that now you have to go and speak to this person but now when you speak with this person, this person is also a member but now when you speak to this person you don't get cooperation from this person, now how do you deal with that situation. She/he is your member and he's also your member but now this one's allegiance lies with management and

doesn't want to see this one oppressing him, so those are the things we needed to start addressing with members, tell them look even if you are in a senior position you don't have to side with management you must think about the people you are senior to and think about how they feel, but if you continue with the behaviour then we would have to challenge you. There are a number of other challenges where we had to bargain around condition of service which was very terrible at that time.

Facilitator: In what sense, can you explain?

Respondents: Look, other people didn't have benefits like medical aid, pension funds, bonuses, sick leave and a number of other things, so those were the problems that we encountered on a daily basis, say for instance a person gets ill a person has to come back to the manager and explain to the manager why he was off, even if they produce a sick certificate and that certificate would start to be questioned and that kind of pressure being put on them so we would have to come and intervene, those were the kinds of problem we handled.

Facilitator: Were there successes in these issues?

Respondent: Yes, if we got stuck and then we would call the region which was based in Athlone and the comrades would come out and assist us in our battles.

Facilitator: Did you win some or you never won any battle?

Respondent: Look in terms of the week strike, we won something, we had an agreement, we kind of got close to what we were demanding, the percentage, at that time there were no unprotected strikes, we

would just decide to go out on strike and would not have to make applications to the courts so that the strike would be protected and during that time there were no essential services where there are people who cannot go on strike because they work in the waters or in electricity, all the workers who were there at the time would all go out on strike if it was called, it was quick and easy to win your battles because everyone would be out on strike. We won a number of our dingaans but some of them we couldn't win.

Facilitator: And the general attitude of the employers over the union, cause there was no union there before and suddenly there was a union, how was that viewed?

Respondent: I was even called a terrorist because I brought this union, so I was involved in the political activities outside and the guy called me a terrorist, you remember that time during apartheid, they would call us terrorist because I was involved in these things. And more especially the whites who were management staff, all of the white guys were management staff, they didn't like it, they were even targeting some of us because my car which I had at that time was burnt, there was some kind of worked out plan by the people who were involved in this whole thing. I became a target by the whites because I introduced the union because they were totally against unionising workers and they just wanted workers not to be long to unions, they would even go as far as making people supervisors so that they can take them away from unions. Talking about that, there was this one person that was working there, who had been in that municipality for as long as I remember during my youth days and he used to be my uncle, he came with the Cape administration board, the old local municipalities at the time, the apartheid structures, he's always been working with the whites, he's always been begging and busy, he's

attitude was always that we cannot challenge or argue with the white person, he always had to adhere to listen and do whatever the white person was saying and a white person was not to be challenged. When we started this union he was the only one who was on the other side of the union, he was quite close to the white guy who was a manager at the time from Free State and they used him to check on our activities, he always knew our activities, management at that time was close to the special branch, the police so they would always get information from the management at work via this guy who stayed with us in the township and he would be there in all we would be doing in the township and come the next day they have all the information, even during meetings he would stand far away from us but eventually he was fired by the same management and he wanted protection from us.

Facilitator: What did you do if I may ask?

Respondent: Oh we told him that he was not a member so we could not protect him. Somehow he got re-employed and then he came back, when he came back the second time he joined he union and he was part and parcel of the union, so people could see now that the union was really working.

Facilitator: When you went to prison did the union continue with the activities?

Respondent: Yes, comrades had started to believe in themselves, when I came back I was dismissed so there was this comrade who took up, he was with those who used to come from Cape town to organise the union, they were very strong so he was elected as a shop steward, he continued with the struggle there. I was then employed here at

SAMWU but I would go back to encourage comrades and attend meetings, so the union never died until today the union is still quite very strong and I think Paarl is the majority in the union.

Facilitator: So after you were dismissed you came here straight or there was a gap.

Respondent: There was a gap because for the whole year I didn't do anything because I was looking for a job until I was employed here.

Facilitator: Political activism in Paarl, what were you doing politically during that gap?

Respondent: I continued attending meetings and I was then elected at that time as Secretary for the youth structure of the SACP, and then there was the unbanning of the political organisations, we were running with recruitment of members going door to door, doing all those things. This Mandela plan that was there was before the unbanning of the political organisation.

Facilitator: Tell me more about it.

Respondent: I was the head structure in the my street committee and I was a street commander in my street, in each and every street we have a committee and then a commander then that plan would move to every area and then to a committee, so everything that happened in every street we would know and we know that in each every street there are cadres that are deployed, whatever happens and if the police are coming we would know, there would be a report, I think Embekweni was one of the best in the Western Cape to have that structure implemented in the way it was implemented.

Facilitator: You came here which month exactly to join here.

Respondent: Here at SAMWU?

Facilitator: Yes.

Respondent: I started at SAMWU on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 1991.

Facilitator: And you were employed as an organiser?

Respondent: Yes.

Facilitator: And your impression when you arrived here, what was expected of you practically?

Respondent: It was to go out and organise members and organising members you go to structures. The union in Cape Town was well organised, it had structures all over the place, it had area councils, regional structures, we used to call it regions at that time before we called it provinces, so it would be area councils and then it goes to regional RECs and then national. So when I came in I had to follow some of the structures, there was Cape Town and surroundings so I had to organise that, there was other areas, Southern and Northern suburbs and CMC which was scattered all over the metro and outside the metro. I was then expected to go to the structures and organise workers and take up province workers and deal with those things, so I had to travel quite a lot, when I came I had no car at that time because it was broken down so I had to travel by public transport, from here I would have to take a taxi or maybe a bus to Gugulethu and go to meetings and sometimes I used to get a lift from my colleagues and

Will Brown would take me to meetings, there was another organiser Russell McGregor who used to take me to structures until I got my money from my pension in Embekweni and then I was able to buy myself a car then it was easy to travel. At that time we used to travel, we did not have what is currently in place now, the metro, we used to travel as far as Stellenbosch area, as far as Noordhoek, over the mountain, we did not say that is not my area because we didn't have designated area for you like what is happening now, we used to move all over the place, when the committee says there is a problem somewhere, you would get in your car and to that place. We used to have meetings in the afternoon from 2pm in the CMC area, and this area is in the mountains and those comrades were oppressed that they didn't even get time off and sometimes you would have meetings after work, until such time that we organised the union itself to get upon itself and negotiated recognition agreement and then we had those rights and we had to come to meetings during working hours, that's how I started in Cape Town.

Facilitator: And the challenges of organising the workers, what did it take to do that?

Respondent: It was quite difficult in the early stages because you are coming from somewhere else and you are getting into a well organised place and workers are always getting reports backs and the report back they are getting is like people who give a report in a way that they can understand and there's no question about, if they have to question, they question some of the issues that have been put to them. I was still very young during that time and our meetings were not so big and here I come to Gugulethu civic centre its big and I was intimidated by the workers and I had to address these people because I needed to get used to this, but initially they took me with and then

Cde Mel Brown and Cde General Secretary Ericson, they were so helpful to take me out and then they would give me a report back and then they would give me a slot to report and then during question time I would take questions and I would answer some, I got used to it and told myself that I had to do it myself, it didn't matter whether it was the Good hope centre, I had to do it myself, so I started to do it gradually and then got used to it.

Facilitator: In terms of resources because organising could be an expensive exercise, were you providing for a hall, or were you using free space.

Respondent: Like what?

Facilitator: Like if you go to Gugulethu, were you using their hall without paying for it?

Respondent: When it comes to Gugulethu, we would just tell the comrades that we would have a meeting on a particular day and they would just open up the hall and we would use it, but when it comes to other areas outside Gugulethu like coloured areas, they were always so strict we couldn't use the hall without paying, and we always paid deposit and when we finished we would get our deposit back. When it comes to getting the workers to a place and requesting transport, you request time off to have the workers in that place for a meeting and when you request transport to get them to that place you always got a problem with the employer because they didn't want to release transport and release the workers, but in areas like Gugulethu, Nyanga and Khayelitsha they would take the transport without getting permission to use it, they would take it and go to the meeting and those trucks would



be parked outside the hall and after the meeting they would take the trucks and deliver people and then go park them.

Facilitator: Just like that.

Respondent: Ja, that would be without the permission of the employer.

Facilitator: The mood at the time, this was the early 1990s, there was in the case of KZN and Gauteng, violence, and in the case of Cape Town what was the mood?

Respondent: Cape Town was not so violent like KZN and Gauteng where there were clashes between ANC and Inkatha, we didn't have that kind of violence. We were focused on a single enemy which were bosses, when I talk about bosses I am talking about workers vs. employer and that time we had a different municipality, it was not metro it was splinters of different small municipalities, I think it was 32 of them and they amalgamated to make one single one which is Cape Town. In Cape Town then we would have Fezeka municipality which was Gugulethu and surroundings and also including Langa, then you would have the Crossroads municipality, you would have Khayelitsha it was called .....at that time, then you would have Mfuleni which was so small but they had the own municipality, you also have other small municipalities before they got together form a single structure. As I was saying, at that time we used to have plenty demands whether it was a wage demand or some kind of conditions of employment, conditions of services and those kinds of demands we used to get very quickly and easily because as I was saying at that time there was nothing called essential services, when we would say we were going out because the employer does not want to meet our demands, so everyone would go out and for instance Cape Town would start

without even going to the courts, they called it wild cat strike at that time, and we would start striking there and demand whatever percentage increase, everyone would go out, it would be fire, administrators, security, they would all go out at the same time, we would go for 2 to 3 days and all our demands would be met. So there all those kinds of situations, Cape Town would go out of strike, then Crossroads and all those kinds of things, and you are here as an organiser sitting and have to go to all these places to deal with these issues and we were short of human resources to go and handle these issue and we had to then rely on our strong comrades, people like Comrade Boss and others who would be able to control the others while you were busy on the other side. Even the General Secretary would come out to help, I remember our strike in Goodwood which was one of the biggest strikes, that one was a march from Bellville right down to Goodwood, the General Secretary and Mel Brown were there, it was a longest march we ever had in Cape Town.

Facilitator: The unions players visa vie the government, the ANC had just moving towards taking power in 1994, were there no discussions between the ANC and the unions about the future, post 1994 on how the unions were going to take part in the new government.

Respondent: Those kind of debates were, we are part of Cosatu because we are affiliated to Cosatu, so Cosatu is then very much linked to the political organisation which is the ANC and there is also SAPC, they have that tripartite alliance, so as an affiliate of Cosatu we then have to, whatever Cosatu puts in place in campaigns, let me make an example, when we had to go to the first elections, Cosatu had a campaign and asked the unions to campaign for the ANC, so we had to go door to door in Khayelitsha, Gugulethu, Mitchelsplain and all these areas around Cape Town to campaign for the ANC, so

that's how we were involved with the ANC at that time. Also in branches, we said that comrades must always be part and parcel of these meetings of political organisations and also to put strong structures and debate issues of the workers with these political organisations.

Respondent: So your responsibility as an organiser was to just organise the workers or are there other activities that are involved in this.

Facilitator: The work of the organiser is to go out and organise workers and deal with their day to day workplace struggles like misconducts, grievances and report back to them and take mandates and then you come back to the office and you still have to refer issues, for instance there's a comrade who's been dismissed and you still have to put in an appeal and then you must take that matter if the appeal has failed to the bargaining council and fill in forms in favour of conciliation or in favour of arbitration, you are involved in all those areas if you are an organiser, and you can even go as far as the labour court but the labour court is starting to use lawyers but you must be part and parcel of that process to take the issue to the labour court. So you are not only dealing with organising members but you deal with a lot of other areas. We are also involved as organisers in the union in the bargaining structures in municipalities, we are involved in the SAGBC in the divisions, so we have in the western cape a division in the metro division, you have party worker leaders and you as an organiser have to be part and parcel of these worker leaders to advise and guide them when they need the advice. You also need to sit in local labour forums and the delegation is your worker leaders and you sit there as an adviser and guide them and always be present when they deal with these issues. So it's not only to go out with deal members issues at their work places, you are responsible to take up issue like bargaining

and campaigns, you need to part and parcel of everything, you need to guide member and worker leaders and advise them.

Facilitator: Beyond 1994, this whole thing of quota system, a certain number of people must go to government and so on, what's your take on it, does it advantage or disadvantage the unions, MAWU in this case or other unions for that matter and Cosatu as a whole.

Respondent: I would say that my own opinion in terms of have some of the worker leaders in parliament, sometimes it does work in a sense that we have been able to influence discussions and decisions that are being taken in parliament, but at the very same time the deployed comrades in parliament, some of them are being swallowed by the very strong capitalist orientated government and they also end up being involved in all these other things. So it's not always to say that when you deploy them in government they will always carry the aspirations of the working class, for me if you sit in parliament where you are dominated by capitalists and you are alone there as a person trying to carry forward the aspirations of the working class you will be dominated by those things in that atmosphere and then your issues that you always come up with in terms of the advantage of the workers, in favour of the workers will always be dominated, so in a way you cannot come out and say that you have been able to push forward the aspirations of the working class. For example, you remember Jay Naidoo, the then Secretary of Cosatu who was deployed in parliament, he ended up being Minister without Portfolio and at the end of the day I don't even know where he is today, from that time I still remember we were busy participating in the drawing up of the RDP as a programme that would be the economic policy of the government, we then said that we will deploy comrades in parliament so that they will be able to influence the economic policies of the

country, what happened is that the same RDP was totally changed from what it was to what it is today, the economic policies of government at the time were actually the economic policies of the ANC, and the ANC is pushing the agenda of capitalism, and when we were in the struggle we were saying we were fighting the two-faced theory of struggle, we were saying we were pushing for the unbanning of the ANC and then making the country a democratic country and there move toward socialism, but where are we now in terms of those aspirations. The number of comrades that have been deployed in parliament, the then president of Cosatu, Gomomo, he was also there at that time but did he do in order to change things, and all of those that are there, like Petersen, what's happening to him now is that Cosatu has to stand up to say that the person they put in parliament does not have any power

Facilitator: The minister?

Respondent: Yes, he doesn't have any powers, he's just there in parliament for the sake of the party. If you look at the battles now currently in the tripartite alliance, Cosatu is saying that there's no tripartite alliance, it's even back to where Thabo Mbeki was at the time, the minister that is being deployed there doesn't have the power to push economic changes and the ANC is still saying their economic policies is going to be changed from GEAR to ASKISA. Deploying cadres from the trade union to parliament with the idea of changing the economic policies, I am saying it's not going to happen, that's my honest view.

Facilitator: How successful has SAMWU been in handling worker issues, when you look back. You have been around for twenty years now.

Respondent: I would say SAMWU has had a number of successes, some of them very good. Look at the example of last year's wage negotiations, we were the only union in the whole industry which had 13% increase last year only, we then agreed on a 3 year agreement which this year is a CPIX plus 1.5%, it went up to 8.48% and next year is the last of the 3 year agreement which will be CPIX plus 1.5% again. In a way we could get round about, in fact last year we got 13% which was the only union which got a high percentage according to wage negotiations and this year we got about 8.5% which is a very reasonable offer for this year and then next year. Look at what is happening in terms of the public sector, they put an offer of 8,6% and they are struggling to get 8.5%, for me you can't put your demand close to what you are fighting for and then make it a point that you want that 8,5%, you must at least put 10% and then you know that you move in terms of negotiations then you will be able to get closer to 8.5% which was your objective in any place. So I am saying in terms of SAMWU we won a number of major battles, we had successes in wages, we have been able to stop some of the privatisations that usually took place like outsourcing of services, we have what is called in terms of our resolutions, anti-privatisation campaign, we have been fighting the privatisation outsourcing of services, we have been successful because if we did not take up this campaign I am telling you that today the local authorities would have one of those British models where you have managers and director and you have private companies dealing with services but we have been able to block it because most workers are still employed by municipalities. We are also involved in health and safety areas, the City of Cape Town has been non compliant with the health and safety regulations and we have this campaign that we are busy with currently and its gone up to arbitration and I think the labour court, where we want to have an agreement, we want to force them to comply in terms of health and

safety issues. When it comes to areas of dismissal and misconduct, we have a number of organisers, the unions employed organisers and have been take to education courses by Cosatu and a number of other organisations and some also provided at some stage education to organisers, so we have well equipped organisers that can do the work, they are prepared to take the issues right to the labour court and we've been successful in that area also, but you know in some areas you do get disappointments where members are being dismissed where members are just doing things like where you have to go protect a member whereas you know that you don't have a case, things like stealing, corporate theft and others going to work drunk and make it a habit of going to work very late, so those are some of the issues where you see that its difficult to defend that member but you still have to defend them to a point where you say now I have gone up to arbitration and you cannot continue. But we have had some successes.

Facilitator: Some people are saying that after 1994 some unions have become sweetheart unions, what's your take on that one.

Respondent: Yes there are those unions, in fact there is in the municipal sector there is a union called IMATU, it was an exclusively white union before when it was still apartheid government and they lost a number of members when the new dispensation took over in 1994 and they opened up their ranks and started organising non-whites, Africans, that is one of the sweetheart unions. I would agree that when there was a democratic government after 1994, some of the unions thought that now that we have a government led by the ANC and we are in the alliance with the ANC, therefore we would easily get some of the things that the workers want, it was not going to be the case, look at where we are now, we have been dealing with the ANC in this

municipality, ANC was government before the DA took over again, we had some problems with the ANC, so it was not like now that ANC is in power things would be easy, we would get what we want, its not the case. Those unions who changed their attitude about fighting their struggles and became more lenient with the government and companies they were dealing with, have now decreased in terms of membership.

Facilitator: Just maybe the last two things, what is the future of unions in this country, what is your perception?

Respondent: I think unions should remain the vehicle of the working class and they should be stronger and not think because there is this government that is led by the ANC everything is going to change in the favour of the working class because the current government and the whole society is still a capitalist society therefore the working class is still going to be oppressed, so we don't want our unions with their militancy and their progressiveness to just give up and some of the collapse, I am saying those struggles are still there, the working class will still be oppressed and they need more vigorous and very progressive unions now more than every because the leadership though when the ANC government was in place the working class will be far off than what it was, it didn't happen, the working class is still suffering today, its still being oppressed today, there's a problem of job losses, the problem the economy is still the very same capitalist economy which is not in favour of the working class, so you need strong unions, especially now, look at what is happening in the public sector, what is currently happening is just to show that whose strong in terms of government and labour led by Cosatu and the other independent trade unions. You can't imagine that the teachers and nurses, the people who are dealing with the very basic essential services to communities they still



earn that kind of wages, its logic that those people who are delivering those kinds of services must be looked after and they must be the people that at least get some kind of wages so that when they get home they will have food to put on the table, but what is happening currently those are the people that are being neglected, those who are sitting in parliament are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer, so I am saying in this kind of a situation you need very strong unions and the future of unions to me, we are still needed very much in South Africa more than anywhere else. I don't think we need to follow the examples of UK and other countries, where unions became part and parcel of government, somewhere somehow you start to become government and start controlling the state apparatus and you start turning against the same working class that put you there, so they should be there for the working class, I believe and our union is becoming very strong.

Facilitator: Was it worth it to be involved in these activities or do you feel you have lost something in your life.

Respondent: It was very much worth it, I believe to be part and parcel of the trade union and to represent workers and to protect them from being oppressed and abused by these bosses and powerful organisations, for me that is a battle that I think I have done a bit in terms of protecting the rights of the working class and protect them from being abused by the bosses and capitalists, so I haven't lost anything. Where I am now I believe I still feel that I can go for another 15 or for whatever years to be in this position where I am, just to protect the working class from the abuses carried out by bosses and capitalist system, so I don't even think I want to get out of the trade union, currently to get another job, I think I would resign and maybe resign or

retire from this job that I am in now as long as I am doing my bit in order to protect the working class from oppression.

Facilitator: Isn't there anything that you think is important that which was not asked in this interview.

Respondent: What I am thinking about would be what is it that we are doing as trade unionists to assist the public sector unions to get their demands and how do we at the end of the day to change the economic policies of the country, the ANC has been trying to change from within, I think there needs to come a time when you say, the ANC is the same the organisation that is implementing pro-capitalist economic policies, how do we start moving away from always saying that we need to support the ANC and what is the ANC doing for the working class, so I am saying somewhere somehow we need to start debating and get to resolutions on what it is that we can do. We are always checking resolutions and having meetings with the ANC and we come to manifestos of putting demands, those things are overlooked when they start to implement their policies, so I think we need to start moving in that direction, we do have political power but in terms of economic power our people are still suffering, the job losses have increased in this who capitalist world according to stats, if we remain partners with a capitalist organisation our workers and the working class are still going to suffer, so I think there needs to be a vigorous discussion in terms of that, that's what I think and I am not apologetic about that, some of the comrades would want to engage me on what I am talking about, do I want to break away from the ANC, I am saying we need to start drawing line on where do we want to go as representative of the working class, do we really represent the working class when we are sitting with capitalist government and at the

very same time engaging in the same policies that are oppressing our own people, so where do we go from here.

Facilitator: Thank you very much for your time.

Respondent: OK, it was my pleasure.

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