

Mlungisi Twana

Facilitator: This is an interview with Mlungisi Twana, we are in Pretoria, the date is the 10th of November 2011, and interview is done by Brown Maaba. Thanks very much for your time. You can speak Zulu, English or mix. Just kindly give background of where you were born, where you were raised, did you come from a rich or poor family, schooling activities and how you ended up in the world of unions.

Respondent: I was born in Port Elizabeth in Woma. I was a member of the Azania Student movement during my schooling days, at Cawen High. Later on, I matriculated in 1984 I joined AZAPO. I was then a chairperson of AZAPO, Woma branch from 1985/86. Subsequent to that it was a time when AZAPO in Port Elizabeth wanted to establish the trade union because at that time AZAPO no any other formations of the trade unions. I was one of the few people that were seconded by AZAPO to start trade unions there. My background is that I never worked in any firm whatsoever, I was just a student that passed matric; from matric I was an activist of AZAPO. My family background is that I am from a poor family, because my mother was a domestic worker and my father was driving a delivery scooter for medicines in the pharmacy.

When we started trade unions, we started with a general trade union, that union was called Black Allied Workers Union of South Africa. And because I did not understand what was happening in labour field, like in the workplace situation, I was trained by Mbulelo Nzwana and Lizo Neti. Mbulelo Nzwana was a General Secretary then of BAWUSA and then Lizo Neti was a National Organiser. From there I attended courses at the then University of Port Elizabeth which is now the Nelson Mandela University, I attended labour courses there. At one stage we

requested Mandla Selwana who was based here in Pretoria and who was also a member of the Central Committee of AZAPO, but we had labourbackground, to come and train us further in labour matters. From there I became a Regional Organiser, and then we started now attending cases of workers. My job at that time was just to go out and recruit members and there in the office and they would join and my job would be finished, then Lizo Neti and Mbulelo Nzwanana would take over because they were the people who knew how to handle disciplinary hearings and how to negotiate with management and all those things.

So, up until now I was trained in doing those things, and then I was a Regional Organiser for the Eastern Cape. I handled cases and attended to negotiations. From there as the union was growing, because if you know Port Elizabeth (PE), PE in an area which has lots of hotels and restaurants because of the sea. Now our membership, basically we had more members from that industry. Because we had lots of members from that industry we decided that we needed to form another union which was going to look after those people, the hotel industry or I would say the catering industry. It was called NHLRRWU (National Hotel, Liquor, Restaurant and Retail Workers Union). I was still working for BAWUSA then; I was not seconded to work for NHLRRWU. I worked for BAWUSA; I was the National Organiser for BAWUSA. NHLRRWU had head offices here in Pretoria, the office here in Pretoria did not run smoothly or comrades here in Pretoria were not doing their jobs according to what was expected of them. So it was decided that I must come over here to Pretoria to be in charge of NHLRRWU affairs. Whilst I was working for NHLRRWU, its there now I was, when we established NHLRRWU and it had its own people, and it moved on, it was independent and I was recruited now to work for National Union of

Steel and Allied Workers, which is NUSAWU. Its then I came into contact with Mr. Tibane.

The big companies that were under NUSAWU were, Iscor, Desass and Du Plessis Highveld Steel, I forget the other companies. Must I continue?

Facilitator: Yes go ahead I will come back with follow up questions.

Respondent: At Iscor, there was NUSAWU, Esteelenstaal, Mine Workers Union, NUMSA, there was this other union, United Association of South Africa, something like that, and the other one of Electrical Engineering Union. There were about seven Trade Unions that were operating there and NUSAWU was the majority union at Iscor, in Pretoria West. In terms of Iscor National, like if you take Vanderbijlpark, Vereeniging, Newcastle and Saldanah, you'll find that NUMSA was the biggest and Mine Workers Union, but in Pretoria West NUSAWU was the majority, but if you compare the entire membership of Iscor, NUMSA was number one. I represented the Chief Negotiator of the union at Iscor and Tibane was doing office work and also advising, giving some advice. I studied at Wits University, I got my certificate, CPIR, Industrial Relations Certificate at Wits and I also got another certificate at the then RAU, an Afrikaans University the following year. The problem that we encountered at Iscor was that they closed down here in Pretoria, so we had to negotiate for the retrenchment of the people. People got retrenched; others were transferred to Vereeniging and Vanderbijlpark, that's the short part of it.

Facilitator: Just to go back, how were you introduced into politics, and also mainly AZAPO?

Respondent: I area in Woma, actually the are Woma, which was the, we had Moki Cekisani who was then Deputy President of the Black People's Convention, so he's the person actually who used to make us sing the songs about Steve Biko, Mapetle Mohapi, when they were still young boys at the time. At one stage, people like Steve Biko used to come there in Woma and they used to have parties there, they called in Gumba, and have some meetings there. My elder brother was also from Grahamstown with Moki Cekisani. Originally my family comes from Grahamstown, but I was born and bread in Woma. So they are they are the people who came there, they were members of SASU then, so they established the PPs there, so I grew up under thatof the PPs. So when I grew up and started to realize that the relevant organization that I needed to follow because of that background, at school would join AZAZIN and when not at school it would be AZAPO, so we grew up in that situation. If you remember there was that political time where ANC activities and PAC were not in existence. The only thing we heard was black power.

Facilitator: Later there was, in PE I would take it the Woma township as well, I have a sense of PE, I know PE a lot, I studied at Fort Hare so I used to go to PE a lot. The tension or the fight between AZAPO and the ANC, where did that leave you as a person, were you still around.

Respondent: Yes I was still around there, I was a Chairman of Woma branch then, but to me that tension was deliberately made by white people because I remember at one stage when there was a state of emergency, in AZAPO we received t-shirts from Johannesburg, they arrived in the office of AZAPO, immediately after they arrived, the system came in and then they searched, there were three of us there, they searched and took those t-shirts. When they took those t-shirts, you must also remember that during those days, what the system used

to do, used to take people, Zulus from Durban and take them to PE and take those policeman from PE to KwaZulu, also take Sothos and Pedi's from this side and take them to Cape Town, you know that kind of a thing. Those people when they are arrived in PE, the system would give them the AZAPO t-shirts and then they would go and attack people, and people would see people wearing AZAPO t-shirts attacking them, so therefore this is AZAPO and it was not the case. So that's how to me, that's why there was that tension, it was deliberately done, so that there must be black on black violence, there must be a diversion from a real political direction. So it caused a lot of havoc because those people were killing people there, they were doing all those things, and it appeared as if that was done by AZAPO. Now when it comes to youth, obviously they were angry, there was this necklace thing, and there AZAPO was left with no option but to defend themselves. But really it caused a lot of problems for both AZAPO and the UDF at that time, because right now if you see the very same people who were involved in those things, are the very people who grew up together, they are friends and they realize now, now that there was that Truth Commission, and it was also there in PE and people started to see realizing later on that this thing was the whites, particularly people like Eugene De Kok. Nobody liked it.

Facilitator: You became the chairperson of BAWUSA first.

Respondent: No I was an organizer there.

Facilitator: Was it of BAWU or BAWUSA?

Respondent: BAWUSA

Facilitator: Ok, not the BAWU of the 70s.

Respondent: No, it was BAWUSA, Black Allied Workers Union of South Africa. I was not a chairman there, I was an organizer, but that's where I started my trade unionism.

Facilitator: The kind of unions that affiliated, or sectors that affiliated to BAWUSA, which were they, was it steel or food, or was it different sectors that fall under BAWUSA.

Respondent: BAWUSA was a general trade union because it took each and every industry that came in, but as I have said earlier on is that the majority of membership recruited from the catering industry, from the hotels and restaurants, hence now we established NHLRRWU.

Facilitator: When was BAWUSA exactly formed?

Respondent: BAWUSA was formed in 19....., I joined it in late 1986, but it was formed before I joined them.

Facilitator: And the challenges that you guys faced in organising workers, you were BC aligned and other people were ANC aligned.

Respondent: It was very difficult during those days because what happened was that you'll go, first of all what we do, we go out let's say we target a certain area, like we say we go outside Dispatch which is just outside PE. In Dispatch we target the garage, we checked garages around there, and we didn't focus on the big companies. We focused on small companies and the big companies we'll just follow suit, because you must also understand that during those days most big companies were under COSATU affiliates. What would happen was this, we recruited those people, they would come to the office,

normally we held meetings on Fridays, we would hold meetings, workshops and talk with them, and they would join the union and give them membership cards. The only thing that we specialized on, immediately there's a case in a company, we would make it a point that we win that case, sort of consolidate the membership and get confidence of the people. There were two guys, they were dismissed in one garage, when we sat down with them we found out that they are bread winners, they are married and have children and their wives are not working. So we did all our best and we won those cases, those guys went back to work, they were happy they went back to work. After winning these cases, they were so excited; they had confidence, so they started recruiting other people around there. That was the basis of our strategy, that if we handle a case we must make sure that we win it, so that the person can go out and recruit for the union. We had a lot of competition, strong competition, because you must understand BAWUSA had no money.

So those guys, in one meeting they said, we see what you guys are doing and we are happy, and mind you we didn't expose ourselves that we were members of AZAPO, we didn't discuss AZAPO issues, we addressed trade union matters only. This was a mass meeting, we had arranged the meeting in a hall, there were about two hundred members, one guy stood up and said he was impressed with the way we were working, but we don't have t-shirts like other trade unions, he asked when we were going to print t-shirts so that they can show people that they belong to this union. We agreed with them and told them we would bring the t-shirts. We started fundraising for t-shirts and we got some money from a guy who owned buses in PE, a coloured guy called Brandan; he gave us money to print t-shirts. We sold the t-shirts. We picked up lots of trouble with those t-shirts because some UDF guys knew us because we were wearing those t-shirts, they said if

we are wearing those t-shirts we must also understand that in some other townships UDF had strong support, so they will say if you are a member of this union and wearing the t-shirt it meant you are a member of AZAPO, they said they would burn our houses because we were sellouts. People started to get scared; they would come to the office to complain, asking whether we were members of AZAPO, mind you AZAPO, just like in these offices, the head office of AZAPO was three offices down from our office. We said no we were not AZAPO; we were just in the same floor as them. We told them this is a union and tried to explain further. They said their wives and children were afraid because they were told that their houses were going to be burned. People started resigning, it was tough. We said we cannot just do away with the t-shirts, we decided to continue and see what happens, others were strong because they said if people say these people are part of AZAPO and they are doing the work that they do and are protecting us at work, it means that AZAPO is not a sellout organization, it means they are a relevant organization.

Others were strong and others were weak, so we lived under that situation for a long time, it was really tough. I remember we recruited Elizabeth Hotel in PE, I am not sure how many floors it had, it had lots of staff, but we recruited them. In fact they moved away from CAWUSA, they resigned from CAWUSA and joined us. There were more than two hundred forms, people were joining. We went for the first meeting, the union was recognized, and the second meeting was a question of recognition agreement with management, that agreement was signed. People wanted t-shirts, trouble started again. So there was lots of trouble, it was in and out. In late 1987 or 1988, I am not sure which year, around there, I came here.

Facilitator: So was this kind of a problem ever resolved, of recruiting and losing people.

Respondent: You know unions are there because of members, it was easily resolved because if your members come and join mine or mine join your union, that is the name of the game. Its continuous, even today it exists, but it exists now on different versions, not the same as in the past.

Facilitator: Was there maybe some kind of direct tension between BAWUSA and maybe FOSATU then which later became COSATU?

Respondent: No, that is the funny part of it, as officials we didn't have any problems, as officials we didn't have any problem, that was the main thing. We would go together to these meetings, like in UPE, we would greet each other because we know each other, sometimes even in the townships, we would sit in a shebeen and drink together, there was no problem between officers. But we wouldn't know if the person doesn't say anything to you but says something to his members about you, but there was no tension between officials and there was no feud between the unions, it never existed. Because I remember there was a company in Costen, we were majority there, but NUMSA was also in existence and the other union Electrical Engineering which was regarded as a coloured union. So we supported each other with NUMSA, we also didn't have a car at that time, after the meeting NUMSA would take us to our offices. There was totally no problem whatsoever, none. The only problem was when the guys would wear the t-shirts in the townships, and then the people would start saying if you wear that t-shirt it means you are AZAPO and therefore we would burn your house.

Facilitator: You also mentioned coloured workers, was it easy to recruit in the coloured community as BAWUSA.

Respondent: No I don't remember us having a coloured member. We had a guy that lived in Missionvale which was a mixed area in PE; it is opposite the main road to Uitenhage, its opposite KwaMagxaki. So Missionvale is a mixed area, there are coloureds and black people who live there. We had a guy that lived there, but he was not a coloured but spoke Afrikaans fluently, but I don't remember us having a member who was coloured.

Facilitator: And generally the kind of crisis you had to deal with as BAWUSA in the PE industry, what were the pressing issues for the workers.

Respondent: The main issue there was the question of salaries, because salaries were extremely too low in that area. To me I find it different at that time because were certain times when you work in a certain area you get so much, and then if you work in that in another area you get so much, but you are doing the same kind of work, but because you are in PE, you would be paid so much, then if you are in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town people were paid differently, that was the main problem, but now it does not exist. Also the question of, you see the area in PE, if you don't work for the motor industry, or Government or catering industry, there is no other jobs there. So people didn't want to lose their jobs, but the other thing is that, you'll find that most of these people, more especially people who are dealing with money, like those who were working at Garages, filling stations, we used to have a lot of problems with regards to shortage of money there. A certain person would complain and a client would come back and say I gave this person this amount but he poured so much in my car, he didn't pour R100 and poured R50, something like that. There were a lot of cases of this nature. You should understand that people needed money to survive, the salary they got was not

enough, they always needed extra, so they would resort to all these things, but at the end of the day we had to defend them. Sometimes we would win the case and sometimes the person would be suspended, it depended on the individual case.

Facilitator: And then issues around safety at workplace were these ever major issues.

Respondent: The only problem we had and I think it was discussed, we had a company there Delpart, it was called Metalman, and they worked with iron and steel. There were problems there in terms of safety, but what we did there was that we requested the then Department of Labour officials to go there and also train those guys and look into the question of health and safety. We also called in the inspectors from the metal industry to come and check if the standards are ok, because in the past there used to be lots of accidents there, people were cutting themselves with machines and all that stuff, but later on it was resolved because management were now following the correct procedures and the workers were trained properly.

Facilitator: Was BAWUSA sustainable in that area where you kept on losing members?

Respondent: When I left BAWUSA and came here, I think BAWUSA, I don't know whether they exist now or not, I am not sure. What happened was that I left BAWUSA and came to Pretoria, then later on the General Secretary, Mbulelo Nzwanana worked for Murray and Roberts, I am not sure whether they still exist or not. I still go to PE, my home is there, I was there in September last year to bury my mother, and I don't know whether they still exist.

Facilitator: Cases of expulsion, cases that you had to deal with, did you have enough muscle internally as BAWUSA, because most cases require legal experts, did you have enough muscles to deal with those cases or you had to bring lawyers from outside to help you with the cases.

Respondent: There was this guy, a coloured guy, he was a member of AZAPO, and he was a lawyer. There are some cases where we could handle as officials of the union, but other cases we referred them to that guy, I forget his name. He was harassed because he was a member of AZAPO but also handling UDF cases, he was harassed and then left the country.

Facilitator: Was it not Peter Jones.

Respondent: No it was not, Peter Jones is based in Cape Town. I forgot his name, he was a very good guy, he was handling most cases, especially cases for AZAPO members but later on he also helped the UDF. He would take a case referred to him but would be paid by the South African Council of Churches, PE branch. So he was not paid by us, what would happen is that he would write a letter to the SACC stating that there is a case of this nature. We used to refer cases to him.

Facilitator: You say he was harassed, who was harassing him and why?

Respondent: The system.

Facilitator: Oh I see.

Respondent: The system, because he left the country. He was a very powerful guy. Maybe as we carry on I will remember.

Facilitator: Just to go back a little, you also mentioned NHLRRWU. So you left BAWUSA to join or form NHLRRWU?

Respondent: NHLRRWU, Lizo Neti who was a National Organiser was seconded to establish NHLRRWU and then became the General Secretary of NHLRRWU. When NHLRRWU gained momentum, it had office here in Pretoria, but now the guys who working here in Pretoria were ill-disciplined, they would misuse money, and they would not bring subscriptions to PE which was head office. So they would just misuse funds of the union here, and membership was complaining, they were not serviced, and the office was disorderly. I was seconded to come over here, to stabilize the union, NHLRRWU around here.

Facilitator: The importance of forming NHLRRWU, what exactly did you see, maybe you saw some angle, that you need to start the union for these reasons.

Respondent: As I said to you earlier on, BAWUSA, most of its membership was derived from the catering/hotel/restaurants industry. We decide to have a specific and fresh union that was going to look into the affairs of those members directly, because those members were the majority in BAWUSA, so we said lets have an industrialized union to cater for that industry, so we formed NHLRRWU. Through that membership NHLRRWU was able to be on its own, to pay office and also run their affairs and we continued with those.

Facilitator: So did it reach its objectives, did it achieve its objectives.

Respondent: As far as I am concerned yes.

Facilitator: So you came here in 1987?

Respondent: 1987, 1988, around there.

Facilitator: Your impression of the world of unions when you came here, in Johannesburg, what was it like, was it different from PE, the set up and so on, and the problems and challenges?

Respondent: My first problem here was the language, there were no major problems as such. There were similar problems, but the only was the question of the language, because one I didn't understand Isipedi which was the main language spoken around here. Also I had a problem with Afrikaans because the workers speak Isipedi and are also good in Afrikaans, so I didn't understand Afrikaans, up until I gradually learnt Isipedi, and I would say my Afrikaans has improved now.

Facilitator: I would take it that maybe NHLRRWU is the kind of industry that is dominated by women, that there would be more women in the hotel industry and so on? Was it easy to recruit in that industry because women tend to have different problems, they are worried about kids and so on and so forth. Wanting to stay away from trouble as best as possible.

Respondent: Yes, you know what, what you are saying is true. The only strategy which worked well there was that the first contact person that you meet, lets say for instance most of them will meet a guy, you'll meet a man and talk to him and tell him who you are and why you are there and working for this kind of union. You explain to this guy about your union and how it can help them and the problems that maybe

that they affect and how we can resolve them, that's the first one. When you have met this guy, you manage to convince him. The next step for him would be that he must arrange other people, then you tell him that look, I need you to help me get one powerful woman around here who knows who does not fear white people and a person whom you trust that understands trade unionism and understands workers problems. As him to bring her along to the meeting, obviously when you arrive there he is going to introduce you to the woman, and make sure that you win the confidence of that woman because that's when now the woman must influence women. Other women must see to it that if Maria can stand for this, let me also join. If they find out that its only men joining and no women then it becomes a problem. As you are saying, the main thing for women they will all tell you that they are there to work for their children, they'll tell you that they know these things of the unions because they will come here tomorrow and tell us to go on strike and we lose our jobs, things of that nature. Those are the questions that workers will ask you, more especially women. So immediately we have a woman of that nature, when we have won her confidence, then we are finished with them, she will go and work on them, then after working on them and then we will know that we are proper. That is the strategy that we sometimes use. Or vice versa, we go to a situation where, lets say Wimpy for example. Wimpy, you will find that men are working at the back, its very difficult for you to go at the back there and talk to these guys, so when you go there you sit down and order. I was working with a guy, I don't know if you know him, Nelvis Qakembe.

Facilitator: Nelvis Qakembe, no I know the name but not him.

Respondent: He was at the Western Cape University but at one stage he was a spokesperson for Musumudi Mangena when he was a

minister of Science and Technology as Director and I think he's still there. We would go there with Nelvis and we will sit there and say lets eat, one person would come and we would ask her to bring a menu, whilst looking at the menu we would start introducing ourselves, we would ask her to tell us who she is, but sometimes you find them with name tags, so you see the name. We would tell her that we are from a union and our main mission is to recruit them because in the places they work in there are a lot of problems that they encounter, we would ask her to look for a person that she trusts and knows that is not afraid of white people, we would tell her that it mustn't be their supervisors because you would find that they work with the white people, we want a person that she trust that is not afraid of white people, and that we want to speak to that person. She would say ok, it must be so and so, she then would call that person for us and tell them why we are there and why we want to speak to her, she would tell her that she thought she was the right person who fits the person they are looking for. We would talk to her and arrange an appointment with, ask her what time would be convenient to see her, whether lunch or her day off. She would then tell us when she would be available and then we would get her contact details, but then will tell us when we can call her at work, during working hours or lunch, something like that. We will then workshop that one, we used to call it a workshop, and we talk to her and make sure that we win her over, because you would find two guys working at the back there, the women are the ones busy in the front and in the tills. So that one you workshoped is the work with influence, and you would also find that sometimes they also do stokvels together which gets them together somewhere, which is where we sometimes go and recruit them, and then we go to the company to negotiate. When we go to the company we don't say which of their employees brought us there, we tell them that we want them to be present at a meeting where the employees will nominate a person who will be

representing them, and it must be a democratic process. Then we go there, obviously they will recruit this lady and she becomes a shopsteward and then we start negotiating their salaries and other basic conditions of employment.

Facilitator: Do you still recall some of the women that you recruited of a period of time, and did they make some impact on the role of unions.

Respondent: There's this woman who ended up being the Vice President of BAWUSA, she was based in, what do you call thatin Uitenhage, I think its waterfall, her name was Nompumelelo, and she was the Vice President of BAWUSA. The funny thing that happened there was that his husband was a stonge UDF activist in Uitenhage, KwaNobuhle, they had their problems because she did not want to hear nothing about our union because she's a union herself, she knows how it operates, she's part of the decisions that are being taken and she frequents the office, she would move from Uitenhage and attend meetings in PE and vice versa, wherever meetings are she would always be there, at one stage we sent her to Wilgespruit in Roodepoort for a workshop, she was here for about two to three weeks, where she was taught Neville and Bishop Joe..... and other people, she was there for about a period of three weeks. She could understand that the issue of AZAPO even if its there it is irrelevant when it comes to union matters, you understand what I mean, it was not a primary issue because she was part and parcel of it. So she had a lot of problems with this man, they got separated for about six months, and then the family brought them together again, but that woman when I left there she was still Vice President of the union. There's another one called Olga from Humot Hotel, she was very powerful.

Facilitator: In terms of victimization, don't they get victimized by their bosses, these powerful women or any other powerful shopsteward?

Respondent: There were some frequent threats, like Olga at Humot, she was dismissed and then the workers went on strike, the union was called in by management, we sat down and then she was reinstated. From there, there was new management but had no problems with her up until she decided to leave Humot Hotel and go to work for Elizabeth Hotel where she got a better, it was sort of a promotion because she got a supervisory position. There was victimization, there were things of that nature.

Facilitator: Why did you leave NHLRRWU?

Respondent: You see when I worked for NHLRRWU, one the problem of NHLRRWU was that those comrades that worked for NHLRRWU as was alleged by the head office of NHLRRWU in PE was that they were not taking money to PE, the subscriptions to the head office. So I was taking the money to the head office, but vice versa, the head office did not care about my well being here, because immediately they received the money in PE, they will say that they will give me so much. One, I was staying with friends and must pay rent, two, I must be able to move from where I stay to the office, from the office back to where I stay. I must also be able to buy myself groceries, so we had a problem now, let alone the salary, we are just talking about basic things that are needed in life, to go to work and come back, eat, pay rent, those things only, I am not talking about lets say buying two beers or things of that nature, no I am talking about those basic things. They would say that the money they gave me was too small as compared to what I was taking down to PE. AT one stage we received, I applied for funding to the Australian and to the Netherlands Embassy, I took all

those monies and I deposited them to their account in PE because they gave me the head office account, but I sent that amount to PE. What they were complaining about with these guys is what they were doing to me. So up until now, the guys from NUSAWU recruited me and I decided that these guys are playing, even if they are here in Johannesburg, if there's a workshop in Johannesburg, they won't bother themselves to come here and check how I live here, so we had lots of problems of that nature with them. So whenever I phone them, I write them letters, I do this and that, they don't respond to those things. Even if they respond they would be saying don't worry we are going to do this and that, we had a problem of this and that, in PE there was a strike, you know there would always tell you about their problems there, so I decided to leave them.

Facilitator: Well I know there's a lot of counts of problems, but then any achievements at NHLRRWU when you look back?

Respondent: There were achievements in NHLRRWU. There was a, Proes street here in Pretoria, there was a big company, King Supermarket, it was owned by Portuguese, they had about 150 staff and all those people were members of NHLRRWU, I recruited them, I was fortunate enough because some of the people who were working there, particularly the shopstewards and other people could speak IsiZulu and IsiNdebele. So they could hear IsiXhosa and I could also hear what they were saying, so I could communicate with them, so I recruited them and they joined the union. After they joined the union I wrote a letter to the company requesting for a meeting. Those guys were brothers, they were three, and they called themselves kings. They said they are the kings and will not hear anything from the union, if you guys decide to join the union, in fact they called them one by one and they decided to dismiss them for joining the union. So we went there,

they refused to talk to us, we declared a dispute, we won the case, they were taken back. After they were taken back, its when now we gained momentum around Pretoria, because we found out these people were not staying in one area, they were staying in Garankuwa, Mabopane, Atteridgeville, Mamelodi, so they could tell other people from where they are staying. At one stage there was a funeral where I was given a platform to talk, one of the members had died of cancer, so I was given a platform to talk, I was in Garankuwa speaking in English and then somebody was interpreting in Setswana. So it was an opportunity for me also to canvas for the union, so when I was talking there, I found out after the funeral when we were eating, a lot of people were very interested, they wanted my telephone numbers, so I gave them because I didn't have business cards then, I gave them addresses, some of there were saying they wanted to come to this union. Others we met in Rustenburg, Brits, they said they had problems there, so we asked them to come through to us. So people started coming in now but I decided that what I do for these people is not what I get back, so I decided to leave them.

The other achievement was that some of the guys that were working there, I still meet with them, the other one is a supervisor at OK now, he was a shopsteward when he left at Kings he went to work at OK and he joined SACAWU, it was when now I was longer working at NHLRRWU, so he joined SACAWU, and then came to me I gave him my blessing and told him it was a fine union also, told he was right because the union was relevant, so he became a shopsteward there and from there he was promoted to supervisor, so he is doing fine. So those were the things because I didn't stay for too long.

Facilitator: In NUSAWU, what is your position there?

Respondent: I am General Secretary.

Facilitator: What have been the challenges of being associated with NUSAWU.

Respondent: A lot of challenges now are that, its no longer the same like during the liberation struggle, now it's a little bit tough because if you remember in the late 90s or early 2000, there was a problem in the steel industry, steel went down because most of the firms closed down, even before the new dispensation. What happened was this, most of the companies particularly those around Roslyn decided to close down because they didn't know what was going to happen for them when the new government takes over, that is the black government. Other companies were owned by white people who had farms, so immediately they realized that there was going to be a new government, they decided that, because they were renting those firms, they didn't own the buildings, they decided to build their own structures in their farms and operate in their farms so as to avoid the question of the unions. There was one company called Calvin in Roslyn, and that company was closed down, they went there to negotiate with the workers for retrenchment because some of them refused to go to the farm with them in Pietersburg because we know, we have been there at one stage. This guy was taking his firm and he was going to continue working in his farm and if I want to come and recruit in his farm I was welcome to go there, but I must know that it is his premises and anything happens to me in his farm the union must take responsibility for it. So these guys were that place was back, the owner said at 8pm everyone must be in their rooms, they must lock themselves in the rooms, he would open up for the dogs to roam around the yard, whoever was not in the room, maybe they decided to go drinking with friends and come back late, the dogs would bite

that person. So they said that place is not right. So we said ok fine lets negotiate for retrenchment packages, others lived in that area in Pietersburg said they didn't have any problem they would go there, others said because they were from Mabopane and Garankuwa were not going there, so we negotiated for those, they received their retrenchment packages.

So those were some of the challenges. Iscor closed down as well and it was later on by this guy (not clear). Even companies like Dessans and Du Plessis, they went down and were bought by St Gobyn, a company from overseas, they are running it now> The other thing is that these big companies have introduced the labour brokers, this is giving lots of unions headaches. The retrenched workers, they said they were retrenching them because they didn't have enough work, but later on you would find out that a certain company is a labour broker, they hire those people that were retrenched for that company and they don't get the same money they were earning when they were working for Dessans and Du Plessis but they are doing the very same job. With these labour brokers they work with contracts, you are contracted for a year and they will see if they renew it, you are doing the very same job you were doing for that company but you are not getting the same salary and you are contracted maybe for a year. So those are the things that are challenging and very problematic when it comes to this industry.

Facilitator: So NUSAWU focuses on steel industry.

Respondent: Steel and motor.

Facilitator: This is more or less a vicious industry so to speak because its more or less like similar to mining, tough work and so on. The levels of exploitation in this industry?

Respondent: Yes as I have said, its too high. Labour brokers in this industry, its very problematic. The other thing is that the problem with that industry is that negotiations, wage negotiations are done at industry level, meaning that you negotiate at the bargaining council, for all that employers who are working in that industry. Now the problem becomes that the companies that can afford to pay for example ten percent increase will hide under those who know that these are small companies and they cannot afford to pay ten percent, they can only pay maybe five or six percent, but the big companies know that they can pay up to twelve percent, but they use these small companies and say that they are also unable to pay this. For instance we had a case with Dussass and Du Plessis, NUSAWU was saying we want to negotiate at company level, we want to negotiate with Dussass and Du Plessis face to face, we don't want to negotiate with SIPSA, we took that case industrial court and we won it there, they appealed and we lost the appeal, do you understand now. It's a very difficult industry, even if you have a muscle like NUMSA for example, which is a biggest union in this industry, but also there are other unions like Solidarity, if NUMSA says they are going on strike, Solidarity says no they are not going on strike, so NUMSA alone cannot do anything. If you check also the question of the members of both unions, NUMSA, most of their members are labourers, Solidarity has artisans and they are white people, and the gap between the two is too big. So if you give say 6.5% for an artisan and 6.5% of the labourer, its not the same. So you find that artisans get a lot of money but for the labourers, general workers its peanuts, so those are the things that are problematic in this industry.

Facilitator: What about injuries/safety at work because steel is something else, it can fall at any time.

Respondent: There are accidents but not too many. Its not like the mining industry, there are but they are not too many, to be quite honest they are not too many, you find once in a blue moon, but there are not too many.

Facilitator: Post 1994, this is more of a general question, could it be possible that the fact that AZAPO didn't participate in the general elections and subsequently in 1999 they lost the elections, could it be possible that in some way that BC oriented unions got affected in a way.

Respondent: I will give my personal view on that one. To be quite honest AZAPO made a big blunder, because to be quite honest I was one of the people that were saying look, I can't see any reason if you don't go to the elections in 1994 and then sometime in 1999 you go to the elections, what is that, what are you going to achieve. I said in those many meetings I was in contact with these people, that one, the issue of the armed struggle is totally out, there is no way that in this country we are going to fight again, if we don't go to the election, didn't campaign for the elections in 1994, there's no other solution, if you think you are going to go back and take arms, that would be suicidal, there's no other solution here, for us we have to swallow our pride and go for elections. You this kind of military, these guys who like to talk too much, I told them not to go there. Look at them now, its very problematic for both AZAPO and BC (not clear), and I cant see AZAPO coming back again, it would be a miracle. The very same army of AZAPO, AZANLA was not integrated and some of them are

unemployed today, and they are well trained, trained in Lybia and everywhere but are unemployed today. Two, AZAPO got divided, it was SOPA, after SOPA AZAPO got divided again, and there was BC Party. I can't see AZAPO coming back again, I can't see how they are going to make it back. That's my personal view.

Facilitator: When you look at the labour setup today, including the labour laws, do you think people have been met halfway, the unions and workers and so on.

Respondent: There's lots of improvement, the only problem is the question of labour brokers, if they can deal with those labour brokers its going to be better. The other thing which affects unions today, you see there are these companies, Legal wise, Scorpion, they also came in, they have recruited employees and told them we will help you, pay R35, we are lawyers and blah blah. Workers are who are with unions, when they hear that they are lawyers, they decide that they will join lawyers because they will represent me, so I don't care about unions anymore. But now that lawyer doesn't go inside and negotiate basic conditions of employment, it does not deal with day to day problems in the firm, does not deal with health and safety, does not deal with wages, doesn't deal with any problems within the company that crop up in that company, they wait for you to be dismissed and retrenched and then go and negotiate for your money. They don't go to CCMA but they don't tell workers that they don't do those things, but workers think that because they have a lawyer it is enough. This thing doesn't work, they confuse workers just so they can see them as lawyers who can properly represent them with all these fancy words. So that is another biggest problem facing the unions now.

Three, it's the in-fighting within the unions, there seems to be a lot of money now, with bigger unions, but with small unions like us you don't have that kind of a problem. With bigger unions you have investment arms, they take money and invest it, companies come to them and negotiate to print t-shirts for them, give them this and that, so there are a lot of kick backs, there are a lot of this and that. So union officials nowadays are like company directors, they drive big cars, they no longer care about the problems of the workers, it's only those or during that time when there's congress, provincial congress, and they want to make sure that tomorrow where there's congress of the union they are re-elected so they can continue. Their lifestyle has changed, everything has changed, they are no longer that vocal and consistent, so its also problematic. I don't mean that they must live in the squatter camps, at least if a person is in a position to live a healthy life or a nice life, he must be able to also plough it back to the workers. They come in and out, they don't care about anything, as long they know that they have organizers at the bottom who are working, they only want to see the reports, they don't have that commitment like sometimes going to the firm and meeting workings, like for example go to a company, for example an engineering company and address workers in person as a General Secretary of the union, no its not their job. Even if as a union organizer its your responsibility, even if you want to impress the workers by having the General Secretary there, but they tell you that its your baby you must look after it, you must do it and report back after the meeting. So top leadership does not care too much, that's another problem.

Generally when it comes to government, the government has tried, there are changes, a little bit. There are CCMSAs now, there's talk of this and that, if you have a complaint you can write a letter to the minister, there's a black minister now, your cases are being taken care

of. If there's a problem you can go to workman compensation, you can write a letter to the commissioner, you can arrange a meeting with him directly and discuss whatever you want to discuss. There is some kind of changes, I think there's a lot of improvement compared to the previous government.

Facilitator: Is there anything that you think that is important which should have been part of this interview, have we left anything out that you think is important which you think should have been part of this interview.

Respondent: No.

Facilitator: When you look back was it worth it to be in unions, or have you lost your time, energy, resources, your life.

Respondent: No, I would say trade unions opened up my scope of thinking in life generally. I have benefited a lot to be part of the trade union movement because I can deal with a lot of issues, even socially and generally I can handle them, because it opened up my scope so wide. So I think I have benefited, I can't complain.

Facilitator: Any closing word maybe?

Respondent: No. When is this publication going to be released.

Facilitator: This is how it's going to work, I can send you your own interview. We are not necessarily writing, personally I am not writing anything out of this, so these interviews we transcribe and then put them in the library. So anyone who wants to do research, or anyone

who wants this for something else maybe you know your obituary, they can phone us and we'll send them the stuff. If they research and want to see what we have on labour, this is the material that we have. I must be honest, for the next two years I wanted to have time to sit down and have something because I am doing my PHD at UCT on another subject, this is mainly my job focus.

Respondent: What is that certificate programme on Industrial Relations? Its CPIR from Wits.

Facilitator: Yes with Phil Born?

Respondent: What's his name, Duiker, is he still there?

Facilitator: I haven't had of that name now for a long time, so I am not sure.

Respondent: What courses do they have now there, do they have the advanced diploma on labour law.

Facilitator: Yes they have.

Respondent: How many years?

Facilitator: I think its one year?

Respondent: Do you have their numbers?

Facilitator: You can give me your email, I will send you their stuff.

END

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