

Joe Mabuza

Facilitator: This is an interview with Joe Mabuza the date is 15 September 2012 we are in Thembisa, interview is done by Brown Maaba. You were telling me earlier on that NEHAWU used to be strong in the beginning?

Respondent: Yes it was strong in the beginning but it is no longer strong.

Facilitator: When did you join NEHAWU?

Respondent: It's been a while, more than 15 years

Facilitator: Which company did you work for?

Respondent: The Department of Public Works

Facilitator: Here in Kempton Park?

Respondent: Braamfontein, de Kort and de Beer in Johannesburg.

Facilitator: You used to work far. So was this your first job?

Respondent: Yes it was my first job in 1989

Facilitator: By then did NEHAWU exist?

Respondent: Yes it existed, it was much strong from 1986, backwards so and right up to 1990, but now it is no longer strong. I visited their offices and I am not impressed with it. They no longer hold meetings.

Facilitator: But 1989/90 what were they doing?

Respondent: It was very strong in those days

Facilitator: What made it strong in your opinion explain to me?

Respondent: The leaders in those days were very encouraging, they informed us abouto what was going on etc.

Facilitator: What did they do to make the organisation strong?

Respondent: Yes they used to strike but they also ensured that our demands are met, we know the way forward.

Facilitator: Things like what for instance?

Respondent: For instance if it was salary increase time we were kept informed of what was happening

Facilitator: They addressed your demands and other things?

Respondent: Yes they addressed all our demands

Facilitator: In what way, by striking or negotiations?

Respondent: They negotiated a lot with the employer

Facilitator: They negotiated with the employer, yes

Respondent: And your demands were met

Facilitator: What were your other demands from the employer as workers at the time?

Respondent: In most cases we wanted a salary increase and the treatment of the employer, the way workers were treated at work, those are the things we needed most

Facilitator: What about benefits like medical aid, pension etc., did you have those?

Respondent: Yes we had medical aid, Gems, I just didn't understand it very well but we had pension fund

Facilitator: Women, did they qualify for maternity leave?

Respondent: Yes they do have maternity leave, I don't know when it started but I know they have it now to date.

Facilitator: Who were your leaders in 1989/90 of NEHAWU?

Respondent: Mr Malatji I think was the leader

Facilitator: So was he the one who attended to your demands?

Respondent: Yes he was very strong, and people like Don, I can't remember his surname he was also very powerful. Since they left I don't know what is going on

Facilitator: How long did they remain in the movement in NEHAWU as leaders?

Respondent: More than five years

Facilitator: 1989 to 1992 ..

Respondent: Yes, and then I moved from that branch and went to another place

Facilitator: Still in Jo'burg?

Respondent: Yes

Facilitator: But still they were in charge of the branch?

Respondent: Yes they remained in the branch

Facilitator: So what went wrong in your opinion?

Respondent: I would say maybe because I was no longer close to them a lot went wrong, and I don't know what happened in my absence. Now when I ask how things are I do not get a good response. I went to their offices and was told what is going on, there's a new leadership.

Facilitator: Malatji and the others used to hold meetings with workers?

Respondent: Yes

Facilitator: What did you talk about in the meetings?

Respondent: About things which must be done

Facilitator: Relating to workers?

Respondent: Yes

Facilitator: Did the workers agree with unions in those days?

Respondent: Yes, they believed in the union, we were proud of being union members then

Facilitator: So what went wrong with NEHAWU, you say it's no longer strong?

Respondent: I don't know, since I moved from Johannesburg I don't know what is happening because I am so far from there, there is no time to go and visit and find out what is going on, there is just no time

Facilitator: Is NEHAWU still strong?

Respondent: To some extent yes

Facilitator: The other union you talked about, the white union, what was it called?

Respondent: PSA

Facilitator: When did it start?

Respondent: I don't know when it started, all along it belonged to whites and now suddenly it is competing with NEHAWU

Facilitator: How is it?

Respondent: The members say it's alright, they new recruit funeral packages as well

Facilitator: But is the majority still NEHAWU?

Respondent: Yes NEHAWU is still in the majority

Facilitator: Does NEHAWU have funeral packages and other worker benefits?

Respondent: Only recently were they introduced, people are talking about them now, I also joined the funeral scheme

Facilitator: So all along they did not have funeral packages?

Respondent: Yes they were silent on such things, they would say you are a member but there were no funeral benefits. Later on we were encouraged to join the funeral schemes for our families.

Facilitator: Any other benefits from the union?

Respondent: Not to my knowledge, it's just the funeral scheme

Facilitator: Do people still believe in NEHAWU?

Respondent: Yes we do, we still have shop stewards

Facilitator: Tell me about the shop stewards are they encouraging?

Respondent: They are but they don't attend their meetings, I would sometimes ask them how things went

Facilitator: What are the shop stewards currently busy with relating to workers?

Respondent: We've been asking for union uniform to indicate that we are members of NEHAWU, t-shirts, caps, etc.

Facilitator: Are they promising on this?

Respondent: Yes they are, we do have t-shirts

Facilitator: So there are no other demands from the workers to the union?

Respondent: Nothing at this stage, things are quiet

Facilitator: So the PSA is it here to stay or do you think it will dissolve?

Respondent: I think it is here to stay because where I live most people belong to the PSA, when positions are vacant they are given to PSA members. New people who join are encouraged to join the PSA. So the majority of people where I am belong to the PSA.

Facilitator: What is NEHAWU doing about this?

Respondent: It is not visible at all, the people who create jobs belong to the PSA so they employ people and encourage them to join PSA, NEHAWU has no power. So I think PSA is visible and it seems it is going to take over.

Facilitator: PSA members, are whites in the majority?

Respondent: Yes whites are leading

Facilitator: Are you telling me that NEHAWU doesn't have power, you said they were in the majority? Do they not have power to employ people and represent them?

Respondent: NEHAWU is powerful but where I am at the moment PSA is in the majority

Facilitator: Which branch is this?

Respondent: Department of Public Works

Facilitator: So PSA is in the majority?

Respondent: Yes PSA is in the majority

Facilitator: Is PSA affiliated under COSATU?

Respondent: I think they are under NEHAWU

Facilitator: So people cannot differentiate between the struggle of the people of NEHAWU and the struggle of PSA?

Respondent: No people don't know

Facilitator: What went wrong?

Respondent: I don't know

Facilitator: What challenges does NEHAWU have these days?

Respondent: I don't know

Facilitator: What about in the past, when NEHAWU started what challenges were they faced with?

Respondent: I don't know

Facilitator: Have you had any strikes in the last few years?

Respondent: No strikes, negotiations were held and agreements were reached

Facilitator: What did the workers want?

Respondent: A salary increase

Facilitator: Did they get it?

Respondent: Yes they did

Facilitator: Are workers happy with their salaries?

Respondent: Not really

Facilitator: Why, are they going to go the Marikana route?

Respondent: People are not happy, I think currently there are negotiations, apparently there's some monies which are due to the workers, we are waiting for the employer to give us the money

Facilitator: So you're waiting for them?

Respondent: Yes we are waiting for them to respond, the Minister of Public Works must respond. We were given agreements to sign and were asked to wait for the money. A meeting will be held on 26 September 2012, they will give us an update on the matter.

Facilitator: What about other demands, what else do you expect from the employer apart from money?

Respondent: Nothing I can think of at this stage

Facilitator: What about safety issues at work, is the environment safe to work in?

Respondent: Very safe, protective clothing is given to us, we have all the protective clothing we need.

Facilitator: What about health issues and so on?

Respondent: Like what for instance?

Facilitator: For instance HIV Aids/TB and other chronic illnesses, is NEHAWU attending to this?

Respondent: I would say they do come and give us information, they run awareness programmes and encourage people to check their health status. If a person is sick they are referred to the hospital

Facilitator: Is this organised by NEHAWU?

Respondent: No by the department

Facilitator: What is NEHAWU doing for its members?

Respondent: Nothing really, nothing is happening

Facilitator: Do you expect them to do something for its members, people are dying etc., or do you think it is not the union's business to get involved in such matters?

Respondent: I think they should get involved and show an interest in their members' health

Facilitator: How do other workers feel about this or are they just silent?

Respondent: People are just silent about it, nothing has been raised so far.

Facilitator: How do you see the future of NEHAWU?

Respondent: I think NEHAWU has a future, I have not encountered any problems with them that is why I am still a member. I am not sure what will happen in the future. For now they are doing what is expected of them.

Facilitator: You are hopeful

Respondent: Yes

Facilitator: So you are going to stick to it?

Respondent: Yes I will stick to it

Facilitator: So currently you have no other demands apart from salary increases?

Respondent: At this stage there's nothing.

Facilitator: Is there anything that you think I should know about NEHAWU that you have not mentioned?

Respondent: Not to my knowledge, I think I've told you everything.

Facilitator: Does the Department of Labour visit your workplace to check whether workers are given protective clothing and that they understand their rights in the workplace?

Respondent: They do come and give us information on such things

Facilitator: What information do they give you?

Respondent: The importance of wearing protective clothing etc., the importance of sticking to rules especially protective clothing.

Facilitator: Is that the only thing they deal with?

Respondent: Yes

Facilitator: Nothing else from the Department of Labour?

Respondent: No nothing else.

Facilitator: The workers, do they attend the sessions with the Department of Labour?

Respondent: Yes they do, they are told on time to attend

Facilitator: How effective are the courses with the Department of Labour?

Respondent: they are fine because if they find you without protective clothing they do not get involved should you be hurt

Facilitator: Nor does the union?

Respondent: Yes, they first ensure that you were wearing protective clothing before they attend to your case, if not they do not get involved

Facilitator: What if you followed all the regulations do they pay you out?

Respondent: They do pay you, they have to pay you for sure because you are wearing protective clothing

Facilitator: Do you know of a case whereby someone got hurt at work?

Respondent: None happened, someone was involved in a car accident whilst driving to work which was something completely separate

Facilitator: What about cases of dismissal?

Respondent: There were cases of dismissal

Facilitator: what were people dismissed for?

Respondent: Like corruption, a lot of fraud, fraud was popular

Facilitator: Other things like getting drunk etc.?

Respondent: No I haven't heard of any

Facilitator: What about theft?

Respondent: Yes that's fraud, people would steal things and sell them where ever, they would be arrested and dismissed.

Facilitator: Did NEHAWU not represent workers in such cases?

Respondent: They do if you are honest with them, tell them if you have stolen, but if you lie to them they do not help you – if you lie the company will dismiss you. The union does not have power in such cases, they only represent you if you are being honest with them

Facilitator: Did the union win any cases?

Respondent: Not to my knowledge, the cases I know of were fraud cases involving a lot of money so they were dismissed.

Facilitator: So they had to go?

Respondent: Yes they were dismissed, four of them

Facilitator: Were they union members?

Respondent: Some were union members yes

Facilitator: Why do people steal, is it out of poverty or do they just do it for the fun of it?

Respondent: I would say so, but these people are not children, people holding senior positions getting involved in such things what can you say about them, others would ask a junior person to do their dirty job and then when the company finds out the junior staff member is afraid to tell them who sent him to do so.

Facilitator: So other people get into trouble for the things they did not do?

Respondent: Yes.

Facilitator: What happens, do they get into trouble?

Respondent: Of course, you are the one who committed the act, you were told to deliver a lounge suite in Springs instead of Thembisa

Facilitator: So that is how things got out of hand?

Respondent: Yes

Facilitator: The union representatives are they strong, from the side of the union, the shop stewards?

Respondent: Yes they are strong

Facilitator: Were they given training in order to be efficient shop stewards?

Respondent: I don't know, we just nominated and voted for our shop stewards

Facilitator: What criteria do the workers use for choosing shop stewards, do you just choose anybody?

Respondent: No we vote

Facilitator: How is the selection made, do the people volunteer?

Respondent: We vote for this person because they are hard working and attend union meetings, and is able to report back to the workers, we vote and confirm him as a shop steward.

Facilitator: Do they disappoint you?

Respondent: No they do their best, one of them lives here in Thembisa

Facilitator: Apart from shop stewards do you think you can manage on your own as workers?

Respondent: I don't think so because there won't be any direction, no way, we need shop stewards

Facilitator: How long is their term in office?

Respondent: The same ones have been in office from the beginning

Facilitator: When do you change them?

Respondent: If we are not happy with them, if they are not reporting back or taking instructions from us

Facilitator: Do you trust them, are they not sell out?

Respondent: Ours haven't although I believe others do, ours have never sold us, they are doing what we expect them to do.

Facilitator: So you say there's a future in NEHAWU?

Respondent: Yes there is

Facilitator: Thanks very much let me release you.

END

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