

## Wiseman Mangali

Facilitator: This is an interview with Wiseman Mangali, we are in Kempton Park, the date is 17<sup>th</sup> September 2012. Interview is done by Brown Maaba. Comrade thanks for your time. Just kindly give me a background of where you come from and how you got connected to this world of unions which you are very familiar with.

Respondent: Okay, I grew up in the Eastern Cape in a place called Xala where Gwede comes from, Moses Mayekiso comes from, Enock Godongwana comes from and the rest, the majority of them are coming from that place. But in different locations of Xala. I schooled in Xala Village, also Bathandwa Ndongondo but he was my junior. Thereafter I went to Falo High school which is Xofuvaba and then I was expelled in 1978. Thereafter I went to Tsomo High School, I was expelled there as well in 1979 for promoting the struggle. In 1980 I went to Zongotha and 1981 I was in Zongotha and kept a low profile there, it is in Lady Frere.

Facilitator: So you were introduced to the struggle in the 1970s?

Respondent: In the 1970s yes

Facilitator: How did it happen, was there an influential person in Xala or somewhere around?

Respondent: There were two guys which was Biongo and another guy .., I just forget his name, he was an advocate, Adv. Msizana, they introduced me to the struggle. By then it was still the black power. Because of my background, I didn't come from a wealthy family I would make a plan to attend the meetings. Where I am coming from the people were supporting the PAC.

Facilitator: Really?

Respondent: Yes in those days it was only PAC in Xala. I managed to get more than what PAC is bringing to me and then I decided this is not what I'm looking for, this had started in 1960, I am not looking for 1960 I'm looking beyond 1960. That is when I was introduced to the BCM. I went as far as .., when I came to Jo'burg actually, that was in 1981, after finishing matric. I was introduced to UDF by some comrades there, by that time I was still linked to BCM. There are comrades that were in hiding at Emdeni Extension, like comrade Popo Molefe, Terror Lekota and other comrades. We were promoting BCM then, but I could see that BCM is dying a natural death. I then decided this is not what I'm looking for, I want to go further. I went as far as organising some comrades in Soweto to revolt against the rental increase. That was in 1984, the government started increasing the rates in Soweto as a whole. Some people were killed in Jabulani. Then in 1985 that's when they came to our place, which is Emdeni, it was called Beirut at the time. Then we fought but they didn't manage to do what they wanted to do.

In 1985 I was also working and was introduced to the labour movement by the late comrade Abraham Ndala, known as Mmaphuti and Sam Ntuli. That's when I realised that the struggle is not about liberation only, it was economical freedom and political freedom, the two are linked. So I joined NUMSA, although I was office bound. In those days if you were office bound they used to say you are a staff member or part of management, although I was not a manager I was nothing I was just a worker. Then I said no I'm not in management, I am going to go with my black brothers. I joined my black brothers. It was me, Abraham Ndala and Steve Malele.

Facilitator: Which firm did you work for?

Respondent: ANCO Mining Machinery. Thereafter I went as far as becoming a shop steward. But before I could take this matter further, I was retrenched. I then went and worked for Johannesburg Country Club which is a golf course.

Facilitator: Do you know why you were retrenched, were you victimised?

Respondent: I think so but I didn't want to say anything because I was no longer interested in the company anymore. I could see they were .., I can't remember which year it was, when Mandela was in hospital. There was a white woman who was saying Mandela is sort of a terrorist, he used to kill people that's where the problem started actually because I challenged her, a white woman. I said to her if you are saying Mandela is a terrorist in which manner are you saying that, because Mandela is fighting for his country and your current president who was then PW Botha is a terrorist in our country as far as I'm concerned. So I was suspended for three weeks. Thereafter I came back everything was sour until the retrenchment. I decided not to dispute the retrenchment because I was no longer interested in the company.

Facilitator: So NUMSA did not take the case us, you were members of NUMSA?

Respondent: Yes, actually you know what happened, there were things that you wouldn't even go to the union and .., because I could go to the union and tell them about this thing. But in the working environment they wouldn't do anything, because I was going to be a working ghost and I didn't want to I wanted my freedom. I then went and joined country club and became a shop steward there, under FAWU.

Facilitator: Country is a food industry?

Respondent: Yes. While I was working for country club it was the time when ANC was in the process of being unbanned. I then started to organise and mobilise people around that area and then in 1994, I left country club and joined Rand Merchant Bank. That's when I was very much involved in politics. There I was ..., I went as far as becoming the treasurer of the zone which is Kempton Park zone and also the treasurer of my branch which was ward 69 then, of which now it is ward 12. Up to now I'm still a member of the ANC. That's where I am.

Facilitator: Just to go back, when you went to country club, you became a shop steward as well there?

Respondent: Yes

Facilitator: Were there no shop stewards before you came in?

Respondent: There were shop stewards but they were in a ..(unclear)

Facilitator: What was their problem. They couldn't .., you know there are some labour relation disputes where if, let's say a person is caught stealing. I'm not saying I'm promoting that. That person there are two versions in stealing it's either you took it, you are going to take it from here and then you gonna put it there, as long as it is not out of the premises of the company, that is not stealing. The only time that we steal is when you are taking it out of the premises. So that's where the problem was, because these people they used to come from the kitchen via the kitchen, straight to where these golfers used to stay. And they would be caught and they would say they are stealing. And then that's where I said to them no this is not right. The boundaries of the country club are not here, they are there. They've got security on both sides. Why can't they wait for these people to get out of the gate – they said no the people were given a direction. What happens if the side is full, what must

they do? You want to go and serve the people you must find a way to get to them. that's where the problem started and then I said no this thing of stealing between workers must come to an end. And also in the office when I went there, there was no black person working in the office, only whites. The members, black golfers were not allowed. I then asked the criteria they are using in terms of choosing their membership. They said because this company was formed by a certain group. I said now why can't we apply transformation, why can't you adapt to the current situation. So they were a bit reluctant and then I decided to resign from the country club. I then went to join Rand Merchant bank.

Facilitator: The country club, which one was it?

Respondent: Here in Woodmead

Facilitator: The famous Woodmead Country Club?

Respondent: Yes

Facilitator: So it was an apartheid run style country club?

Respondent: Yes.

Facilitator: And then when you became a shop steward, you became a shop steward for how long there, at the country club?

Respondent: For two years.

Facilitator: And the workers were they behind you?

Respondent: They were behind me, fully, 100%

Facilitator: Okay so they were not fearless?

Respondent: No to such an extent that we staged a strike but unfortunately it was that month that I was leaving. I then said to them they must wait because people might think that I'm influencing them because I know that I'm leaving. I asked them to wait, give your grievances to the next person, not me, because they might think that because Wiseman is leaving he is just making a mess of this whole thing.

Facilitator: What were the pressing issues there, as a shop steward because you had the country club and you knew what was happening there?

Respondent: The pressing issue was discrimination. Blacks were treated like dogs. And in terms of salary then that was 1994, they were getting R992 a month and most companies were paid more or less R3000 in those days. But at country club they were getting only R992 and there was no pension fund, no medical aid, nothing. If they fire you or you retire you just get your pay and then you go. So those were the pressing issues.

Facilitator: But were those things ever resolved, pension, medical aid and so on?

Respondent: Medical aid I don't think it was resolved, but the rest .., because they opted for .., not pension but .., I will remember it now. The pension had some little

hiccups, you cannot borrow from it. The situation was they were not getting paid enough, so they were supposed to go and borrow some money from their investment or whatever and with the pension you cannot withdraw from it, until you retire.

Facilitator: But the working conditions how were they at the country club?

Respondent: The working conditions were very bad to an extent that people were not even staying there, they had their own dormitory, some people were staying in Alexander, others were staying in Thembisa, Soweto you name it. The place they lived in was not in good condition.

Facilitator: And then salary disputes were there ever any salary disputes?

Respondent: Yes there were after I've left, I raised this as an issue while I was there, and then thereafter ..., we had some casualties while I was there. People were fired, others were demoted and

Facilitator: Were there women who were employed there?

Respondent: Yes there were women, but basically they were just working in the kitchen, except the white women who worked in the offices.

Facilitator: Were they part of FAWU these women?

Respondent: The black women were part of FAWU

Facilitator: Were they vocal or just passive?

Respondent: No they were not even educated, it was just people who were just following whatever we were saying.

Facilitator: But they knew of the importance of the unions?

Respondent: At a later stage I would say yes, at the beginning some of them didn't want to join the union because they said they were not there for political reasons, they were there to work for their kids.

Facilitator: But other than that, did they have benefits these women, I mean maternity leave and so on?

Respondent: No if they get pregnant, it's either you leave the work or you just give birth and come back after two days.

Facilitator: Just after two days?

Respondent: Yes after two days, or you take a sick leave which is four/five days only per annum. Those were the pressing issues.

Facilitator: But what was the response of the management when you took them on on such issues?



Respondent: Management because they were dealing with people who are illiterate is only in 1992 up to 1993 where they could see that we are no longer dealing with illiterate now because it was me, another guy called William Wayi, he is late now, that were pushing this thing. Then we set up sort of criteria to employ people, they must not employ anybody who doesn't have at least standard 6. Actually we were not, I think we were a bit paranoid but because we could see that the majority of the people they didn't understand what we were doing. At least the people who had some education could understand .., that's where we managed to bring the company down to our level, after they employed people from standard 6 upwards.

Facilitator: And you succeeded?

Respondent: We succeeded.

Facilitator: But in terms of other things like safety, was that ever an issue, safety issues at ..?

Respondent: Actually because I was working in the office, I was the only black, that was the problem, but unfortunately I was also a member of the union which is FAWU. I was not allowed to workshops and see how things are done. So also on my side I think I failed the workers because I must admit I failed the workers really.

Facilitator: In what sense?

Respondent: Because I didn't do a proper research on the working conditions, I was dealing with the situation that was close to me, the kitchen, the offices and the

caddy department. But the workshop I did not attend, workshops were held outside so I needed transport to get there.

Facilitator: As a shop steward you also had to consult with FAWU, how was that done and when was that done and what were the issues discussed?

Respondent: You know FAWU was a very good union then, I don't know now. In terms of responses, whatever complain I had they responded on the spot. They would come to the office and deal with management in my absence. I was dealing with the finances of the company. So I didn't have enough time during the day except after work. That's when I had time to meet with them. But during the day I dealt with finances.

Facilitator: Was it an effective union?

Respondent: Very much so. I cannot discredit them.

Facilitator: Why did you leave the golf club?

Respondent: Because of the money. I then joined Rand Merchant Bank, there was no scope for improvement, black people could only reach up to a certain level. I wanted a company that didn't have such restrictions for black people.

Facilitator: And then you joined the Merchant Bank, was there some upward mobility there, did you gain a better position at Merchant Bank?

Respondent: Actually you know these intellectuals have a problem. When I got there I found people with degrees who didn't care a damn about black people's struggle because they are well off, some were living in suburbs like Sandton etc. I tried and had to leave, they were not interested in what I was doing.

Facilitator: What did you want to do, did you want to introduce unions there?

Respondent: Yes I wanted to introduce unions, not because of the payment or whatever. Their salary scales were good, they paid well. In terms of working conditions there was no discrimination at all.

Facilitator: But just a culture of unions that's what you wanted, that's all?

Respondent: Yes

Facilitator: And they refused to be part of it?

Respondent: Yes, not the company, when I was busy trying to organise, Mac Maharaj was introduced as the director of the company.

Facilitator: So he was at par and with understanding?

Respondent: Yes

Facilitator: So your activities ended up at the golf club as a unionist?

Respondent: Yes as a unionist. But beyond that it was only the ANC. As I'm still with the ANC to date.

Facilitator: So which position did you hold, at what level?

Respondent: I was the treasurer of the zone which is the highest position in Kempton Park. Now I'm just a member of the ANC. I had a stroke in 2006, thereafter I decided just to follow. But now this guy, Mongezi Maphutha wanted me to be involved in the structures of the ANC. I said no. I can rather .., I am not a supporter, I am a member. There's a difference between the supporter and the member. I am a fully fledged member of the ANC.

Facilitator: Just back in the 1980s. Was there a connection between the worker struggle and the township struggles, was there a link?

Respondent: They were very much linked because you know if you look at .., I would say during 1985, our situation in Soweto then, our situation was held by the labour movement, including this one because then it was before COSATU. It was handled by them and they were the ones who were instructing us, because some of us didn't have material. Some of us were new in politics, so we didn't have material nor did we know what to do until some of the labour movements came and guided us.

Facilitator: So it worked very well?

Respondent: Ja very well. I nearly forgot, you know here in Ekurhuleni the Tourism Department, Environment Department, I am the one who formed it in 1994. It was

me, Roux and other comrades, Ntombi Mekgwe and other comrades. I was also involved in education as well.

Facilitator: This tourism route, because talking about tourism route, people tend to land here at OR Tambo, which is our airport but they don't go to Soweto to see a township. What happened to tourism around Ekurhuleni?

Respondent: I think we didn't strategise the whole thing because now the better route for the tourist is Soweto unlike Thembisa, Brakpan and Springs and other areas. I think that's how we managed, after the death of OR, Phesani and the rest that were the heroes of Ekurhuleni. But now you cannot go and take a person to see a grave. We didn't have a vision .., because the vision that we have was only short term. Now Duma Nkosi as well tried and widened the vision of Ekurhuleni, but he didn't have support.

Facilitator: So that was the problem?

Respondent: That was the problem yes

Facilitator: But post 1994 do you think that unions remain effective after 1994?

Respondent: Very much so because if we didn't have unions the exploitation would be visible in this country, it is clear that companies do not want to pay. Taking into consideration this thing of Marikana. How can you live with R3400 as a man, I'm not promoting what is happening in Marikana but they should be paid a decent wage. If you look at a white person who is also a miner like them, he is getting round about R14 000, a black person is getting R3000, that is still there, it hasn't changed at all. They are right to fight for that, but at the same time what they want is beyond any

investor's power. You cannot ask for 150% at once. At least if they were asking for R8000 I would agree, R8000 is a living wage for a starter, it should be an entry level in the mines. But now they want R12 500 upwards which is beyond the investor's control.

Facilitator: So what's gonna be the solution there, do you think the mine will close down?

Respondent: Well, the mine won't close down but there will be a lot of retrenchments and that's why most companies, even in the construction industry, like SABAWU .., I think you know the union called SABAWU, it is in the construction industry. People used to push wheel barrows until SABAWU was introduced. SABAWU wanted an increase, then as I was saying in the beginning, we are looking at short term. The short term is fine but what about long term. Now the company looked at long term, they introduced machinery, cranes and other things, instead of using manpower. So that's when there was a lot of retrenchments after 1994. The apartheid government the reason why there was such high employment, it's because they were using cheap labour. We have expensive labour but unfortunately a few people are working as compared to the people that are not working because of the machinery that they are using to replace labour.

Facilitator: I don't know, the issue of labour brokers, has it also changed the working environment in South Africa?

Respondent: I never came across it, I read about them but I've never come across them. Labour brokers, people are struggling and have nowhere to go when they have a problem, a labour broker is there to introduce them to the company and then from there they just .., they cannot demand an increase from the employer, they must go to the labour broker, who a labour broker, that's a problem. So I think the labour brokers are the ones who are .., they are even worse than apartheid. In

my opinion they must just go. They must just do away with labour brokers. If a company wants to employ people they must just go and advertise the positions, no labour broker, nothing. Another problem that we are having again is the youth – because labour brokers want experience .., you cannot buy it, the government is also failing our youth because they have to introduce interns like in the olden days, in the apartheid era. In the apartheid regime the white kids used to work as interns, from there they will be absorbed in the working environment. But they are no longer doing that now. Where are our kids going to get experience from.

Facilitator: They are struggling. But also just to pick up a few points. After matric did you plan to look for a job or you wanted to go to university what was your vision?

Respondent: After matric I didn't want to go to university but my parents wanted me to go to university and I decided I wanted to fight for the liberation of the country.

Facilitator: And also you mentioned that you were introduced into BCM politics in the 1970s, yourself and others?

Respondent: Yes

Facilitator: Who came with BC politics in Xala?

Respondent: There was a guy called Ubambo Gonxo, he was the one who came with that. Actually he was from Fort Hare if I'm not mistaken, I'm not sure whether he was from Fort Hare or another university, but he was a varsity student. Then he came with the ideology of BCM. And then also these guys, Biongo and Mchizana and the rest, buti Dumisa Ntsebeza ..., they were BAC then. They were guiding us because

PAC also wanted a chunk of us and BCM wanted a chunk of us. So we used to go to their meetings and listen to what they are saying.

Facilitator: You mentioned the fact that Xala was a PAC area, more or less?

Respondent: Yes, I would say 98% of people in Xala were PAC.

Facilitator: How did that come about?

Respondent: It was because of the ..., you know the forced removal of our people in the 1960s, and the PAC was against that and ANC was already banned by then, I think it was in 1964 when ANC was banned and then it was during the time when Matanzima was supposed to ..., he was inaugurated as the president of Transkei in 1965, besides this one of 1976 because that's when we got independence.

Facilitator: So that's how people came into ..

Respondent: Ja then they joined Poxo, it was Poxo then, just to fight for our rights, but there was no political guidance, it was just fighting and fighting then we said no but here it's just only fighting and we were not fighting against the boers, we were fighting against each other.

Facilitator: So your very first job when you came to Gauteng was with Armcor?

Respondent: No it was not with Armcor, it was with a bakery, Bakoven which was linked with Albany



Facilitator: Did you occupy a senior position there?

Respondent: No that's why I worked there for six months and then I left, I worked for a company called Riba Structures, which was an Australian company, consulting engineers and I .., they closed down during the time of sanctions, that was in 1985, they closed down then I went and worked for Armcor.

Facilitator: So both these companies there were no unions?

Respondent: No there was no union because I was the only black in the entire company.

Facilitator: And then you were actually introduced into unions at Armcor?

Respondent: Yes

Facilitator: Did you already know about unions or this was a new thing to you?

Respondent: No because I was staying with guys in Soweto who were union members. I used to go out with them to their meetings, though I was not a union member but I used to go with them because of the interest I had in the political struggle.

Facilitator: So it worked in that sense?

Respondent: Ja

Facilitator: And then the working conditions at Armcor fell under NUMSA, how were the working conditions there?

Respondent: After introducing the union in 1985, that's where everything changed. When I got in there, when I started working for them, a black was a black. A black person .., even in the administration there was no black person but after we introduced the union that's when they absorbed some of us in management positions. Like Godfrey Pooe and the rest. We were in sales and they were managing that department as well.

Facilitator: The recognition agreement, was it signed immediately?

Respondent: It was signed immediately because they could see that they don't stand a chance, because I would say 90% of the workforce of Armcor was black.

Facilitator: Safety issues?

Respondent: Everything was okay because since I worked for Armcor I never heard of any incident where there was a death, or an accident, a terrible one except a person just cutting himself for whatever reasons, even ourselves you go to work you do something that you were not supposed to do, so those were the issues. But it was not a major accident or incidents.

Facilitator: But what were the issues then for the workers at Armcor?

Respondent: In terms of safety?

Facilitator: Grievances was .., I would say basically it was the salary. Because Armcor before the union was I would say, they were just average, but the company was making a lot of money because of the effort from the workforce, people were happy, it was like a home – we were just a family, even ourselves we would come to the workshop and encourage the guys to do more because we were from the offices because we could see there's about 30 machines that must go out in the next 6 months. So we will encourage the people to push harder, the company will grow and we can press for a better salary. So that was the situation.

Facilitator: Do you think it was worth it to be part of unions?

Respondent: Very much, I don't regret even now because at least I have a knowledge about what is happening around me.

Facilitator: What lessons could be drawn from such an experience?

Respondent: You know the lesson that can be drawn is that never exploit a person, a black person in particular because that person is from the struggle, from the sufferings that people encountered ..(unclear). Like these guys that are working here, the security guards, in the malls. Those guys must also be included in our bargaining council, they've been exploited, before they can come and work here they must pay a certain amount. After paying that amount they must also .., there is no weekly/monthly salary, they depend on my kindness, if I give them R2, R1 or 50 cents. The person who introduces them here must be paid R50, what if they don't make R50. You see exploitation is everywhere in this country, it comes in different ways and forms, whether it's in security farming or where ever, but it's vibe and

there's no way it can be controlled, unless we can have foot soldiers from the Dept of Labour that are going around here and check the working conditions of people. We don't even look at them, all we are looking at is the company, what about the people who are looking after the cars, they are not working for anyone, it means they don't exist. That is why if you go all over you will find, you won't find more than 10% of the South Africans, the rest are foreigners because they are being exploited.

Facilitator: And the foot soldiers from the Dept of Labour, are they doing their job?

Respondent: I don't know if they do have, that's why I said I think the Dept of Labour must introduce foot soldiers, people that are coming from the labour unions, they must employ these kids that are unemployed to go to the unions and work as interns, after that they come to the department and they must be strict with them. But the Dept of Labour must take responsibility for those kids – they are the ones who will guard the situation, the current situation where our black brothers are.

Facilitator: Lastly, the future of COSATU and any other union in this country, is there a future?

Respondent: COSATU has got a future, actually I don't see in a million years where other organisations can come and tackle COSATU because COSATU has got a reputation amongst the black people. I'm not talking about white people, only black people. Irrespective of the fact that they can form other unions, it will be like COPE, UDM and others that came and went. Like now recently we had COPE, where are they now, PAC had ID, where is it now. So COSATU I don't see in a million years that there will another company that will take over from COSATU because COSATU has got a history. If you look at his book, it's COSATU from here, it was never COSATU before, actually before that there was another federation in 1942, I think you still remember there was the strike in the mines, we had a union then. So it's not a new thing. That union if you took people like Wilson Mkwai, and the rest, Raymond

Mhlaba, though they were teachers but they've contributed a lot in terms of the working class. So you cannot take away that experience because the experience started from there, to where we are now, where COSATU is.

Facilitator: Comrade thanks very much for your time.

Respondent: Sorry comrade you caught me otherwise.

END

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