

## **Tebogo Steve Moseki**

Facilitator: This is an interview with Steve Moseki, we are in Kwa-Thema, the date is 4 April 2012, interview is done by Brown Maaba. Steve thanks very much for your time. Give me your background as to where you were born, schooling and how you ended up in the unions?

Respondent: Alright, thank you, my full names are Tebogo Steve Moseki, I was born in Galeshewe in Kimberly, Northern Cape now, I schooled in Galeshewe for my primary, higher primary etc. I did my Matric at Tshireletso and from there after my Matric I started looking for a job. My father was a carpenter and my mother was a domestic servant. We were 9 in the family, I am the third born. I am currently the first born, the first two passed on. And then my first job after schooling, my Matric results were very poorly because of the 1976 politics, I was involved in activities. I don't blame it but I got too involved and I'm not saying I passed poorly because of that. At the time anything could have happened because we were already identified as activists.

We went to look for jobs in the mines. The first mine I worked for was Finch Mine, where Manne Dipico was also there. So the first three months exposed us to the realities of apartheid, what apartheid is doing to our parents.

Facilitator: What did you learn there, what were you exposed to?

Respondent: Three things were exposed to me, my standard 9 and 10 I did history. The first thing I learnt about was oppression, exploitation and the third one was the treatment of migrant labourers. For a township guy to get into the mine and find so many people who are not properly schooled and are from rural areas, some are from outside the country, they were used underground. Some of my colleagues

were sent underground, in the hostel situation as we sat at night cooking we would start discussing. The first three months I worked in the surface not underground, Manne Dipico was underground, they came back and talked about the guys underground. At the time we had no knowledge about unions and so on. Some of us who had studied history managed to talk about unions, we had heard that overseas there's this thing called unions and encouraged people to start organising ourselves. I think in three months time or less, we managed to mobilise the employees there – with no union in place just to say the conditions there are not bearable. For the other workers it was normal, for us it was totally abnormal.

Facilitator: You mentioned that you were involved in the 1976 uprising, going back a bit

(interruption: recording stopped)

Continuation

Facilitator: Okay, you were still talking about ..(unclear) was there a BCM Movement in the 1970s, in Kimberley?

Respondent: Yes there was but you know I picked it up because I was active in the church youth club, I was an Anglican. So we started having youth clubs, the Roman Catholics started theirs, the Protestants started theirs, the Dutch Reformed Church also started theirs. From that time we learnt that there are two schools of thought in terms of politics. We were all having a problem of oppression and inequality. Whites were more superior and dominant and we could not accept that, via Christianity we were able to interact with some white intellectuals and they would assist us to understand that we are human irrespective of the fact that we are black. So we developed from there. So the Black Consciousness came up to say we must be proud of who we are and the colour of our skin. We then started going deeper, when the Steve Bikos of the time came up and drove this thing at school we had our own problems, the Afrikaans things started. Then we began to understand where the dominancy is leading us in terms of oppression and dominance. So we started resisting.

As we grew up, after Matric some of us were more aligned to Black Consciousness and some of us we felt that we needed to be more progressive, look at the progressive politics, not just stick to the black issue and then but the power was more on black, we had to mobilise, in the first instance we would say we are black, we didn't even say African that time. And it was then that one was experienced to the mine experience. We started understanding the dynamics between the ANC and the PAC. Some of us started subscribing to the politics of PAC and ANC as the main liberation movement. I started getting underground leaflets – at the time our hero was Tsietsi Mashinini, we only knew of him being in exile, the others we didn't know. As a result we started connecting with other comrades who were not in the country because of the June 1976 group that left the country because of the pressure.

In 1979/80 people like Manne and the others were arrested and left the country, then we started - from that we realised that there are two major revolution movements. For me to be in a trade union was an incident because we went on strike at the mine within three months. I was a very active young person in the church, politics etc., I would mobilise youth to stand for their rights and so on. But when I left school my parents couldn't take me further because there was no money and there were other siblings who had to come up so I had to go and work. So that was my first experience.

I landed here in Nigel because what happened during the struggle, most of us were arrested, others were deported back to their homelands of origin, so we were taken by train so we were on strike for almost a month, it was a wage strike with no solution. We mobilised the workers around the wage but the working conditions were horrible. Then we were identified as ring leaders. All the people who came from school, the youngsters. They broke the strike by bringing in armed police and then we were divided. There was no union, we negotiated on our own, we had no clue – the unions were in Transvaal nothing for us in there. So then they took me back to Kimberley with other groups. Manne and them were arrested, the others went to exile, so we didn't see each other to date. So I was in Kimberley a few

months, the police started harassing us. It was a very major strike at Finch Mine. I then applied for a job outside Kimberley because whenever I looked for work in Kimberley (there was a red sticker in my ID of which I was not aware of) – during that time we had the TBV States, my ID was from Bophuthatswana and my parents was the South African one. I stayed in South Africa, I was born in South Africa but I had a Bophuthatswana ID. So they had an opportunity to treat me like a person who was from Bophuthatswana. So they put a red line in my ID. And the system was so clever to inform the white guys, they had a very good system. All employers were informed about us, they were encouraged to ask us a lot of questions. So I was not aware of this until I came to the Transvaal.

Facilitator: The red line was it visible?

Respondent: The red line was there all of a sudden but I didn't know what it meant. I applied Union Carriage invited me for an interview. I arrived there and they said to me you're young and we need a lot of people who can help us in the storeroom, we don't have clerks, a lot of the guys were not really at that level of my education and so it was an opportunity for me and them. I didn't even know Zulu, a little bit of Sesotho, Setswana. They then told me I do not go back home. It was on a Monday when I went for the interview, in the evening I decided to go home and reorganise myself. I had a small bag, I came by train and didn't know the place. Then they said we will put you into a hostel, the bell rang, another hostel and they promised to find me a place later on in the township. I went to the hostel, I didn't have money to pay for the hostel, one guy told me that he is doing night shift and offered me his bed at night for a week. So that is how I survived for a week.

They then gave me the job. I sent a letter to my family, there were no phones then. I told them I will come back once I get paid. So at the end of the day they told me "we are watching you but we are not going to tell you why". I stayed there for a month, went home, packed my stuff and came back to work.

So while working for Union Carriage, I started noticing things, the hostels were bad because we were rated every week for hostel permits, I didn't have a permit until I could pay for one. We were rated by the local authority police there. So this time of the year during the Easter Weekend, I left before paying for my permit and when I came back we were arrested that evening. We had to come back the Tuesday, Tuesday evening they arrested us, they knew that most of us are from different places. So for that one day I realised that I am the one these guys are looking for. I was locked up for one day and the following day I went to work. I first started as a labourer and then later on they offered me the position of a clerk, it was a big storeroom and they introduced me to my supervisor, Sam Msibi. I worked with him and there was this foreman called Japie, a typical uneducated boer. He probably had standard 3 or 4, he spoke to us in Afrikaans. I was the only one who didn't want to speak Afrikaans, so he beat me up. I came to Transvaal is because I grew up talking Afrikaans and Afrikaners oppressed us and in the mines there were these Afrikaners in the storeroom. So I started mobilising the guys in the storeroom for the trade union because I had learnt my lesson there.

My first union which was formal was with Union Carriage and I joined MAWU. I went to Jo'burg to look for pamphlets of joining a trade union, the following week I mobilised them, that was after this arrest here after the Easter Holidays. By June we had almost 50% of the employees who had joined. I mobilised, every Saturday we attended .., the people who actually helped me are Rusty – and then we started a local shop steward committee. We used to come to Kwa-Thema from Duduza and then we started organising other sectors of the union helping SEFAWU to grow then in Nigel because there was no presence of that union there in Nigel. So from there on it was FOSATU of MAWU.

While we were in MAWU the dynamics started, there was this guy comrade Golongwane he worked with Chris Dlamini who was official and Sam Ntuli, he was fresh from varsity. He came him from the Metal Industry, there was David Sebabe who was from Limpopo. All these three guys I knew them and then we started organising a lot of metal industry from Springs, Nigel, Ratunda, Heidelberg then,

organised and organised the metal industry. While I was young there was this thing of Christians in the community. I used to do a lot of community work. We had started a concert of worker in the community. We then started mobilising against the bucket system in Duduza as workers. The first uprising was against the bucket system in Duduza.

Facilitator: Was that by the workers?

Respondent: Yes. We started the concept and then brought in the Civic Movement as workers. Workers were leading the Civic Movement, we had shop stewards, chairpersons etc. We then went to schools mobilising for COSAS and so on, we started COSAS here. Then this Black Consciousness thing and PAC, ANC now was really coming to ..(unclear) – in MAWU we learnt that we were not allowed, Ella Going and Bernie Fanarow that we cannot be too involved in Civic politics as workers, so we said no that's reactionary. We started to have two groupings, The Reactionary and the Progressive grouping. The Progressive grouping were more aligned to the ANC underground. So we started working closer now. So they could see that workers are becoming politically conscious. We attended a lot of training on bread and butter issues, increases. Alec Irwin and a lady called Adrienne Bird educated me on union matters as a shop steward.

I then became the secretary of the local shop steward committee and then in my own plant I was an office bearer until MAWU split into UMAWUSA, it was a split, I can't remember the year but it was either 1989 or so around there. When they split, comrade Andrew Zulu was the first president of that because now they were beginning to see us as the leftist in the MAWU. We split and found UMAWUSA and when COSATU was formed we merged back with MAWU and then NUMSA was born. There were a number of independent unions which did not belong to any federation, that were belonging to NAPTU.

Facilitator: The reason for the split between MAWU and UMAWUSA?

Respondent: There were a number of reasons, first it was administrative whereby ..., the first reason, I'm sure you will remember the Mayekiso brothers

Facilitator: Moses Mayekiso

Respondent: Moses was co-opted by Alec Irwin and Bennie van der Hoff to say that there's this element of Godongwane and them, they mis-used funds and Sibabe, I think he was the regional secretary of ..(unclear) and those are the people, they started parting administratively. Our eyes were then opened, we realised that the parting was not only regarding the mis-management of funds, it also had to do with our involvement in community work as workers and beginning to get material, began to speak about the revolt against the apartheid regime. So we were getting tired about how to prepare for the wage negotiations, we wanted to combine those things, the wage negotiations and we wanted respect as black workers in the factory shop floor, getting better positions and so on which was not going to be easy. We were then exposed to training that took us to those levels. We also wanted to see changes outside the factory as well.

Because of worker activism they started arresting us, just for being a shop steward you would be arrested. The CID's will visit you and so on and then we realised that this is war. Later on we realised who was selling us out inside the trade union, obviously we would debate openly not knowing we are being sold out. Some of the organisers came from universities, some were from Turfloop in Limpopo and Eastern Cape, they were more into ..(unclear) politics than what these guys were trying to feed us, so it changed the whole thing.

Facilitator: What was their reason for refusing to be part and parcel of township struggles, the Alec Irwins and others?

Respondent: The employers were linked to the system, so for unions to be recognised if you have the white faces it was easy, if it's a black union it was not easy to get recognition at the plant level. So once we begin, they organise us and we are no longer under their control, they are losing control, these guys will pay subs to you, you will come and ..(unclear) they will be happy, go and work for us and so on. And then when they go to the township they identify other issues that are oppressing them, that are making them feel that they are not human beings, they are not really living well irrespective of the increase they've received, then they say it's not right, you don't have to talk let other people talk for you, not you, we have developed you as leaders so that you can understand the employer/employee relationship.

Facilitator: Ja, how it worked. So was there no bitterness during the split?

Respondent: There was plenty, like I said even during the split there were more arrests, there were more detentions, there was also the issue of people working underground for the ANC, so the ANC becomes more popular and the more we mobilised for the workers that led to a better federation than the FOSATU one, it was more linked to the west. Then we said no look, COSATU thought that the element of the east will also be there. We then started introducing these Communist element, socialism and all that thing which were not exposed to FOSATU during that time. When you start talking Lenin, what is Marxism, here we're talking about employee, not class struggle, not something to do with class. So then you see our best teachers were Alec Irwin .., they would allow you to talk about those things but they would caution you or they would organise a follow up session because we had three levels of education. Basic, intermediate and advance. So when you are in advanced you must talk about politics there's no way, we introduced a political class there, they would want to say we must begin to understand how the economics works, but



ours was an apartheid economy, you wouldn't be able to read anything into it because for instance how many of our black parents would be owning factories – so when you ask that question it would be a problem.

Facilitator: So serious problems there

Respondent: You can't move, the class cannot continue because you are keeping them away, then you get side lined, the following day you are not invited to attend classes they say they must select other comrades, the class of this year cannot move because of certain people.

Facilitator: And during the merger later, you said there was a split between MAWU and UMAWUSA and then later there was a merger after the formation of COSATU?

Respondent: Yes that is how I landed into FAWU because during the merger processes there were informal, union to union discussions, so if you want to merge, your ..(unclear) then I was the Acting GS because all of our comrades, Godongwane and them were arrested, we were working underground, even myself when serving workers, because I was retrenched eventually at Union Carriage then I was called to come and work for the union. I then started a branch in Benoni

Facilitator: For which one?

Respondent: UMAWUSA

Facilitator: Were you able to sustain it, now there were two unions, MAWU and UMAWUSA in this field, were you able to sustain the union?

Respondent: It was not easy because what we started, because of our experience when we were attending these classes organised by Alec Irwin and them, and as shop stewards we were engaging management. We said we cannot allow our officials to negotiate for us without the shop stewards presence, these worker control principals, we would direct them on what we wanted in our company and so on, so as we were sitting in the negotiation table we learnt a lot on how to engage the employers and how a recognition agreement gets started. So what happened is, when we split, so Bernie van der Hoff and Moss Mayekiso said all those unions that came out of MAWU and formed UMAWUSA must be blacklisted because they've stolen our members. So as leaders of those workers at the shop floor, they had to follow us. So we pushed them into MAWU and then we go back to our own employers and negotiate with them a standard agreement on stop order and so on, just basic things. The registration process had to start, it was not easy, our union was not registered immediately. So there was pressure. So during that process we called it a Plant Level Recognition Agreement, they know us, it's just a change of name, we've been in the union, they know us, we are very strong, if they lose there can be kayos at the shop floor. So we moved as .(unclear) in every company, they knew, it was all over the newspapers that this is a new union coming in because of the bitterness and the problems there, the purging that is taking place from the officials that are powerful and so they are following their leaders. Immediately our leaders were arrested then we had no leaders we had to lead ourselves. So to sustain a union was tuff but we managed, for about three/four years and then things happened in the history of the country. Then there was this COSATU thing, then we said look, it was not an ideological split, so we can go back to COSATU and be part of the new processes, but they said on condition that metal workers talk to metal workers, so MAWU have to initiate from FOSATU, the biggest union, the talks about talks, so we started talks about talks. I could not be employed into MAWU because I had to make room for other officials who were senior. But then SEFAWU offered me a position

Facilitator: Sweet Food

Respondent: Sweet Food became FAWU, there was a lot of name changes in the process as well. So then I was employed into FAWU, that's when I left the metal industry.

Facilitator: Was UMAWUSA an affiliate of FOSATU?

Respondent: No, it was an independent union, they didn't want us back, we applied for affiliation immediately after the formation they said no we can't have two metal unions there, then MAWU resisted. So we were outside, but that also gave us an opportunity to start interacting with other unions that are more township based, that are prepared to also run politics and worker issues

Facilitator: But you are not an affiliate of NACTU, you are just independent?

Respondent: Yes we are independent as if we predicted or preempted there will be some changes where we will be called. In fact we have a lot of friends in FOSATU, like the Sweet Food People, they would give us information on the developments. So we stayed independent, we related, we came to their local shop steward councils though we were not affiliated, of FOSATU because of township issues. We didn't want to kill those structures, without us they would be dead and gave the apartheid regime an upper hand.

Facilitator: UMAWUSA, were you able to grow your numbers, did that work or you just remained with the people that you walked out with?

Respondent: No we grew, we grew in numbers and there was a risk that FOSATU could run without us. You remember the element of the left, the progressive, it was

not only based in the trade union MAWU, it was .., we had an influence in all the FOSATU affiliates. There was the element of the left also in sweet food, on paper/wood, so all of us we met in the Civic Association. So they would recruit for us, they no longer recruited for .., the left ..(unclear) that is good for MAWU.

Facilitator: And what became of MAWU, did it become stronger than UMAWUSA?

Respondent: Not at all, the problems that we highlighted did not disappear because we were no longer there, they continued.

Facilitator: And other challenges that were faced by MAWUSA other than trying to survive, what were they?

Respondent: The arrests, we were mostly targeted by the regime

Facilitator: So you were put under pressure?

Respondent: Yes under pressure

Facilitator: Did that impact negatively on your families?

Respondent: Much more on our families than the workers because workers we had a very good base. In the evening underground we would meet .., for instance myself as a GS of UMAWUSA I had to report to Godongwane and them, they were in jail, Sebabe passed on, so we had to change offices, close that one from Benoni, open another one in Springs – I'd been harassed and only shop stewards would man

the office on things they don't know. We could not go home everyday, we were sleeping all over the place, you would see your family once a month whilst in the country, and still working. Our office was our beds, where ever we moved, at that time we used public transport, we used trains and taxis. We had only one or two cars and then when we ..., I can also say the South African Council of Churches played a major role, they helped us a lot in identifying lawyers who are pro-black struggle, Indian lawyers, white lawyers who were pro-struggle, we could take our cases to them when we had labour cases. If we didn't have money to pay they would still stand in for us. So a lot of things were going on. So your recognition was not merely because you are at plant level, we were better off.

Facilitator: Okay there was the split, and then the formation of COSATU and then there was a merger between MAWUSA and MAWU, now the problems that you guys were fighting about were they now resolved, after the merger?

Respondent: No we had this imagination that they are resolved for now, but they were not, our leaders were corrupt and also in COSATU we had better ammunition to fight those guys by giving them their own medicine, they also realised that this is a different ball game, they took a back seat, most of them, these white guys went to training rather than becoming GS's and so on but they maintained the international links. Our comrades became more exposed to the international trade union movement. So we could have access to funds, it was better, we were not getting hand outs from them, we were directly in control of the funds.

Facilitator: Just to fast forward things for now. Post 1994, did you find each other as these two streams or the animosity continued, other people became powerful like Alec Irwin?

Respondent: No post 1994 there were no two streams because our focus changed and we have learnt from the process of the early 1990s, we had to do more political

work because some of us went out a lot, through COSATU, we were exposed to the ANC. I went to Lusaka, I went to the east, GDR, West Germany and so on, others went to Russia, others went to Cuba, so we were too exposed. When we came back we had to do more political work than the trade union work. So there were no streams in the trade union. So they had to continue with the administration and we had to do revolutionary work.

Facilitator: Just to go back to the formation of MAWU at Union Carriage. How were you introduced to MAWU, you came here not knowing anyone, knowing nothing?

Respondent: Like I said I picked up a newspaper and saw a development in Alrode, that MAWU went on strike

Facilitator: so you connected?

Respondent: Yes that is how I connected, then I looked for their offices, one Saturday I took a train to Jo'burg and looked for their offices and landed in the sweet food office, they gave me the pamphlet and then they directed me to MAWU and they also had forms for their affiliate members, so they gave me the MAWU forms and they reconnected me

Facilitator: with the one that you wanted?

Respondent: Ja.

Facilitator: But then after forming the union at Union Carriage, of course you mentioned earlier that white people were keeping an eye on you and now

suddenly you fell into their hands by forming a union, were they surprised or not surprised, angry or not angry, etc?

Respondent: The white guys, my employers were upset from the very onset because like I said I learnt to work underground from the mine in Kimberley, so I exposed other people in order to prolong them catching me. By the time they got me they had to face me legally by retrenching me, that is how they got rid of me, I was retrenched. But the union was already strong – it was after the bucket system and they knew me, where ever I was they knew I would still work for the union. But during my retrenchment I went back home. To escape arrest I went to Daveyton, I started to Kwa-Thema, Daveyton and then went to Kimberley. Then traced me, they called my mother, I don't know where they got my mother's number – they told my mother that I've been involved in an accident before he left Transvaal for Kimberley and the guy who was in the car with him passed on we want to come and interview him, get a statement from him. So my mother panicked, she came to me and told me about the call. So actually they came, I was not at my mothers but was at my brother's place. Then when they came they said there's no accident they want to arrest me. I came back here. When I came back I got a job in the union. I ran back, I thought it was the end for me. I didn't want to stay at home because it was dangerous for me. The comrades advised me to go and hide, but I couldn't hide any longer, two weeks I'm in Kimberley they are there.

Facilitator: And you remained in hiding even here?

Respondent: Yes it was much easier and we were in numbers and were able to manoeuvre, my parents didn't know what I was doing in Transvaal, only my brother knew because I had told him. So I came back and started a family.

Facilitator: The kind of shop steward issues that had to be dealt with at Union Carriage, what did they include, I mean you took over as a union. What did you want from the employer?

Respondent: What actually made things easier for us is some employees had been there for quite some time, supervisors were wearing a green overall, and we were wearing ordinary casual suits, blue and white. The first issue was wages and this issue of our black supervisors not given the right to manage, they were being controlled, there was too much Baas Baas, there was this Baas Japie who was not learned and he would come, because we were doing most of the paper work, and he couldn't do it, our salaries were low and we felt this was not right. The white guys would just sit around the whole day, watching us as if we are prisoners. So we said this is not on. They would kick you behind your back. Nigel was far behind at that time, and I came from a township bigger than Nigel. It's like coming from a township to a rural areas and become a plaas Japie. So we said this is totally wrong. So we were fighting discrimination. When we wanted to make tea, there was no facility, we had to make tea for them, we had two canteens, one for whites and one for blacks. We were forced to eat pap and vleis from Monday to Friday, the other canteen was strictly for whites, there was discrimination. The third problem was we used municipality bus service, and Duduza had only one entrance and one exit, it was easy for them to arrest us because of this. The bus would arrive at 6 and we must be at work at 7, like in the mines. When we are at the factory again it takes us back in the afternoon. One Saturday we were asked to come and work overtime, stock taking. When we were there there was a big soccer match, Kaizer Chiefs and Pirates at 3, and we said we want to leave by 12, the guy said there will be no transport. So we had to stay there until he released us, the bus didn't come. So we raised it as an issue on Monday, that transport is controlled by our own company and we are paying for it. We are paying for the transport, we had informed the bus to come and pick us up at 12, he said no you are leaving at 3. So I was not happy, so I raised the issue of the transport and mobilised everybody, we were like slaves, that is how the whole thing was started. We raised it as a company grievance, the transport issue.



Facilitator: And wages?

Respondent: they were very low, for it to go up is when we were organising the union. So we were paid less than R1 per hour, around 53 cents per hour, it then went to R1 per hour after we had organised the employees and later it was R2 per hour, it was very low for us. The employer did not recognise whether you had Matric, JC or not, as long as you're black they would give you any kind of salary.

Facilitator: This problem at plant level, the split between UMAWUSA and MAWU?

Respondent: Like I said we were fortunate, we moved as a block, nobody was left to MAWU

Facilitator: So you took everyone

Respondent: When we split we advised them that we move as a block, anyone who wanted to stay would suffer, so we moved immediately to make our lives easier. We moved as a block, there was nobody left for MAWU. We all resigned and joined the new union all of us.

Facilitator: The working conditions at Union Carriage, how would you describe them?

Respondent: They were horrible because there were a lot contract workers, fortunately we had international companies like Siemens in the electrical side and we were doing locomotives. It was horrible, you would find these guys have their own employees from the township, they just bring in an engineer or an expert in a

certain field. The company requested them to assist them with the black community, they were treated differently from us. When I say the conditions were horrible I am referring to salaries, uniform, supervisors were given uniform we had to buy our own, protective clothing – other people didn't have boots, the hours of work were too long. Black staff worked longer hours than the white colleagues didn't have to. We worked for less money, if you want more money you have to come and work Saturdays and Sundays. The one that really pained us was development, the majority of blacks we were not trained. You were given a job, if you make a mess of it it's your own problem, they either dismiss you or move you around all the time. I was very fortunate they never moved me around because they wanted to watch me so they kept me at the same place for a long time. Most of the guys were moved around

Facilitator: They were just general labourers

Respondent: Yes, they were general labourers. And when you are sick, they had a clinic and a sister in the factory, like I said it was like working in a mine. Every Monday we were given Epsom Salts laxative. It didn't matter whether you had flu or something else they just gave you Epsom Salt. So it reminded me of the Finch situation. We had a first aid kit in our storeroom as a department but blacks were not allowed to use it, if you go to Jan and say you're not feeling well he would say "I know it's your stomach you will be eating a lot of pap and vleis in the township". I'm telling you when I look back, I was telling my daughter that I want to write a biography of where I am coming from, these things keep haunting me, or when I read about disputes. I stayed in the trade union fraternity, I only left four/five years ago. Because even in FAWU there was a split, I was again in the split situation then I felt this is too much.

Facilitator: You then left which year exactly, were you fired or retrenched?

Respondent: With the trade union?

Facilitator: No with Union Carriage

Respondent: I was fired in a form of a retrenchment. We went on strike and were fired, we fought our way back and we were re-instated, every time we were the only company that led strikes in Nigel, the stay aways etc. So eventually they felt that we need to let them go, so I was actually retrenched in 1987. I then joined UMAWUSA first and then I went to FAWU

Facilitator: Why did you leave UMAWUSA?

Respondent: It was a merger, like I said and then they wanted .., there was a ratio, I think for every 50 or 100 members one official, I can't remember the ratio. So in our union we were fairly small and the Godongoanes then, we had four outside and the rest were detained, Godongoane and them had to be accommodated in the merger situation. So when he came back he worked for MAWU so I put them first and negotiated for the others and then already there was a deal that if I don't get taken by MAWU Chris Dlamini and his gang wanted me in FAWU.

Facilitator: So you already had connections with Chris and others?

Respondent: Yes

Facilitator: And you came in as what in FAWU?

Respondent: As an organiser, and hardly three months because they started the elections I was appointed branch secretary and then I left FAWU while I was the general secretary of Transvaal.

Facilitator: Was it easy to organise in FAWU? You were new in this union, you came from IMAWUSA, of course MAWU earlier, was this a new feel completely, Sweet Food?

Respondent: No like I said from the Shop Steward Councils and committees at COSATU level we dealt with all sectors problems, so to me .., the only thing that was new was the way they operated. But a lot of things were fairly .., from what we did from the metal was the same because we had a Bargaining Council and they didn't have it, a lot of things were done at plant level and then they had sector. You would find that if Kelloggs was the only factory where Chris was working but you find others like Bokomo, the bakeries, throughout the Transvaal and outside then we had to form a sector. So we had regional negotiations and so on, but most of their negotiations were not done like ours, when wages were discussed, big guns will go to the Metal Industry Bargaining Council, I think they were called Industrial Councils then, then we would see it in the pay slip and then the adjustment would be negotiated at plant level.

Facilitator: So you were a member of FAWU when you went to Lusaka?

Respondent: Yes

Facilitator: what were the missions all about, you went to Lusaka and then GDR and maybe some other countries?

Respondent: The mission was, there was a trade union in the ANC, SACTU who would communicate with COSATU and say you must send guys outside so that the connection (interruption) – so the mission was go to SACTU but when we were outside there there was no longer SACTU we were introduced to ANC comrades. Go to SACTU and then SACTU will then take you to the various sectors, we are from the food because SACTU operated more like a federation and then from there you begin to understand what the comrades are doing there. So when we arrived there SACTU was not like COSATU here, they would take us to the political school and to Lenin and Marxist school outside there, that was the first exposure. So when you are there in Lusaka, already from the country they knew, FAWU was more leftist, we believed in socialism than anything, so automatically as a FAWU comrade they took me to GDR, and the others were taken to America etc., and then after the trips we would report back – but in the process we would meet the political organs, actually MK. I met Jabu Moleketi there at Lusaka.

Facilitator: And the general discussions what was the ANC's position?

Respondent: They would ask what is happening in the country, they wouldn't tell us much, we would share with them what was happening with UDF etc., and then they would say you will get a report back when you are back in the country if you are lucky to go back safely

Facilitator: But did they feel that you were in control of the country?

Respondent: Yes, we would tell them more, there was so much mass mobilisation, we had to so many rallies, stay aways everything. You know during the time of the first president of COSATU, people were dying and every death we would counter it economically, we will make sure that the country comes to a stand still. So they liked that. But when Kunter??, happened that's the time they told us what happened in Angola. But they would not tell us much for safety purposes. We would tell them

about what is happening in the country, they had information about what was going on in COSATU, they were well informed. They interrogated us on what was going on.

Facilitator: And the regime, were they aware of your movements, from South Africa to Lusaka and so on?

Respondent: My passport would state that I am moving between here and Lusaka but not to GDR, their spies were following us

Facilitator: So they never intercepted you or arrested you for these movements?

Respondent: Some of us were arrested, those that went before, when they came back we were worried why they were arresting them, they had given us the right to go to Lusaka and consult with other trade unions. Trade unions were legal they were not banned. We had those blinkers only to be exposed to the ANC outside. They knew that the ANC's head quarters were in Lusaka but they would say to us we allow you to go to Lusaka and consult, they thought we were going on trade union missions. Fortunately for us most of the trips happened when Mandela was about to be released. I was harassed, the only detention for me was when I went to Botswana, Thabo Mbeki was going to address Bophuthatswana and we were driving through that border. When I came back the Bophuthatswana police arrested me at the border. That is the only time I was arrested, it was for a different mission.

Facilitator: Were you charged with something?

Respondent: No eventually I was not charged, I was detained for a few hours, just for questioning.

Facilitator: How long were you in FAWU?

Respondent: 12 years to be exact

Facilitator: Any highlights while you were there?

Respondent: FAWU was a dynamic union and it had a lot of activities, actually that's where my popularity emerged because I was doing a lot of work, when companies introduced the thing of multi-skilling, that we need to be multi skilled, I called it multi-tasking, so SAB took me first to Geneva when they did the massive retrenchments to go and check what programmes were in place for workers because I was saying that there's no way workers can be retrenched ..., they need to be empowered economically, give them opportunities for small businesses and so on. So we went to Geneva. The second thing was the multi-skilling programme, SAB took me to South Carolina in America. Those were the dynamics, the union was not paying for the trips, overseas trips were paid for by employers, I led the shop stewards. So we would come back and negotiate, if we deadlock we would go outside the country in order to reach a settlement. I was so powerful with my team in the East Rand, the employers could not do as they pleased. There was a problem for my national leadership

Facilitator: In what sense?

Respondent: In the sense that when I push issues at this level, a national company like SAB would meet at head quarters and say the affected plant is here in my branch, but when they select people to go out of the country they would not take one of the officials, they would take the senior officials at the head office and our shop stewards. This would be a problem. We pushed a lot of issue at this level – we

learnt a lot from the international trips so we had a lot of questions to ask. Our agreement was that we are not going to have national agreements in terms of working conditions. So if our company is international, we would ensure that workers communicate with COSATU and our head office and share the information. We would have workshops that are not limited to FAWU workshops. So we decided that as shop stewards and other officials we are going to engage the employer, the employer realised that we are too advanced compared to other people. FAWU policy was head office makes the decision as to who goes overseas. The second problem was politics in FAWU. We would go to conferences, elect comrades who would sit in COSATU structures, our branch/region was growing faster were the biggest in FAWU, so it needed more delegates and became a problem. In almost every meeting/section I was elected and this became a problem for other people. I had three international trips, the employer insisted that I become one of the delegates.

Facilitator: In what way were you becoming a problem?

Respondent: I questioned the style of leadership, I had a problem with the administration. Although I was politically inclined I wanted a clean administration. So one of the reasons FAWU fired me at FAWU at a branch level I exposed even my own president, the one who employed me on mis-management. I was then reinstated. The feeling was because of the pressure of the workers, the support I received from the workers – we won most strikes and negotiations. So that is why I was taken to the region as the regional secretary and then two years down the line national elections were held, before I was nominated as a GS, there were problems in our head office, some of these guys informed us. So we sat in the evening and discussed issues. There was a time when Kruger rands were in the market and there was a recommendation that we should buy them so that we can invest with Kruger rands, there was a recommendation to invest in this way. We moved from pension fund to provident fund, we were the first union to push that, so that workers can have a better share of their money and we sat in different boards. Head Office decided to invest in Kruger rands without proper procedures being followed, the



decision was taken by the GS and the president and we picked it up in the financial statements. This became a problem so they started fighting. They then called a meeting of the region when there was a lot of in fighting, the FAWU head office of the Eastern Cape was strong. Everything we did from then on we had to vote on, even if you had facts which was frustrating. Eventually they called for a regime change because there was a feeling that we cannot run a union like. So all policy issues were decided on a vote. So I became a problem, I was then called in to an NEC meeting, I went alone. When I got to the meeting I was charged because I did not bring the other workers. It was not my duty to organise transport for the other workers to Cape Town. It was unfair of them to put me in such a position. They trapped me and then when the split happened, the President and the Assistant GS who influenced this – SAFATU was then formed. I was elected as the GS, innocently when I went to work I realised that I had been elected although I did not know, they then told me that I have automatically resigned from FAWU. There was no hearing or nothing. When I went to the office my office was locked, I was told I've been demoted because you failed to bring the shop stewards in Cape Town – while I was appealing against the demotion, then there was a launch taking place. They froze everything, my bank account, so I joined the new union.

Facilitator: What year was that?

Respondent: 1997

Facilitator: Just going back a bit, 1990 Mandela's release from prison, the unbanning of organisations. What did that bring to the union world, did it bring some positive attitude to the world of union or?

Respondent: No there was positive and negative. The positive aspect of it was we were just saying free at last, those who were more involved in politics, we can now influence the labour relations better only to find that was not the case. The negative

part of it was that a lot of the trade union leadership were taken .., the Jay Naidoo who was then the GS, he was given the position of Minister of no Portfolio, so that was the negative because this weakened us. The positive aspect was that Mandela was there now, we were seeing him for the first time, in fact I remember while I was the regional secretary I had a photo of myself and Mandela while he was still in prison as a boxer next to it. We unbanned the ANC before it was banned. So for us it was like we are signing a new agreement with the new regime and out with the old regime.

Facilitator: And post 1994 the Labour Department did it come through for the workers?

Respondent: Not really, there were so many Acts, some were amended as a result, let me tell you about the period I was in the unions. The first thing I was invited to Turfloop to give a lecture or a brief on the new Labour Relations Act, how it would impact us now, show the comparison between the new and the old one. We looked at the rights to strike and the procedures in the Act and the new CCMA as opposed to the Conciliation Board, we now knew about the appeal. So there were a number of things that needed to be reviewed. For the older generation like us it was difficult to follow some of these things, it felt like we were back to school. The gains which we had made through the Recognition Agreement were reversed by the Act. Most of the things were reversed by the Act. Procedures, the Basic Conditions of Employment was also reversed etc. We used to have 6 months paid maternity leave, the New Basic Conditions Employment was 4 months unpaid leave. We used to have leave for traditional healers, if people had to go through the initiation of becoming a traditional healer they qualified for leave. They were given 6 months, 6 months unpaid, 6 months paid. The new Act did not cater for such things. We also looked at the right to strike, how it was formulated by the legal gurus as opposed to us in terms of our experiences. Workers were protected, there was no need for us to have scap?? Labour in terms of our agreement. Scap labour, when we say the company have made ..(unclear) 5 to 10 days, no employment of scap?? Labour that's when the union or the strike is strong. They were banned and the

minority that did not go to strike had the right to go ..(unclear) could negotiate out of the strike. So there was that thing of lobbying in the strike rules. When it came to strike rules before the interdicts, we were allowed to stage a sit in. Now with the new Act the sitting is not allowed. The Act was a problem compared to when we come from, that is why the older workers still want us to negotiate for them because the new guys are unable to do so. So what happened is the companies would flush the newcomers through retrenchment. They would bring in the new Matriculants who had no knowledge.

Facilitator: but the department's officials did they reach out to go to the plants and so on relating issues of safety?

Respondent: Yes you mean in the new dispensation?

Facilitator: Ja

Respondent: Ja you know what was good is there was money allocated to retrain the workers and for skills development, the Sitas, we were allowed to participate. The Act is more democratic for participation, we have NEDLAC etc., you can still strike if you don't agree. The officials are lacking capacity. Look at the latest Aurora Case, when you raise issues of unfair labour practice as we used to call it there, they cannot resolve such issues, in the past we were able to do so.

Facilitator: What's their problem?

Respondent: I don't know whether it's lack of capacity or the employers are more advanced for them, an inspector can come, with all the non compliant issues of the

Act, they would go and verify and when they return they change face and the workers expect feedback.

Facilitator: So does that mean that all the gains have been reversed?

Respondent: Most

Facilitator: which of those have not been reversed?

Respondent: Like I said, let me go back to political holidays, those have not been reversed, that was our major problem, workers are still enjoying those holidays. The other thing which has not been totally reversed is the recognition of shop stewards at plant level and the right to organise, we have to fight for that, the other one would be I'm not happy about the maternity leave. Unfair dismissals were reversed, it was not easy for them to dismiss because of the agreements, it was easier for companies with no agreement to dismiss. Companies could not outsource the workers but the work – that has been reversed. They can outsource the work but not the worker. All the workers were represented from canteen downwards, we would represent them even if they were not union members. Those things are gone.

Facilitator: You said you were involved in another split from FAWU, when you formed another union outside COSATU?

Respondent: Yes, the first one was more political, this one was really not necessary to be honest, it was just that the infighting was too much, people could kill you and job security was an issue – like I said I didn't even form it but I happened to be used, you remember the MAWU incident, I was vocal in FAWU like I was vocal in MAWU but I had no interest in splitting FAWU but FAWU split itself knowing that workers will

go back but they didn't, until I left the trade union and SAFATU was de-registered because of the people I left there and then they started a training company

Facilitator: they changed the union?

Respondent: No, you know in unions there's a lot of in fighting, people just don't talk about it. Do you know comrade Malepe

Facilitator: I've heard of him

Respondent: He was one of our presidents then, if you look at what is happening in the ANC .. – I started an anti corruption programme but when Shilowa was the GS of COSATU then, we raised these issues, we marched to COSATU, we told him the situation in the region, that we've been sidelines, decisions are taken of a vote, the element of the left is being suppressed in FAWU which was not the case we used to lead in COSATU meetings, so all those things came up. But they shouldn't have led to a split, COSATU itself decided to take a side. So when we eventually split, there was no interest to affiliate back to COSATU, we knew that we would either reconcile with FAWU, the differences that existed or not, then FAWU had more problems, they started firing one another. So it took time for the dust to settle, for the same reason they took us out they kept on clinging there, taking themselves out until .... FAWU was nearly dead until when Masemola took over from Mandla, Fanky and then they started to re-sustain themselves, because even ourselves as SAFATU like I said I lost interest, we didn't grow anymore because amongst ourselves there were problems and I said look because of these problems, I had uplifted the trade union movement. The Communist Party also approached me and told me that I've uplifted the trade union movement. ..(unclear) I want to continue to do something and I felt I cannot go back and work, another company tried to recruit me to join their human resources. But the split was more about the infighting. After 1994 most trade unions had a lot of infighting it was not just FAWU, MAWU, NUMSA, NUM, so it

was easy for those powerful guys to jump the ship to the political ship, but other continued to struggle.

Facilitator: And what caused this infighting if this was now a general thing after 1994?

Respondent: It was caused by a number of things, besides the one that we wanted to elevate ourselves for positions in the gravy train, that was the one element. Obviously if you are in the NEC you're president you would not lose out in the ANC. So we were fighting for positions

Facilitator: tickets to parliament

Respondent: tickets to parliament or provincial legislature or local government, something, the exiles would recognise you – there were caucuses, COSATU will also influence who must be leading the ANC and so on. I remember I attended only two national conferences of the ANC during that time, so we spent sleepless nights. There was one in Mafikeng and the other in Cape Town or Durban, so these were the issues causing the infighting. But I felt it's too much, I am aging and I needed to make time for my family, so I had to start afresh. So I decided to leave the trade unions but I am still involved in labour issues – I still sit with comrades in the trade union movement.

Facilitator: And the burning issues today in the world of trade unions or labour issues?

Respondent: there are a lot. Now you can see what is happening now in terms of ..., the social issues, the e-tolling they are taken up, they are taking a lot of things via

COSATU that are more in the limelight. The Federation is actually leading the social and civil issues for the workers and the burning issues at shop floor level they are sort of suppressed, you see more dismissals and when there are wage negotiations we see disputes at national level. I can tell you now all trade union members have a problem in terms of representation – the employers are doing ..., not only in the public sector. Public employers are weaker than the private ones in terms of dispute resolutions, they can fire, they can all those things that's why we have more strikes in the public sector. It's like the trade union is now new in the public sector than in the private sector, that's why we see more strikes even for issues that have been agreed upon, people still go on strike. There's working conditions, it's a burning issue. In the private sector you find that it's training and there's no recognition of prior learning for the older generation. I had an issue with employment – the gentleman told me there was a time where the employers, national came up with a strategy that the older staff members must be retrenched, they would offer them attractive packages, even if they are not attractive, they would make sure that you go with the younger generation because they wanted to meet their development plans in the company and try to camouflage for the government when inspection is done, that they are doing more training in order to access the money for tax purposes and rebates. So those are burning issues that workers don't even see even today. So that's why when I was in the trade unions I could see those things and highlight them.

In the past the unemployed would never be training they thought this was threatening the employment of the employer, but the Act is very clear, 18 (1) and 18 (2) – 18 (1) is employed, people can be trained and 18 (2) unemployment. But the trade union would ignore that and fight for these guys. So when these guys go for training the employer would say because they don't have Matric so they cannot fit into the development, they felt in house would be better for them and in house you will just get the certificate which is not NQF aligned which would cause a lot of problems. They are not fighting for them but they are burning issues. When we talk them I show them these are the weak points of the trade unions, they are not taking the issues up. In the Labour Relations Act there's something called Workplace Committee of some kind whereby the minority if there are many unions can also

participate in terms of what is happening in the company, not the majority union only which is also a reverse, during the past a majority union would do everything whether you exercise your right to belong to another union but if you are in the minority you are minority. Nowadays even the minority can have a say in whatever they want to do. So there's a situation where these Workshop Training Committees, trade unions are not vocal or strong on those committees, or Equity Committees, they'd select anybody who holds the employer by the hand.

Facilitator: And your take on labour brokers, what is the future there?

Respondent: I see them as agents, I don't agree 100% with the banning, the position of COSATU and I wonder how I would debate with them in this regard. All I'm saying is labour brokers are corrupt and very bad, I had an experience of them. You could not assist a labour broker employee at the CCMA – the labour brokers were a law unto themselves. So if they are regulated this will make our jobs easier. I am not sure what Act covered them but what the employers would do is they would outsource the powerful departments in an employment situation and give it to labour brokers or in a small factories, the whole staff would be employees of that company in terms of the payslip. You would be told that you are no longer employed by us when you arrive as an organiser. The employee will tell you to go and talk to the person responsible. It was confusing. You want to question him he will say if you want to talk to me talk to me through the Labour Relations Act. The employees are already working there. So before you enter the premises there's a big guy at the door, they communicate with you with the walkie talkie. There's a lot of problems with the labour brokers, I know that they frustrate the unions, I've been there. What I'm saying is .., the other thing is the exploitation of the workers which I don't agree with because I was exploited myself. That made me hate labour brokers, workers have to pay them. The workers do not know their employers, money is being paid to the bank, if you have a grievance they replace you, you can no longer go to the factory, you are home for the whole week with no income. You cannot fight anybody the employees have no leg to stand on. That is the bad part of labour brokers. The issue is you cannot tell the employer not to outsource, what happens to



the workers if you ban the labour brokers. The labour brokers have literally taken over. The frustration is our very own government that we voted into power is allowing this. Labour broking is a serious headache but the approach will hit COSATU if they had to ban them. I read something in the newspaper that the compromise would be one month once off payment and that's a rich industry. For years they've been operating they are very rich, powerful, they can tell the government where to get off. Legally they will hit this government arms down.

Facilitator: And the future of unions?

Respondent: I don't know, my comment would be generic. I don't know, it seems as if we are hanging on a political string. Once that is gone there will be no problems. People are frustrated. Everyday there are grievances with trade unions, we used to balance horses there, there is no balance now, those that are paying the fees whether in public or private sector the complaints are the same. Call the shop stewards and ask them where are we going they will tell you how frustrated they are, we go to meetings, we send agreements they are not implemented. We want to go on strike our members are existing. So the future is going to be like in America, where we exist in name, people paying because it's compulsory. That is how I see the future of unions.

Facilitator: Anything important maybe which should have been part of this interview?

Respondent: In conclusion, I just wish one day that the trade union in South Africa would not be as divided as it is, we should go back to the founding slogan "One Federation One Country, One Union One Industry", if we can get to that it will be good but as it is things stands now, I pity. You can talk to my son who is now in his first year at Unisa, he doesn't want to hear what you're talking about. All he knows is that unions are the ones that organise workers, you get to the workplace it's

everyone for himself, people say they are learned. They are more career minded, they don't see the job hop. There is too much job hopping. I pray the principle be realised, then I will know there's a future in our country. As it stands now the influence of trade unions is very limited, the unions are very weak, Vavi can make noise there but one day the same membership that is following them will be going a different direction. There will be a split, the leadership and the membership will go different directions. Things are very bad. I have given my life to trade unions, I couldn't manage my family as the head because it felt like I am arguing across the table with my wife and children. Nobody thought I will leave the trade unions, it was in my blood. Some organisers gave up everything for the workers. I couldn't even go to church, now I have time for church. I am happy you gave me this interview, it will assist me in writing my biography

Facilitator: Let me set you free.

Respondent: thank you.

**Last session:**

Respondent: ... also for these guys to dis-invest, so when we were retrenched, before we joined the trade union we formed what we called *Amalofa* Unemployment Organisation

Facilitator: Special will know about it?

Respondent: Ja, because remember the majority, it was like a balance, there was an army of people who are unemployed, who were previously employed and there were those who were left behind

Facilitator: because of sanctions

Respondent: and we wanted to participate in the structures of COSATU and they said how do you participate because you are no longer employees, then we formed *Amalofa*, people who are job seekers, we came in as job seekers, we told those that were working to tell us if there's employment and that they should remember we were part of them. It was tough.

**END**

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