

Thabedi Mosala

Facilitator: This is an interview with Thabedi Mosala we are in Sebokeng, the date is 15 December 2011, interview is done by Brown Maaba. Comrade thanks very much for your time. You can speak any language you are comfortable with. Kindly give me a background as to where you were born, how many were you in the family, your family background, your schooling, how far you went with your schooling and you connected to the unions?

Respondent: I was born in 1965 in Small Farm Everton, from the Mosala family. We were a family of 9, I am the second born of Mme Mamosala and Ntate Charles Mosala. I started my schooling at a school called Bula Madibo Small farm, it was a community school. Previously we did not have a Xhosa school, it was the only school which was built by the Small Farm community. The school catered for Xhosa speaking, Tswana speaking and Southern Sotho. There was no higher primary school around Small Farm. Mme Manku, who was a prophet in Small Farm and had a big church called St. John. The church itself had a mission. So because we had to travel from Small Farm to Everton to access higher primary schools because there was no one around my area. Mme Manku sacrificed her church mission and turned it into a school. The school was named Mokotudi, it was the higher primary in Small Farm. After about 12 to 15 years Mokotudi was still there, Mme Manku decided to buy a stand around Masenkeng, it was a Putco Garage, she turned it into a school. The school moved from Small Farm church mission to Zone 7 Masenkeng.

I then passed my Standard 6 from Mokotudi to Sizanani, previously after passing standard 6 you would go to do your Form 1 in a secondary school.

I studied at Sizanani up to the year 1982 when I completed my Matric. Because of family problems, we were a family of 11, my father was working alone, the circumstances forced me not to continue with my studies to go and look for a job. I Matriculated in 1982, in 1983 I was employed by Brite Metals, it's a company in the steel industry. By then I was already an political activist but at the time we supported United Democratic Front (UDF) because all black political organisations were banned. When I arrived here at work I found that workers belonged to a trade union movement. The first organisation I joined, which was PAC oriented, I joined a union called SIYAWUSA. After joining I was given training on how to deal with worker's problems. We were given something like learnerships, we used to hold seminars. I was then trained and taught about trade unions as a worker organisation. I started as a shop steward in 1983, I knew nothing about trade unions but after a few workshops and seminars I learnt a lot. I grew I later became the chairperson of shop stewards where I worked.

At the time a lot of people misunderstood trade union organisations, there was a lot of confusion. We were the new generation because there was a lot of exploitation especially with the senior union officials who were making money at the expense of the African people. This is when I took a decision to educate black people about their rights at the workplace. I initiated for SIYAWUSA to have what is called Shop Steward Council because previously we were meeting once quarterly. My understanding of unions at the time was that it's where workers meet and discuss their worker rights. I also believed that you can only invest in an organisation if you know it's policies. I realised that most of the people we represented were forced to leave their work because we were able to win cases because they were never inducted, they did not understand their

contracts of employment. Even for us as trade unionists we were contributing to this problem because we did not educate them about trade unionism, explaining the importance of understanding their contracts of employment, lateness, not coming to work, theft, going to work drunk – people did not understand the basic rules, the do's and don'ts in the workplace. Most of the cases we had were related to that.

We then decided to educate the workers so that they can know about trade unions, that trade unions are not labour lawyers who will represent you if you were charged with misconduct. We wanted to teach them that the trade union is a worker organisation which should educate workers on the importance of complying with the rules and regulations in the workplace. That was my view at the time (interruption, phone rang). I then became interested in educating the workers, they are paying subscriptions to the trade unions and we only represent them once a year. The union was making a lot of money with the subscriptions. I suggested that we use a certain percentage of the money to train the workforce so that they understand the aims and objectives of the trade union. I met a lot of objections but eventually I managed to convince them. I got the workers together and started educating them about trade unions.

We carried on, and as you know when the employer realised that I was educating the workers they wanted to remove me from being a shop steward and offered me a management position. I did qualify. There was a salesman position advertised, I applied for it. At the interview I was told I must quit being a shop steward and focus on my job so that I can grow within. There was no policy that specified that if you are at management level you cannot belong to a trade union organisation. In the conditions of service there was no clear policy that at a certain level, for instance

supervisor etc., you cannot belong to a trade union organisation. The disciplinary codes of conduct were clear, they also indicated that you can get a representative to represent you. After the interview I was appointed as a salesman. In 1986 I enrolled with Tech Institute, a three months course on Telesales. We still had Shop Steward Councils where we shared what we experienced in our different workplaces, how we dealt with the issue, the challenges, the solutions etc. I completed the course but I still had an interest in labour law. Eventually I became an administrator in the offices of SIYAWUSA, I worked there weekends. I was then appointed the Regional Chairperson of SIYAWUSA.

As the Regional Chairperson I became dedicated to the trade union movement and left the sales position. I met people who inspired me in terms of trade unionism. I was inspired by the late Keith Rankgole, the late Moeti Potsane. I stopped working in 1996 and was employed by MEWUSA as their co-ordinator around the companies. I would check on cases before they are referred to CCMA by trade unions. I co-ordinated for about nine months. The owner of the company I worked for, he was back from overseas and asked me to come back to work. I worked there as the Production Superintendent for three months and then there was a position of Quality Control Management. They enrolled me with the SA Bureau of Standards

Facilitator: so this was at Brite Metals?

Respondent: Yes I went back to Brite Metals. In 1986 it was taken over by MacSteel Group of Companies. I then realised that union officials work in their offices and are not working for the people. Trade union organisations do not work for the people at the end of the day. They

were not playing according to the policies of their constitution. All trade union policies have what is called a Strike Fund but this was never benefited the workers. No trade union organisation has ever paid what is called a Strike fund. I then went to the trade union organisations and asked them what happens to the member's subscriptions, I wanted to know whether the subscriptions benefited the union only, the officials or the workers? Unions were making a lot of money at the expense of workers. We checked how many workers contributed from as far back as 1987, for about 10 years – some workers had lost their jobs in the process. The unions were making money – there was never a successful strike whereby the workers achieved what they wanted. I was aware of that and had questioned the officials. I also realised that all organisations have financial statements, but this never happened with trade unions, what they did was they increased the subscriptions. Workers lost their jobs and the trade union did not do anything for the workers, things like skills development programmes or job creation projects. After a while I did not have friends in MEWUSA. MEWUSA split and was left with a few people around Vaal. There was a union official called Ngale. A white guy had opened a trade union organisation and worked there as an official. He was a strong labour politician. I still have an interest of our people coming to labour struggle. Trade unions have not made any changes for the workers. The subscriptions benefit trade union officials not the workers. Our people are represented once. The unions do not even ensure that the workplaces are conducive for workers to work in. They know that companies do not comply. The trade union must contribute to the workers as a worker organisation. Health and Safety in our companies is not there. All the trade unions wants to get involved in is increasing the subscriptions and the salary increases for workers.

Trade unions do not have a panel of health inspectors that can manoeuvre around companies and ensure that companies comply. Most companies do not comply even though they are rated 5 Stars. People are working in environments which are a health hazards. Brite Metals lost about plus/minus 18 people. Two weeks ago we buried a worker. All the workers are having lung problems. I made them aware of this. They use a chemical called short blast, it cleans metals and it secretes a lot of fumes, there are no extractors in the factory to release the fumes. It has side effects. I was fired for this but I won my case at the labour court. I was awarded back payment and re-instatement but I felt the workplace was no longer conducive to me. The people I was representing at the time were later against me. So I opted for outside court settlement and left. This was in 2007. I was paid and invested some of the money. We had a four roomed house, my mother brought up my children and I decided to build her a bigger house to accommodate us all.

When I came back home, I found a very tense situation which was worse than at the workplace. Children were all over the township and had nothing to do. The government was going to introduce skills development programmes but they never reached the children in the township. I was now back in township politics. I then decided that trade union organisations should contribute to the future of children. They have a lot of money, I'm still saying it. Workers are paying a lot of money in subscriptions, this money is not benefiting the workers at the end of the day. Only union officials are benefiting from that. They are making money at the expense of the work force. If they contribute they will be ploughing back to the community, trade unionism is a billion industry. The majority of stakeholders is black South Africans. Trade unions are not ploughing back to communities. For instance NUMSA is in the steel

industry, they have never organised learnership programmes for workers, we need boilermakers, we trying to help employers and the government in order to alleviate poverty. Trade union organisations with their influence they can play a sterling role so that companies can comply and the government can comply. Learnerships are there but they don't come to the people, it is very difficult to access them. For instance here in Zone 7 we do not have a Youth Desk with a database of skills in the area.

I then talked to a friend of mine called Thamane Mothibedi and asked him what can he do for the community as a trade unionist to facilitate programmes that can empower people at the end of the day. For instance the security industry is a big industry which makes money. What they do is they employ our foreign brothers to work for them because they pay them very little, also because of the standards in the country. I asked him to ask his trade union to assist with learnership programmes so that they can find jobs for these people after training them in order to remove the youth from the streets. My other concern was with the transport industry. The industry was affected by HIV Aids, we lost a lot of drivers. Transporting companies are now employing our foreign brothers from countries like Ethiopia.

After leaving the job I then went into the construction industry, I tendered and was a sub-contractor. My first project was with Kwaggastroom, we sub-contracted under Bra Abbey Ledwaba who is from Pietersburg. He was impressed with my work and deployed me to work in the Free State, Frankfort. That was my second project. When I left Kwaggastroom, 98% of the artisans were our foreign brother. Here in Zone 7 I identified only two bricklayers. I was sub-contracting under 10 companies, the foreigners were from Lesotho, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. We have a scarcity of

skilled people when it comes to construction. There's something called Potential Employer, our government at the end of the day can be the Potential Employer because we have a backlog of housing. What if they train our youth in construction and then employ them to build RDP housing. Nowadays things have changed, we no longer use buttler fences, people are now building screen walls etc., trends are changing, as young people get educated they renovate their homes. If we have enough people in the construction industry this will assist with determining the price. Housing prices are high because of the scarcity of skills, we do not have enough people in the construction industry. If people can be taught to build houses the price will go down, there will be a lot of competition. So I asked my friend to get the union involved. Trade unions will also lose members if people are not employed the people with skills cannot join trade unions because they are not South Africans.

Sometimes we should not blame our government – unions sometimes misrepresent the workers, all they do is sacrifice our fellow black brothers.

Facilitator: Just to go back, I have some questions. You joined Brite Metals in 1982/83 and joined SIYAWUSA?

Respondent: yes

Facilitator: Was SIYAWUSA the only union at Brite Metals?

Respondent: Not only SIYAWUSA, we also had NUMSA

Facilitator: why did you choose SIYAWUSA instead of NUMSA

Respondent: I chose SIYAWUSA because of the unionists that inspired me, Moeti Potsane and Keith Rankgole. They influenced me a lot in politics. Before I joined politics I was a politician. I became a politician in 1974, there was a man called Thuli who later died. I became actively involved in 1977 inspired by Thuli and another businessman called Armstrong. This was after the 1976 Uprisings. I grew up in the ANC ranks but I never held a position in the branch or at executive level of the ANC.

Facilitator: So Thuli and Armstrong were they ANC?

Respondent: Yes they belonged to the African National Congress at the time

Facilitator: How did you meet them?

Respondent: Thuli I met as a colleague, we played football together and he started working at a very early age, I continued with my schooling. We had a very good relationship, when he got paid he would spend some money for me. He didn't tell me about his political interest or affiliation. Whenever I arrived there was a gentleman called Chief Moagi who is also from Small Farm. He used to tell me that small boys like you I break their necks if they want to get involved in politics or with the Communists. So I asked Moagi what does he mean? And then he started telling me about political prisoners like Mandela, I knew a little bit but was not interested in the politics. There were no politicians in my family. As I grew older and became acquainted to Thuli, I met my grandmother. They had started what was called the Weldebees Stand Owner's Forum. People used to get together and talk about South African politics, how the land was taken away from us, they had been fighting for the land since Africa

Izwelethu. I then learnt that my grandmother was a Pan Africanist, my grandfather served in the First and Second World War, he was also a Pan Africanist, but because people were not allowed to belong to political parties my family lost interest in politics. Thuli spoke about ANC politics, I felt they were not beneficial to me. And then Moeti Potsane, we went to school together he was a year ahead of me. At the time he was at Tshepo Themba and I was at Sizanani doing Form 3 when he introduced me to Pan Africanist politics. He explained the politics in detail to me. ANC politics were not very clear to me. I was introduced to people like Mr Ganyi, Mr Magagula – I rubbed shoulders with the heavy weights of the PAC, those that were holding high ranks in the PAC until 1984 I was attending a union seminar in Wilgespruit and met Mr Zofaneyya Mothupe, I already had an understanding of African politics.

So for me to join SIYAWUSA, it was affiliated to NACTU led by people like Cunningham Mokwana. SIYAWUSA was PAC inclined and at the time I had adopted PAN Africanist as an ideology. I also changed the labour movement I belonged to and joined NUMSA because it is a charterist organisation. I was attracted to NACTU after joining SIYAWUSA, SIYAWUSA discussed a lot of politics, politics that involved black people. The organisation's motto was Self, Serve and Sacrifice for another African. I then decided to dedicate my time to assist workers by joining SIYAWUSA. I wanted to contribute to the black society. I joined SIYAWUSA because it was aligned more to the Pan African ideologies. What I liked most about NACTU is that it never joined any political organisation. Our concern was if it happens the PAC is elected to government, how are we going to negotiate for the workers if we are in government. It was a neutral organisation representing the aims and objectives of the workers, not aims of a certain political organisation.

Facilitator: You had SIYAWUSA at Brite Metals and then there was NUMSA. Was there tension between the two?

Respondent: Sometimes there was tension within, the thing is we were sharing monthly meetings with management and the two trade union organisations. For an organisation to be strong in the workplace, particularly a trade union organisation, it depends on how you are representing the workers in the workplace. The workers will move from one organisation to the other and choose the one that works for them. So the tension was there because NUMSA was losing members in MacSteel because the union was led by people like me. We were not pushing our own agendas, but we were representing the workers. We wanted every party to benefit at the end of the day, not just individuals at the expense of others. Those are the problems we encountered. We will sometimes have disagreements, others will come with suggestions and others will question them etc. Finally we would come to some agreement.

As a township boy I had organised work for guys in the township, about a 100, I was influential, so whatever I was saying they would support me because we knew each other and trusted each other. SIYAWUSA was the majority in the company.

Facilitator: so you arrived there in 1982 and the following year you were made a shop steward?

Respondent: The very same year, I started working in February 1982, the very same year in May because I was from the township, I was a Pan Africanist, I had the hatred for white people – I got everyone in the family

to become a Pan Africanist. I had issues with white people, I was questioning a lot. I was given an opportunity to read both constitutions, NUMSA and SIYAWUSA, but because I was already a Pan Africanist I joined NUMSA because I wanted to further the Pan Africanist ideology.

Facilitator: Going back, of course you were suddenly charged with ..., these are your responsibilities, SIYAWUSA were your people. What were the challenges of workers at Brite Metals?

Respondent: by then, the challenge was, the workers did not understand trade unionism. For instance when I started I realised that the workers' believed that trade unions are lawyers to represent them when they need to be represented if there is misconduct or they were being dismissed from work. Trade unions did not educate the workers about what what they stood for. Most of the cases I came across were minor cases. And in most cases most people were elected as shop stewards even though they had no background. The workers also did not know their rights and did not sign contracts of employment. They were only told things like you start work at a certain time, your lunch is at .., your tea time is at, you go home at such a time, that is all, nothing else. People were not told that they cannot come to work drunk, drink on the job, or stealing, you also have to listen to the supervisor's instructions, consult your shop steward if you have a grievance with your supervisor. People did not understand their rights and what trade unions stood for. So those were the challenges. Some shop stewards did not know the basic conditions of employment and is told by a union organiser or official – this was not right. People lost their jobs because of this, and to me this was unfair dismissal because the workers do not know about this information, they were not inducted, they

are only told of the rules and regulations after the misconduct has happened. I dealt with a lot of unfair dismissal cases.

A friend of mine Disco was fired by Iscor, it was unfair dismissal. I spoke to the organiser, Larcy, he was with NUMSA. I checked the case and realised that Disco was not given any documentation from CCMA so that he can also consult for advice and go through the evidence. The organiser was not of help to Disco because he had no clue as to what to do. I went to CCMA with him to CCMA, I guided him and he won the case, the company contested, the case was then referred to the Labour Court. We strategised again, I could not accompany him because my dad was suffering from throat cancer. We did our case studies and when he went to the Labour Court he won the case. Iscor backdated his payments and reinstated him. He is currently working for Iscor van der Bijl. Workers do not know a thing about unions, they do not understand labour laws. Unions must contribute by teaching the workers about unions (he repeated this over and over again).

Facilitator: how were the working conditions at Brite Metals because this is also the responsibility of the shop steward?

Respondent: I am still saying it again that the conditions were a health hazard for the workers. Some workers had worked for as long as 15 years on one side. Brite Metals, they are blacksmiths. They work with round bars, squares and hexagon, the hexagon makes bolts and nuts. So they use a lot of drawing machines. Their market is in the motoring industry. There has been no changes in the company, they are still using the old technology which was used in 1972 when the company was established. They also used reelers which are used to straighten steel. The reelers used

a lot of oil when drawing, the oil would burn and would let out a lot of fumes. The fumes are very strong because even if you were wearing guess masks. The short blast should have been done in open air not inside the factory so that it does not affect the health of workers. Since 2007 about is plus/minus 17/20 – others would die two weeks or so after receiving their pension. Some it affected their eyesight, all the people are wearing spectacles because of this. There are peelers which use ammonia, the smell is very toxic. I know a guy called Sedge Mlangeni, when he first joined the company he was huge, he is so thin now. The workers are still to date not given protective clothing. My colleagues are telling me that since I left nothing seems to be right, they miss me, they tell me they are sick. They also force people to consult with the company doctors. I always argued with the doctors when they recommended that workers should be given light duties, if you are injured you must be booked off until you get better. Those are some of the tricks the company used, the company had its own doctor, any injury the doctor would recommend. A lot of people were not compensated by IOD even though they were injured, some are at home, others died – the doctor would sometime say this is an old injury even if that was not the case.

Some of the black shop stewards benefited from the workplace, the employer would give them management positions even if they did not deserve or qualify for it, whatever happens he had to take the side of the employer. The company is still the same to date. One of the shop stewards who is still here, his name is Shalas Ndaba, people are still complaining about him they say he's a sell out. I tell them that I have taught them about trade unions, why do they not go and see their official in the designated area. They must report the officials and go to the media if they do not get any joy. People are still having the same

problems, nothing has changed. Shop stewards do not look out for the workers, they don't ensure that there is equity.

Facilitator: what about salary disputes were those an issue at Brite Metals?

Respondent: What happened is, we had no inhouse agreement, the negotiations were done nationally with other similar entities. There are many things which we initiated in our company, like bonuses, incentives. We asked the company to encourage workers by paying them bonuses if they meet their targets. Production bonus was introduced so that if we reach a target at the end of the month the workers would get something in order to encourage them. People would produce the best quality and more. Production bonuses were put in place. I was the initiator. The employer agreed to it, to date it is still there. The other thing was for our children, we recommended introduction of bursaries, it was approved but it depended on the child's performance, if the child performs well he would qualify for a bursary. I used to sit on the bursary committee. The bursary was extended to extended family members as well as long s they were performing well.

Facilitator: Were women working in this organisation?

Respondent: yes Selina Mpati and her sister. Selina started as a cleaner, there was no balance in the equasion. To date I still feel the women working there are not enough, there is no balance of the sexes even though there's a lot of work which can be done by women. Now they have only 5 women and a workforce of about 200 men. Women can be employed as clerks, in the stores department and weighing, sales

department etc. The management to date is still dominated by white people. There are no changes whatsoever.

Facilitator: The few women were they part of the union?

Respondent: yes they were part of the union

Facilitator: what kind of work did they do?

Respondent: Selina Mpati was the tea lady/cleaner in the offices, cleaned white people's toilets. That is what she did.

Facilitator: Were they catered for in terms of maternity leave and other women's benefits?

Respondent: yes there was maternity leave at the time, hence the men were also covered in the basic conditions of employment, paternity leave as well. We were not part of it. Only white people benefited from paternity leave not blacks. We could not support our women

Facilitator: so you didn't fight for paternity leave?

Respondent: I fought for it but to date it is still not there. I do ask what is going on that is how I know what is happening right now. I still give them ideas. I was talking to this Ndaba guy and asked him why must he buy spectacles if his eyesight was damaged by the workplace? Why does the workplace not check your eyesight and health etc., they should introduce "Red Sea" – if most people are having eyesight problems it means there's a problem in the workplace environment.

Facilitator: In terms of strikes, I am thinking there was NUMSA, there was MEWUSA at the workplace. How did you work? Did you agree on strikes or .., everybody did their own strike?

Respondent: what we used to do is we first checked whether the workforce is going to benefit out of the strike. Sometimes we disagreed with NUMSA when coming to strikes, sometimes we realised that some of the strikes were about somebody wanting to show their dominancy and power. At the end of the day strikes did not benefit us. We were never given the strike fund, a certain percentage of our salaries. Some workers would be out of work for up to three months, at the end of the day nothing was achieved. We would first look at what the purpose of the strike and whether it would benefit us or not – we would join the strike if it was in line with our package. Some strikes were not national they were workplace strike of which we had to go to a ballot inside the company after being awarded by the commissioner. If a worker was not interested in striking we would let them continue with their work. The snag was the minority was able to go to work and the majority could not go to work because SIYAWUSA dominated – if COSATU called a strike, the workplace would benefit because the minority would go on strike or just abandon it after realising that NUMSA is taking them for a ride knowing very well that they will be given the 6%, promising workers 13%. Why go on strike?

Facilitator: Cases of dismissals were they there at Brite Metals?

Respondent: yes a lot of cases, I know of many where people were just dismissed for nothing, unjustified. Like I mentioned earlier that somebody came to work late twice or three times. They told him did you come here

looking for a job or did you come here to start working late? If you don't want to work I will go outside and find someone who is willing to work. There were such things. People were forced to work overtime, from 07:00 am to 10:00 pm, arriving home after 11 or 12 midnight. When this person wakes tomorrow they must report again at 07:00 if he can't make it he is fired. The company did not care. We first checked the seriousness of the misconduct. We expected the company to do things right, first verbal warning, first written warning, second written warning and then final written warning, if these are exhausted we knew that you are likely to be dismissed. The employer also had to contribute somehow by engaging in social responsibilities. If a worker had personal family problems the employer had to support the worker. It is important for the workplace to have a resident psychiatrist. If a person is angry from home this might somehow affect the production. Screaming at a worker creates hatred and the worker loses interest in his work. Employers must be able to notice if there's a change in the worker's behaviour. Most of the people who were dismissed were reinstated as I reviewed their cases. As a Production superintendent I had my team, we worked together and they would advise me on the people who were dismissed and were top performers. I encouraged the employer to induct people on Thursdays for at least 2 hours, the project was run by the Human Resources team. Workers needed to know the Disciplinary Code of Conduct and the rules and regulations of the company based on the LRA, basic conditions of employment. Educate them before punishing the worker.

Facilitator: what about racism, discrimination?

Respondent: It's still there, to date it is the same. Management is still dominated by whites, there are no opportunities to empower people also

there's nepotism, if there's an opportunity to go up people will call a family member to take over the position. The position which I was supposed to hold was given to his brother in law, his secretary was a cousin to his brother in law. If a black person was given that position they would not last they would ensure that you are uncomfortable until you leave.

Facilitator: so issues of equity have not been addressed?

Respondent: no equity whatsoever until today.

Facilitator: health issues how important are they, is it a problem for workers, for unions, for management. Today with the prevalence of HIV, what happens? Are workers getting sick or is this a problem for the workers or the problem of union or the problem for management. Who's problem is it?

Respondent: It's a problem for all of us, workers, the trade union and employers. If I am working in an environment which is hazardous I must voice a concern because every work place must have a health officer around. If my health officer does not take my health concern seriously I must go and see my shop steward who must take the matter up. That is why I say shop stewards needs to be empowered, they have to attend courses on health and safety. Once the shop stewards know about the importance of health and safety they will be able to report to management or to the health authorities.

Facilitator: so when you were at MEWUSA you were still working for Brite Metals?

Respondent: yes

Facilitator: you formed a Shop Steward Council?

Respondent: Yes we formed a Shop Steward Council whereby shop stewards met at the offices so that we share ideas and what was going on in the workplace. It was a union in the steel industry and all the companies that got together were working with the same products. We met every weekend and discussed which is the best workplace, what have other shop stewards achieved in the different workplaces and they managed to achieve whatever they achieved. The Shop Steward Council still exists. Other trade unions like NUMSA followed that route.

Facilitator: so it actually helped a lot, the Shop Steward Council?

Respondent: Yes the Shop Steward Council helped a lot. There must be health officials representing the union within the workplace, every department should have a union member who is trained on health and safety who will monitor and ensure that health and safety standards are maintained. Shop stewards do not know what to do if a worker is injured at work, they also don't understand what happens with the Workman's Compensation. The Workman's Compensation has never paid anyone because the shop steward has no knowledge, the employer will just bribe the worker with R5000 instead of paying a penalty which was going to rectify the situation ultimately.

Facilitator: Recruitment, were people interested in joining unions?

Respondent: When I started working people had an interest in joining unions and work related politics.

Facilitator: I'm not sure whether you had coloureds and Indians in the workplace?

Respondent: Let me say in the production field we had black people and boers, the sales department had one Indian, we never had a coloured person.

Facilitator: so they were not part of the unions?

Respondent: we never had a coloured person, but in other companies we had coloured people who worked for other companies who were trade union members

Facilitator: so what was wrong with you?

Respondent: It shows there was no equity in my workplace, whites were given the preference that is why they were in management and black people worked for production. The maintenance department, they have never employed a black fitter or black turner. They employed a guy called Sibuyane who died in an accident, he was a shop steward. He was taken to a training centre to be trained as a fitter assistant. He never made it at the training centre because he was illiterate. They did not want to empower the relevant people. The opportunity was given to someone who did not benefit because at the end of the day he did not learn anything.

Facilitator: At some point in time you became an administrator of SIYAWUSA, I'm not sure whether you left Brite Meals or what?

Respondent: By then I had left Brite Metals, I was helping MEWUSA to maintain its standards within the workplace

Facilitator: what about SIYAWUSA?

Respondent: It had died at the time and MEWUSA also split, SIYAWUSA died completely. When officials realised that there are people who understand trade union organisations they would cause havoc, some would be signatories in the organisation, they would spend the money, the union is no more.

Facilitator: was it the same with MEWUSA?

Respondent: YES the situation was the same. The Secretary General and the president of the organisation did not want to be moved, some remained with MEWUSA because they were in the steel industry, but the secretary general and the president were happy that other people left because they could spend the money as they wished (interruption, phone rang).

Facilitator: so MEWUSA also there were power struggles?

Respondent: yes

Facilitator: was it a steel industry?

Respondent: yes Metal and Workers

Facilitator: so you went to work for to them as an official?

Respondent: I was just helping them, I was not getting paid, I didn't want to ..., my problem was my organiser was offered a better offer from a white guy who had formed a trade union organisation, so I wanted MEWUSA to sustain but then my union official Nkane was not paid for something like 12 months and then the white people offered to back date his pay for 12 months if he brings members as a signing on fee. Eventually I realised there was nothing for me to do, you cannot run an organisation that does not have money, hence the workforce had an agreement with the union that they must give a 3 month notice before terminating the contract. So the subscriptions were paid directly to the coffers of MEWUSA.

Facilitator: You mentioned that ..., let's start with exploitation at Brite Metals. Was it something that was there or were the workers happy?

Respondent: There was never a day where our workers were happy more especially because of wage differences within the company. Sometimes people would be operating the same machine, the salaries are not the same, hatred developed within the workforce itself. Favouritism played a role in that company because positions were given to people who collaborated with management. Those people would be given increases and perks, when they are drunk in the township they would boast about this.

Facilitator: I'm not sure whether since you were part of SIYAWUSA and then also in the township there were PC underground activities or whether those things died in the 1980s?

Respondent: they were there, there were underground cells that I managed but as a Pan Africanist. We even had a camp and trained our youth to fight against the regime. So our youth has contributed a lot to our liberation struggle especially in 1984 because PAC as a political organisation around this area of Zone 7 has contributed a lot to liberate Zone 7, South Africa as a whole. If you check around this area, from this block I'm staying in, up until the top area there we have Pan Africanist who are demoralised because of inner party struggles in our organisation. We had youth here, I know someone who is still in prison, Xmas he was dangerous. Because there was a national call at the time which talked about we take whatever belongs to the Azanians from the white regime, there were criminal elements around our area, those that did break ins for white people etc. We wanted this to benefit our struggle at the end of the day. We took the very same criminal elements around our area and train them in line with Pan Africanism as an ideology

Facilitator: and that worked?

Respondent: It worked and that was when we opened up a sect that attacked the boers so much, a lot of boers were killed in those days, boers were killed in Potchefstroom, Boskoloos, people took their livestock and ate meat, boers were killed in Vereeniging plots, they went into every household and took anything they wanted, after taking whatever they would write in a spray and say APLA was here. Karel Zimbere would

accept accountability for everything that happened as if it was an external mission.

Facilitator: it seems to be that you are disillusioned about unions?

Respondent: yes I don't have confidence in them, I've lost faith in them?

Facilitator: what happened, you were in the unions, shop steward, official and so on and then at the end of the day you feel it was not worth it?

Respondent: Ja because as I had indicated, trade unions do not serve the interest of the people at large. You can check subscriptions that are paid on monthly basis – trade union organisations only represent our people if there's a difficult case in the labour court and it's not many cases whereby trade union organisations opt to go to labour court because they don't want to pay, they would rather sacrifice the worker than pay money. They do nothing for the people at the end of the day, they are not ploughing back to the people who have contributed money in their coffers. People in the steel industry have lost jobs. We cannot ask the government to empower them, they have contributed money to the organisation, they should use the money to empower the people to create more employment or empower their children. What happened to the money? Previously this membership had a membership of 1 million, ten years later they have 500 000, they were collecting subscriptions, what happened to the subscriptions. Why do they not create opportunities for these people so that they can work. We must stop importing skills from foreign countries. We can educate our own people through trade union organisation for skills development. The mentality of the employers would change their mindset. If you speak that language in any trade union

organisation they tend to hate you because individuals are benefiting at the expense of the majority. I do not hate trade union organisations. I have worked with them but they don't benefit the people at the end of the day.

Facilitator: what is the future of trade unions in this country?

Respondent: the future of trade unions is doomed. For instance they cannot eradicate labour brokers. They were part of the system of limited duration works. A big union like NUMSA it's an alliance of the ANC, whatever situation in relation with labour, the Minister of Labour was agreed within the alliance. That is why I'm saying there is no future for trade union organisation because the very same trade organisation is the government of the day, you cannot fight yourself. So that is why I'm saying people are losing confidence in the trade union organisations. People are losing jobs everyday. If a company wants to create employment they opt for labour brokers because it is limited duration contract employment based on the condition that if you have a breakdown today, you are not paid, you have to go home. The works directors and production managers are the ones benefiting at the end of the day. The people are not going to get paid until the machine is up and running, there are no benefits, the only benefit is the Unemployment Insurance fund which gets exhausted. There is no provident fund or housing subsidies from the employer. The union does not assist people to get jobs. The youth is forced to register with labour brokers in order to get a job. R22 that is supposed to be earned by the worker, the worker is only paid R8 instead of the R22. For instance in the construction industry, the government would say we have created 17 000 people hence it has created employment for 800 in the country, the rest are our foreign

brothers. Money is not invested in our country, they don't pay taxes. The people who create employment for our foreign brothers are happy because they pay them less. Trade unions have no future in the country, they need to reshape now. COSATU should create learnerships.

Facilitator: thanks very much for your time this was good.

END

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