

ELIAS MABOEE

Facilitator: Can you please give me your full name and surname?

Respondent: Elias Maboee.

Facilitator: I am speaking to Mr Elias Maboee, we are in Gugulethu in Cape Town, the date is the 31st August 2010 and the interview is done by Brown Maaba. Tata thanks very much for your time, you can speak in Zulu, English or Xhosa or you can mix. Can you give me your background of where you were born, where you grew up, your family, was it a rich or poor family and your schooling until you connected with the unions and politics.

Respondent: I was born in a place called.....in a Skwatta camp here in Cape Town, it was July 1955. Like any family, we had a family of seven and my father was the sole bread winner, he came to Gugulethu in 1960. I am not well educated but I started at a school called Msiko Primary, from there I went to higher primary in Luzuko Higher Primary where I then left school in standard six. Like any other youth and a person who believes in making something out of nothing because our parents were not so rich and they could not managed to educate each and everyone of us, based on that then I started to work selling newspapers during the early morning and late news, I then moved and was then working at Enterprise Bakery for about three years, at first I was delivering break and later I was moved to the biscuits department. From there I went to work at a clothing factory, there I started being involved in workers struggles, by then there was a union that was managed by a family, I don't remember what the family was called, then when we arrived there as young people we started to change the union, the union was Gamin Workers Union then

we managed to merge with a Gamin Workers Union in Durban and we formed a union called GAWU. After building GAWU as a shop steward, we were not a part of COSATU and then we joined COSATU, if I am not mistaken it was around 1988/1989, then there is this principle of one union industry, we were then engaged in talks with APTUSA, we then formed a union called SACTU. I served in the region and then served in the national structures, from there we engaged in most activities of unions like strikes, fighting for better wages for workers and I was then elected in the COSATU RSC, I served there for three years and thereafter I was then elected as Vice Chairperson of COSATU, so I won't be able to assist you with the exact years and dates. Comrade Boss left and he was appointed the president or deputy president of SAMWU, I was then elected to be the Chairperson of COSATU, once I was the chairperson of COSATU, the company which I was working for, ...Clothing closed down, then I think in that same period, the secretary of COSATU resigned, he had about six months to go, I was then asked to act as the Secretary of COSATU, and then in the congress I was voted out because moved from the national office to the province, so then I lost the position, thereafter I was employed by the Chemical Workers Union as an organiser, once I was working as an organiser there, there was another merger, we merged with the paper union, we formed a union called SEPAWU. We had campaigns as unions to make sure that at least we fight for workers rights and to also make sure that the working conditions on the shop floor are taken seriously, we would campaign LRA and be part and parcel of that, and also assist in making sure that the country becomes a democratic country. While I was working for SEPAWU we had one major strike which was against the petroleum bosses where we managed to get what we wanted, but the strike lasted for about three weeks, those are some of the things of how I moved in the area. While I was still a shop steward I was asked to serve in the council in the pre-interim phase, and I also served in the

interim phase but because we were under the so called national squad council, I was very frustrated by the way council or government operated, I then resigned and went back to the union, SEPAWU as an organiser. That is the brief summary; I don't know maybe you can also ask questions.

Facilitator: You said you went to school in primary, can you tell me what level you continued to?

Respondent: I said I left school at standard six and then I was involved with trade union work where I underwent a lot of empowerment training, trade union studies at Workers College for three months which was based in UWC under the leadership of P. Govender. There is a lot of education which was involving worker rights which I received, I was also enthusiastic about any training that was available and would attend because I thought I was working with people and it would help me with understanding things, so that is how far I got, the other training I received was training pertaining government, local government in particular.

Facilitator: This form of training, was it effective?

Respondent: Yes, in terms of the workers college, it was effective because I started to understand things better because I had an understanding of issues about the factory floor but in the college we were then given a lot of trade union studies from all over the world, how workers engage and some economics background so that when you are engaging with the employers, you can at least make up informed positions and argue issues which can assist people; I remember at Inside where I used to work, I engaged the company around some benefits, in particular the workers used to save money

and then end of the year they would get their money and interest would be kept aside, and we engaged the company to check what was happening with the interest of the workers.

Facilitator: Which company?

Respondent: Inside clothing, so we agreed with the company that all the interest of the savings, we managed to get about 80% of it to the workers; we agreed to share out of the 80%, 40% of the interest was to be paid to the workers as how they saved and the other 40% we used to open up a fund so that when workers are in dire straits and in need of money, they can borrow from it so that the fund keeps on growing, that was one of the issues that made us strong on the factory floor. We were in fact on the verge of trying to engage with the company that they have a crèche in the factory because in most cases women comrades were on the factory floor and they struggled sometimes, they had a high absenteeism rate, and then we engaged the company because there was space available that we could utilise to establish the crèche but then it was the dawn of democracy, the company sensed that because they used to work for the old regime, they saw changes coming, they said we wanted more out of South Africa because most South Africans were outside the country, what they proposed that they can sell some of the shares to the workers then they can have a stake in the company and when they sell the company the workers would also get something, we agreed but when we took this to the union, the union said they didn't have a policy around that, so that fell away. The company said they gave us an offer and told us that they were selling the company; they didn't want to run it anymore because they were leaving the country to live with their children, and I think the union dragged their feet. Then they started making arrangements and engaged us around retrenchments,

the agreement we had with the company was not catered for by the union so they started retrenching and finally closed the company. The point I am making here is that we had a good team of shop stewards who were very keen to assist and I think if our plan with management had worked, I am sure the company would still be running and the agreement we had with the company would have bear fruits for the workers, we didn't know how we would have went about running the company but the owners were willing to take us overseas and train us but because there was no policy in the union, that failed. The union assisted a lot in my upliftment and also the organisation which I am representing played a role because they empowered me with training and played a role in me being the person I am today who believes that I still owe people to work for them.

Facilitator: Why did you leave school?

Respondent: As I indicated earlier, we were not a rich family and all of us were in school and some of us left because of very little income in the house and we could not cope with the fees at school.

Facilitator: You mentioned the fact that, I don't remember which company; you might have to remind me, the union there was run by a family.

Respondent: It was Gamin Workers Union.

Facilitator: Can you unpack that a bit, I don't understand why a union could be run by a family.

Respondent: I don't remember the name of the company, but if you remember the old unions use to be run as a company and there was

no democracy because even the notion of wage negotiations, there was nothing to that effect, what usually happened was that the shop stewards would go to a meeting and then be told that the wage increase was going to be a certain amount, with no proper engagement with the workers first or with the shop stewards, they would take what comes from the top, so that is why I was saying that the unions were usually run by a family.

Facilitator: Your introduction to the unions, who brought you on board to be part and parcel of the unions?

Respondent: The former General Secretary's brother in law, comrade Lionel Khutuba became a the General Secretary of the province which was then called a region, he had some union background and was also a very intelligent guy who started to engage with COSATU unions, it was not him only, I know in Durban, because I said they were from GAWU, in Durban we had Comrade Eunice Shaik who used to be in the Natal Union, and then I think as leadership we met and tried to engage with COSATU unions and hence we agreed then to have a new union formed which includes the Western Cape, Durban and I think there were comrades from the Eastern Cape. After that we started going to COSATU and then we started to understand how democracy worked, the shop stewards were elected rather than just being told who your shop steward was, in the old union shop stewards would be appointed and they would remain there and they would not be accountable to anyone, they would only bring information from above. When we joined the new union we started shop steward committees, we started to get demands from workers and then we would take those demands to a chamber of shop stewards where issues raised from different companies and would debate them and then agree on what will be forwarded to management in terms of

worker demands. We got know that there are time frames with negotiations, those things were not there during the past but we used to prepare for annual wage negotiations but what was fortunate was that we had bargaining councils and they were not very democratic, when we became part of COSATU the bargaining council was transformed so that it was more democratic and more active.

Facilitator: Your position in GAWU, what was it exactly, were you a shop steward or an organiser?

Respondent: I was a shop steward, I was a chairperson of what was called Cape Town Local, we used to have about seven locals, there was one was Cape Town, one in Woodstock, one in Salt river, one in Eping and one Maitland, so that was only for the metro.

Facilitator: I am interested to finding out organising strategies as union, what did it take to organise unions?

Respondent: Look what was easy in the clothing factory was that they had what was called a closed shop, so when you get into a company you are already a member of the union, the point I am making is that in order for you to come into a union, then was that the minute you start working you don't have an option, you are a member of the union through the closed shop agreement, so it was easy to be unionised and also I think it was a better mechanism of making sure that at least you work as a collective. The closed shop was not so democratic but I think it assisted in building an organisation. GAWU in particular, most clothing factories were under the closed shop, only after we merged with APTUSA, in APTUSA there was no closed shop, and then I started to understand how difficult it was to organise because we used to assist comrades from the textile. When membership was down they would

call some of the shop stewards from other companies to come and assist, trying to win over members who belong to other unions, we managed to recruit on that basis.

Facilitator: And then you were a chemical workers organiser at some point in time, did you use the same strategies or was the environment different?

Respondent: Oh it was different because there was no bargaining council in the chemical industry; the way of organising was to go physically and engage and then you must know that during those times people were very scared of unions. Then if you didn't have members, in order for you to get into a company, you needed to have a recognition agreement. We used to recruit five to six members a day, so that at least you try to get to a threshold so that when you have at least a third of the members paid up, then it would be easy for you to go to the company and ask for recognition. If you didn't have that it would be very difficult for you to get access to the workers, so the point I am making is that it was unlike the closed shop agreement, it was very difficult but we managed to mobilise a lot of members into the union.

Facilitator: You also mentioned that it was difficult to organise workers to be part of the unions back then, what was their problem exactly?

Respondent: I think the problem then was that everybody scared to join because employers used not encourage people to join unions, they would argue that unions become powerful and that they would challenge them around issues pertaining worker rights. In the environment where there are no unions it was easy for employers to do what they wanted because people didn't have knowledge of their

rights as workers. Employers were very tough and making sure that they not allow any organiser in their plant, if you were caught in their plant without permission of being there, they would even take you to jail. We would encourage people to come outside during their lunch time so that they could join the union.

Facilitator: The perception of the employers over the unions, were they hostile or just a negative attitude?

Respondent: They were very hostile towards unions because they knew that when workers get organised they would be more united and they knew that if they are unionised it would be very difficult for them to just do what they want, they would be restricted. The minute workers are organised and you have a recognition agreement and in particular if you have 50 plus 1 you have a right to negotiate wages on behalf of them, hence I said earlier that if you don't have a number like 50 plus 1 you don't have a right to negotiate on behalf of the union, so those workers would just be paying subscriptions to the union with little which they can get. The target would be, in any company that you are recruiting, you try to reach 50 plus 1 so that you can negotiate on behalf of the workers and you can defend workers when they are faced with disciplinary hearings.

Facilitator: You worked in the garment industry for a long time which is dominated by women, more or less, what was the role of women in these union structures, was it prominent or the positions were dominated by men?

Respondent: I must say very few women were active, but because of the majority of workers in the company, in particular the garment workers union, in fact I used to work for a company which had 1500

members, 90% of those members were women and I think we were entitled of about 25 shop stewards. There were a number of women comrades elected as shop stewards but a number of them were struggling, remember in the earlier years this thing of maternity and paternity leave were not there and these things only came into the frail when unions became stronger and managed to negotiate around those issues. Companies used to abuse women because they knew that they would work the nine months and thereafter go and have a baby with no benefits, now the unions started to raise those issues with management and the women comrades started to fall in line.

Facilitator: Was there a way of taking them out of the situation?

Respondent: Yes because when we sat as management and shop stewards committee, they would be part and parcel of those meetings and would raise those issues.

Facilitator: How far did you succeed on those issues pertaining women, maternity issues, exploitation and all those issues?

Respondent: We managed because one thing unions used to empower us with was that we should understand what the issues were which we were supposed to be fighting for, and if we couldn't they would give us information and a way of how to address the issues. We fought long for maternity and paternity rights to be on the agenda of negotiations, they knew that workers usually addressed issues of wages and working conditions, but the question of maternity and paternity leave, when we engaged them about the issues people would say that it does not affect everyone and would want to move it from the agenda and want to discuss real wage instead. The increment then used to be R2.50 maybe for three years, my father used to work as a

clothing worker too, so it used to be R2.50 for three years and only after then that things would change, the point I am making is that people would rather see money being put on the real wage than see issues pertaining benefits. As a result, in the earlier years there were no arrangements for pension for people, they worked without pension or if they got pension it would be very little money being put aside. When the unions started working, people put some of the benefits to be part and parcel of the annual wages.

Facilitator: On the issue of women, were there no men who were antagonistic or harsh on women and so on?

Respondent: No, in fact in the industry that I worked in, most men didn't like to sit in meetings, women were the people who would rather be in the meetings because they were more affected.

Facilitator: You went on to be vice president of COSATU regionally and subsequently president, what were the challenges of running an organisation of this nature?

Respondent: It was immense. Very few people wanted to take action when it came to strikes, in particular the so called coloured people, they were not very interested in strikes, and the people who rather engage in strikes would be comrades from the African areas. The so called coloured people were majority in most of the companies, if the union took a position of going to strike they would only go for one day and their form of engaging companies would rather be lunch time demonstrations which will not affect their pockets but we had a different approach. The African approach would be to shut down the floor although we knew that we were not a majority, and the people

who would go on strike would be the so called African people, we used to use to force them not to go to work.

Facilitator: How did you do this, did you lock gates or were there other ways of doing that?

Respondent: We used to block people from getting on trains, particularly in the areas which I had just raised, also there was the strike of the petroleum, we used go to the companies and force them to close and block their vans from going out but we were interdicted, that started to scare the employers because we used to block them, in particular in Montiki Gardens where are was deployed, there were companies there which were affiliated to us and they would help us. We would block the gates although we knew it was illegal, and we would do it anyway knowing that we could be caught, but luckily no one was caught, we were just chased and hit by the police. The main this was that we made our point and that is the way we used to organise and what we used to do was to make sure that, if we are not going to block them we would make sure that we hire a hall and everybody is there to hear speeches from leadership and we would show films of people on strike and that maybe might encourage people when seeing what other people did to push for their position. This was a way to see how our workers can relate to workers from other countries.

Facilitator: Relations between coloured and African workers in relation to issues of strike and positions, what was it like and how are the conditions today?

Respondent: Look, I don't want to say we used to fight, we knew that they would not partake in the strikes, and there were no tensions

because we knew they cannot take a fight but the only thing they wanted was the money and if there's no money then it does not assist them. We engaged because we wanted to improve the situation of the people, better wages and conditions of employment, in fact employers knew that coloured people would only be in the strike for one, two or three days, especially in the industry we were working in. In other industries, for example, in the chemical industry you wouldn't differentiate a coloured working in that industry and an Africa person because workers were very united. Even in other industries like metal and building industries workers were united, the reason the clothing industry was not united was because it was dominated by women.

Facilitator: Is that the reason why they didn't want to go on strike?

Respondent: I think that's one of the reasons.

Facilitator: In terms of leadership positions, are there no contestations?

Respondent: No, in fact when we were in COSATU we used to agree with the leadership, we made sure that at least as leadership we look at positions and say that this person will be capable to deal with this position, in fact there were racial fights around leadership positions.

Facilitator: Any other challenges of managing COSATU at this level and beyond, other than these issues?

Respondent: Look, in COSATU, hence I was saying the predominant people who will engage in strikes would be the so called African people.

Facilitator: What about the threat of being arrested and victimised by the state and so on?

Respondent: Then we knew that if you are caught you are going to face the consequences, but we knew that we would be victors at the end of the day.

Facilitator: Were all the shop stewards into working for the workers or some of them got co-opted by management as far as you known?

Respondent: In most cases we used to work together, but there was also this notion from the workers, for example, if an organiser comes to a company and management used to have strict rules, they would say this gate will be used by workers and this one will be used by management. Now you come as an organiser and you could not use the workers gate because there were restrictions, you were supposed to identify yourself at the management's gate then workers would say you were a sell-out because you started at the employers, they would say they employed you, they are your bosses, but those were things you would get anywhere. When you engage with shop stewards and management, management would arrange tea and biscuits or bread for the meeting and workers would start thinking that management is buying your loyalty by giving you refreshments, this was just a perception from workers.

Facilitator: In terms of township struggles, what was the relationship between the township struggles and workers struggles, because in the 80s the townships were burning and so on, and I am sure as worker leaders you found yourselves in this situation as well?

Respondent: In terms of our struggles in the township, in fact people in the township wanted union leaders to be part and parcel of the leadership and look up to them to give direction because they had this perception that those people are trained and know what to do. In this township for instance, I remember we found strike which was a round three strike, people were very sympathetic with the workers strike, and were donating some money and whatever they could to assist people who were not working because of the round three strike. So I am saying in the township they youth, political organisations and trade unionists, people in the township used to look for guidance from their side. There was never a situation of bad things between unions and the community.

Facilitator: But were there union members who doubled up as community activists as well as union activists?

Respondent: Yes that combination you to exist then.

Facilitator: You were chairperson of COSATU in the province for some time, the idea of aligning COSATU to the ANC, how was it viewed, how did you view it, was it the right move, what were the views of the other workers?

Respondent: We used to have two strong federations, there used to be COSATU or FOSATU then and also those affiliates of NATU who would maybe align themselves with PAC. This was never a thing that could be dividing by the whole community, in corners yes there might have been people who were trying to, but the point I want to put here is that people only saw the ANC as the only organisation which will liberate people in this country and because most of us usually supported the ANC even if we were not members of the ANC,

because of the work it used to do underground where we were staying. So there were very strong activists who were working underground, and I don't remember major clashes the PAC and the ANC in this area. I know the area which the strongest PAC alignment was in Langa, but I am still saying there were no major fights between the two organisations, even with the two federations we might have had clashes but not physical clashes. For example, I know at one stage we arranged a march in town, I was leading and I think Patricia De Lille was leading the PAC, now we agreed that each and every federation donates some money to make sure that the event is successful, but the PAC did not come on board in terms of finances, and they wanted to be on stage and address the workers, I was very critical of them, I said look you cannot speak because you donate towards this rally. There was a leader who came from national who said that was not the point; he said lets address issues of workers.

Facilitator: Some workers feel that unions tended to be dominated by white liberals and all those things, some black leaders were not comfortable with that, I don't know if you can shed some light on that one?

Respondent: Hence I was saying the union I was involved with, not so much but maybe comrade Boss would be able to tell you because he was there before me. The point I am making is that the union which I started to engage in was not dominated by so called whites, only the one which I said was run like a company, the people who were running that were whites, hence we then managed to democratise it. I know in the province at one stage we had a secretary which was Nick Heywood, who was a secretary of COSATU then, and he was a very active person. The history of this province, the majority of the people who used to be COSATU members were Africans, and I know that in

leadership, in fact in this province I don't remember us having an African secretary of COSATU, unless the first one because I was not in COSATU then, but as years go by it would be either a coloured person who would be a secretary of COSATU, hence I am saying I acted for only six months as COSATU secretary, thereafter Tony. Before then it was Joseph Williams and before him I think it was comrade Nick Heywood, also comrade Allen Roberts, I don't know if you have heard about him, the point I am making is that I don't remember having an African secretary, in particular COSATU. In affiliates you would find African secretaries but in COSATU specifically in this province I don't remember an African secretary of COSATU.

Facilitator: Also the effectiveness of bringing the employer on the table.

Respondent: As I said I know which unions used to bring employers on the table if there are disputes, unions like NUMSA, Chemical Union, now SAPTU, although I don't remember having a major strike with SAPTU rather than now late when I left the union, but usually they used soft methods to bring the employers on the table, either they would say lunch time demonstrations. I know unions like NUMSA, NUM would go on full blown strike, POTWA then and other unions would attempt to go on strike, like SAMWU since then used to do that, to take people out on strike to make sure that employers come to their senses, it was one of the unions that was very strong around that.

Facilitator: The role of LRC, how effective was it in the life of unionists?

Respondent: LRC, what is LRC?

Facilitator: I mean LRA.

Respondent: We had major campaigns in most cases industrial areas highlighting what we needed to see in the LRA, in fact those marches were most used in the inter.....areas, we used to have councils, shop steward councils and area council.

Facilitator: After being a chairperson of COSATU, you said you went back to Chemical?

Respondent: Yes I was employed in Chemical as an organiser.

Facilitator: How did that work out, any problems, and any victories when you look back?

Respondent: Look, when I was an organiser in Chemical we had strong comrades who were worker leaders in that area, and also officials who were strong, so I managed to get into a gate through them, you see when you are organisers you have meeting which you do before you go to areas, where you are empowered by other officials so that whatever you do, you do as a collective. I was assisted a lot by the former organisers and also my bit of experience which I had as a leader of COSATU because when you are a leader of COSATU, when there are strikes in the areas they would like COSATU to assist or to come and speak to the workers, so I think those experiences assisted me to deal with the issues. In fact if there were disputes in the industry they would ask a COSATU person to be present, usually they would send office bearers to go and interview or assist, so those areas assisted me a lot.

Facilitator: How long were you an organiser here, I am trying to move towards the end of the interview, in the Chemical industry?

Respondent: You mean?

Facilitator: How did you remain an organiser or an employee of Chemical?

Respondent: I remained in the organisation till there was a resolution taken by the unions, in fact COSATU, in particular the union to say one cannot be employed and also be an organiser of the union, so to be an organiser of the union and also to be a public rep, comrades were saying it contradicts. If I was a shop steward I could still manage to be a councillor, but because I would be paid by the union congress felt that if you are a union organiser you cannot again go and become a councillor in council. So this is the only thing that removed me from unions. In fact even though I left unions workers used to phone me for advice and I used to assist them where I can.

Facilitator: When did you become a councillor, do you remember?

Respondent: First local elections were in 2000, but before the first elections, I think in 1998, I am not 100% sure but we started to have proper elections in 2000. There was pre-interim phases and interim phase, in the pre-interim I was put by COSATU there to become a councillor, and then in the pre-interim phase I was elected to be a councillor, then in the local elections, I think in 2000 I was properly elected on the ANC list.

Facilitator: Then in 1990, let's start with 1990, did you see this coming as unionists, the release of Mandela, the unbanning of the ANC and so on, and what was to be the position of the unions post 1990?

Respondent: During the 1990s we knew that there will be changes because we put pressure on the employers, but not on the employers only but also in the then government because the actions of the communities, like when they formed civic organisations. Trade unions were pleased because of pressure they were getting from workers, and in the communities we had a lot of the community organisations, even in the so called coloured areas, but not affiliated to SANCO but they were fighting the local authorities then. We had strong organisations, and I must also applaud the role played by community based organisations and NGOs, their work in empowering our people in terms educating people and also show them how organisations are run, and what the rights of ordinary people were. I think the role which played by those organisations also assisted to make sure that at least by 1990 the then governing party would come to their senses, not only those activities but also the student movements if you remember were also on board. The then government was under pressure on all fronts.

Facilitator: This thing about the quota system, whereby certain numbers of people should go to the government from unions, how do you view it; was it the right move or it strained the unions and so on?

Respondent: I think when we started to engage around that, we had different positions, but I know in COSATU, I was serving in the national structures of the union, when we agree on saying we should put aside about twenty people to the ANC list for parliament, but one of the debates people were engaged in, people like the late comrade John Gomomo, he was then the president of COSATU, I engaged him and asked why he was not going to parliament. He raised this issue with me, he said we will be going to parliament, it was twenty from COSATU and in the government structures there will be more than four hundred, he was arguing that whatever we wanted to do with our

understanding of trying to put the views of the workers on top, we might not succeed because the ANC would be in the majority, in any province we have two, three or four from COSATU in that area, there is not much shift we can do, that's why he said he was not going to parliament. I think his understanding was right because really to put twenty people to four hundred won't do a dent, it was quite obvious that there's nothing they can do, they could do something but won't do as much as we want to get.

Facilitator: But it continues even today, people being co-opted from the unions, what's your take on this?

Respondent: I hope it's not going to bemy view is that unions have changed a lot and for me very little is done now in the new democracy for workers as unions. For example when I left the union called SEPAWU, I was involved in trying to improve the ratio in companies, meaning that management positions in companies were all in the hands of the then government people, and there was a resolution taken by COSATU that each and every company must give a plan of how they were going to try and change the situation. I think there was a plan which was supposed to be in within five years and I know I was involved in Caltex, I think it was about seven years after I had left the union, I then checked with the workers what the process was. They reported that what was that after the five years employers applied for an extension, being that more time, those workers were still saying that the company has not submitted the plan yet. That's the one thing, the second point is that I know in some factories which I used to organise, and I left recognition agreements halfway, when I ask some of the workers if they managed to get their recognition, they said since I left this thing was taken off the agenda, the point I am making is that I don't think the unions have the oomph which we had when we

workers, because for me I started as a shop steward and I know what the shop stewards were getting underneath, now I said we should transform this as soon as possible, but its quite clear that this has not taken place. What is happening is that people are paying a lot of money to unions and I don't think they are getting the services they are supposed to be getting. I am in the sidelines and I am not really involved in COSATU now, but as a person who used to be active in trade unions, I can see the gap. I am not surprised that this teachers strike is taking place now, for me I am sure there's a lot still to come. The point you were making that hence we moved out of the union, one comrade was saying that when we left the union, they are saying we left a vacuum. The people who came into the unions are not capable to deal with the issues that were supposed to be dealt with then, as something which is ongoing. I don't blame them really, because maybe they arrived and got those positions and saw that things have changed and tried other methods which they think will be better to enhance the struggle of the workers, and for me maybe they lost it there. During our times there were no laws when we were fighting, now there are laws in place and maybe those laws might then start to block them in many things which we didn't have laws for, and now those laws might be stumbling blocks for them.

Facilitator: Last two questions maybe. The future of COSATU, where will it be in ten years time as far as you can assess?

Respondent: For me, because I have an experience of being a worker and an experience of being a paid official in COSATU, I don't see many changes in the next ten year, because the point which was raised then that when experienced people leave the trade unions, in most cases there is a vacuum which starts to encroach. The tripartite alliance has also a lot of challenges, we have an ANC government

which maybe we will be sympathetic towards, and not address the real issues of the workers. When you hear now, you hear people are retrenched left, right and centre, even then people used to be retrenched but we used to fight, but now the challenge which we are faced with is that in our time we did not have most skilled people, now we talk about a situation whereby there's a lot new methods of working, the computers and all those things, everything is modernised. Now you have a challenge of things which were made by people, now are made by machines, now that's the challenge which we are faced with and that's a reality, hence I am saying I don't see much improvement in the next year. There's this industrial policy which I think will be on the agenda of COSATU, but I didn't read the whole thing, I must just go through the whole document so that I can understand it. I am saying yes, we have little breathing space if unions are not taking up issues which they are supposed to be taking up, and we have these things which I raised, the new technology which is there to minimize the people who are working. Those are the challenges that I think COSATU will be faced with in the next ten years, and they are immense and I don't think any person who can come up with a solution rather than getting everybody on board and try and pave the way of how we can strengthen the unions in the period we see coming. I want to say I think the unions are becoming very weak, not weak because they want to be but because the unions are not doing what they are supposed to do for workers. The level of service, I know workers who say the last time they saw an organiser in their company was three years ago. When I was an organiser at Chemical, every week I was supposed to have visited companies where I was organising, in the same vein I ought to have companies that I had recruited, and every month I must report on what I have done in terms of service and in terms of recruitment, I don't know if that is still in place. When I was an organiser, every month I used to have my report to the Regional

Secretary who in turn would fax or email it to the General Secretary. I know at one stage he didn't wanted me to leave even if I was working for the union, but he was defeated in the congress because of the majority and you cannot undermine the majority, when we used to sit in national meetings, he used to make an example about that he had never not received new companies in all my reports, he used to brag about that. I think maybe unions must go back to basics in terms of service and recruitment, and they will gain education around workers, a lot of workers are not given the right things, even this strike people are just told this is our demand, I don't this was explained to workers in real sense. My wife is a teacher, when I try to explain to her she says no, you work for the ANC and you people don't want to give us money, and will say lets not discuss this issue. I was trying to tell you, you see the union is on 8% and 1000 in terms of housing allowance, she was expecting that what will come out there will be exactly the same, and I was trying to tell her that these are negotiations, there's nocome with a fixed position. I tell her that their leaders who tell them that they are going to get this money know that they are not going to get the exact amount, now they are there and the employers are at another point, now it means one must fall back and the other must also shift backwards, they don't understand this, they say that leaders said there should be nothing less than 8,5%. I know this, I used to be a worker, and we used to go and fight and even fight our officials and tell them we are not taking this, but at the end of the day we must budge and we must go back to those workers and say this is how much we can take. Trade unions cannot come with a 15% increase in demand, when we were trained we were told the gap must not be more than 2 to 3%. Now when you go to negotiations these people don't look at 15%, they first look at the inflation rate and how much they can add on to that, now you go to 15% which you didn't even calculate, and at the end of the day as a leader you know that's not

going to happen, it will be difficult for you to serve that. We were told when we were organisers to try and minimise the confrontation with the employers, the workers would put a shopping list but you must try and narrow that down to real issues, so that the gap is not far from each other. I think I have said a lot.

Facilitator: Is there anything that you think is important that should have been part of this interview, and that I didn't say or ask?

Respondent: I think it could just the method of negotiating on plant level and in the bargaining council.

Facilitator: Can you expand on those two, if you still have time?

Respondent: I am saying, you see on plant level as you engage with the company and maybe you can be lucky and get something bigger in terms of wages and working conditions, but if you go to industry level you must know that you have companies who are doing good and companies which are not doing good, but because you don't want to see competition you end up having a smaller slice but also you have a better way of engaging the industry, the point I am making is the bargaining councils are very good for negotiations rather than the plant level agreements. One benefits of making in the plant level agreements, one is a small company and one is a big company and now you'll get different outcomes on both but when you have industry level bargaining, at least all employers will be bound by the agreement which was reached in the bargaining council.

Facilitator: Were the workers aware of these advantages of the bargaining council except the plant level negotiations?

Respondent: In fact we used to be negotiating on plant level and people who were bargaining on plant level, say big companies were earning more than those small companies, which you can get, but because they don't want to have an uneven industry, now as unions we welcomed the bargaining council because that bargaining council will stipulate what industry must pay and working conditions. It also makes it easier for persons who are in small companies, and I will make an example, when I was still in the clothing union, we had two agreements, there was this bargaining council agreement and then we will have Cut Making Trio (CMTs) which are not bound by that agreement, and because they were small and were not a major player but the industry would determine how much they should pay. Now there was a boss called Mr Booth who used to undermine the bargaining council in terms of the benefits of workers, we know in the bargaining council we used to have twelve companies who participate, now Mr Booth used to undermine the bargaining council, when people come to him with a sick certificate, he used to tore them apart and not pay workers. Now I remember when in one bargaining council this was raised, our chief negotiator used to say maybe what they should do they should develop certificates which are made of steel so that these employers who tore certificates would not be able to tore them. The point I am making is that really for me the bargaining is the better option, because at least it starts to stabilise the industry, but also in the same vain, smaller companies might end up closing down because they cannot meet the demands. But as I said in the clothing industry we had some exemptions for smaller companies so that they don't see themselves as victims, and special arrangements will be made for them in terms of application of exemptions so that they can be exempted from A, B, C but they are exempted if the industries sees the necessity of getting them the exemption.

Facilitator: Thanks very much for your time, I am most grateful. If there's anything that I want to ask I will just give you a ring.

Respondent: OK thank you.

End

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