

## **Chris Dlamini**

### **Abstract**

This is a wide-ranging interview that begins with Dlamini's early life and describes various life experiences that moulded his political views. The interview gives a good account of how he experienced racism and discrimination in the manufacturing sector during apartheid. He recalls the 1973 strikes in Durban and describes the beginnings of the rekindling of trade unions both in the Transvaal and in Natal and the different political viewpoints that prevented trade union unity. He moves on to provide important background to the formation of FOSATU and later to the birth of COSATU. He remembers the 1976 student riots in Soweto and how workers, himself included, walked to work instead of supporting the students. This experience was to reinforce his view that this was a mistake and that community and worker struggles had to be joined if apartheid was to be overthrown. He dwells on the splits in FOSATU over this debate and the breakaway to form UMMAWOSA

Facilitator: This is an interview with Chris Dlamini, we are at Johannesburg, Southern Sun Hotel. The interview is done by Brown Maaba. Thanks very much for your time Baba Dlamini, the interview is going to be unstructured, just questioning and we will take it from there.

Respondent: That will be fine

Facilitator: you are welcome to use a language you are comfortable with

Respondent: ja

Facilitator: Can you just give me your background, where you were born and how you eventually became politically conscious and got involved in the union structures.

Respondent: In fact I was born in Benoni 1944, unfortunately my mum and my father couldn't stay together because the system, the apartheid system did not recognise their marriage as they were married in Swaziland. So my mum had to get herself a shack in Benoni whilst my father was staying in George Goch hostel here in Johannesburg. My mother's employer, she was a domestic, a maid (so called at the time). She realised that she couldn't take me with to her workplace, therefore she had to take me to Swaziland. I stayed with my grandmother, her mum. She went back to her job until 1953 when my grandmother died, I had to come back here. But still at the time they still didn't have a home because of the laws of the country as I stated earlier. So we stayed in a shack in somebody else's backyard. I started my schooling there.

Unfortunately or fortunately in 1957/58 there was the campaign that was conducted by the ANC, not that anti-pass, the Defiance Campaign. So people like comrade Tata Mandela and Tata Sisulu used to visit what was called Etwatwa then, that is the township before the establishment of Daveyton and Wattville.

Facilitator: Before the present Thwathwa

Respondent: Ja, that Thwathwa that is there was named by myself when I settled there in 1984. So they used to come there and hold seminars and at times address public rallies of some sort. Some of the youth, including

myself were interested in listening to this man because he was starting to be prominent, I mean the area, our area was talking a lot about him and we had people that were followers of the ANC who would at the time announce that they were coming and we would want to go and listen to what they were saying. That is the first time I got to know that there's something called town, and that the white people living there with big houses and I don't know what he meant by big houses, and tarred roads and things like this, and that the reason they were living in those big houses and the tarred roads is because they have confiscated what was ours and suppressed and dominated the black population. So I had an interest in that. They started a school in 9<sup>th</sup> Street in Ethwathwas which was called *Mayibuye I Africa*. Some of us would attend at some point, at some stage to listen to the political education that was taking place there but at some point it would not be Tata Mandela and comrade Sisulu but some other people like, you had a very strong presence of South African Congress of Trade Unions, we had this company called Amato Textile, that was the base of SACTU in South Africa, well in the Transvaal to be correct. My uncle was there, the 1956 strike, and also opened our eyes because that's when my uncle lost his job after the big textile strike in Amato.

So that in fact arose some kind of interest to me with regards to what was happening in the country politically, although I did not know its politics, I thought it's just angry people wanting to change things. And in the 1950s, towards 1959/60 we were selling, me and my aunt, my mother's sister, we were selling sheep heads and throttles and *mageu* and vet koek *magwenya* in some of the companies. We used to travel in the morning about 10 kilometres to town because Wattville was now, that's where we had moved to, it was about 10 kilometres away from town. So we would travel in the morning with a trolley, a two wheel trolley that we pushed to

the factories to sell the sheep and *mageu* vetkoeks and we made some money because I could buy myself some tekkies and some khakhis. But in 1959 a law came in which said scotch carts, you know the trollies that we used to sell our goods in town, they were banned and the government said nobody is allowed to sell or to be seen pushing this trolley to the industrial areas. That was the end of the business. That also angered me you see because that was our livelihood.

And you as you may be informed that that was the beginning of sheep heads, and throttles and *mageu* being sold by the Portuguese in the restaurant. They started building restaurants next to the factories like you can see right now. That is how it started, so they took all that trade of us and it was used by white people. That also angered me. Well I went to school and I moved to Springs that's where my parents were, eventually my father's employer got my father a house in Kwa-Thema Springs, there they were allowed to stay together irrespective of what the law said. But I think the company had lots of influence on government. So we moved there and I went to Tlakula High School and that's when they introduced Afrikaans as the medium of instruction on three subjects at that time, it was General Science (Algemene Wetenskap) Arithmetic (Rekenkunde) and then Mathematics, these were the three subjects and I was doing Form 1 then. They introduced those subjects and some of us felt that we wouldn't want to learn in Afrikaans. I spoke to some friends of mine, one friend of mine had connections in Natal, Amanzimtoti. He started connecting them but unfortunately the parents of this friend of his, there was no space in Amanzimtoti. They finally got us a space in Endaleni Training College, that's where we, then when I was doing Form 2, we left for Natal, that's where I did my Form 2 and 3.

Facilitator: Which year was that?

Respondent: That was in 1959/60 that is when

Facilitator: did the general mood at the time, were other students willing to protest against..?

Respondent: No, no, no there was no protest at all, there was just complaints that we don't understand the language, but there was no protest. The protest that I can ever talk about is the one that we staged, leaving the school and going to another school. That's the only protest, passive one. So we studied there, did my JC which was an equivalent of a Matric at that time but unfortunately it was the time when Umkhonto We Sizwe was formed and there were lot of politicking because the teachers in Natal, in Endaleni, African teachers, there was teacher Beka, he told me that he was teaching Harry Gwala. We became very good friends. He told me a lot about Harry Gwala and why the formation of Umkhonto We Sizwe and the struggle that has been waged by people like Moses Kotane and the rest of it and I got very interested. So at lunch time we would not go for lunch, me and him, we would sit in the class and he would tell me about these things, but informally of course. And then 1961 Umkhonto was formed and I thought that I'm an activist of Umkhonto We Sizwe when I had no connection but this is what was in my mind, that I'm an activist of Umkhonto We Sizwe. I would read The Post, you remember that newspaper

Facilitator: ja, it was banned in 1977?

Respondent: yes, and I would be reading it and I will get some information and this man would bring me some more news and cut the papers, this teacher. Cut the news on the papers that we did not have access to. We started some activities at school, not very strong activities but activities that showed that there was some different attitudes that were beginning to take form. I think at one stage we organised a march to the chapel, 7 o'clock in the evening from the boy's hostel, because there were separate hostels, girls and boys. So we staged a march to the hostel and the superintendent who was also the preacher at the chapel. He realised that this is a movement that is likely to disrupt his activities, expose his unfair practices. So he decided, he picked on me and some other guys but I was the first one to be picked on. He sent a telegram, at that time there were no faxes, he sent a telegram to my father telling him that they must come and fetch, that I died and they cannot bury me at the college, my father will have to come and fetch my corpse. So my father came with my sister that night. They were surprised to find that I'm still alive. I didn't know that they wrote a letter to my father and they told me this is what they got and I said let's go to the superintendent and find out what it is all about, instead he locked the gate and he wrote a letter and sent one of the security guards to come and give a letter to my father that I was expelled three months ago, and I didn't want to leave that is why they sent a telegram, which was a lie, I had never received a letter saying that I've been expelled. But nevertheless they expelled and they blacklisted me. I couldn't continue with my studies in South Africa.

Over two weeks, the rest of the guys were dismissed because they organised a march, guys from Kwa-Mashu and from here, you know there was up-country and down-country, they all got together and they staged a march, protesting on my dismissal. They were all fired and that's how I

came back. Then I started working, I started working for Samba in 1964, Samba Brass Consol. I worked there. There was a situation where .., you know Samba was a German company sort of, it had some links with Germany. So they were somehow liberal, I would put it that way

Facilitator: in their approach?

Respondent: ja in their approach because they would give us a quarter of bread every morning with coffee for free. Everybody enjoyed that. But the Afrikaner woman who worked in the canteen made a deal with the suppliers of bread, the bakeries, to say they must supply her with stale bread but invoice fresh bread and she would get 50%, if the loaf was 2.5 penny, a loaf was sixpence, the stale bread would be charged half. So she gets 2.5 penny on every loaf that she bought for .. I noticed that this bread was now becoming stale, you know, every time we collected bread it would break. I approached her because people were not ready to .., they didn't care in fact, they had their bread. I approached her and asked to talk to the bakery and tell them that the bread is being bought by the company, we need fresh bread. She said "jy moenie kom kak praat, die brood is reg, of jy nie die brood soek nie" (do you remember the war in Nigeria? – The Biafra War), she said "people in Biafra are starving they would be very happy to have this bread". I said this is not Biafra. She said "ek sê jou:". And then I threw the bread on her face and that was a big case in the company and everybody thought I was gone. But I stood my ground, I refused that I ever threw bread on her, I said the bread fell while she was getting it because I was trying to show her that the bread is stale, she pushed my hand and the bread fell and it went on to the floor. I never hit her. I was allowed to go back and do my work. That was the beginning of things to come.

So in 1973 I was working for an engineering company when strike started in Natal, do you remember that

Facilitator: you were here in Gauteng?

Respondent: I was here in Gauteng, I was in Springs and there was Trade Union Council and Co-ordinating Council [TUACC] and there was this other body in Johannesburg where Maggie Magubane, Calvin Nkabinde, Churchill Mhlanga and Benjamin were working for Urban Training Project (UTP). They started to organise workers in a general form, you know just to become trade unionists. I joined one union called Engineering and Allied Workers Union (EAWU) which was led by Calvin Nkabinde who was also from Springs. But it didn't grow because people were very scared to join trade unions, you know employers would threaten them, they would dismiss them, they would do all sorts of things. So they were very scarce. So it couldn't grow, had very few members and I left that company to join Rank Xerox in 1974.

Facilitator: so why did you leave?

Respondent: Better salary at Rank Xerox and I was going to be a Warehouse Manager

Facilitator: so that thing never followed you ..(unclear)?

Respondent: no, no, no it ended with the company taking me for a disciplinary hearing and I won the case because I denied ever hitting this woman, I said we had an argument and the bread fell because I was



trying to show her that the bread is stale and she interfered and the bread fell and it went on to the floor and that is how I won the case. I think this could be found in some of your files of the 1970s. Then I worked for Rank Xerox but there was what we called the ..(unclear) [liaison?] committees, because Rank Xerox was a subscriber to the Sullivan Code which was the American Code for companies operating in South Africa to follow. So Rank Xerox was an American company, so they had that code, so they had a Lassing?? [liaison] Committee which was a way of blocking people from forming or joining trade unions. I was immediately elected to serve in that committee. What was interesting is that in most .., in all of our meetings, what we were discussing was how to use your fork and knife and that you need to have a lawn in your home and we would be taken outside and shown how you can enjoy the lawn, drinking cool drinks etc. The job was fine and the money was okay, but I wasn't very happy and what made me angry to be honest is when the students struck in 1976, because of the money that we were earning, even at the time when students called for boycotts, for stay aways, we would agree to that. We would even have to walk to work if there were no taxis just to get to work

Facilitator: I remember those incidents

Respondent: You remember those incidents, chief, that thing would haunt me throughout my life. And I realised when I was working for Rank Xerox that the reason why students died in such large numbers is because we as parents did not stand up and defend them and prove that what they are fighting for is genuine, is right. I sold out because I'm one of those who were walking along the railway line to get to the station. I left Rank Xerox late 1976. I decided that I would rather go back home where I would be able to mobilise and work with people that I know and address

those imbalances that are currently being experienced. So I went back, I joined Kelloggs. Fortunately when I joined Kelloggs in 1976, the mood of trade unionism was beginning to emerge, especially in the area because the guys who were working for UTP, four of them came from our area, three of them, it was Benjamin, he was organising Paper Union, you know Sappi and Mondi, and there was Maggie Magubane, she was organising Food Union, you know Westons, Kelloggs, I&J and then there was Calvin Nkabinde, he was organising engineering, the Metal workers in Springs and other engineering companies, Gesta [Gestro?] Steel and the rest of it, but in a very small scale. As I said workers were still scared to join trade union because of this. And then you had Churchill Mhlanga who was organising the Glass but he was working for Pilkington Glass. So we had a strong presence of people that were a bit conscious, I mean who knew of the trade union movement.

So when Maggie came to organise, Maggie and Maseko, to organise Kelloggs, I was one of the first people to join and volunteered to organise for them inside the company and also organise other food unions around the area. That is how I got into the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union (SFAWU) that was organised under UTP and the general secretary of that union at the time was Sikhakhane, a man called Sikhakhane, he came from Natal.

In 1978 we pressurised Kelloggs to recognise the trade union movement and it was difficult then because companies were not allowed to recognise an unregistered trade union movement. You would recall chief that during the Rand Revolt Strike in 1922, there was the LRA that was instituted, which was the Labour Reconciliation Act and that Act excluded blacks from bargaining in formal structures, and that man that

blacks were not allowed to form trade unions, that's right. That's when the Trade Union Council of South Africa came in, which was mainly white. They started organising what we called sweetheart unions, they would, in their food union they would organise blacks, a sister union, or sweetheart unions but the black union would not have a formal structure. They would be negotiated for by presumably by the mother union, which is the white union. At times we would be told that the government did not declare increases this year, we didn't know how the government got involved in increasing wages but we believed them – "government did not release an increase this year", you would work for five years with no increase. So we started breaking that thing up and we started challenging the question that we need to be recognised as employees, not as commodities as they do. That's when the government established the [Wiehahn] Commission, which pronounced in 1979 that black workers should be recognised as employees and they should be allowed to form their trade union. Then we were in Cosatu because in 1978 I became president of the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union. When we were to form Fosatu in 1979, we had a problem because there was a breakaway within our union, the Sikhakhane faction, which wanted us to affiliate to Inkatha before the formation of UWUSA, they wanted us to be a trade union wing of Inkatha and some of us refused. So we had guys that were supporting him, Longwe Kholomfani, who is now a councillor in Springs, and Lonwabo, so they broke away from Sweet Food and then we went to court because they were claiming properties and assets, we were also claiming that. Eventually we won the assets and the name, we retained the name and they formed what was called Food Beverage Workers Union which ..(unclear) [fell under] CUSA

Facilitator: so this in a way ..(unclear) UWUSA

Respondent: no, no, no, they didn't go the Sikhakhane way of going to UWUSA, after breaking away and forming their food beverage, they went into CUSA because CUSA was also formed after FOSATU was formed, Council of South African Trade Unions, ..(unclear), he was the general secretary of that union, and later Mdaweni became the president but now it is called NACTU because they amalgamated with AZACTU

Facilitator: so the formation of FOSATU, were there no hurdles in this formation?

Respondent: in the formation these were some of the hurdles and the hurdles were that UTP was opposed to the formation of FOSATU. So in UTP itself there were two factions, one faction saying no formation of FOSATU and one faction saying the formation of FOSATU and the faction that said there should be a formation of FOSATU was also supported by guys from Natal, you know the textile union, the MAWU, Metal and Engineering Union, so we had a stronger force and some unions in the Eastern Cape, like the motor union, ja. So there were about 14 unions but unfortunately at the time you would have unions criss-crossing, you would have energy union and then also have the paper union and have the chemical union separately. But we then decided in FOSATU that we should have one union per industry and some of the unions merged and formed one union.

So we then affiliated to FOSATU in 1980 after we have sorted our divisions yes, and in 1981 we started the Talks About Talks, where we invited all independent unions to have discussions around forming one big federation in the country because you see what was happening, I think you would know about this. The employers would play one union against

the other, say you've got two food unions in one company. The company would not want to recognise both, it would say I want to recognise one but at the same time supporting this one so that they keep you weak, divide and rule. They keep you weak, you don't come together. Then we passed the resolution that there should be one union which forced both factions to start talking about forming one trade union in that industry.

So, Kelloggs recognised the union, we became formally recognised and we elected shop stewards and we started negotiating with the company and at the time there was a company in Kwa-Zulu Natal, Frame, it was involved in textile. That company recognised the concept of a full time shop steward, which means you've got an office, you only do union work, you liaise with your office in town and you help workers and you advise workers and you co-ordinate every union activity inside the plant. We negotiated for that, we were first one in the Transvaal after Frame to get that recognition. So I became a full time shop steward and that allowed me a lot of space to organise other workers including in Kempton Park. That's when I started organising Simba Chips, you remember the strike in 1984, I was heading that strike. So I became the president of FOSATU in 1982, FOSATU taking over from Johnny [Mke?], there was a fellow from Eastern Cape who was the first president and Alec Erwin being the first general secretary of FOSATU but then on the elections in 1982, I was elected the president and Joe Foster was elected the general secretary. Then the talks were continuing with unions like SAAWU, GAWU, Food and Canning, a number of unions that were existing because we had a variety of unions operation but very few with membership and lack of administrative systems in the union.

So in 1981 I got banned because I organised a strike with telephone manufacturing in Springs. So we were supposed to have a general meeting on Friday, on Saturday because workers went on strike on Friday and I was there and we agreed that we are going to have a general meeting in the township to discuss a way forward. And I think telephone got to know about that and they informed the Intelligence and what is this guy's name, Neil Barnard came to Kellogg and told management that he wanted to speak to me and then he took me to the board room and he told me that he knows, he doesn't want me to answer anything, he knows that I'm involved in the strike at telephones and he doesn't know whether I'm aware of the damage that the strike is causing the country in terms of telephone distribution and that I am banished to my home from that Friday 6 o'clock until 6 o'clock on Monday morning and in my company I should not have more than 3 people. So I was banished that whole Friday, Saturday, Sunday until on Monday. But we continued with the formation of FOSATU, now the problem in FOSATU was the question of whether we should be involved as workers, should engage in community struggles or not. Our argument with some of the comrades was, actually that's where stand, that's where politics are, not necessarily, well there are politics in the company because we are being discriminated against and paid low wages and we were having no rights at all, but when you get to the township that's where you don't have sufficient water supply, you don't have electricity, you don't have transport from work to home or from home to work, that's where your activities should concentrate, your activism should be concentrated. Now FOSATU was saying no, because this would lead to what happened to SACTU, SACTU was actively involved in the work of the ANC so when the ANC was banned SACTU had to go underground. They said the same thing would happen to us, so we said no, no, no, in fact we followed the

steps of the ANC, the struggle that we are fighting is based on what the ANC was fighting. So it is banned yes, we can't be an ANC now but we follow their strategies and tactics. Now it was a bit of a hectic argument and we never agreed, despite the fact that we have tried to explain to them, that apartheid is just a cover, for domination of one nation by the other and in that domination there would be exploitation, economic exploitation because then these people cannot rise because they are being dominated and suppressed. So yes, whilst we are fighting the economic exploitation, you cannot ignore the political oppression and suppression. That was the area which they did not want to understand or they understood but they downplayed. So at some point there were splits in FOSATU. Like for instance you remember the guys from the East Rand, Andrew Zulu, Godongwana, Sam Ntuli, those are guys I was working with. They split from MAWU to form UMMAWOSA because of that approach, because at one stage, well in FAWU didn't have that problem, in Sweet Food we didn't have that problem, all of us understood what we were fighting because I was already engaged in underground work, I was connecting with the guys from outside. Fortunately even in FOSATU they made me the negotiator with the International Trade Union Organisation for funding, I used to go out and meet unions in Switzerland, in Sweden, in Norway, Holland, in Canada to talk about how they should help us with funds to run our organisation because we were a bit weak financially. So I would meet with guys from SACTU, if I'm in Geneva I know there will be guys there, if I'm in Canada there would be guys there. The movement would immediately send somebody to come and meet me, and brief me and I would debrief him on what is happening. So I was well connected. And fortunately in the food union I'd been elected as the fourth vice president of the International Union of Food, IUF, which has got head offices in Geneva. This lady Brigalia Bam was the administrative secretary

of that federation, I was her boss. Her general secretary was Dan [Gallin]. So I had those connections, I was fortunate to have those connections, I mean to be exposed to this kind of movements.

Nevertheless we kept FOSATU together even though there were these tensions.

Facilitator: Was the tension between black and whites?

Respondent: mainly whites but they had their own people that they had mobilised, I mean you know our people I don't have to tell you. So they were a bit of a problem. But we could manage them because I remember when the chairperson of the Wits region of FOSATU was killed by boers, you know they took him on the road and threw him inside the hippo and trampled on him until he died and threw him out of the hippo and we decided in fact in the meeting of FOSATU that we are not going to bury this comrade on a weekend, we are going to bury him during the week so that the employers should feel the heat, because if you bury him on Saturday they won't feel the heat, we are going to bury this comrade on a weekday. And we resolved at the same time that every death means a stay away, every death of any comrade or any student means a stay away. That's where we differed with [CUSA?]- ..(unclear) because they have got nothing to do with this, it's the government, why punish the employers, we said, no, no, no and we buried him on a week day, it was on a Tuesday. And you know what happened, the system stopped trains from Dunswart, trains could not get to Springs because they thought if trains get to Springs it will allow workers from Kempton Park, Johannesburg to attend the funeral. But people still came. We realised that this is becoming a problem. At the time petrol was being rationed. You could



only get petrol during the week and there was no petrol on Saturday and Sunday. I think it went up to Friday 12 o'clock, Saturday and Sunday petrol closed. But we managed to go to the garage owners in the township and told them that the taxis would come here and fill in and you give them petrol, they going to pick up our comrades in Dunswart. There was general agreement, there was support from the garage owners. And at about 11 we were told that the trains cannot even reach Dunswart now, they stopped at Germiston. We still went to the taxi drivers and said even if you have to get to Germiston please do, it's for your cause. We didn't pay anything. Taxi drivers did that and they were very co-operative and that funeral was one biggest funeral we ever had. I don't know if records of that funeral have been kept somewhere. It was a huge success chief, you know a stay away the whole of East Rand, from Alberton right up to Heidelberg, no factory work or nothing. So those were the successes of being involved in community activities, combining the two.

And with the students, that's the one history that I told my daughter to start working on because in 1984, before my detention, there was a kid who was knocked down coming from school with his friends, knocked down by a bakery truck and students revolted because the driver was arrogant. They started stoning the bakery van and police came and intervened and shot some of the students. That's when the revolt in the Springs area started, of these kids, that's when COSAS was formed. That's the time Billy Masetla started moving around, yes and then my daughter was in the frontline of forming that COSAS then my son became the chairperson, and my daughter was the secretary, Lindi, I don't know whether you've heard of her, Lindi she was arrested at the age of 14 and locked in Ganota Army Base. She is the one I was taking to the airport.

So they formed COSAS, our strategy as the trade union was that we can't allow a situation where the struggle of the kids is separated from our struggle because these kids are fighting for the recognition of SRCs, that's similar to our fight for the recognition of the shop stewards. So why would we leave them to fight it alone, why don't we get involved, that's when we started forming what we called Parent's Teacher's Association and we would draw in students, we would sit down with teachers and plan and invite students and talk to them to try and sort out the division between teachers and the students so that the battle is against the system not against the teachers. And we managed to win that battle because eventually teachers started to support kids but very subtle.

Okay the Talks About Talks went on but they hit a snag because most of the unions that were outside, like SAAWU, like GAWU, Sydney Mufamadi's Union and Sam Ndou, they were movement unions, Siza Njikelane, Thozamile Gqwetha, Thozamile Botha and all of those guys. So they landed a support on the one faction of FOSATU that was pro-movement and that's what made these other guys in FOSATU to be, not very happy about the formation of COSATU as it was ..., as it was then, they wanted some of the guys to be kicked out. Remember when the UDF was formed, when it was formed you had unions like SAAWU, like GAWU becoming part of UDF, they were then called UDF unions and they were identified as spoilers because they were very pro-ANC. But then with our support inside they were unable to kick them out. And then they made a mistake when we had a conference in Ipelegeng, when we were supposed to finalise the formation of COSATU. We wanted resolutions on principles and policies and one of the area where the UDF make a f\*\* up, when they supported the principle of anti-racism as compared to non-racism

because that came up with AZACTU, they thought that if they support that they will win the support of the Black Consciousness Movement which was AZACTU and they would form a bigger force within the federation and take control and they made a mess because AZACTU was a very small grouping. And these guys, our guys that were anti-ANC, they moved a motion of dismissing them and expelling from the Talks. So they were expelled the UDF unions, the SAAWU, the GAWU. We were to proceed in the formation of COSATU without them. I said no, I've lost my battle in the conference but I'm not going to lose it in the region. I went around and spoke to people like Andrew Zulu, do you know Zulu

Facilitator: I went to see him in Tsakane?

Respondent: you went to see him, that's good. Spoke to people like Zulu, I said comrade Zulu we cannot allow this, we said we want to form one federation, and no union that is progressive should be left out. We can't allow unions like SAAWU and GAWU to be left out of this process, let's find a way on how we rope them in. He said comrade I agree with you, let's find a way. We spoke to the chairperson, we immediately called a regional meeting, the Wits Regional meeting. We invited these unions and they came. Sydney was representing GAWU and some other comrades, Elija was representing SAAWU. All of them were present. We said to them look comrades, some of us are committed into the formation of COSATU, you know I made an example on commitment between a pig and a hen. I said a hen lays an egg and he goes on with her life. A pig would die for a bacon but the chicken won't die for the egg. So when you eat bacon and egg you must know that somebody died for it and that's a pig and I said this is what we as a region of FOSATU have taken as a position that we would die for the formation of this federation and it should be all

encompassed but for you play games and come in a meeting and say you support the anti-racism as opposed to non-racialism, that is completely not ANC and do you .., you are playing games. You must tell us here whether you are for the formation of COSATU or not. They said no we made a mistake comrades, we miscalculated and we have in fact in our meeting resolved that it was a wrong move for us to support that. So we will be prepared to go back and support the non-racial policy. And this message went through to all the big heads in FOSATU and those that were participating in the Talks. People like Jan Theron, from Food And Canning, this comrade from General Workers Union in Cape Town, John Erntzen in the municipality and whatever union in Cape Town, Cyril Ramaphosa from NUM, Johnny Copelyn from NUTW, Alec Eriwn from FOSATU, all of them. They invited me to the Protea Hotel in a meeting in the evening. I didn't know that I was invited by these big hawks, I thought maybe it's just a meeting to finalise. Chief I was grilled. I thought that Cyril is going to support me "who are you to take a decision to change the resolution of the conference". I said I didn't change anything. We had our own regional meeting and this issue came up and people had already some of these unions and it was not my responsibility to stop comrades from debating, what they felt was within their right to debate. So if you think that I have sold out, you can take whatever decision you want to take but I cannot change that decision because more than 12 unions were present at that meeting. For me just because I happen to be heading the Talks from FOSATU to try and change things. It was not an easy meeting but at the end of the day there was no agreement.

But in the next conference they were invited, the SAAWU and the GAWU and when it came to voting on the non-racialism they were non-racial. They had no reason further to kick them out, that is how COSATU was

formed. Let me stop there because it's a lot. It can take you the whole day and I don't want to waste your time. It's a lot of stories, you know when we were forming branches of Sweet Food in the whole country. We hit a snag in Natal because some of our comrades like this Indian fellow, Norman Middleton. He was our organiser in Natal. So he was mainly concentrating on sugar industry. All of a sudden we get messages that that branch wants to affiliate to FAWU, chief we went there flying. We told them we are coming, they organised a meeting. You know what they did, they organised an ambush. We get there we are five, all of us from Kelloggs, the guys I was working with, in fact we had to resolve that one of their responsibilities is to organise the FAWU factories. We get there, there are security guards at the gate. We are allowed to go in and once we are in somebody gives instructions for doors to be closed and I'm asked to take the platform and explain what is going on. I go up and I explain, this is FAWU, this is where it is affiliated, Sweet Food this is where it's affiliated, there is a talk to form a federation, that's where we are going to be participating and we are in the forefront, leading the talks towards the formation of a new federation. One guy stands up and says "we believe you don't want to have a child", I asked how can I say I don't want a child when I have so many children. They all said 'he is arrogant'. Fortunately I had a scotch knife, we went out there running. So we left in our kombi and spent a night with one of our comrades. We then asked our comrades to sort out the matter and call us when they were ready. We were then invited to Empangeni, FOSATU was going to launch a region in Empangeni, we went together and launched. We didn't know that the guys in Natal were very sympathetic to Inkatha. We were told later that some of them were members of Inkatha. They invited Chief Buthelezi without our knowledge. They bought a cow, we went to a meeting in Empangeni. I was asked to speak on behalf of FOSATU,

fortunately I did not say anything about Inkatha. I knew it was a thorny issue. I talked about the workers only. They called their chief Buthelezi, he spoke, on his arrival our Chairman in the region spoke. The cow was slaughtered. Fortunately he was listening to me when I spoke, or maybe he was told. He supported everything I spoke about because I did not say anything about Inkatha. He then called me and we had our discussions in private. Even in parliament we were friends.

So I'm just sighting some of the interesting dynamics. Let me tell you two dynamics which are not interesting but you need to know. Like when we started talking about .., when we got involved in negotiations with employers. One of the issues that we raised was equal work for equal job because there were women in Kellogg, and they could operate the same machines, push the same trollies but they were paid something like R7.50 per week whereas some of us were getting R12 something. So we said we need to look at the question of equal pay for equal work. We discussed this as shop stewards and we agreed that we are going to propose this as one of the issues in the negotiations. But before we go the negotiations we must get a mandate from the general workforce. That was in Kelloggs in 1983/4, we said equal pay for equal work. And then we went and convened a general meeting for all the workers. We introduced the subject. As shop stewards we agreed. During the debate others were saying we cannot be paid the same salary as women. Some of the shop stewards were supporting that and I said to them "guys we agreed that equal pay for equal work" they said comrade Chris we didn't understand it but now that the workers are giving clarity, we cannot be earning the same salary as women. I don't know where this came from but I said to them you work here and earn R12.50 and your wife works here and earns R7.50, the total is R20-00, you have three kids, you will be able to pay your

rent and support the 3 kids, or hypothetically lets say the man dies and the woman is left to earn R7.50, do you really expect your wife to be able to bring the kids up with R7.50 when you were struggling with R20. They then agreed. That is how the issue for equal pay for equal job was adopted and became a norm in FOSATU at that time because we submitted this to management and eventually it was agreed and we started, union workers started getting the same salary irrespective of sex. The other aspect is the question of maternity leave. We talked about maternity leave as shop stewards, we introduced it, we agreed in a general meeting, nobody opposed it. It was agreed that we need to submit to management and tell them that if a woman is pregnant must get 4 weeks before the child is born and return two weeks after the baby is born but it must be paid. They agreed, we took it to management, on the agenda, the Human Recourses manager at the time, he had studied at RAU, he was the major negotiator regarding wages. We got there, it was him and two other white guys. He wanted us to explain what we meant by maternity leave. We explained that once a woman is pregnant, four weeks before delivery she must go on leave but she must be paid for the 6 weeks she is on leave and her job must be retained, she should be able to return to her work with no hassles. He said to us "what do you mean", he said you must have sex with the women and I must pay, is that what you are saying. I said to him not necessarily us having the sex but a woman who is pregnant, irrespective of who had sex with her. He took his books and left. Our seniors intervened but eventually the leave was granted at Kellogg. We were one of the first companies that we won the battle for women to be paid for maternity leave. That's about it chief.

Facilitator: maybe a few things?

Respondent: 30 minutes will be enough

Facilitator: Talking about the issues ..(unclear) how did you manage to cope in a male dominated world, talking about leadership, if they had problems like they can't get salaries because males are ..(unclear) how did the leadership view that one?

Respondent: at the time they were not leaders in a way, they were strong women but not necessarily leaders because men believed that only men can lead. It comes with our system and you had to gradually break it down because you could see even in your general meeting that you had strong women than men when it came to arguments but the point is how do you bring that woman into the structure that gets into contact with the employer. So the equal pay for equal work was one way to breaking that stumbling block, that stigma and eventually we started to bring them in in the shop steward committees especially in Simba Chips, the majority of the shop stewards were women. I remember at one stage, just before the strike in 1984, only one man was a shop steward and he was the chairperson the rest were women, very strong.

Facilitator: and then the shop stewards themselves, from what I am reading were the darlings of the unions as arranged but was that always the case?

Respondent: no, you see there is what we used to call worker control, you remember the policy of worker control. What that meant was elections of shop stewards will be done in the factory in the presence of an official and it would be done, elections would take place in every department because every department must be represented in the shop steward



committee. So workers you would convene a meeting of workers in that department, say it's packing house department, all workers from that department would converge in one place and you ask them to elect two people that they believe should be their shop steward, they would then freely elect their person.

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