

## Omar Parker

Facilitator: This is an interview with Omar Parker, the date is 18 March 2010, the interview is done by Brown Maaba we are in Johannesburg NUMSA offices. Comrade Omar thanks very much for your time. Just kindly give me a background of where you come from, when were you born and the family that you came from.

Respondent: Okay, thanks comrade Brown. Basically I'm from Cape Town, I grew up on the Cape Flats in Cape Town. I was born in an area called Kensington, it was at the time, Kensington coloured people living there, Xhosa speaking people, some Chinese people and so on. Later we were pushed out of the area and I ended up in a place called Bontyoville. I practically grew up in Bontyoville, I can remember as far back as when I was three years old when I came to Bontyoville. I can remember when I was taken from Kensington I was three years old. Bontyoville is a working class area, claiming to be as a result of the apartheid social engineering took place at the time. Bontyoville, I'm sure you are familiar with Bontyoville, it's been known for .., it's a very militant area in terms of its contribution and participation in the struggle against apartheid. That is where the Bontyoville Military Wing, some structure at the time, it was linked to *Umkhonto We Sizwe* was formed by the late comrade Eslie Kriel and others. I myself, I received my schooling in Bontyoville, I was politicised at a very early age when I was at primary school, 1976 I was in standard 5, I can remember that was the first experiences that I had of the militant struggles at the time but I can recall very clearly when I entered high school it was 1977, already then we were active as young people, you must understand I was a child in a sense, standard 5, being the first time I can recall where we used to throw petrol

bombs, fire bombs at these rattles and buffalos and *goetes* that used to come into our townships but it was an interesting period for me because that is when I was first politicised in a sense where I became very much aware that what we have to do, even if you not part of any organisation, that is what was embedded in a person at a very young age, that we must fight, that's all we knew. I was politicised through the whole concept, the whole understanding of what at the time was known as the Black Consciousness Movement. We began .., we could related to things like "Black Power, *a zikhwelwa, amandla*", those were the things and especially *a zikhwelwa, stay aways*, and we immediately as students. When I entered high school we were already politicised. And I was part of the Bontyoville Youth Movement at the time. Later, people like Quinten Michaels who went into exile and many others, Leon Scott, I was a very young boy at the time but became politicised through the student movement.

I can recall that the student movement at the time, had a very close and organic link with workers at the time because I can remember in the early 1980s when I was still at high school, there was a Roundtree Sweets boycott, there was a red meat boycott, I myself participated in Cayak, an organisation called Cayak. We all participated at that time in the UDF structures and so on to different degrees and so on. But all we knew, whether you were not part of an organisation or part of any structure, all we knew at the time was that we had to fight, and those were militant fights that took place. If I think back I'm still trying to reconcile really, was that really us, did we .., I can't sometimes believe that really as young people we had the guts to do what we did at the time. It was an interesting period because that .., despite the difficulties, you were not scared to die even at the time, you know if a person thinks of death it

somehow gives you a little bit of a shiver up the spine. If you think of it now, "hey I'm going to die", but at the time we were not scared to die, whatever the consequences, and we've seen many people die, myself too.

I attended a school called Arcadia high in Bontyoville, also known for its militancy at the time and ja, we were very active in the struggles at the time, myself we used to .., I can recall as a young boy we used to go into Langa and we used to sell the Grassroots newspaper. I cannot recall exactly how much it was, it was a couple of cents. We used to sell it, it was part of the movement at the time, it was one of the little mouthpieces we had and we used to have our gumbas, where students and some of the workers would come together we would have political discussions. I was very young, I can recall we had our gumbas, it was like social interactions where we would have a lot of reggae music. Reggae music used to be one of the things that we used to conscientise and influence us a lot, but structured out of that we used to have our political kind of schools, where young people came together, students even some of the teachers who were at that time teaching, younger teachers. I can recall my class teacher, Neville van der Rede, was at one stage the provincial secretary of the UDF at the time. When I was at school, my first book, I think it was in standard 8 or 9 or standard 7. I can recall the first political book that I had for myself I received from my class teacher. Neville van der Rede who was a teacher and is still a teacher today at Arcadia High school. I can recall the book, it was a red book, the book's name was entitled Socialism from Below. It was a book on Marxism, Communism and socialist movements and so on. It was a very thick book. I couldn't .., thinking book some of the concepts and some of the things were a bit difficult for me at the time but thinking back, you know at a very early

age, one became politicised to the extent ..., and this was generally the case, not with me, but with other students as well. There was that interaction with students, who were at high school, with students from university, and teachers, and workers. There was that organic link between those sectors of the community and that gave a powerful trust to the struggles at the time and I'm sure that was the case also elsewhere in the country, there was that kind of organic interaction and link in the early 1980s. That is where I come from.

I was in school in standard 8 at the time, I recall at a May Day Rally or something, or some rally at Bontyoville High, we attended that rally and we burned the South African Flag that day, I can recall I was in standard 8. Not even knowing that I had made a flag which was actually the emblem of AZAPO at the time, I loved sketching and artwork and so on. And I had made a flag with Africa, with a fist in it, and the fist with a ..(unclear) with chains that's broken, not knowing that in fact that was an AZAPO flag. One of the teachers pimped who the person was who made this flag. I had information that look they were going to come for you, myself and a very close friend, comrade Magmoed Benjamin. We just decided we going to leave Cape Town and we left the area. I left school for a year and then I went to go and work. And then I went back to school. I came to Arcadia, I completed standard but when I heard about these people were after people like myself and others, I became a bit scared because I thought if they are going to get me they will get to my family. We were very militant at the time. I had access to the school's laboratory where we used to take all the chemicals, important chemicals that we used to fabricate and manufacture our own explosives with. One of the chemicals I recall very clearly, and they were looking for why all those pots of chemicals disappeared, potassium permanganate, that's a

chemical that you, it's a kind of a metal that you have to cut under oil if it gets into contact with water it creates hydrogen and it creates an explosion, if you take a small piece of that it gives you an explosion. We used to use those things to make bombs with. We used to meet at the chemist in Bontyoville called Pothmount Chemist. Reggie was the owner of the chemist, very progressive guy, also UDF member, he has emigrated to Australia now. But that was also one of our piers at the time, Reggie who was the owner of this Pothmouth Chemist, and that is where comrades used to meet a lot in the chemist at the back, but I was a bit very careful of Reggie and we used to buy chemicals from the chemist to also make explosives and we would sent it different people to buy different chemicals, one person would buy one things and we would use those things, chemicals that made gunpowder.

We were exposed to that kind of thing in the 1980s, all we knew is we had to fight. We were a bit like some people would term unguided missiles at the time, we didn't care what happened.

I went back to school when I left standard 8 I became a bit scared, I was scared for my family, I didn't want them to get involved. But later my family found out because they found a little dungeon dug at the back in our yard with lots of chemicals and pamphlets and stuff and they became beserk about it and they threw the stuff out. Some of the chemicals were laying in the street, like the force 4 chemicals started to ignite because the force 4 when it makes contact with normal gasses, it starts to .., used as a chemical reaction that takes place then you begin to see smoke. The same with the potassium permanganate if you put it in your hand and you close your hand you can feel it starts burning because your hand gives off part of water, H<sub>2</sub>O and when that gets in contact with

a chemical, a chemical reaction starts. Potassium permanganate when you throw in water immediately you hear a chemical reaction. Now those were the kinds of things that happened in the 1980s.

I myself wasn't active in the BMW as such because at that time I had already moved to Johannesburg. In our meetings, in national meetings I can recall we used to get reports from people like comrade Jay Naidoo about what was happening in Bontyoville, what was happening in Cape Town, Klipfontein Road, what was happening in Bellgravia, Thornton road and all those other areas, we were getting reports of what was going on with the fights, with the *wit doeke* in Khayelitsh, Goeks, Langa, Nyanga, and then at that time then I had entered the labour movement, when I moved I completed standard 9. When I was three months in Matric I had to make a decision to get out of the area and its then when myself and Magmoed finally decided let's leave Cape Town altogether and that is how I ended up in Johannesburg. The first night we came here we were sleeping at John Voster Square. The first night. Fortunately they were not fully aware who we were but they thought we were some crooks.

Facilitator: you voluntarily went to John Voster square?

Respondent: In fact when we came here, we ..., we saw this place, this is where they kill our comrades, let's just go in here, lets go and see what the hell is going on here. We became completely withdrawn and we needed a place to sleep. And it was already very .., in the mid morning, and we asked one of the African guys there if we could just sleep there around .., there was a place where the cleaners were and they found us there and asked "what the hell are you guys doing here", early in the morning they kicked us out and then we left. And then we said okay we

know where this place is. That was so interesting, we were very responsible I think to have done that. We were very curious also, this is the John Voster Square that people were talking about, where people are being tortured and thrown and all sorts of things happening.

Anyway, entering Johannesburg was another completely different situation for us, it was struggle. And finally in the 1980s, I was recruited into some structures I didn't even know that the structures was clandestine structures. And then anyway, meeting up with some comrades, people who were trying to organise this company, Phillips, I managed to .., before I went to Philips, I managed to get a job as an so called unqualified teacher in Eldorado Park. Coincidentally I still have the appointment letter, that time they used to call it the Department of Internal Affairs, Coloured Affairs, Cape Town. That was at the time of the anti-tricameral campaign. You recall that time.

Anyway I taught there for a year, this was my appointment letter, you won't believe me this is what we earned, R282 per month. Unfortunately they kicked me out because I organised a meeting and a protest at the principal's office with the other teachers because we were complaining about the pay. This appointment letter was in 1984 as you can see there, 3/9/1984

Facilitator: so that's when you came to Jo'burg in 1984?

Respondent: no it was prior to then. In 1981 I left school I think it was, let me check, its been some time, it was in the 1980s when I came to Johannesburg. It was 1982

Facilitator: so between 1982 and 1984 what were you doing?

Respondent: We were in Johannesburg in Kliptown, we stayed there in an old house with people there. I know one of the guy's names was, they used to call him Bra-Snakes, I don't know his real name, he has probably long passed on. He was walking like, limping because he was ..(unclear), we lived at that place and then later we lived in Indiana Avenue in Ext 7 and I managed to link up with a cousin of mine who was a teacher. That is how he managed to get me a job, we were struggling to get work, it was extremely difficult for us just to get into a job as a youngster at the time. And finally I ended up .., we had little jobs here and there but nothing of significance. That's when I started to work, Magmoed later decided to go back to Cape Town, and I myself, I continued. This is when they first kicked me out of the school. It was called at the time Eldorado Park Primary number 10.

Thereafter, one of the students and I met up with a chap called Alistair Smith, Madney Halim, Chris Leew. You will see that Alistair Smith was an organiser at the time for MAWU and I was introduced to MAWU but then I had managed to get a job at Phillips and I heard about these guys who were having difficulty in trying to organise this place, Phillips. Because I was sort of politicised at an early age, when I worked at Phillips it was then really when I for real experience, apart from my experience in the *Binnelandse Aangeleenthede* at the time, I then in the private sector I could feel this is what the workers are really experiencing when I entered Phillips. But I had a taste of that earlier when I worked in 1980 for a place called Progress Lightning in Cape Town. But in Progress Lighting, because a person was so rebellious, we didn't want to take shit from nobody and I probably worked myself out of that job consciously because I used to



deliberately ... this might go against me, but it's fine but I was young at the time. I used to deliberately sabotage the production. They used to supply this expensive chandeliers, I used to just damage them deliberately and make them fall to an extent where they asked me "*meneer* you must leave this job". But at Phillips that is where the whole shit started further, where we really experienced now, this is a .., this Phillips, this workplace is a .., I can describe it as a microcosm of the South African apartheid vs system. That is what I can say, what I have experienced about South African Phillips at the time.

I was elected as a shop steward whilst I was outside of the place. I was dismissed in the very same year when I started to work at Phillips.

Facilitator: what were the problems there, you said that there was a lot of problems confronting the workers at Phillips?

Respondent: You know, we going to write a book but just to give you a small indication, Phillips multinational was giving this beautiful image to the outside world, of how good they are and how good they treat the workers. It was a whole lot of bullshit, it was a whole lot of window dressing I discovered and I could relate very easily to the African comrades, the Zulu speaking comrades, Tswana speaking comrades, Shangaan speaking comrades and I became unpopular amongst the coloured people with Phillips to the extend where my supervisor who was coloured was saying to me "*jy fokon Kapie, jy kom van die Kaap om die kaffirs kom slim maak hierso*" and I told him "what, you are saying what" and I retaliated. But its unfortunate, he's one of those *brekgat* kind of elements kinds of so-called coloured people from this area. He used to wear lots of gold rings and unfortunately my face was full of blood, he hit me so

fucking hard, mark on my left eye left me smithering with blood and I wanted to retaliate and the comrades just held me back. That is where things started to escalate. I was dismissed and he was given a final warning by the company.

The very next day I heard the entire plant came to a standstill, "we want that person back, Omar Parker, he must be back here tomorrow", they suspended him because the comrades wanted to kill him, you see and they then elected me immediately because that time it was MAWU. I started slowly working with Alistair and the other people, I started with a group of 4, very small group of workers and signing them up with MAWU, secretively. I used to organise very secretively. We didn't even let anybody know that we have stop orders, they find out you're busy with the union it's shit for you my friend. And then I started to organise in a very systematic way. Taking a small group of workers outside the company, subjected them to political education first, before talking about rands and cents. Before talking about working hours, there was some kind of political education. And then of course the bread and butter issues would feature, prominently and strongly because those were the key things that we used to mobilise workers around. We would find out what is your problem, etc. and we would try and discuss it in our political meetings. Look here, how can we approach this problem, how can we highlight this problem to conscientise workers, to win the workers confidence.

But an interesting thing happened when I was told by this guy you are coming to make the *kaffirs slim* here, that was his exact words, I didn't like it and the comrades didn't like it and they wanted to kill him. So they saw management's inconsistency and unfairness in dismissing me. They

demanded my reinstatement immediately. Management called me back, I was back at work and everybody was rejoicing. But that resulted in further work stoppages because the workers then demanded that they must dismiss this guy, his guy was Graham Gugman, that was our supervisor. He was a very arrogant person. I'm not sure if he was white or coloured, not sure what he was, but I think he was coloured. He had this arrogance about him. Anyway Phillips didn't want to get rid of him, finally they ended up giving him a final written warning, but they had dismissed me. So anyway we had to live with that and they finally took him away from our plant and transferred him to another area, away from us then it quietened down a little bit.

But then things started.., we started to mobilise MAWU, we started to participate in the programmes of MAWU and so on, workers became more conscientised. Of course one of the main things at the time in the workplace was, the attitude of management, that baas skap mentality, the kind of outright racist kind of tendencies that came from certain people, in particular I can sight on person who's name was Pierre Fouche, he was a director in charge of Phillips at the time. He was a full Afrikaner with a big head, people were so scared of him, they were extremely scared of him. I organised, together with people like Solomon Atlane who was an awesome activist at that time, a very strong activist and other comrades in Phillips, Zano Sakwe, Patrick Baloyi who was killed by the police, Musa Xulu who was shot by the municipal policemen also. We started to mobilise, the more conscious comrades we started to mobilise the workers around demanding that this director we don't want him in this company anymore, he's an outright racist. When he comes people would fall around, honestly. He was like a tyrant, we managed to cut him down to size through our protest action. And we became more

conscientised about the worker struggles because MAWU at the time had a very militant approach and that is what really kept us there in the campaigns. At the time there were fierce battles between comrades and people from Inkatha. I recall the union's name was UWUSA, but in Phillips itself when we started to organise, they organised a counter towards us in the form of a reactionary union that was affiliated to Tacksa, Tacksa unions essentially organised, white, coloured and Indian workers. Later they had to change their whole approach and get black workers also aboard to give another face to the union. But the Radio and TV and Allied Workers Union was so to say organised by management elements as our opposition to counter balance our strength. But we out organised them because we gotten rid of Pierre Fouche at the time, we dealt with Graham Goodman and then other campaigns started around wages and so on. Wages of course was a big issue and you know this is always a big issue amongst workers. When you talk about rands and cents, don't touch one cent of the worker you going to get shit. And obviously those were the issues that workers could relate to easily, the bread and butter issues to take them up and we used to do that consistently, whenever somebody is dismissed we used to fight for that person. Even if meant we had to use unlawful ways, we used to do it to try and get that person back at work.

So then in 1987, we actually had our first successful wage talks internally in Phillips. We were struggling to get the recognition agreement, I think we had concluded already, then the recognition agreement and we had two levels of bargaining. There was a big debate later in NUMSA, we became founder members of NUMSA about the different levels of bargaining, plant level vs centralised bargaining, of course we developed a position of all level bargaining as workers in Phillips. Our shop stewards

committees discussed it and in Phillips we took a position and that was a position we argued in our locals, in our local in NUMSA, we were part of one of the strongest locals in NUMSA, Johannesburg at the time our offices were in Harrison street. Here you can see in 1987, this is still a photo that I kept that came from the Phillips news but of course you can see Phillips trying to give a good image about themselves in this paper. They didn't even want to make reference to the name NUMSA or MAWU. Just recently South African management and trade unions, they wanted to bring in even the Radio and TV and Allied Workers Union, I don't even see any of their representatives here in this photo. But trade unions they wanted to give this view to the outside world that they were open to trade unions. But the trade unions was a misleading thing because we had the majority union in the plant and they were promoting Radio and TV and Allied Workers Union which was more reactionary. I can just point out to you in this photo here. That's me signing the agreement here, this is the director Jeremy Pollock at the time (he was showing pictures), this was my co-shop steward when I was working in the central warehouse. Sadly he was shot by a policeman through the head. It was very painful for us as comrades, we had to go and bury him in a place called Ngobe Village, Giyani in the Eastern Transvaal. I recall the name. He is from that village, very humble but very militant comrade, Patrick Baloyi, Shangaan speaking comrade. I feel sad that I'm thinking about him because there was that love between us as comrades because you know, as myself being classified at the time as a so-called coloured person. I could never come to terms this colouredism, this coloured identity. It was something I was struggling with. But I supposed you know I've got to live with it now. You have to overcome it also and I've overcome it you see. And it was sore because I know coloured people were favoured more and it used to pain me because I used to be with my comrades. I used sit and eat with

them. We used to sleep together, we used to go where ever, we used to go overnight, *siyalala*, at the time we used to have *siyalalas*, we would have political gatherings and meetings right through the entire night until the next morning. Patrick was shot because of his involvement with organised resistance within the company. I call it organised resistance because there were structures and to an extent some of our shop stewards were involved with it. But we had a policy that we don't want our above board structures to be immediately identifies with our more clandestine structures. There was a whole orchestrated move to liberate, at that time comrades used to use the word liberate some of the products which we felt belonged to the workers. And sometimes truck loads of TVs disappeared. Some TV's wrong safety resistors and wrong things went in, it went past final test. Sometimes it would just not work it would blow up or stuff like that. That was part of organised resistance in my view.

And then some of the people linked to the security people and the police they cornered Patrick and they somehow got him and they shot him through the head.

Now this comrade here was from Wadeville (he was showing a picture) as a shop steward. This comrade on this side and I must mention him, comrade Solomon Atlhane, I understand he is working for the ANC now. He was an extremely powerful comrade. They always regarded him as comrade Parker's right hand person. You can see on the photo he is standing on my right side, like he is standing there, he was standing with a firearm on him but you will never say because he used to dress nicely like a gentleman. That was his way of operating. You can see I used to look like Ruffian with a Palestinian scarf around my neck, thick hair. At that time I had all my hair and of course this guy was a state prosecutor. Jim

Bester. He was the guy who put more fuel on the fire by wanting to nail me and say you will never be a shop steward in this company. He was the guy who made shit in the company but his shit caused, or provoked a more militant response from the workers which was good in fact. We used to use tactics in provoking certain people so that they can respond in a way that will provoke the workers. Those were tactics that we used and of course, we were very successful in this first wage ..(unclear, he was showing a picture) – of course NUMSA was formed already by then I think. I was ..., I attended the inaugural congress of NUMSA. It was in the 1970s.

And then prior to this first .., one of the problems we struggled with was the way they classified workers in Phillips. And you can recall I said that in Phillips when I came there I could see here the shit is starting because for me it was like this was a microcosm of the bloody South African situation at the time and this interview here (showing picture) with the FNV in 1986, you may take a copy of this but they did a fact finding mission on Phillips and some people were talking about “look here Phillips must disinvest, we don’t want them in South Africa” but at the time as workers we were politicised in the understanding and the idea of worker control, of workers government, socialism, taking control and smashing capitalism, establishing a workers government, workers power. We wanted to establish workers power in the factory. That was a very ideal and noble idea and I still have some of those beliefs today about worker .., I still believe in worker control and workers power and that. But we were so militant that we were unable to see that we will never ever establish worker control in the real sense in a company, a multinational company in this country, Phillips. Some people were saying fuck them let them go, we will keep the buildings and the equipment and we will control this factory. But then we said we took the position, no don’t let these people disinvest, we want to

take control of this company. Why must we chase them out of the country with the resources. Let them keep the resources here we will take over this – that let us to a ..(unclear) factory occupation also but it was ...(unclear) by some other incident. I will get to that later. This article of Federasie of Nederlandse ..(unclear) in FNV is based in Holland. Remember Phillips had offices in Holland.

Having said that when I came into Phillips it reminded me of apartheid government, where they had different classifications. The workers themselves were differently categorised. We had indirect workers, and we had direct workers. When we asked them what is indirect workers and what the hell is direct workers. They would tell us direct workers is scheduled workers. That is the majority of the whites and some coloureds and Indians. Indirect workers, non scheduled workers, they are not scheduled and those are the majority of the black workers, under paid, low paid workers. And I fell into that category, and I couldn't come to terms with this nonsense you see. Many of my comrades fell into that and in this article, I reflected on this, it clearly was a way of discriminating because the majority of the workers being black fell under what was called indirect workers.

Facilitator: but coloured workers and Indian workers at Phillips were they keen to join MAWU?

Respondent: I can tell you it was a very slow and difficult process, to win the confidence of the so called coloured and Indian workers in Phillips because the Philips management would favour more the Indian workers. Although they were subjected to some shit in the company, the same with the coloured workers, they were subjected to the very same shit that



the black workers were subjected to. Coloureds fall under black category, it's difficult somehow to make this references, but somewhere we have to make these references, black, coloured and Indian because it becomes so indomit and so entrenched in our society, we still have it today but to make a point is, whilst the coloured and Indian workers were suffering the same kind of exploitation than any of the other workers apart from the so-called white workers. There was a bit more privileges towards the Indian workers and some of these blue collar workers and so on. So it was extremely difficult to organise then. At time we would take, and Solomon Atlane was a very strong comrade on this, "look here, too hell with them if they don't want to join us, Parker you are bending over a bit too much backwards to these people". I said let's be patient, let's convince them, let's win the mover. I took such positions. Solomon was consistent and very rigid and said look here, if they don't want to join the union f\*\*\* them, it's in or out. He was a very militant comrade. I used to take a more subtle approach and say we can win this person over, what is your issue. I would take this issue and help him sometimes I will just consult with some comrades because I know Solomon is going to oppose me. But then I helped that person with taking up his problem without him having joined the union, so it used to put me into conflict with my comrades. And then a success with this problem then he joins. It wasn't a good thing to do, but I saw that we need to organise these workers. It was a slow process but we did eventually. When they saw the successes we made in wage talks and all of that, and we took them and told them that we are also fighting for you also. Later a lot of these guys joined us.

Facilitator: You said that you also became a shop steward when you were not at work, you were appointed in your absence. In fact when I was beaten up by this guy, that was the first time that the workers

demanded that we want this guy who was fucked up by the supervisor, we want him to be our shop steward. But at a more formal meeting inside the plant, I was then formally elected as the shop steward and later the shop steward committee recommended that I be elected as the chairperson of the shop stewards committee and then a general meeting then further confirmed and endorsed my position as the chairperson of the shop steward committee. We then had a final election in Phillips.

Success of wage talks, then the whole debate about different levels, bargaining surfaced at plant level because the workers saw that we were strong at Phillips, we can push more out of workers, out of management, then .., management was aware of the politics of collective bargaining at the time, let's give in more to these workers at the plant levels so that they divorce themselves from the broader struggle of workers in NUMSA in terms of centralised bargaining. So they don't participate in the industrial strikes and industrial action. We took up a different position, we said we want Oliver?? Bargaining, because it became an issue within the union structures itself. So we said that whatever is negotiated at a national level we will participate first in whatever action that is initiated by the union. That is what we will call, it will be our minimum industry increase and then our recognition agreement we structured in such a way that we want substantive bargaining. Over and above what we get through the bargaining council, through the industrial national negotiations. So we got them on two sides. We strategised in such away that we didn't give in to their pressure, to marginalise us just to concentrate with ..(unclear) tribalism, we affected it on our own because we wanted out, comrades were so politicised and in fact involved with different structures outside Phillips, we couldn't afford to marginalise ourselves just to be bound to plant level bargaining. So we participated in the national actions of the

metal workers and here you will see there were successive strikes and we participated in it. There's a one strike that was interdicted against NUMSA in 1992 for example, you can see in this article, Phillips workers featured prominently there, and despite whatever we participated in the strike.

Facilitator: and the challenges of being a shop steward, you became the first shop steward in the 1980s, what were the challenges that you experienced as a shop steward?

Respondent: Many challenges were .., the challenges were also related to broader political struggles outside of the workplace, in the workplace itself you had to deal with hostile management, you had to deal with reactionary workers who were linked to the radio and TV and Allied Workers Union which were supported by management. We were constantly monitored and under surveillance by the security police. I myself almost ended up a mental wreck because of the way the Phillips collaborated with the security police to try and neutralise me to the extent where I ended up with substance abuse, to try and cope and deal with some of the problems. I must say there was also fear in me. I was also becoming scared because one of the security police persons who wanted information out of me was, knew everything about my family, and that is what fucked me up. Remember I was far away from home and imagine you are being pestered by security police and acting as if they are working for the press, coming with all sorts of things to you, setting you up and giving you banned literature. They wanted to know what is happening in the meetings, wanted to know what's your plan and what you doing and what you going to do in this mass action, what are you going to do in this .., I had difficulty in collaborating with these people to the extent where they .., the one guy very cold person. I can't even give

you a name of this person. But I tried to set this person up and expose him to some of the senior comrades in COSATU and then that is when he became wary of me, I didn't want to collaborate with them, I was very reluctant. And I must tell you they became so pissed off because I then gave them the impression that I am collaborating with them and giving them information. But I would give them information that I know tomorrow that information is coming out, that information is already public. It was difficult because at this one stage, I was so close and so non-cooperative with these guys, when this one person said to me, "by the way is Anwar still in the mental hospital", my brother, "is your father still drinking so much, and auntie Aisha next door, is Mannie still sick in hospital", imagine a security police person, you are longing for your family and he tells you this in your face. Where the hell does he come up with this f\*\*\* information, but of course the security operators at the time were so highly skilled, they could get any information and that really you know, bothered me a lot and I actually went to certain structures, told them look here this is what is happening and I'm feeling very much intimidated because I fear for my family in Cape Town and then of course Phillips, I believe and I strongly believe and it was confirmed by the HR person that they employed, a person by the name of Lesley Mahlape, after my dismissal I met him in Durban on the beach and he grabbed me and he said to me "Parker" with tears in his eyes ..

Facilitator: you said you met this person at the Durban beach?

Respondent: Ja, when Phillips management, when they (interruption with recorder) – linking with the kind of repressive that they had at the time, working with the security police, Phillips itself in trying to portray and trying to show to the outside world that they are now trying to empower blacks

they would recruit black managers, for specific reasons, to deal with people like myself and Solomon Atlane and the others. And such person that they employed was a person by the name of Lesley who at the time had a Masters Degree in Industrial Psychology. He was studying in the United States and had all sorts of degrees and stuff. He was employed as an HR manager of the plant. He later left South African Phillips, when I was dismissed out of Phillips, I was retrenched later in Phillips, by the way NUMSA took up the retrenchment as being unfair and we had an arbitration against Phillips for my unfair retrenchment. But they didn't want to take me back, so we had a compensation award.

This guy Lesley Matlape was specifically employed to deal with people like us. I met him after my dismissal on the beach in Durban and the guy grabbed me, and with tears in his eyes he said to me "Parker I am so glad that you are away from South African Phillips because they were going to destroy you psychologically, I myself was employed specifically to work with other people to see that people like you are neutralised. That is the extent to which Phillips went. They even went to the extent, because I asked several times when he was working there. I went to him and said "Mr Matlape why are you people paying me extra money every month, for more than a year when we were at a hike of things and things were beginning to turn, you could see there was a turn in events. The 1980s was known as the beginning of the end. And in the mid 1980s they could see things were going to change quite dramatically because at the time as workers we were sitting already with minutes from Lusaka. We were sitting with secret minutes of meetings that took place between the late comrade Oliver Tambo and others about what direction this country is going to go into. The time in the late 1980s when delegations were going to Lusaka to meet including sports people, church people, people from

the labour movement and so on. We had feedbacks, we were discussing the transition to democracy and they were becoming unsettled. Lesley Matlape they used to pay him every month for more than a year, and it was for more than a year, they used to pay me extra money into my account. I went to him and asked him, you're not supposed to pay this money. I got extra money every month from Phillips. You know what it did to me, it fucked me up psychologically. Then the damn manager tells you who cares the shit, you are being given for free. What were they trying to do with me. It bothered me. I then went to a general meeting and I said "comrades, I went to management to Lesley Matlape, I went to go and complain about this extra money they giving me every month and he is turning a blind eye to it. Comrades I think these people want to work with my mind and with my consciousness, they want to work with me". I put it to the general meeting. You know what the workers told me, "fuck them, eat their money, we know where your heart is". I left it, and then when they saw they couldn't get me into their pockets because they wanted me to be a supervisor, I didn't want to be their supervisor, I said I will be an acting supervisor because I could still be the shop steward if I was the acting supervisor. And I would refuse to discipline the workers and that's why they saw no they had to stop this thing with giving me extra money.

So I knew this was happening and I reported this to the workers and the workers said it's okay, just take that money. And then I got this guy at the beach after I was dismissed and I asked him, Mr Matlape, no he said to me, first when he got me, he said "I'm happy that you are out of Phillips because they were going to destroy you. So I asked him why and that was his response, he was amongst one of the people who were employed to deal with people like me. So neutralise you, psychologically, to fuck you up psychologically. And one of the things I believe strongly was that

they tried to work on me by paying the extra money into my account and making offers to me to move up and become a manager and all that to the extent that I blocked it and I didn't want to be a supervisor. And I said I will be an acting supervisor and when you're an acting supervisor you cannot just necessarily discipline the workers. And you could still then be a shop steward, but if you're a supervisor and you take up the position you can no longer be the shop steward. Those were some of the challenges.

One of the other serious challenges that we had, myself as a shop steward, one of the challenges that I had was you know dealing with, myself, dealing with the situation in my workplace, and then going home and facing also problems outside the workplace. That is why I was also active in the community itself, in the civic organisations. I was involved with the formation Eldorado Park (Kliptown, Eldorado Park Civic Association) at the time, it was a community structure. And then you had to deal with your family, that was very difficult, my children were small I had to take them with me at times to my son, Ebrahim, they even adopted him some of the comrades with the name MAWU, they gave him the name MAWU because he used to be with me all over in meetings, in Thembisa, Kwa-Thema, I remember we had a conference once there and he was with me there and he was all over, I would leave him, I would be with that comrade and that comrade, later some people termed him MAWU.

Then you had to deal with the family situation, having to leave your family very early in the morning to go to political meetings and being away for weekends from your family, attending siyalalas and political education in our meetings in the union. And MAWU and NUMSA, there was a thing of

us having regular seminars, what we used to call siyalalalas, where we used to sleep over right through the night, political meetings. In fact we carried this thing over right into the factory where we had a week long factory occupation in Phillips because we demonstrated against the introduction of the omni time systems which applied essentially to blacks and then management, most of the whites, 99% of the whites were excluded from the omni card system. A lot of the coloureds, Indians were excluded. Now you can imagine, most of the so-called what they termed indirect workers have to be subjected to a clock machine, omni time, if you clock, if you come, three minutes late, then the card won't register then you must go and call the foreman to go and override the system to swipe your card, to clock your time. And we said bullshit, we going to boycott this thing, we threw glue into it, nails we put into it and the whole thing jammed. And we said petition, nobody is going to use this thing unless it is extended to everybody. This resulted into the dismissal of one cleaner, Teddy Sedibane. And then we demanded her reinstatement and they didn't want to reinstate him. We then went on to a protected action that led to a week long factory occupation. In the factory occupation, comrades, our self defence units at the plant had smuggled all sorts of things to help protect us and people swore that we were going out here, we will die going out there, we going to kill these police dogs. Like the comrades did at Rand Barlowrand. We going to start fighting with this. I was becoming really worried because some of the comrades were outside the meeting or at the plant, were positioned in very strategic positions and I became aware that people had some serious weapons on the plant and so on. To the extent where the thing went on and people were becoming worried what was going on outside because this thing went into the community, people were discussing things are going bad, those people are going for .., they are going now for the second week



into a factory occupation and we had to get food, get supplies and all sorts of things, but no truck went out of that plant. People were prepared to die there.

Finally we were interdicted, we were served with a supreme court interdict, that was in the late 1980s, I was sited as the second respondent, NUMSA the first respondent, and Omar Parker is the second respondent in that supreme court interdict. Phillips was asking the courts to evict us and we were not to return to work unless we cease our actions of the factory occupation, they were sending the South African Police with dogs to stop us. Fortunately because of the whole turn in events and the entire tide in the political struggle on the national and international level, I think that also impacted on the situation and the pressure that we gave from inside and outside in within the company they were forced to settle with us, half past 11 we were served. I remember on the day, with the court interdict, and 11:45 we had to be in the supreme court. We made it and then it was an out of court settlement for us to return and for them not to give us warnings and the union to discuss the whole question Teddy Sedibane's dismissal and all of that. Anyway we managed to get Teddy Sedibane back. But Phillips had it in for us, so they had to find and devise new ways of dealing with us you can see there in the Mail and Guardian in the early 1990s it begun, this was Mail and Guardian 5 to 21 February 1991, retrenchments at Phillips, you will see this one picture says here, people were very much opposed to privatisation at the time and Phillips embarked upon a major restructuring programme called Operation Centurion. I think Centurion is like a warrior or in Roman, something to do with the Roman, the emperor, warrior, centurion. It's something to do with a strong person

Facilitator: it's one of the emperors ja.

Respondent: something to do with a strong force. This thing was initiated through the head office Eindhoven in Holland Phillips, and they had to devise new ways, new sophisticated ways in dealing the militancy and the level of organisation that existed at the time. And one way that it dealt with that was through their consistent restructuring programme which they then engineered and forced from the top down. Now in that result of that restructuring programme that we opposed, then when we had over 700 members, then that result you can see today where there's only a 112 members left in NUMSA.

At this one, I don't remember the date here, but you see this photo, Phillips started then with its operation Centurion, they said we want to downscale, we want to rationalise, to optimise our profit margins so that we are more competitive and so that we can ensure more job security. What a beautiful, stupid, contradictory position that they come with, when we could read between the lines, then already in the late 1980s we could read that this was coming, they are going to be dealing with us in a more sophisticated way and it worked. They fucked us up organisationally. I must tell you that they fucked us up, this restructuring thing, workers and the more reactionary elements in Phillips were led to believe that this is going to help empower blacks, nonsense. And I said sometime back in an interview, eventually we going to have two types of workers, those selling peanuts on the streets and those earning peanuts. Those workers who are selling peanuts were those who were led to believe that you will be empowered if you have your own little small businesses around the core business of Phillips. Their own little satellite businesses around Phillips you will be empowered so much so that you

can become a big entrepreneur and those others are still there who are earning the peanuts. So there are two workers, the ones who are selling the peanuts and the ones that are still earning the peanuts. Now Phillips went on this large scale restructuring programme which graphically I am showing to you that from over 700 to 800 members to 112 members today. If you look at that plant, its just reduced to a little warehouse. I understand now that the government has entered into a joint partnership venture with Phillips and some other company to set up a manufacturing plant in Lesotho, they are taking it away from here. I am not saying that workers are not conscious in Lesotho but already then what they were doing they were sending work, outsourcing work to neighbouring countries where the labour standards were lower, where the workers were still very much suppressed. They came with this pre-privatisation thing, outsourcing and all sorts of nonsense of downscaling. First our cleaners were under attack, we have to reduce the cleaners because it's not core business and they got in a cleaning company. They started with the canteen, no we need to downscale because that's not core business. And they got in a company like Fedics Food services. We were up in arms against Fedics and management. Then they got in a company called XPS transport, to take over the transport because we used to be very strong when we had our own transport because if we had reaction, the comrades, or drivers they know no bloody truck is going out, so they outsourced it, XPS because they can't go on strike because they will lose the contract. Come strike you will be there by the door. So XPS won't go on strike but Phillips workers will go on strike anytime if its in defence of their rights or their comrades rights who are outside Phillips.

So systematically they got rid of workers, you can see here from this article, 70 workers, they started in drips and drabs, Phillips workers are to

be axed at two plants in what unionists say its part of a global ..(unclear) exercise by the Dutch based firm. Worldwide at the time they had to get rid of 45 000 jobs worldwide. That's a lot of workers.

Facilitator: But why were they downsizing after 1990 in particular and before that, what were the political dynamics that influenced them to downsize?

Respondent: Well I can tell you this was a thing that was coming on not just in 1990, it was .., we were beginning to see it already in the late 1980s. I think Phillips could read the political situation at the time that policies were emerging within the movement of a mixed economy. We were critical about this mixed economy idea, many of us were very critical about this mix economy idea. Tito Mboweni at the time was talking this mixed economy thing and all sorts of things. On the level of economic policy development in the movement, Phillips probably could see there was a gap for us to start, as the political and economic situation changed, we also had to change, just like the apartheid regime had to change. And they saw the gap. And of course I think it was economic pressures on them as well, it could have probably be a number of factors, but my gut tells me that they .., it was a multi-faceted approach that they adopted, centrally and importantly to try and deal with strong level of organisation at the workplace. And Phillips is not a unique story to this whole situation, and a lot of other companies, Siemens, Tedalex, so many other companies were confronted, Barlowrand, so many companies were confronted by restructuring and downsizing. So it was a phenomenon that was developing and it was in fact that they had to bring down labour standards in a sense, not bring down but deal with organisation. If they changed the internal dynamics within the workplace, it's going to affect

the level of union organisation. And this obviously was also propagated through ..(unclear) national companies from outside South Africa, the same like the IMF and the World Bank deals with so called developing economies, we will give you support here and there but please there are system prerequisites, you must know your social spending, you must do this and that, subscribe to these austerity measures and policies and we will continue to support you. Phillips, these things were dictated and developed by the head office in Eindhoven, the captains of capitalism, all these technocrats, all these people from outside, the big guns of capital sitting and having the resources to plan how can they improve and optimise their capitalist agenda, surely it was part of a global phenomena I would say clearly Phillips is not unique story to this whole thing.

And if you look at the word they use, Centurion, like a Roman warrior or something, and finally people like XPS and armed response were people who took our contracts in Phillips. Part of the whole globalisation and this whole development of this new liberal economic agenda has really taken its route within multinational and transnational companies I would say and the effects that we are feeling now is a lowering of workers in reversing of worker living standards and rights. The impact that that is having also is on weakening trade union organisation. The main thrust is to see that they weaken strong union organisation so that they are able to rationalise in such a way that if they present the picture or motivation to any person – it sounds rational that we have to get rid of our non-core businesses, but it's all a big farce in the guys of what they now want to say we are promoting broad based black economic development. Today in Phillips you will find there's a lot of satellites around Phillips but those workers are not .., they were Phillips workers but they no longer NUMSA members.

Facilitator: so they broke down the company to pieces?

Respondent: yes

Facilitator: and yourself when did you leave, you were also part of those who were retrenched?

Respondent: ja, they got me very nicely. I was transferred from the more militant section here, I was beginning to have problems also family wise in Cape Town. And they knew that. Phillips worked with the security police. They would study you, they would know everything about my family, they knew that I had problems at home with my family. And then the offer came there's a job in Cape Town. Then they threw me into disarray but then I discussed it with comrades and comrades warned me, "Parker you going to Cape Town it's the way they going to get rid of you" and it happened like that.

Let me just show you here, I then took up a position in Cape Town. You can see there's still a certificate of service. I started in January 1985 at Phillips, 1993 I was dismissed, leaving 31 August 1993. I started off as a material issuer, in Johannesburg. Then I became a checker, a senior checker then I became, remember I explained to you about the supervisor and so on, I never wanted to take it, assistant supervisor or acting supervisor. And then in Cape Town I was a customer service clerk, nice job. Then I became very interested in technical work. And then they said we've got a position for you as a senior technical assistant. Listen to the nice fancy job title. They taught me, I went to some basic electronics course and I had to start fixing small domestic appliances. Later I discovered when I read some magazines of Phillips, part of these damn

operations, Centurion thing, was in terms of the rationalisation thing, restructuring programme was looking at how to restructure production and distribution processes. And there I was in a job where I had to fix small domestic appliances, not knowing that it was already on the agenda that they are closing or they are going to cease fixing small domestic appliances because the labour costs are too high. For me to fix an electronic bath scale or electronic shaver, the person hours that you work on it, that you book for that is too high, is too costly against rather replacing it immediately. So what they did they called it they are going to do away with fixing category one products and all shit hit the fan. There was no more work for me. And then they said to me "sorry, bye bye, retrenchment". And then I job came up in another department for an internal customer service clerk. Then I said why can't you give me that job, they said you are not fully equipped for the job. And then NUMSA took that case up. An important precedent that was used in this case was the ADE judgement, the no difference precedent. Because Phillips argued that even if they wanted to offer me the job I wouldn't have been able to do the job. Do you understand? But NUMSA used the case law in that case of mine and we were successful. The person who represented me was comrade Tony Erenright from NUMSA, he is a very good comrade, he is a COSATU provincial secretary in the Western Cape now. And can you see what I am explaining to you with this restructuring thing, how it came down to eventually even affect me. They put me in a job that they know I want to work with my hands, I like to do something because all the time I was doing work which was not technical – then I was out of a job, there's no longer category one products that needs to be fixed. They realised of course that something was wrong, this guy continued to fix things and in a short space of time. A lot of the category one products they make with screws and nuts that the normal screw driver cannot open

and they make sure that they don't give you such tools. You see you get the spline, a screw or a nut with the zigzag groove, then I used to design my own little tools, I used to take screw drivers and grind it and cut it and I would still open a cattle in less than five minutes I would quickly fix that kettle and say sorry to the customer here's your kettle back and I will book one and half units of time on it, what they called man hours for technical purposes. They found out there's something wrong here, this guy is not replacing the items, he is fixing the items and giving them back to the customer. And then anyway they came with the policy and said "meneer this is the policy, you no longer supposed to fix it, you're supposed to immediately replace it and then you take the product, even if it's working, somehow you go book it out to the stores, the obsolete stores, from there you must see that it is ..(unclear)". So they don't enter the market again. That is how capitalism work, just like if there's a surplus of food, they would rather throw all that tons of tomatoes into the sea rather than giving it to poor people to keep and regulate the prices in the market. So they want to make sure its obsolete goods, the stock doesn't enter the market again. The time factor to them in replacing it is much better for them from a business point of view.

Facilitator: your impression of the workers in Cape Town, were they unionised, organised?

Respondent: When I went to Cape Town it was an extremely difficult situation. The workers were not unionised at the plant where I was transferred. The plant was named after some Xhosa, I don't know whether its industrial residential, Ndabini in Cape Town, that was where the plant was situated. I worked there. Workers were really not unionised at all, in a very slow way, systematic way I was able to organise the



people in the stores, so we managed to get some members in Cape Town and then .., the workers at Ndabini would never participate in the strike. It was such a .., it became a laughable thing later that when there was a national strike in 1992 or what .., there was a month long strike of NUMSA. A month long national strike, I almost think I was in 1992, not one single worker at that plant in Phillips in Ndabini went on strike except one person, the comrades were still laughing here in Jo'burg when I came up and they laughed, they had some little photo, I don't know where they got it from and they saw .., it's a photo of me where I was holding on to a NUMSA flag, there was some caption there, one person in Phillips in national strike going on a strike, and I was the only person at that branch that went on strike. But here the comrades participated very well in the strike. I think it was in 1992, it was the strike which was interdicted this national strike. Phillips workers here they participated quite well in the strike, I was the only one in Ndabini branch of Phillips who went on strike, it was a whole full month strike. I recall I still received a nice pay slip, computer printed. I opened the pay slip and I still owed the company towards my provident fund because they pay a percentage and you pay a percentage of the salary. So I had to still pay, from my neck, they following salary that I got I had to pay an additional amount that I owed for when I was going on strike towards the provident fund. So that was the situation and that's how they finally got rid of me.

Sad things happened at Phillips I must recall. Some of our comrades who were active in the structures outside, Patrick Baloyi was shot by the police, we were all saddened by the death of comrade Musa Xulu, he was one of our co-ordinators in the factory, he was in Martindale, he was a fault finder. He had studied part time, he had just completed his BComm degree and then he was killed by a municipal police. He was living in

Mapetla Extension. There was this crisis with the rent boycotts and all of this thing, and electricity was put off and so on at that time in Soweto. Musa had a small baby and I can recall from what I've picked up from the other comrades, there was some problem, the young lions went to put on the electricity because they felt they knew Musa in the structures and so on as a more senior person and the comrades put the electricity on and municipal police person who was working, who was sort of a neighbour of Musa, he put it on and it went on and off and on and off between the municipal police and the young lions and so on. This guy came to Musa to blame Musa. Musa went and said to him leave the lights on because .., they told the municipal police I believe, they asked him leave the lights because this guy has got a small baby. Musa also said "ag man leave it", and Musa was warned ja if anything is going to happen you will you will be held responsible. I understand that a four year old child died with a hand grenade attack, the municipal policeman's child and after the funeral, this is what I understand transpired from the other comrades. This municipal policeman after the funeral sent his brother to call Musa, Musa went next door when he was called. When he entered the door, the guy had a gun and shot Musa in the face, in the back and in the head, Musa died right there. We were all shocked and in pain, we went to and bury Musa in Mapetla Extension, I remember I was there. It was burning, people were asking us, particularly the young lions, because we were a bit more politically matured and we wanted things to just be quiet and burry the comrade with dignity, but you know you can imagine the day of the funeral. The security police were all over Mapetla extension, monitoring the funeral. The young lions were angry. Things got out of hand I had to make a way just to get out of the area. Imagine you know a so called coloured person just being there at that time .., it wasn't a good experience. People were crying and screaming and there was

lots of singing, we were toyi toying of course but we were singing freedom songs that really stirred a lot of emotions. But it was a sad ending for Musa who had just completed his BComm degree and of course Patrick Baloyi who was shot and there was some other comrades of us who was chopped up in pieces by Inkatha people. I don't know what happened to other comrades.

Facilitator: Yourself what did you do after you left Phillips, outside the working environment?

Respondent: After I left Phillips I was active in my area in Bontyoville again. I became involved with RDP structures. I was elected as the PRO in the RDP structures in 1996. I was involved with the peace and safety structures in Bontyoville. At that time here you can see "benders with the deel forum .unclear", this is when I was part of the RDP structures, there was a lot of gang violence area in Bontyoville, serious and extreme gang violence where the army had to be called in. Those were some of the challenges post apartheid that we had to deal with. And then of course I still did some voluntary work for NUMSA, I was able to go to the Workers College through NUMSA. I later ended up working fro some independent unions who really fucked a person around to the extend where recently I was dismissed by an independent union, they called themselves independent, I think its another ..(unclear) on its own.

After having being dismissed at Phillips I again just worked for CAWUSA as a union, for NIPSO, and for this other union also in the furniture industry. But I've always kept ties and contact with my comrades at NUMSA and so on. And I've done a lot of voluntary work of course in the community itself after my dismissal with Phillips. I continued, then I was able to do a study

course, adult education through Unisa. It was a two year study programme that I managed to obtain a certificate as a practitioner in adult education. And of course now I'm unemployed and am doing some voluntary work with community organisation in Bontyoville based at Thusong Multipurpose Centre. I work together with those people to try and help people who are dismissed and so on. I am also involved with the environmental forum in Bontyoville especially with food gardens and so on, environmental campaigns on solid waste and all of those things.

Facilitator: Just to go back a bit. You said that MAWU became NUMSA?

Respondent: MAWU was one of the organisations, one of the unions, the Eastern Cape based strong automotive sector, MAWU and LICO? And some other smaller unions who later just I think pulled by the wayside out, but essentially those three strong unions including with MAWU, together with MAWU formed the basis of a very strong giant called NUMSA that was launched in the early 1990s and I was fortunate as a shop steward to attend the inaugural congress of NUMSA.

Facilitator: but MAWU was affiliated under FOSATU?

Respondent: MAWU was that time before COSATU was with the FOSATU federation, MAWU at the time when I joined, COSATU was already formed and I recall MAWU was one of those militant unions in particular who had serious problems, it didn't want to register with what was known as the industrial councils didn't want to register with them.

Facilitator: any reason?

Respondent: I think MAWU didn't see at the time the sense and benefit, or the need its gonna serve to register with the industrial council. But later on views changed and we had to become part of the framework that was existing at the time, we had to also move with the time. MAWU was seemingly at the time a very militant union, Moses Mayekiso I was there was general secretary who was in prison with the Alex guys and we had a ..(unclear) campaign for his release, the free Mayekiso campaign. Phillips workers participated very well in that. But the ..(unclear) centre around him because the Release Mandela Campaign was quite prominent also, and workers consistently every Monday went on a one hour stoppage, Fridays we went to ..(unclear) specially to look at the .., to monitor the trial of Mayekiso. I recall his defence was sanctioned, his line of defence was sanctioned by the movement in fact. (pause)

Facilitator: you were still talking about Mayekiso?

Respondent: Actually at the time when we were still active in the union in Numsa, Mayekiso was standing trial for treason and we had a campaign "Release Moses Mayekiso Campaign", and of course at the same time there was the "Release Mandela Campaign", our members at Phillips participated consistently in the campaigns. Clearly I can recall the Mayekiso Campaign because it was linked to the imprisonment of the other comrades from Alex as well. I think Amos Masondo was one of the comrades, who is now the Mayor. We used to attend the trial of Mayekiso every Friday, workers through their structures used to go there, at Phillips, I can recall that every Monday we had, without fail a one hour work stoppage in support of the Release of Mayekiso. Some workers idolised him because of the position he took on worker control, very strong comrade, very brave comrade, he commanded a lot of respect amongst

workers. His position of worker control and socialism and all of that, he was a strong comrade in the movement. He was one of the proponents of the .., what I understood to be at the time “the one stage theory approach to our struggle, our revolution, I can recall parts of his defence in his trial when he spoke, and I understand that that defence of his was in fact sanctioned by the Congress Movement when he had to explain why people had to take a particular position and why it led to the formation of the People’s Courts and all of those things, the street committees and so on, the problems that were inherent in the struggle for a new South Africa that on the one hand people had different approaches to the struggle. There was those who looked at the one stage theory and those who looked at the two stage theory, to the national democratic revolution and those who felt that there’s no such a level of progressing in our struggle as a national democratic revolution that we will go one way in smashing capitalism and go to socialism. Those were some of the things that came out in his trial and because of those, and because of the hostility of the state and so on, and the internal kind of tension, people had to form those structures in the community to deal with problems. Part of his defence was, and the way it was actually sanctioned by the movement and there was the problem amongst what was termed workerist and charterist and so on, and people had some serious fights. Looking back then and now, I’ve seen another progression of another transformation of Mayekiso, Mayekiso who came out of a strong Congress aligned and socialist kind of position. He has gone to a party which I’m still trying to .., I’m still grappling with myself in understanding what is the aim of this new party. With all due respect people have got the right to align themselves with any particular way they feel free. But I still need to be convinced about the political correctness of his position today. I understand that he was at one stage .., and I was a very strong supporter

of Mayekiso I must say and even the comrades where I worked at Phillips. I have difficulties in reconciling his position that he held that time and the position that he is holding now because I believe that he was advocating for the formation of a new federation to stand in opposition to COSATU. I don't think it is, it would serve us politically if we form a formation in opposition to COSATU. If we had argued that we form a formation in complementing COSATU then I would understand the logic in his position .. - because the bulk of workers are and organised workers are within COSATU and it is there where you have to orientate yourself, where the consciousness of workers are and develop that consciousness to become more organised so that that level of consciousness gets multiplied beyond COSATU. I have a great deal of respect for Mayekiso. He was influential in helping our politics in the workers movement as well. And like I'm saying, one can ask questions, it is like that. One must accept that we gonna have change in political dynamics all the time.

Facilitator: And also I'm looking at this photo, women at Phillips ..?

Respondent: Women played a central role in our struggle at Phillips. They .., we had .., I would say in terms of the gender balance, in terms of our membership at Phillips, I can say without any doubt that the women played the most militant role in Phillips. You can see here from this photo, there's not one man standing there. And I want to mention a name of one particular comrade Mavis Khubheka, a functionally non-literate person, but you would get that person, you would get her with pamphlets, distributing them, she was not a shop steward, she was delegated from our plant to participate in the industrial area committee, together with another comrade, Linda. Those comrades were active. They used to participate in the self defence units even, elderly women, strong women

and you can see from these photos here that those were women and the women, they were the people in Phillips and in the struggle of workers there in Phillips. Even in NUMSA women used to play a strong role. Women in Phillips used to participate in all sorts of structures of the African National Congress, at the same time they had to come and participate in the factory. So there was that healthy kind of embryonic kind of interaction and relationship between the struggle of workers within Phillips and the struggle, the broader political struggle that was taking place in the country, in the 1980s and the 1990s and I believe even right until now, but now you can see the level of organisation as really being smashed, the high level of worker organisation that was harnessed by NUMSA and I must give NUMSA that credit as an organisation, was harnessed by NUMSA has been smashed to pieces. If you look at the comparison of where we come from, with the amount of members we had that time and the amount of members that we have now I understand is a 112. So women played quite a central role, they would always be in defence of our male comrades if the male comrades were under attack. I remember one march we organised from the plant at Martindale. Our own union office were negotiated and we were planning an industrial march. Of course the march was with the hype of the mass democratic campaigns. Of course the march was a so called illegal march because we didn't want to apply for permission. But the march was co-ordinated from our plant in Martindale and it involved NUMSA, FAWU and SACAWU. I don't know if it was CAWUSA at the time, but the commercial union affiliate of COSATU. The companies that were involved there Pexilin, Bakers, The Bakery, the Shoprites, the retail stores right down there Newlands, some smaller places, Phillips, so its comrades from FAWU, NUMSA, SACAWU and all of those comrades we planned to march on to that time Johan Koetzee Police station in Newlands. It is now called Sophiatown Police



station and we all converged onto to the point because they came from down, from Newlands side and from the Brixton side, from that side up and then we converge on to Martindale's plant of Phillips and from there we then intended, but when we were just about to proceed to the police station the security police and riot police broke up the march. They gave us just a few minutes, not even a few minutes and then they started to shoot. I promise you, the women were strong but I felt so terrible because I could do nothing, I was just saying to comrades "comrades *bopha*" because the moment comrades were panicking and running they were shooting more. People were laying all over the shoes, you shoes and slippers laying around, people ran round that way Newlands side to the mosque that way. But anyway the police broke up the march that day. I recall when we had the factory occupation, there were people laying with sniper rifles. When we had the march and when we had the factory occupation there were people with sniper rifles on the roofs of Phillips and cameras. Now you can imagine to what degree Phillips was involved with the apartheid apparatus if Phillips deny that at the time that they were supporting the apartheid regime with equipment. We found out that they were lying and we sent overseas all the transmitter and receive frequencies of Phillips to show that they were supplying Armscor, they were supplying all the TBVC states with communication systems, receive/transmit, all these kinds of frequencies including the defence force, all of these tentacles of the apartheid state at the time, CCTV's and so on, we exposed those things. Our aim wasn't to shoot ourselves in the foot but to heighten the contradictions of what was taking place. We had to do it there was no other way, to show the world that this company is portraying such a nice face in fact they are just like the apartheid government, no better, that's the way they operated. That march ended in a terrible kayos that day. That was in the early part of the 1990s.

Facilitator: But what about women rights and so on, issues of maternity leave etc.?

Respondent: yes we took our queue from one of the COSATU affiliates, I think it was in the struggle of the workers in Pick n Pay and CAWUSA at the time who secured the best ever, that time agreement on parental rights. And yes Phillips we put pressure on them that they must already begin to adjust their position in line with what workers have achieved through the Pick n Pay struggles that time. To some degree they have moved at the time but not to what we wanted but they were prepared, the company, I must say, they were prepared to make concessions. They had to make concessions. It's like a microcosm of the South African situation where the regime had to make concessions. It was repression and concessions. It worked as a two way kind of approach to try and bring the situation to normality. So yes they did make certain concessions and our women comrades there .., we ..,and of course Phillips was always arguing, look your main agreement, these people are saying this and this, the main agreement, we must stick to those things, but they were prepared to show the outside world that they do things for black workers but nothing in a fundamental way of changing anything. Nothing in changing things in a fundamental way, they were just trying to make little concessions. Our women were very strong, the women participated more strongly in the activities even outside of Phillips. They used to have to come back from the meetings, in industrial committees, we expected a report from them. Then they would report, Mavis Khubheka was always the one who reported from the industrial area committee, that this is what is going to happen, there's gonna be this action, this comrade was detained, that comrade was still .., that factory has got an issue we need to mobilise and

assist that factory. That was the spirit that existed. We were able to transcend that narrow factory consciousness and for me that was very important in the contribution of the struggle of workers at Phillips. They were able to transcend that narrow factory consciousness. We almost ran into .., and we really ran the risk of going into that, and being constrained by the factory kind of consciousness because of the first wage agreement that we signed which was quite a good agreement, quite a substantial increase was given the first agreement but that was also I think a wake up call for Phillips, we had to adjust things in our weight structure so that people don't see there's some anomalies in our weight structure. So yes, there were concessions but you can see now what the end result is of restructuring. The message that I would like to get out through this interview also, for other workers and for the community and for workers in particular. We need to pay attention as workers what is happening to ourselves in our workplace. Don't just take things because they are painted in such a rosy way by your management, by the bosses. Workers must be aware of what is going on at the point of production. They must take note of any changes at the point to production, in processes of production, in processes of distribution. Looking at the policies in the market, policies and the economic policies and approach that companies are adopting in terms of the operations, in terms of the strategic approaches because there you can pick up what these people intend to do because any change that takes at the point of production affects the level of organisation of workers. And we've drawn some bitter lessons in the struggle of workers at SA Phillips as to how the capitalist organise themselves to counter act the growth and development of militant worker organisation. Those are important lessons that need to be drawn from this experience of Phillips workers and workers elsewhere. We've gone through similar kinds of problems.

Facilitator: how long did it take the employer to recognise unions at Phillips, was it a struggle?

Respondent: It was a struggle initially, of course Phillips wanted to also report internationally of how good they are with .., and open they are with how liberal they are towards unionism and so on, and that was an opportunity for them to use the growth and development of worker organisation and trade union organisation at Phillips to boost their own profile internationally, and they've done so successfully. They've done so I would say to a degree with success in portraying, look "ja", they see in this article they say unions, they won't say, they didn't say who the unions were, they say unions. That was from their newsletter. This is to show the outside world this was Phillips newsletter, oh they recognise blacks, black unions, unions who are organising black workers, so unions, more than one union so they are quite progressive but underlining the strategy was like the apartheid government, like the creation of the Bantustand, so they support the reactionary unions like Tuks aligned unions to counteract us. So we had to struggle with recognition because there was the debate of you know, there was the position that we took at that time that if there's a majority union, we will then argue for sole bargaining rights. In other words we will represent the minority as well. Phillips was obviously opposed to that, they wanted to give the minority union also rights. So we had to struggle because comrades said "ag these people, they are sell outs how can we allow them to be part of our thing" and to the extend where Phillips they .., we finally managed to get the recognition agreement in place with Phillips as NUMSA but at the same time Phillips argued that they have a multi-union approach in recognising unions and they wanted Radio and TV and Allied Workers Union to be part of the recognition

agreement. We said no ways, we've got the majority here, rather go and sign your own damn recognition agreement with them if you want to, we want one with NUMSA. And we managed to get our recognition agreement then. But remember what I explained to you about the levels of bargaining. Phillips wanted to tie us down even within the recognition agreement so that we could only have plant levelling bargaining with them and thereby de-linking us to the broader struggles of the workers in the union. But we managed to overcome that hurdle, that constraint that they wanted to impose on us. So it wasn't easy to us to finally get a good recognition agreement because Phillips wanted to also have the other union part of the whole thing.

Facilitator: And white workers were they unionised?

Respondent: Some of the white workers actually they were not unionised but some of them, a lot of them actually joined the Radio and TV and Allied Workers Union which was more .., less militant, just concentrated purely on, they wanted to concentrate strictly on bread and butter issues – wanted absolutely nothing to do with what is happening outside the workplace whereas our comrades were prepared to sacrifice and struggle and link their struggle in the workplace to broader political struggles and they didn't want to be part of that kind of exercise. That is the way that Phillips was able to also try to counter act our strength. So the white workers, a lot of them actually joined Radio and TV very few of them and not many of them joined NUMSA, there were few that joined NUMSA. Cape Town there was two I think, here in Jo'burg there were a few of them but more so they were more aligned to joining the Radio and TV, Tuksa aligned union.

Facilitator: Three last questions. You mentioned UWUSA earlier, and the struggles between UWUSA and ..?

Respondent: that's the struggled that spilled over into the workplace.

Facilitator: was there an end to it in the case of Phillips?

Respondent: ja but we were able to nip that in the butt at Phillips because we had some Inkatha members who were also members of NUMSA. Some of our comrades were from the security .., the securities of Phillips, there were few of them and there were some others who were not in security, who were members direct members of Inkatha. But we respected them, we gave them platform within our structures. At Phillips more or less there was not that kind of serious tension with us and those comrades who were still members of Inkatha but we prevented and we tried to curb that from entering our workplace. Because we said "look if you want to belong to the PAC, it's your thing, if you want to belong to Inkatha, please just don't bring your politics here so that it influence and affect us so that we start having fights amongst ourselves". But outside the workplace it was a different situation. We had to be careful. I myself I was almost killed by Inkatha at Johannesburg bus station, it was in the mid 1980s. I just happened to be there, I unfortunately gave pamphlets Mass Democratic Movement pamphlets to the wrong people I just heard "*Usuthu!*" and then people started coming for me. I managed to escape in one of these Putco busses, otherwise I would have been dead meat, chopped up in pieces on that bus rank next to the old .., there was a café there called Moles, the café sold food at the bus rank, they used to sell fatkoek, mince, you know workers coming past there, people would drink and stuff. I'm telling you that was my first encounter, directly with Inkatha I

had to run for my life. But in the workplace we were able to overcome that problem because we had very few. Whereas in companies like Barlowrand, there were more intense fights, intense kind of problem between the Inkatha, UWUSA, aligned people who were also members of the union at the time and there were some bloody fights I can recall. So in a sense we were a bit fortunate and we were able to manage that conflict doesn't spread too heavily into our workplace in Phillips.

Facilitator: how rough was racism in the workplace?

Respondent: Racism it, looking back from the incident that sparked a lot of responses. You can see how Phillips protected a racist supervisor who assaulted me in the workplace and said that "*die boesman kom van die Kaap om die kaffirs slim te maak*" and Phillips sided with them. You can see how Phillips, evidently even from Phillips entire pay structure and the way they categorised workers as indirect and direct workers and the direct workers being the majority of blacks falling the lower category of the wage scale being called indirect workers. And the privileges that the whites had within the company, just with the turn of events in the country, making a few cosmetic changes and putting just a few black faces in white places, to put it that way, in mild terms, where a person like Lesley Matlapi was recruited, but recruited not for genuine purposes of advancing blacks but by using blacks against blacks. So you know, inherent in the approach I would say was a clear trend of racism although not overtly and public visible just like that to any person. But if you read between the lines in terms of what I explained to you, really there was still those tendencies of inherent racist approach towards the application of discipline, the application of benefits and so on within the workplace, obviously they tried to present an entirely different picture. If they were really genuine

they would have mentioned in this article the name of NUMSA. Some of the black comrades they used to lure into some kind of benefits and privileges and so on and use them. That was also part of the approach of the apartheid government and they used to use the same tactics, where even with this Tuks aligned unit, Radio and TV Allied Workers Union, some people were promoted and boost .., "go into this union and here without any hassle you can become a shop steward. Now it appears as if this is another kind of multi-racial union and Phillips is so progressive. It was all done in a very subtle way. And of course I can tell you, one of the, and I'm not apologetic in saying this, one of the arts racists in Phillips and his whole management style, dictatorial, authoritarian management was that guy Pierre Fouche. I want to say one thing good about him, with all due respect, I don't know if he's still alive. But in terms of his work, as a technocrat, as an industrialist, as a capitalist he was good. He was good at what he was cut out and what he was trained in doing in managing that factory. But he managed it like a little Hitler. He was a well trained guy in ,, not only in terms of management, but in terms of his technical skills. That's probably they had him in the job, but he was outright racist. Later they got rid of him, they got other people, at one stage they had Mr Mendes who was the chairperson, seemingly he was seen as a liberal kind of person and so on. But also we didn't take shit of them. I recall one thing that was very clearly racist for me was the way they used to organise their Christmas staff parties. They begged us not to disrupt the parties, we did it once here and we boycotted the xmas party. They were so upset, they were so embarrassed and then they changed the whole pattern in organising the xmas parties. That was organised so badly every year. The whites used to have their party and the blacks used to have their party. But one year we just said "to hell with your bloody xmas party" and we boycotted the xmas party but they felt so embarrassed and they



begged us afterwards, "guys stop doing this man". So those are all the indications that you can see, a lot of has changed now. Racism plays itself out in a very subtle way nowadays. You find now we have black people accusing others of racism also and vice versa. I can live with a person calling me a coloured, although I had great difficulty in coming to terms with the coloured identity. But I can live with it. You can call me whatever you bloody well want to call me.

The real test is how your words are translated into action. And Phillips while they were saying one thing you could see through that, through the nice words, their actions are translated into a racist result. That for me is a final test.

Facilitator: Your worst experience in the unions when you look back, what was it?

Respondent: My worst experience looking at the unions in general. Well, I had some not so good experience within NUMSA itself. But I can tell you its probably, I cannot attest what has happened to me within NUMSA to NUMSA as an entity, an organisation, perhaps what transpired was just perhaps an organised attempt to get me to join the South African Communist Party when at the time, at one particular congress I was approached by a comrade who was holding a senior position in NUMSA that look here we want to groom you, and we want to propose and caucus for an office bearer position in COSATU, but one of the prerequisites is that you must join the party, the South African Communist Party. At the time I was interacting and cross interacting with comrades in the party and in different left kind of structures within the movement itself, there's those people who believed in entrism who went to want to disrupt

and break the ANC or COSATU – great pretences, we go in there and we pretend we are ANC member but yet we are belonging to this particular left organisation. I was open about my politics, I didn't pretend about it, but what I could not take is for any person to put a pre-condition for the development of leadership within a progressive organisation that you have to join a particular political party or organisation. I couldn't reconcile that. And the words of that comrade was .., when I said I am not going to do that I'm preparing to stand for elections. But the words of that comrade to me was "comrade, I'm totally sorry you know what, you have marginalised yourself". I don't know if that was an isolated experience but it was an experience that I can recall within the union movement. I don't necessarily want to name the comrade because the comrade now holds a very powerful position in government also. Not that I'm scared or anything but he knows who he is.

And another comrade who was actually dismissed by NUMSA, who discouraged me, he was one of my organisers. He discouraged me in the 1980s while he was busy studying, I wanted to study business management and I participated in some left structures where he was involved, he discouraged me to study. I was told by him "Parker why do you want to sit and study this capitalist shit, we already giving you political education, you already receiving political education in the union movement and through left organisation that he was aligned to. I didn't even know I was recruited into an antriest group and later when I realised what it is all about, I said no, I am not prepared to be pretentious about who I am and what my politics are about. I'm not going to be operating under another clandestine organisation within the ANC or within the Communist Party, I'd rather be this, a workerist, if you want to term me a workerist tem me that. If we never going to attain a workers government,

or socialism, if I'm an idealist, it's fine you can label me whatever you want. Those were some bad experiences politically I think I had in NUMSA. But I cannot attribute that to NUMSA I must make that very clear because NUMSA is a very progressive organisation, it allows the comrades if they want to be part of whatever organisation they are free to choose, and that has enhanced the profile and capacity of NUMSA I would say clearly, confidently.

Moving away from NUMSA I've worked for independent unions. Some of those unions are really a tendency in themselves to say the least, but it comes to working class politics. So there are some other not so good experiences I don't necessarily want to go into. I've taken also a union that I've worked with, I've taken to task by going to the CCMA because some unions, their employment practices are really worse up to sh\*\*\* than that their employers are to say the least, but I've never seen that in my involvement with NUMSA, I've not experienced such kind of practice within NUMSA or with NUMSA except this kind of consistent pressure politically that you find from comrades here and there who are part of a caucus within the union itself and that stifles sometimes growth of particular comrades, it actually causes what one comrade said "that you marginalised yourself " if you don't want to tow a particular, line of a particular tendency.

Facilitator: the best experiences, in opposite of the earlier question?

Respondent: My best experience is to see today in retrospect, looking at all the bad experiences and today looking back to now. The result is to see that yes, NUMSA has contributed significantly through COSATU as a labour organisation to the transformation of South African society to

where we are now, yes, we can say that things have not changed in a fundamental way, but we have attained political power, we have attained a political freedom, struggle for economic freedom is far from over. And NUMSA through COSATU is playing a leading role on tuning that struggle to transform our society, to a society based on really the will of the people. A society based on the way it's captured in NUMSA's preamble from its ability to each according to needs and looking back is what I have experienced and what I have gained internally as a person, that I can say that without any regret, the sacrifices that I've made, that other comrades have made was not in vain. Today you can see if you look at our society in South Africa, where else in the world will you find that for example Muslims, the religion of Islam, the religion of peace, the religion which some people see as a religion of terrorism, the religion which the west is trying to ostracise, where else in the world have you seen in a country where a religion like Islam can exercise and practice its religion so freely? We are seeing that in South Africa today where the government in fact is also taking cognisance of the plight of the minorities and I'm talking about a minority religion within this country where you now have the Muslim Marriages Bill that's been discussed and the government has recognised prior to them bringing customary marriages in the African society, passing legislation to bring that in line with the constitution and so forth. So looking back at the net result, yes we have gained a hell of a lot, and it was not in vain but our struggle is far from over. Our struggle to attain real liberation is a struggle to transform our society not only this country but internationally where everything is directed towards people's needs and rather than the needs of profit and that for me shows that there's light for us, it instils in you a sense of wanting to continue, it instils in you a sense of being. Yes there are so many problems, there are so many contradictions also, we've seen the levels, we see the levels of corruption

all over but this is not just unique just to South African society and that I think we need people in this country with strong political will to admit where they are wrong and to admit that we need to change where we need to change.

Facilitator: is there anything that you think is important which should have been part of this interview.

Respondent: Yes of course and I've raised it with comrades who are still there, of Phillips for example. I don't want to speak in a vacuum, I've never had that approach and I don't intend to adopt such an approach, so I've spoken to comrades at SA Phillips of what is left now, the one comrade is still there, Daniel Mnguni, unfortunately he no longer works for Phillips, he works for one of the satellites around Phillips. Remember what I described to you earlier on, Johannes Zakwe, he is one of the old guard that's still there at Phillips – I have entered into discussions even with the current shop steward, comrade Eddie who is there, and the comrades who used to be active with me throughout my time within Phillips. The idea was to try and capture experience of worker struggles within SA Phillips and how that related to the broader political struggles of the union and the broader political struggles within our political terrain in this country. They were quite excited for us to write up a little booklet, but because of the lack of resources, we are unable to implement that concept. It's basically a concept now but fortunately NUMSA head office, after I had spoken to the comrades there they were excited and they supported the idea, I was able to speak to some comrades in NUMSA, the regional secretary comrade Sizwe including the general secretary and comrade Jenny and others here who now have put me in touch with your project to try and see how we can zoom into your project

to highlight these kinds of contributions that workers have made in this particular multinational company. So I would like to suggest that in fact, because some information that I may .., you must understand that time has gone by it won't be long God willing I will be 50 which sounds a lot. Some comrades are older than me who are still there and I believe some of those comrades still have a lot of information and I would love to suggest that in fact you must try and follow up with those comrades and I will give you all the details of the comrades, and perhaps you can give them a further report of how you've been able to structure this interview and what information you have gathered from me and perhaps they can add or perhaps they can correct maybe some of the information that I have given to you. But I have given to you the information to the best of my knowledge and my memory and my recollection. There may be omissions and additions that needs to be made in this contribution. I hope I have given you the gist of what we intended to get across and the lessons we can draw from there for workers who are now in the union movement and workers who still need to be organised.

Facilitator: any closing word maybe?

Respondent: I just hope that out of this contribution it will begin to encourage others to contribute more and that your project will best serve the interest of workers and that workers will be able to draw strength from this. I will be glad if I will be able to get .., if there's any publication that is coming out of this that I will maybe get a copy of thereof and that my contribution be acknowledged in such a whatever publication, moreover that of the workers whom I represented at the time and are still there today and then finally just to say I am grateful that to be associated with an organisation like NUMSA. NUMSA is really growing as a giant and I can

recall what the late comrade Harry Gwala, the honorary president of NUMSA, if the struggle of the workers are betrayed, then we must blame ourselves because we've become filing clerks. Stacks and stacks of documents piling up in our offices, let's return to basics, let's return to the times when we used to organise workers in factories, in the mines, outside the workplace, inside the workplace, let's return to basics. I want to end on those words of the late comrade Harry Gwala.

Facilitator: that's great, thanks a lot for your time

Respondent: thanks, it's a pleasure comrade.

**END**

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