

Mr Mlambo

Facilitator: This is an interview with baba Mlambo, the date is 9 April 2012, we are at Kwa Thema, interview is done by Brown Maaba. Baba you can speak any language you are comfortable with. Baba you were saying that you were born in Natal?

Respondent: Yes I was born in Natal in early 1960s, then I grew up in Natal and did my primary education in KZN until my secondary education. At the time because of challenges that were facing my family, I was the first born in the family who had 4, I was the one who had to assist my father to revamp our home. I started to work here in Springs in the early 1980s, I was living at the hostel at them. You will remember that at the time we called this area Witwatersrand not Gauteng. So the system at the time of coming here, you could get a job but you had to get a calling cards

Facilitator: Calling cards?

Respondent: yes they were used by the employers, they would assist you in getting permits etc. So the first company I worked for at the time was called Simplex, at the moment it is called GEC, it's here in Nancefield, it's a foundry company. I worked there until we were introduced to the union. The first union I joined was MAWU which was organising the metal, steel, engineering industry. But there were a number of other affiliates who also organised the metal industry until they formed one union called NUMSA. After NUMSA was formed, which is still currently operating, I was also elected early in those days as a shop steward. The notion of the unions at the time was that you cannot elect a person who understands English because we were scared at the time, that the people are easily

convinced by the employers to push the employer's agenda. But the union grew, it needed more shop stewards who are educated in order to communicate with the employers.

I joined the shop stewards .., at the time we were stationed here at Kwa Thema, we used Roma church in Highland. Unfortunately when we were there, the elections were held at the plant, from the plant you would attend the Shop Steward Councils, you also had to formulate the structures of the local. I was also elected as the deputy chairperson of the Springs local branch. I was the youngest in the local office bearers

Facilitator: of MAWU

Respondent: Of NUMSA

Facilitator: So you were now with NUMSA

Respondent: Yes, as I said earlier on we started a MAWU, after the amalgamation of all these unions they formed one big giant union of the metal workers that is NUMSA. Also I served as the Deputy Chairperson of the local by then in the early 1980s, I served under comrade George. I found comrade George who was also employed by Crabtree. We continued to be shop stewards. Our first secretary by then was Moses Mayekiso at national office, also these other deputy secretaries by then because the constitution allowed us to have those types of people. Fortunately the company that I was working under, GEC, embarked on a strike, the company did not recognise the union. Employers in the apartheid government had more power than the workers.

We embarked on a strike when we were trying to organise the union in our plant, I remember that we ended up being locked up in Springs because we wanted the company to recognise the union. We had the recognition agreement that if you want to have a union the employer must recognise the union. The employer were stubborn. I remember our first organiser, Ronnie Xibi, we worked with him and also on our side we had, what they called National General Secretary which was Bennie van der Hoff at national office. He is the one who played a major role in forcing the company to recognise the union. Also at the time, a member of parliament, Maggie Magubane, she started from FAWU. She was employed by NUMSA as an official. After being an official, she was one of the local organisers who organised unorganised those that were unorganised at the time.

It was something, I was new and young at the time. I was not a chairperson but a deputy chairperson under Jukad Vilakazi, is he still alive?

Facilitator: I don't know, I haven't heard of him

Respondent: He was my chairperson, he was my mentor, he taught me about worker struggles, at the time the composition of the company, companies employed more Zulus because it was heavy engineering

Facilitator: GEC?

Respondent: Yes it was very heavy and it was difficult to find people in the urban areas to work for the company because it was very difficult to work there, it was a lot of hard work. Fortunately I worked with him as my

chairperson, he was also the one that taught me about labour struggles. After that, he retired as a shop steward, the job was demanding, he was also a pastor in his church. So he had no time to attend union meetings because they were called now and then. I was younger then and I managed. I was then appointed the Chairperson of GEC and also I was elected by the local as the Chairperson of the local. We work with a number of comrades. I remember comrade David Madubela was the second deputy president of NUMSA. Our first president was John Dube from Eastern Cape and the third one was Danny Olifant. But when we joined the union there were no demarcations, Wits Central, Wits East, etc., we were all under Wits region. It was a big region. It was difficult to organise itself. I think the union resolved that they should demarcate these regions into four regions if I'm not mistaken because Tshwane, Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni now, also Sedibeng. So now they have regions within the same region. We also another demarcation, Wits East, we were launched by the former president, I forget his name, who was also responsible for launching this region. We then worked under the leadership in the region of Mandla Jele, who also became a local organiser of Springs local. Now I think he left the office because he is sick. He became permanently disabled and he was replaced by another organiser who is currently working with Springs local.

Fortunately or unfortunately, we organised a number of companies in Springs which were also organised by NUMSA and had a number of campaigns I still remember. Moses Mayekiso was also involved in the COSATU discussions, after FOSATU it became COSATU, they were trying to have discussions with the ANC while in exile. Fortunately when they came back from one of the meetings, I think it was Lusaka, when they arrived at the airport, together with comrade Cyril Ramaphosa, they arrested Moses

Mayekiso was arrested, Cyril Ramaphosa they couldn't catch. Then we had this big campaign of "Release Moses Mayekiso" campaign. He was the secretary general of the union by then. So we had fights with the state a number of times. I remember when he was appearing to court we were supposed to go and leave work and go and toyi toyi in the court and show the sympathy and support, that we want our general secretary back. For a number of consecutive sittings until he was released.

At local level branch meetings, sometimes we had structures that were called LOB's, they represented branches in the region of the organisation, RAC meetings where you took some of the decisions of the organisation. I was also part of that. I still remember after that, because you may recall that after the ANC was unbanned, there was a call from the national office of the ANC that, because a number of members of the MK's were not working, some had no skills, but there was a call from national office of the ANC saying we must employ some of them in the unions. I recall, in our local I was a deputy by then, we employed Jackson Mahlangu full time as an organiser. He played an important role in the unions.

Facilitator: Really?

Respondent: yes, because he managed the companies that were very strategic, he engaged them in constructive discussions of workers. That company, one of them was Ultra High by then, today it is called Elementrics. He was the one who was organising those companies and Botha?? – until he met his ultimate death in the arms of the gangsters. I call them gangsters because politically I cannot say they were politically motivated because some of them they were gangsters of Kwa-Thema ..(unclear), that guy also, he was killed afterwards. So

Facilitator: people like Moyo?

Respondent: yes and his crew because they were gangsters. So also we had meetings at the hostel by that, before the third force came in during the processes of the .., when the ANC was unbanned, we had a number of badges, they were organised by NUMSA, regardless of their political affiliation and also most of the workers, they were not politically affiliated by then to be honest, because they didn't understand politics, they knew about COSATU. I was still living in the hostel by then. Most of the time we didn't have venues of calling mass meetings of workers, or factory general meetings because you must pay for a venue and make sure that when you leave after the meeting everything is spot on. So we couldn't guarantee this on the side of the workers because others may come to meetings under the influence of alcohol. So we used the hostel as the base of calling meetings of Springs workers, metal workers in hostels. Until by then there was this .., I think that was a third force, who came in and identified ANC that COSATU those are ANC members, Zulus are feeling inferior because they are marginalised and there was this formation of Inkatha getting stronger now, to say those that are speaking Zulu language are members of Inkatha, if you are Zulu you must be a member of Inkatha, if you are not a member of Inkatha it means you are a sell out, those type of things.

I was caught in a catch 22 situation in the hostel because I was the Chairperson of NUMSA by then, also living in the hostel. I was victimised a number of times, but because also I was born and bred in KZN, I didn't care whatever they said, I also knew that they are also members of Inkatha. I knew Inkatha, they didn't know Inkatha. I continued as the

Chairperson, some of them said they don't want to hear anything from COSATU or any other union because those are ANC, they are not ANC. It seemed as if ANC is the one attacking them. So they tend to attack each and everybody who was a hostel dweller by then, to say you must be a member of Inkatha or you are going to get killed.

I was battling, I was called to a number of meetings. I was so brave I don't know where I got the bravery but I attended, regardless of the fact that I was alone. Also what I was happy about was, some of my parents, not biological but other people who came from the same neighbourhood as me, I referred to them as my father, they were there and supported me. I managed because the one thing I asked them in the meeting when they called me and said that I'm criticising ..(unclear) so and so's child. I asked them question to say I don't care about him, I don't care about Baba Madiba, I am an ordinary worker. I told them that if Baba Madiba was to buy a bag of mealies and potatoes for my family, I would understand because I would be benefiting, I was not benefitting from either one of them, I am an ordinary labourer, I am being exploited by GEC, I will never agree in my life to allow them to continue to exploit me while I'm getting peanuts. I also said to them, there was a question .., I asked them in the meeting, mostly members of Inkatha. I asked them a question which I also posed as an example "in other countries have they ever seen a president being elected from a hostel" – I told them that they are speaking about Mangosuthu Buthelezi, he is at home with his political organisation. Why are we mixing the two, we are a labour movement. You bring in Inkatha into a labour meeting – I was trying to teach them to separate the two, Inkatha is a political party and the union is a labour movement. I felt I was under attack and feared for my life. I told them that I will be moving out of the hostel and moving to the township. They

then said it's because you are a member of the ANC. Others asked me to come back they wanted to appoint me as the secretary of IFP. They promised to donate a car to me. I understood the dynamics, they can buy me a car today and tomorrow I will be killed. I told them I will not be part of the politics. I gave them a forwarding address so that if they want me, I wanted them to know that I am not hiding from them, if they need my services for matters relating to labour I will help them.

After that I felt less pressured. I left Kwa-Thema and I met my wife, I am now a grandfather, I have grand kids. My wife was also a shop steward at Micro Press Tools by then, they were serving under me by then, regardless of the fact that today these are contradictions. Today she is more senior than me, I trained her on everything about being a shop steward, how to handle mandates, how to implement mandates, all these things. Until 1999 when I was retrenched by L Mecas then. The retrenchment I think was the strategy of the employer, they had had enough of me, because the company I used to work with L Mecas and very organised. To date when you show them the Department of Home Affairs they will disagree with you, they will tell you that this is not Home Affairs because it's where we used to be locked up in the previous government and the building was used by the SAP, to date. When I go in there, my mind recalls how I was locked there during the apartheid era.

We worked there and as I indicated L Mecas was a very militant company. I remember us striking for one worker who was dismissed because he assaulted a white employee in the company and the worker was Cyril Zungu, I can't remember the white person's name. I was the chairperson also in the plant at the time. We were strategic. It happens coincidentally at the right time because I was at the plant on the day. I

rushed to the department and spoke to my colleagues. They knew me and how I operated, they also understood my sign language that I didn't want anybody to be a witness because this might weaken the case. So no worker was a witness and we won the case. The Chairperson leading the case on the side of the employer, was the Managing Director of the company. We won the case because sometimes it's good to argue with the whites because they become angry and emotional when questions are posed to them. I asked the Chairperson if he knew what apartheid is. He said, yes. I then said all the workers that are working with these gentlemen never saw anything because they were busy working but the complainant has called a witness who is also a white guy from another department who witnessed when he was hit by another employee. If you can tell me is that not apartheid. The MD agreed with me because a white guy saw them whilst working in another department, why did a black man not see this. If it was a black man witnessing it was also going to be apartheid too. So the white union at the time, I think it was Yster and something, they embarked on a strike, to say it's unfair labour practice that was done by the MD. The processes because of the Recognition Agreement, if we fight with the employer, we must go to that body to come and intervene. They could not bring the case back into the company because the MD was chairing. We won the case and managed to weaken the struggle of the whites too outside the country. We went to individuals that we work with, our friends we tell them that we've got no case, the director ruled on the matter. We said to our friends when you come tomorrow don't stand there just go in, they reduced in number until some of them were brought in to work by their wives. They came in. The MD gave them final warnings because they didn't follow the correct procedures.

Things were difficult in those days unlike today because we were fighting a number of issues, the Labour Relations Act. I remember one day during that time, the state president, I can't recall whether they were called prime minister, PW Botha. I still remember when we talk about Workers Day. I remember that when we wanted 1 May as a holiday, Workers Day, he gave us 6 if I am not mistaken. We sat, the strike was on 1 May because we demanded 1 May and also come the 6th we sit on the 6th because he deliberately said to the public that it's Workers Day, until he agreed the following day that Worker's Day will be celebrated on 1 May. (interruption). Also by then it was goo because we knew we were fighting the apartheid regime and it was easy for us to identify the enemy unlike today it seems we are lost, we do not know who is the enemy. You look at the person who is closer to you and say this is the enemy. At the time it was easy to identify the enemy because of the apartheid system. It was easy to fight with the government, we also knew that we were supporting the ANC because we all wanted a democratic state. We also wanted, as workers to have our rights to be enshrined in the constitution. (interruption – somebody talking in the background), draft the democratic constitution then. I also remember the last congress, which was the best congress in my life, the COSATU Congress which was held at Vista in Johannesburg, Soweto, I can't remember the year. The president of COSATU at that time was John Gomomo, he was following Elija Bagae, the state of his health was not so good, he was very sick at the time. What inspired me is that during the day, when we seconded, a number of comrades, you will recall that Cyril Ramaphosa was already gone and Sydney Mufamadi had also gone to the ANC. We seconded Moses Mayekiso, Alec Irwin, you name them, Danny Olifant, they were deployed to the government of the ANC, they said that they wanted workers to be part of the government.

In that congress I was inspired because Elija Bagae was with us in the congress, during his last days, he also ran with the comrades telling them that we are electing you today but tomorrow you will be having body guards telling us that we are speaking nonsense forgetting that the nonsense that we are speaking, we are getting from the very same nonsense that also ..(unclear). I also remember John Gomomo when he addressed them when they were standing on the podium, he told them go today but tomorrow you are going to forget about COSATU, we don't care, we will never back down as workers of this country. We will continue to fight even fight with you as our own comrades.

So, it was a nice congress, most comrades were deployed to the ANC government. I still remember that they wanted a number of comrades from COSATU and also from the alliance as Communist Party and so on and all that. So we deployed the comrades and they were gone. That was the best congress I ever attended. The other congresses which I had attended before, we were battling, fighting with resolutions and so on, even affiliates. I still remember one day when NUMSA was fighting with NUM and NUM fighting with FAWU, comrade Chris Dlamini. Comrade Godongwane who is from the same location, Kwa Thema, they are leading NUMSA, comrade George Nkadimeng to the NUM from Kwa Thema also leading NUM, on that side, those were the debates, robust debates. What I learnt from COSATU, after robust debates we did not turn enemies. We continued to be comrades. I also remember when Elija Bagae stood in the congress and said "Mr Cyril Ramaphosa can you please take your NUM and get out of this hall, comrade Moses Mayekiso can you take your Metal Workers Union and get out of this congress" all the big affiliates because they were fighting. At the end of the day we

ended up having resolution of the federation, agreed to by all unions. that was a nice learning of the labour movement.

My wife was a shop steward from Micro Press tools, she was also elected as a member of the RAC, but by then I was still her senior until I was retrenched. When I was retrenched I was a member of the ANC. Also belonged to a group which was in good standing when the ANC demarcated the branches of the ANC. In this area we were six, that were in good standing according to the membership of the ANC. We couldn't launch a branch because the number that was required we couldn't meet because we were six. We had discussions with the ANC and asked questions. We were given an option to say those new branches that are going to be launched, let us not ..(unclear) the constitution, let them launch and then we will implement the constitution. It was very difficult to recruit somebody today and then she must go to the elections if she can't meet the requirements of the constitution of the ANC. So I was glad that after that I did not feel ashamed to say I was a member of COSATU, I've been retrenched. I then participated in the ANC.

I was also the one with comrade Mzimase, Mvulindlele Maphegude who launched this Kwa-Thema South African Communist Party. Then we launched the South African Communist Party, started from there until today because the party took another resolution that we must also demarcate the branch also into our base as the ANC. So I never had this loneliness of politics and so on. I always participated in mass formations until today.

I am glad that I am still employed by Metal Workers Union Company that is Master Tubes, I'm working under Master Tubes also I'm led by the

younger generations of today who are my shop stewards and so on. Also try to assist them where they don't see or either they are not, have more strategies to use, they ask me how did we do things in our time. I'm happy that I'm led by the younger generation in the labour movement.

Facilitator: What are the kind of problems that you dealt with, the workers problems, shop floor issues, what did they include?

Respondent: Most of the time the foundry is a company that is very noisy, workers they want masks, for instance health and safety in most cases. They also demanded education because some of them are from rural areas. I remember .., we were negotiating at plant level. We managed to introduce Abet, we disagree with some of its politics, for instance after they studied what are the benefits. Others were matriculants at the time, they wanted to know what the company is doing about them, how is the company investing in them. So we trained some of them as artisans.

I also remember there was an argument about after the speech of the president of the ANC, when he said he is going to fight against white/black domination, there was a guy Msila, he was extremely intelligent, as if he was highly educated. He then said what do we do about what we heard on radio, what is the company doing right now, so that we must feel we are part of the company. So those were the kinds of demands from workers. Sometimes they would embark on a strike, but what they would do is they would go on strike, and come back as united as they were when they went on strike. Also they managed to say there was this notion etc., it came from our forefathers or where ever it comes from. You know when you speak as a Zulu, speaking to other people you tend to undermine their ethnicity as if when you speak nobody must

speak after you. So in GEC I started having those types of things but I educated the very same people to say if Mdlalose speaks after Seabela had spoken, you must not allow one of your clan, or either one of your Mahlathini/Nongoma/Matubatuba to support Mdlalose seeing very well that Mdlalose has no point in the issue, look at the issue not the person. It was just a joke, so whenever someone spoke they would say "I'm Mdlalose but don't take it as if I'm the last person to speak" the feeling was we are all equal, people were beginning to feel inferior to speak after Zungu spoke because they spoke violently. So those are the type of things I taught them. The Eastern Cape people would say what they want to say regardless of who spoke. Gradually people began to understand that when we are discussing worker issues it's not about an individual it's about worker issues.

We also had a problem of other people .., and then we had an understanding about .., saying if you are a worker you are always right. We were fighting the enemy we know. When we introduced our current labour laws .., the democratic ones, it was difficult to tell them that we can't always be right, today this is our government we must support our government so that they can excel so that the apartheid regime does not come back, this is our government, we must admit if we are wrong. They would ask you that you told us that a comrade is always right, those type of discussions, but gradually they are getting there. In labour issues they didn't compromise on worker's rights. I remember one day when they were not talking about safety and they were told that they are not allowed to go to departments when they are not given safety equipment. They all went to the canteen and stayed there. When I arrived there they told me that I told them that they are not allowed. They started working

around 11 after they were provided with the full safety equipment. They said they heard from management.

Management told us to tell them that they are mad once, they sent us back to tell management that yes they are mad, and that they are all going to consult with their different doctors because they are mad. Those workers were extremely militant. I remember one day they had a fight with the employer, they chased away one of our senior guys from the region, the regional organiser. They said "this guy seems to believe in the rules and regulations" they decided not to work, he wanted to bring a new procedure which didn't do much for them at the firm, procedure does not work where it is burning. They were basically saying let's put the procedure aside, I am the one suffering right now, procedure will come after. He went back to the region and reported the matter even to national office. After that GEC gave in to their demands. That was the spirit at the time.

During technical reasons of retrenchment, the company is very small today but still operates, not as big a workforce as before.

Facilitator: You mentioned that that work was very demanding there?

Respondent: Yes

Facilitator: Did you feel that you were exploited as workers?

Respondent: Yes when we first started we felt that we were exploited because come the end of the year or either when you reach 12 months, 1 year service. Our understanding was that after a year the company must

do something. We were underpaid at the time according to the ..(unclear) agreements. So until workers decided to go to strike, so that the union can be recognised so that we will be speaking one voice with our union who will sit down with the employers and negotiate on our behalf.

Also these other heavy sections of the company, they didn't have smarter resources. The company felt that black people must work hard labour than to be assisted with cranes etc., only after we had the union we told them we don't want to use their system – the workers should not feel that they work hard for their salaries. We asked them to change the technology. When I started working there there was no safety at all, you had to bring your own shoes, trousers etc., but after we joined the union the company took the responsibility.

Facilitator: What about benefits when you were still at GEC, did you have benefits?

Respondent: yes we had benefits, the one benefit we had when the company was not paying so well, for instance we had no medical aid. Eventually we had medical aid with the help of the union. We introduced another medical aid .., we also had other benefits – for instance when you got injured there was no compensation, we didn't know about it. Other people had the notion that if you cut your thumb you will get paid but if you cut this one, the pointing finger was more money because it holds ..(unclear) – we would discuss issues not having real facts. So we had no benefits like that before. Others when they retired it took too long for them to get their pension. Others died without having received their

pension money. So as a union we recommended that pension be changed to provident. Workers were then paid quicker.

At the time we took the right decision which was actually a bad decision. Some of them were not to having a lump sum amount of money, when I get a lump some the first thing I think of is buying a car, buying clothes, food, not putting any money away for the future and other life challenges. After a few days you find workers roaming around town, parking cars and not having money to live from – you then ask yourself is it because we were never educated about how to handle money etc., especially big amounts. So those are the things that happened, to date they are still happening.

Facilitator: Was there UWUSA at GEC, did you have UWUSA?

Respondent: That's a nice question. Yes NUMSA was formed by a certain group of Zulus who thought that when you saw Bennie Hofhosten and also chasing away of Zulus from location to hostels they thought that this fight is for the Zulus. You may recall that when we launched COSATU then, there was this counter attack from *umtwana wa ka phindangele* also launched UWUSA. I recall also because also the t-shirts of UWUSA was distributed on air by a plane, but was not democratically launched at grassroots level because even their structures, they can't identify, you can't as NUMSA go and organise at I and J which is McCaine today because it is dealing with food, so we are dealing with matter. So those that ..., you can't go to the mines and say that this one must also organise in mines because there's a mine workers union, you can't go to chemicals because we are not using chemicals, but UWUSA was just a union like it's a federation itself, because it organised everywhere as long as there were workers employed, also

looking for the Zulus. They were never interested in any other ethnic group, they wanted Zulus only – it was a strategy to boost the image of the IFP, because in the end they were not fighting with the employer but they were fighting NUMSA, NUMSA also had Zulu members. Other employers collaborated with UWUSA to bash NUMSA members. We buried a number of comrades from Daveyton, Vosloorus, Natalspruit because other employers saw a loophole and saw this as an opportunity of dealing with NUMSA. So we were fighting one another, even when you tried to talk to them they didn't listen because they wanted to say we must leave their bosses, as long as they are still working it was right. So those are the things we experienced at GEC. I managed, perhaps because I was born and bred from KZN, I told the younger people that if the employer did not force them to resign from the union, go back and to the union. The employer was supposed to call us, there's a clause that clearly stated that if a member is resigning from the employer, he must bring the previous shop steward and the current one so that the matter is put on the table. I was not called nor were any other shop stewards. So we asked the workers to go back to the original union. This assisted a lot in minimising the numbers of UWUSA. The other thing about UWUSA they never trained any of their shop stewards, they were reactionary and did not know how to handle union issues. We had more power than them because whatever we had agreed with the employer they also benefited from it. We never excluded them.

I remember one day we were negotiating at plant level, we did not agree on the employer's offer until the employer agreed to the increase being staggered, there was also another agreement that at the end of the year around 2 December they will add another increase to the lower grades. With this one we said only NUMSA members will qualify. They thought the

employer was bluffing, then come 2 December all NUMSA members received their increase. The interesting part is that there was a guy from the Zwane family who was working with his father. His father who had been in the service for 23 years, he was only 4 years, his rate was higher than that of his father because they were affiliated to different unions. His father was a member of UWUSA and a member of NUMSA. His father said I will never go with a car that is already broken, there's no hope, he then came back NUMSA. He said I will never join UWUSA again because they are not making any tangible agreements. So we managed to deal with these things.

Also we never lost any workers, we never attacked one another. We had decided that we are not going to use the canteen, the employer must provide us with an alternative canteen. One day we were called to a meeting at the same time, I then told them that I cannot sit with the employer in one meeting with another union. The employer was told that he can get into any agreement with another union as they saw it fit.

Facilitator: Were the white workers at GEC unionised?

Respondent: Yes

Facilitator: So did you work together, did they do their own thing and you did your own thing?

Respondent: We never worked together actually because of tensions with political terrain that was prevailing by then, also whites also knew that they were superior to blacks. I remember because the operators of GEC by then, they were joining two unions, there was a union that was

unilaterally introduced by the employers and then there was this union of ours that was democratic, we join on our own free will. This one is a matter of when you become an operator automatically you must be a member of this union. And also they had their own meetings with a big white guy, he was the organiser, I forgot his name and do not know where he came from by then. There was an issue of grading, for me it created a class amongst workers, for instance grade AA was senior staff, the wage gaps were enormous, they would say we are white because we are paid higher wages. They could afford better than others because of the levels of the grading. They held their own meetings. One day we were all in one meeting and I asked them when you get charged as an operator of GEC, I have never seen anyone of you bringing the white guy to represent you, you are paying for the membership. What does he do? Whenever you have problems or family bereavements NUMSA represents you. What is the point of belonging to two unions? We then told them to tell the employer that as NUMSA we want to meet with them, they all resigned, plus/minus 100 operators, they all resigned.

Facilitator: from the white union?

Respondent: Yes, the employer had apparently threatened that if they resign they will be charged, but this did not happen. I told them that we will represent them, the employer did not follow up. That was the end of the union. But because there were those whites who worked for GEC who were not operators, others were just senior guys in the departments, they also formed their own union, a white union. So I had made inroads because of the challenges NUMSA had, that we must organise those who are unorganised, we organised people that didn't have power to fire and hire. So I organised some of them. I recall also we embarked on a strike

to fight one guy, who was a member of our union..., he was white, they employed him for a number of years and then after they heard that he joined a black union, they trapped him, they waited for him to make a mistake so that they can fire him. That motivated the workers, they wanted to see whether the union will represent him because the employer was intimidating him indirectly because he affiliated to a black union. We embarked on a strike, it was very difficult to represent a white person against his own people. So I said to him you make a statement and then I will take over as your shop steward. We took the case and won the case. Workers embarked on a strike, even office staff joined the strike. Nobody believed it. They later managed to retrench him strategically, you cannot avoid a retrenchment. The white unions had no power.

Facilitator: The strikes at GEC were they effective?

Respondent: You know GEC was a different type of company. You know sometimes workers manage to make things happen. When you go and attend .., I remember I was attending an outside residential meeting with all shop stewards, we were on training, workers embarked on a strike. I remember the issue of Boipatong if you remember, all affiliates of FOSATU were asked to request 30 minutes from the employer to pray for those people that were attacked. So workers instead of praying, because they had an argument with a worker, instead of praying they embarked on a strike. They took two and half hours and went back to work. We were called and when we asked the workers, the workers said the employers used this opportunity because they thought the workers didn't know that the issue of Boipatong was created by some members of the third force.

So they argued and did not work. As shop stewards we said because they will not be paid they should also not pay us.

Facilitator: You also mentioned that there was tension between the big unions, FAWU, NUM, NUMSA and so on, and Bagae asked them to walk out of the meeting, what was the tension all about?

Respondent: When it gets to these politics, I think we also discussed politics. I still recall that there was an argument of adopting a resolution ..., the other thing that caused fights was who is the biggest union in the federation, we felt that if you are the biggest union you must have more power because you are in the majority. There was also the ANC issue. There was UDF at the time, we wanted the UDF must disband after the ANC is unbanned. Issues of elections, preparing for the elections, what do we want to see as affiliates, positioning ourselves as if we are going to have the power to tell the ANC what to do, after all we are the ones who embarked on mass rolling action and so on – we assisted in the struggle. We wanted to plan as to what we wanted to see happening should we take over. I remember one of my employees from Umsiba, he never went to school, he stood up in a meeting and said after Madiba took over, he saw his house in Selcourt, he was going to take it over from the white guy and also he is going to leave his wife in KZN with his livestock in KZN and he will get another wife in a modernised region, he is going to have a swimming pool etc. He said he is going to change everything, he will be closer to the company etc. So there were such perceptions not knowing that there will be challenges. Some people were saying the tax must be abolished, it was seen as a rip off. We argued in these meetings, some people knew that if we abolish tax we will be collapsing our very own state. Other people were saying the Minister of Labour must come from

the labour ranks, we were thinking of Jay Naidoo. Not knowing where the ANC will put him, he ended up the Minister without Portfolio. Our own thinking was we will place our own comrades where we knew they will be capable of doing this and that.

At the end of the day sometimes when the president says to the secretaries we must go out, we go out and have these caucuses and consultations and find a resolution as to how to reconcile ourselves in the positions because at the end of the day we've got an obligation as a federation that is this what we wanted. We had senior guys and national office bearers coming to seek a combination of finding one another. When we arrive in the congress we sang, danced and then moved on resolutions, had robust debates and agreed.

Facilitator: At GCE did you have women employed?

Respondent: No we didn't have women, we didn't have because it was heavy engineering. There was a department called co-shop, where they made smaller parts of ..(unclear) – when the department was expanded, the company, they never employed black people, I asked them a number of times in meetings, it was also very difficult for them to come up with a real answer. Anyway they employed a few white people, ladies, no blacks, coloureds or Indians. I criticised the code of employment, I told them that the code of the company is sexist, they only had males no females, I asked them if they were supporting that women are supposed to stay home and make babies depending on men. Other companies had employed women, for instance I was a shop steward for another company, Ren??, she was driving a overhead crane in her company. She was not undermined because she was a woman. I tried to instil the

understanding, how to change the perception of the employers, irrespective of whatever. Some of them were stubborn and not accepting things as they were.

Facilitator: When MAWU merged with other unions to form NUMSA, did this benefit MAWU?

Respondent: Yes they benefitted because all these unions, after that, we made sure that .., we knew that in MAWU we had Moses Mayekiso who played a very prolific role, we also knew that in Volkswagen in the Eastern Cape we had Gomomo and also Mercedes Benz, President John Dube .., - we knew that the comrades improved the benefits of workers. In most cases we had a problem of fighting with the employer today all of us, and then tomorrow one of the colleagues, his wife, father or who ever passes on, then he's got nothing, no benefits like we have today. We must now go back to the very same employer and talk nice, and beg for money etc. This will give the employer an opportunity to do his dirty tricks on the workers. My HR would tell me that you must tell the workers that they must not bite the hand that feeds them, because I am there to beg I will listen and say I will tell them. The employer would go to an extent of using old photos when we were on strike showing you "who is this one"? - we were at their mercy. Employers could decide on who to help and not to help. That's how it was

Facilitator: And the future of unions, where do you go from here?

Respondent: That one is very tricky to be honest, I also asked myself the same question. I tried to grapple with the current situation. I think when we formed the unions, we never said that we want to sleep in the same

bed as the government. In bold, we are not a government organisation, as workers our understanding is that as workers we are a necessary problem, we can't have a government without us as workers, and also we've got the power in relation to the economy of the country regardless of the fact that it's managed by the few, but with our power as workers, our energy is us. I like the strategy of the General Secretary of COSATU Zwelizima Vavi, we normally called the Communist Party *Uthambo Lenyoka*. It's good, Vavi. It's good to argue and disagree with the government, we never said the government of the ANC is a socialist government – the president of the ANC, Msholuzi, we've got different caps in this wagon, others are there to benefit, others are there to get what they want, not taking into consideration as to what we want, that's the problem we are having. If we agreed with all what the government is saying, the unions will slowly. Some of the things that the current government is doing right now, I doubt if they have a mandate. As workers we believe in the mandate to say go and negotiate R5 across the board, you can't just come back and say I decided to compromise, you come and ask first and say we must compromise, today no. Sometimes we follow the government, the government is supposed to get a mandate from us because we put them in power, they must get a mandate from us. I like the notion from one of the writers who said we elected them to government, before they get in they are worried about the seats, they are not worried about what we said they are worried about how many seats they are going to get. I also see that the future of the union changed because we are in a transition. So you will find that most of the time the unions must also follow the trend that is being set by the democratic structures that we have. If we tend to say no others would say this is anti-government. Other comrades are scared to say how they feel, some of

them are fighting with the current government because they want to go there, they are making COSATU a ladder to get into government.

I remember one day we went to bury one of the organisers in Eastern Cape, one organiser says one of you guys must die so that I will cut my hair, wear sunglasses, sing very loud so that the president of the country must identify me I will get a position, he was referring to someone else who did that. Now I'm saying that the future of unions, it seems that now today we do not represent the aspirations of workers. We tend to follow these institutions that are in place. Sometimes in order to change something you need to go to a battlefield then when you come back you will come with a better understanding. We tend not to fight, even when embark on a strike today, they will preempt the final settlement before the battle is over. Then when it comes there you know very well that if the General Secretary makes a statement, you analyse the statement and say we are not going above or beyond this – unlike before to say if you did that, today we've got organisers that are fully employed as officials, who are paid by the union, who are holding the power because they are getting paid – they don't move from the power and do not want to be recalled from the position they have. This deteriorates the spirit of the organisation, others are getting there not for the love for workers, they are there because they are hungry and have to put something in their stomach. So when you arrive there .., you cannot be a nurse or doctor if it is not in your heart. So those are the problems I'm seeing, it seems the spirit of the union is deteriorating today or either we get what we want as workers, or are we saying because we have the democratic state, it's over, but issues of workers are still the same. The Minister of Labour gives us this opportunity but when we go there were are distracted by our own comrades that we must understand certain issues, that is why there's a

point of compromise, because there must be understanding. If there's a difference with the employer with 2 cents, others will say anyway 2 cents is nothing, let's sign, because he's already counted his own personal income, he doesn't care. Unions have deteriorated and worker's education is not there either. They don't go to *Siyalala*, discussing issues of labour – you discuss with a shop steward of today they do not know who they really are. The ANC has challenged that if COSATU doesn't join the higher positions of the ANC that means your voice will not be heard, now once you take Vavi and put him there then you must create another general secretary of COSATU and Vavi who stood up and said comrades I did not leave you like that – rather than to say you go to the government it's not our baby, but as workers we will stand maintaining the militance of the workers and ideas and workers aspirations not of the government.

Facilitator: Any closing word?

Respondent: It's my first interview, so sometimes I've said something ..(unclear) but I enjoyed this opportunity because we always said as shop steward you must organise those who are unorganised and you must also be a shop steward of the society and participate in any mass formation, make sure that as a shop steward because you are a mouthpiece of workers, make sure that the voice of the society is heard. You fight side by side with them because at the end of the day you are a member of the society, you are also a father, you are everything. Before you go where you are you come from the society. That was a nice interview because it reminds me of where I come from. I will appreciate if I can have these things being done time and again.

Facilitator: Great, thanks for your time, that was worth it.

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