

## PHILLIP MODAU

**Facilitator:** This is an interview with Mr. Phillip Modau we are in Atteridgeville, the date is the 17 of November 2011, and interview is done by Brown Maaba. Comrade thanks very much for your time. Just give me a background of where you were born how you were raised, and how did the passion of struggle/union started and your schooling background as well.

**Respondent:** I was born in Mooiplaas, Mooiplaas in as area just behind Lodium, it is now called Swaartkop. There are these mini-cars that race there, that is where I was born and used to be our place. That was in 1949, 19<sup>th</sup> April, the day I will never forget. I started school at the present Thaba Tshwane, the school where I started was amalgamated, meaning all classes from Sub A to standard 6. We had teachers such as our Principal called Makaboge. From Amalgamated to Atteridgeville, then I attended school at Banareng, that's where the late Jafta (not clear) Masemola taught and he happened to be my class teacher.

Politics started at an every early age. I went on and on and ultimately I went to Mamelodi Technical, in fact they used to call it Vlakfontein Technical.

**Facilitator:** Mamelodi as in, in Mamelodi.

**Respondent:** Yes in Mamelodi, where I did the technical subjects. I left school in 1969, when I matriculated. My first employer was Natal Building Society; I was one of the first so called black clerks at a white institution. I did not work long there, I am sure I was there for three months, and then I was fired. I worked in so many places; I don't know

what annual leave it. I worked for more than twenty companies. Ultimately I joined the trade union movement, that was in 1983 2/3 somewhere there, now you must know then the movement was a vehicle for political activism. As a trade unionist one would suffer the tensions and so on and so forth, that's when some of us started visiting a place called Compol in Pretoria. Compol is today a museum, it was a place where all political activists were tortured, it was more or less like John Vorster except it was for political activists, and it had some different dungeons, I was fortunate not to be sent on Robben Island.

As a trade unionist I had to organize workers also into this political movement. The union I started working for was first called Electrical and Allied Workers Union, which affiliated to then CUSA, and then later on Electrical, merged with other unions to form MEWUSA, Metal and Electrical Workers Union and of course the federations merged to form NACTWU, it was quite some time back. That's where some of us met the likes of the late Khoisan X, Ben Alexander, Patricia De Lille, Cunningham Ngcukana and many others. Anyway let's come back to trade unionism because that's what we are here for. As I said, one was paid visits by the State (not clear) for being involved in politics and that of course one presumed that Special Branch would go after us because there are people informed more because of informants. However, I enjoyed working for a trade union movement then because it gave me a chance to confront employers and of course there's no case that would pass me by. What gave us power then was the Labour Relations Act itself, the 1956 ACT, that is ACT 56. That is an ACT that covered or protected workers and us officials. Employers wouldn't just dismiss workers at will, unlike the present Labour Relations ACT, the one that is being used now, which favours employers more than employees. What's happening now is that, and all this because of the government anyway, because of the then Minister of labour, Mandisi

Mdladlana, he liked pleasing employers than workers. Then with the old Labour Relations Act employers had no right to employ a person for more than three months without registration, that means that ACT stipulated that a worker shall work no more than three months as a temporary employee or temporary worker. But it would seem that ACT has since been amended because employers nowadays employ people, or workers or employees on contract or temporary basis. You find an employee working for something like ten years or so, without being registered with that employer, and as such workers lose on things such as benefits, medical aid, provident fund, you name them. I see even government also has followed suit; government is also employing people on contract basis or temporary basis. We see them more especially when it's towards elections, they will employ women, youngsters to clean the streets here on temporary basis and thereafter boast about having created employment, which is not a guaranteed type of employment. Now therefore the Labour Relations ACT of today does not necessarily safeguard the interest of workers, the way I see it. One other thing that I have observed is that nowadays employers are able to deduct money from employees remuneration at will, whereas then the 1956 Labour Relations Act prohibited that, nobody was allowed to deduct even a cent that is except of course the UIF and the like, but for anything either than the UIF as I say, no employers were not allowed to do that. Let me give you an example, say maybe an employee owes, say maybe Russels or whatever, the employer was not allowed to deduct anything from an employee's remuneration in order to pay someone else without the consent of the employee, nowadays we see that happening, in fact government forces employees to join other schemes such as GEMS for instance, I think it is against the spirit of the constitution of the country because I believe any person has a right of choice, right to choose where to belong. There are old medical schemes here that people belong to, but now that government has

come up with GEMS, so they are forced to belong to GEMS, I am talking now about government employees, which is wrong, it's against the spirit of the Labour Relations Act, and you see that. One other thing that I have observed is that today trade unionism is no longer a tool workers can use to further or to protect their interests at a given place of employment, instead trade unionism nowadays is used as a, should I say, a gain. Workers are told to go on strike anytime, just anytime and they do not benefit anything because employers will come up with the (not clear) no work no pay. What is happening now is poor members of trade unions which I have no names of course, are made to go on strike for weeks and months on end for refusing to take an offer from management, lets say maybe its five percent or whatever percentage. Union leaders, I wonder if I have to say, force these people to go on strike for months on end, only to come back and accept the same offer that they went to strike for, the very five percent or maybe five and half percent, whereas workers are going to lose their remuneration for those months or weeks. Whereas in the past, an industrial action was a sacred tool for workers, workers did not misuse it, when workers went on strike in the past, it was a genuine strike and obviously workers got what they wanted. So today honestly speaking trade unions are just but the toothless dog to be honest with you because as I see government favours employers, Labour Relations Act favours employers, there are some employers who are exempted from paying certain taxes for having employed so many workers or this and that, you understand, so they are not supposed to pay this and that tax, I have just forgotten the name of that tax. So that is in as far as I am concerned conceding too much to employer, I cant say demands because it is just a minister who decides that let me please employers and these very employers do not create employment, instead they employ our people on temporary basis. So I see no reason why should

employers be exempt from paying some taxes. Honestly I do not see where trade unionism is going nowadays.

We see members of trade unions are used as pawns nowadays, people settle political scores by using these people, members of trade unions, and I am sure it is not going to be too long when workers are going to realize this, and I am sure they will revolt against their leadership, unless of course government did something drastic to address the plight of workers and again to address the question of unemployment which you know, rises from day to day. The President promised that they will create so many jobs before, 5 years or something and by the way he says no instead of creating jobs then we are cutting jobs, I mean which is wrong as far as I am concerned, and then he does not give the young, qualified, be they engineers or graduates hope of ever being employed. That to me is really something one cannot take. As I say unless your government did something about it.

**Facilitator:** It seems to be trade unions post 1994 have gone wrong, what really happened?

**Respondent:** Yes trade unions have gone wrong post 1994 because of this thing called democracy, do you understand. Everybody thought they will do what they want; they are within their rights to do whatever. It is all because of democracy that we find our people in this mess, it is all because of democracy that our people are used like pawns everyday, because a so-called leader has got the right to tell workers to go on strike at will. I am telling you then, prior 1994, the Labour Relations and trade unionism were a sacred instrument or weapon workers could use against their employers, but every since the dawn of this new administration I am telling you everything went way hire.

**Facilitator:** But is there a way of reversing this?

**Respondent:** Brother as I just said, unless government did something about job creation instead of just talking, and they must stop conceding so much to employers, they concede a lot, the Labour Relations ACT today does not carry weight, honestly as far as I am concerned it does not protect employees. Instead it is there to appease employers. What government is after now is investment, people to come in here, to come and invest, while so doing they exploit our people. Right now there are these things called labour brokers, I am not against them as such but I mean the labour brokers today exploit our people a lot. Then we had TEBA for instance, those TEBA guaranteed people work, it was not temporary employment like we see today, and the other way what employers do no longer employ South Africans, they employ foreigners because they know foreigners cant join trade unions in the first place, and they cannot revolt against them, they accept whatever they are given. If there's somebody who is employed today through these labour brokers, those are scared labourers, people who do not have a guaranteed employment, as such that are unable to join trade unions. They do not get all the benefits and they cant go on strike because they are on contract basis and you know how our people, someone will tell you that they are here at work to work for their children, stop telling them about trade unions. Whereas if government created employment, and I see no reason why government cannot create employment. Right now they are afraid of nationalizing, they say nationalization will scare investors, whereas the previous administrations some of those parastatals, that's the reason why they created employment. You had your ISCORs for instance where thousands and thousands of people were working, and the then administration arrested for not working, you understand what I am saying, because there was employment. Your

Railways for instance employed thousands and thousands of people, the Post Office and government printers, those that I can make mention of, Eskom. There was nothing suggesting retrenchment there. There were companies that invested in South Africa, during that very administration, whereas the bullboys or the previous government nationalized all the parastatals, today we are told that we cannot nationalize because we will scare investors, as such there will be no and there is no employment.

I think with due respect, the problem is with our administration, our government, our government like pleasing multi-nationals instead of people who put it in power. They like rushing to the Obama's of this world, and the Indians for instance, this government favours more than any other person, that's what surprises me. Indians are the ones that exploit our people. So now if government can start here at home, creating employment here at home, listening to people's voices, nationalizing some of these parastatals, I am sure they will be in a position to create employment for a number of thousands of people. Unlike Telkom with one CEO who gets millions and millions of Rands at the end of the year, whereas there are so many people who go to bed hungry every night. I put the blame on this administration.

**Facilitator:** Are there things that the department or government has done right in terms of labour issues and so on, the positives?

**Respondent:** If there are positives Sir, they are minimal, they are overshadowed by all the negatives, and as such one is unable to pinpoint, I don't see anything honestly speaking except that government has privatized some of the parastatals and we have women heading those parastatals, maybe that's one thing they have done, it is good for those women. But those parastatals shed

employment every year. They have come with new terms now, its either downsizing or rightsizing or whatever, fact remains there is retrenchment. Immediately a darkie gets a position the first thing he dreams of is to rightsize or downsize or whatever sizing so that at the end of the year he gets a hell of a bonus. To me it's not a positive. One cannot say divorce the labour department from government because they are just, your government wasted time and money on one fellow who has been in that portfolio since 1994 and did absolutely zilch, the then minister of labour, he did nothing for the workers.

**Facilitator:** Where should we go from here then?

**Respondent:** I think the only solution South African has is a government of national unity, because right away the present administration thrives on deployment, they deploy cadres who are inexperienced, whereas if it is a government of national unity, you get people with experience, you done necessarily look at a person's political affiliation, you look at the experience, the expertise in this person, then you give them the necessary position. There are very good people in other political organizations who can lead the labour department for instance, very good people who can create employment, I think government of national unity is the only solution for South Africa, honestly. Otherwise if we are not going to do that, I am afraid, your freedom charter will become real. The freedom charter reads, South Africa belongs to all who live in it, both black and white, so whilst we become real South Africans then we'll take over this government, and immediately they take over this government they are going to prove to all and sundry that they are better than this administration. Then the struggles of the past and the like would just have been a futile exercise. Although of course I very much doubt that whites will come with that apartheid



system, that wont happen, but one thing for certain they would like to show you who's the boss, and I am sure that's not what we want.

**Facilitator:** By government of national unity you mean which people on board?

**Respondent:** All people of South African, irrespective of race. Because immediately we are going to talk about race, then we are going to have a problem, let's just say members of human race.

**Facilitator:** Just to go back. You matriculated in 1969?

**Respondent:** That was 1969.

**Facilitator:** That was the birth of the Black Consciousness Movement, don't know whether you were informed of the developments as a youngster, you were doing matric then, and subsequently.....

**Respondent:** Then brother. Of course BCM was established then during the political (not clear), and of course we were involved at school. At high school in Mamelodi, we were involved and we had political discussions after school when all teachers had gone. Mamelodi Technical is headed by whites, so we would wait for them to go and some Priest at SCM and address us. There's one Priest I will never forget, that fellow was articulate, Morris Ngakane, I wonder if you know him. Jesus, that fellow was articulate about (not clear), and of course there were other senior students at school who also addressed us. And of course we would attend meetings at the hostel after school and so on and so forth. Well BC was the only political vehicle then, now even though some of us were schooled by Masemola who are Africanists, but we rode on that vehicle of BC until now recently when these

political parties were unbanned. Then we started taking our separate ways.

**Facilitator:** Just to go back talking about Masemola, was he openly a politician in class....

**Respondent:** Yes, Masemola, Bra Jeff was one teacher there, he would hold the assembly from morning till eleven, politicizing us, and Fridays we knew that during manual work, he would take us boys, there's a hill, we would go up there, we would start training as children, then he would give us political education. I remember when the Afrikaans administration came into be, there were these hand flags for the Boer government and these medals. One official came at school and gave them to us, a Boer official. Bra Jeff took them all from us, he called us to the garden, and there was this place where we used to make compost. We threw them in there, all of us, he forced us to thrown them in there, and sent one big fellow to go and buy paraffin back there. Well some of us were worried because we wanted to show our parents, we only came to realize later exactly what he was doing.

**Facilitator:** And the other teachers, were they at par with him.

**Responsible:** Not all of them, of course the principal was, and a few other teachers, others were not of course, and we knew who those teachers were.

**Facilitator:** Just to go back, you moved from the family, I take it you moved from Mooiplaas to Attridgeville. Were those forced removals.

**Respondent:** Yes that was forced removal.

**Facilitator:** After matriculating, you worked for Natal Building Society and you worked for three months.

**Respondent:** Yes for three months, I was expelled.

**Facilitator:** What happened there?

**Respondent:** I could not call them bass, because at school we were taught by whites and we called them Meneer. Now at the place of employment it became difficult for me to call them baas, I kept on calling them Meneer, they reprimanded me more than once, I was expelled just because of that.

**Facilitator:** You subsequently went into different jobs.

**Respondent:** Yes different jobs.

**Facilitator:** What kind, clerical, manual labour.

**Respondent:** Yes clerical, and at some point I became a credit manager at a furniture shop. On three occasions a branch manager, still at furniture shops. The only place where I lasted was in Bophuthatswana. In Bophuthatswana of course I was a branch in Wonder Furnitures, that's where I worked for more than a year.

**Facilitator:** Why did you leave then after a year?

**Respondent:** After that year, there was one Boertjie who was the area manager, what was his surname again, I forget the surname. Anyway he came with that attitude of Boer mentality, no that did not gel with me, so I decided to put in on his place, more so Bophuthatswana was

a free country. So I told him where to get off, well he went to Head Office in Johannesburg, he gave his side of the story, I was not there to represent myself, and the following day of course I was shown the door. I left without any benefits, honestly, no blue card, no niks, no pro rata leave day. I was only given a months salary and shown the door. Then I went to town, that's when I joined a trade union. Tibana, this very same fellow who referred you to me. I started with him because he was always in the trade union movement.

**Facilitator:** How were you introduced to unions, you came from a different background, chemical and electricity.

**Respondent:** Yes I came from a different background. This very Tibane introduced me to trade unions, my aim was to go and ask for assistance from them, to fight my cause with my employer. At that time these guys of electrical, they wanted officials. So Tibane told me that there was a job at electrical, then they phoned the president Khoza, his son unfortunately is late, Raymond, of that union Electrical and Allied, I spoke to him over the phone and we made an appointment that I should come for an interview, on a Saturday they chose, that was after a week. I went for that interview. Of course at first they had misgivings that I was from management, from a different world all together, now how was I going to manage that side. I told them that I would manage, they gave me the job and of course they gave me (not clear) training out in Springs, I forget the building. I worked for a month in Springs whilst in training then from there on, then they unleashed me. They had no office here in Pretoria, they had to firms here, Asia and Siemens then I started organizing in other firms, then I established an office, then that was that. I started attending courses, I attended with Wits, it was a certificate in Professional Industrial Relations, sometime back. Of course I ascended those

ladders in the trade union movement, I even went to Tel Aviv in Israel, to see how unions worked that side, that was in 1986.

**Facilitator:** When you came in now to work after undergoing training in Springs, what was the general impression of the trade unions.

**Respondent:** I will tell you, I for one was happy to work for a trade union movement because it gave me leverage to interact with workers so that I able to talk to them and politicize them and so on and so forth. That gave me leverage to vent my anger against employers and so on and so forth, given my situation at my previous employer. I enjoyed it really, I enjoyed working with people in the trade union movement. The only snag of course was these detentions from time to time.

**Facilitator:** These detentions, what were they for exactly, what were the charges?

**Respondent:** The charges were pursuing the aims and objectives of a banned organisation or banned organisations. And at times they would search offices and find material there and arrest us for that, saying it's subversive and so on.

**Facilitator:** In this case which banned organizations, ANC, PAC.?

**Respondent:** PAC, I mean they were all banned by then.

**Facilitator:** But was there a PAC cell operating in Pretoria in the 1980s because you came in 1983 to work?

**Respondent:** Let me tell you, in the 1980s, if there was a cell then, then they were very secretive, and we wouldn't have know about it anyway, because it is only members of that cell who would know that they are there, the public would not know obviously.

**Facilitator:** So you came into work as an organizer in the trade union?

**Respondent:** Yes I came in as an organizer.

**Facilitator:** You were under CUSA?

**Respondent:** Yes the union was affiliated to CUSA and then CUSA after having merged with AZACTWU, it became NACTWU.

**Facilitator:** And what were the challenges of organizing workers then, that is 1983, apartheid had sunk its claws.

**Respondent:** Yes, I want to tell you, employers did not allow us in at times, and at times they would send police after us, I remember some time back, I organized some worker this side in Hercules, now I want there I first phoned the employer who was the owner and then I arranged a meeting to come and discuss with him the question of subscriptions and of course recognition agreement. I went there, the appointment was for the afternoon, I went the in the afternoon, only to be attacked by two officers. Now you can imagine you have organized the workers and the workers look at you as their saviour, only to find that you are now running away. Anyway I would not have waited for those bloody giants to attack me I had to take cover.

**Facilitator:** And the challenges faced by workers, in this electrical industry.

**Respondent:** In fact in electrical, we organized even metal workers as well, and electrical contractors as well. Now electrical and allied we mean places such as Asia, Siemens and all those that work with electronics and so and so forth, we used to organize them. You are talking about challenges.

**Facilitator:** Yes the kind of challenges that workers faced in the workplace.

**Respondent:** Yes of course exploitation, by this I mean a worker would be given a type of operation, a type of employment, that this is your operation, but only to find that he isn't paid a notch for that operation, maybe he is paid two notches down. Now in that case we had to apply to the industrial council to send in inspectors, to go and see if these workers are paid properly according to their operations and so on and so forth. And of course then, don't forget that it was during apartheid era. Our people, Africans, were less human than Indians and Coloureds, they used to be treated as third class citizens, and that's what we fought against as trade unions or trade union officials. And of course promotions, it's one other area, management used subtly to discriminate against our people. You wouldn't find an African being a supervisor where there are Indians and Coloureds, supervisors were most of the time Indians and coloureds. The safety clothing, some of our people lacked safety clothing, overalls, safety shoes and so on, because employers did not give them those things yearly or by yearly they took years before they could give them those things in some instances, and in some instances workers used their own clothes which of course was a challenge too. Those are some of the challenges our people faced. You find a young man sending an old man, George go to the shops or canteen for me, a young Boertjie sending an old man simply because he is a Boer, those are some of the

challenges our people faced. One other thing that our people experienced was that employers would tell them at the eleventh hour that there's overtime, whereas the Labour Relations Act says that people have to be informed timeously, at least three days before that they would be required to work over time on such and such a day, not tell them there and then when they are about to knock off. Now those are some of the challenges our people faced.

**Facilitator:** And then salaries and benefits.

**Respondent:** Obviously, our people were the least paid, they were down on the ladder, of course they got other benefits, others they did not get.

**Facilitator:** But were there measures (not clear) to pull out, CUSA or before that Electrical?

**Respondent:** Yes. The companies that I represented, Asia, Siemens, Grenel, now those are factories that went on strike and their strikes lasted longer than most companies. With Siemens and Asia we share membership with MAWU, MAWU was an affiliate to COSATU. There of course, I am telling you, workers would go on strike anytime. And now as a workforce workers had agreed that, there's this thing called a sympathy strike, workers agreed that if another group is affected they will join, they used to say an injury to one is an injury to all. Where I did not share membership was Grenel, which was a subsidiary of Denel, now those are the people who were notorious on sending special branch on me. The majority of the employees there were coloureds and whites, our people were in the minority, however I managed to organize both so called coloureds and whites into my union, and when we went on strike they all went on strike, which was a new thing in the



history of that company. One company I can tell you about, Rayrol, it was in Olifantsfontein, that's also one company where I used to do strikes.

**Facilitator:** Women issues, like maternity and so on, were those an issue in this particular industry?

**Respondent:** Yes of course, we had maternity leave, we negotiated paternity leave, management acceded, and then came with family responsibility leave, now family responsibility leave is leave that one takes when there's death in the family or something like that. Of course those we got from management, the only problem with ladies is that, more especially coloureds, they would only enjoy supervisory positions and not above that. And of course if there was discrimination it was based on race, otherwise when it came to labour matters we fought a lot.

**Facilitator:** Was electrical openly BC.

**Respondent:** I'll tell you, no it was not. Electrical, we had members of BC, ANC and PAC so therefore we were not a particular political line, except individuals of course.

**Facilitator:** But the merger with AZACTWU, how did that affect or begin to influence the politics on the ground with workers.

**Respondent:** I'll tell you that merger created problems for some of us, we used to call them Abomnyamana.

**Facilitator:** The AZACTWU guys?

**Respondent:** The AZAPO guys, because AZACTWU was formed by AZAPO or BC affiliates. As I say there were Africanists as well and those that we called Charterists. But now the fight that was there was between Africanists and BC guys because BC guys wanted to take control of the union and Africanists also wanted to take control, that's where the problem was. With us officials it became worse because we rub shoulders even at shop floor level. I remember sometime back we had Mndaweni who was president of CUSA then, addressing us here in Pretoria, then came guys from Johannesburg who were BC, there was merely havoc on that day, so I am trying to say it wasn't easy sailing. We did not tolerate one another, maybe it's because we were still immature, you understand what I am saying, I mean politically immature.

**Facilitator:** What was the bone of contention exactly, was it money or power?

**Respondent:** It was just power.

**Facilitator:** At the end of the day what happened, there was of course eventually a merger...

**Respondent:** There was a merger and at the end of the day we sobered up and tolerated and accepted one another, in as much as I am still friends with some of them. For instance the gentlemen who referred you to me, he is BC. And even ANC guys, I am happy that I live in Atteridgeville you know, politicians here in Atteridgeville tolerate one another, BC, ANC, PAC tolerate one another, we are friends we (not clear) together and the like, unlike in other places where you'll find no go areas and so forth.

**Facilitator:** Yes that's true. But then after NACTWU had been formed, and then parallel to that was COSATU, what did that mean in practice.

**Respondent:** That was democracy at play. Initially, COSATU, what was it called again.

**Facilitator:** FOSATU.

**Respondent:** NACTWU was CUSA, it was alone, and there was this federation of Abomnyamana, AZACTWU, whose president was Khandelani Novolovotwe, you must have heard about him.

**Facilitator:** I have yes.

**Respondent:** So they were there, they were existing, then came a time where there was this proposal that these federations should merge and become one. We had lengthy discussions at CWJ, that's where we used to have meetings, with people like Moses Mayekiso, Cyril Ramaphosa and Alec Erwin, and others. What separated us was again the question of the Freedom Charter, guys you espouse the Freedom Charter and we are saying we are saying we are neutral, because if we come into you and also espouse the Freedom Charter, it would mean you have swallowed us, we shant be loyal to our ideologies, and so on and so forth, that's what happened. So instead AZACTWU merged with CUSA to form NACTWU, and FOSATU merged with other unions that were independent, became bigger and formed COSATU.

**Facilitator:** In terms of strength, was this a loss to NACTWU, the formation of COSATU, you went that way and COSATU went that way.

**Respondent:** There was this thing all along, which unfortunately still prevails even right now for some of these formations. The NACTWU leadership would say they do not want blood money. In order for a federation to grow and so on and so forth, there should be programmes or development, there must be money. Now the leadership of NACTWU used to entertain that they don't want blood money, they could not grow the unions and the federation because of lack of funds and of course COSATU grew up to where it is today. NACTWU is still there, but you seldom hear about it, same as PAC, it is there but you seldom hear about it. Well, at times we've been in the media, when it comes to some of us we close one eye, but anyway these are politics of the day, nothing important. COSATU is a big federation.

**Facilitator:** Was there tension between NACTWU and COSATU?

**Respondent:** Not that I know of.

**Facilitator:** Even in the workplace, the workers?

**Respondent:** No, the workers also as I say, we pulled one and the same struggle with the workers.

**Facilitator:** And the formation of UWUSA had no impact on NACTWU?

**Respondent:** No, UWUSA, but anyway I was out of the trade union movement by then, but I don't think it had any impact, honestly. Is it still existing?

**Facilitator:** No it's no longer there. But how long were you there in the unions.

**Respondent:** As I said it was from 1983 to 1989.

**Facilitator:** So when left, your highest position occupied?

**Respondent:** Regional organizer.

**Facilitator:** Of NACTWU.

**Respondent:** Of MEWUSA.

**Facilitator:** Not of NACTWU.

**Respondent:** NACTWU is the federation, so it was of an affiliate.

**Facilitator:** When you left in 1989, and when you look back what would you say were the milestones?

**Respondent:** When I look back my brother, let me tell you, my heart fills with tears, my heart really bleeds, more especially when looking at the very same union I worked for. It is almost extinct. Maybe I should start by saying why I left the union in 1989, it was not my intention. There was this scene where AZAPO being in the leadership at branch level, and of course we went so good friends with them, some members of AZAPO of course, not all of them. The problem was that most of the workers that I organized are (Abompamanyana), they did not like that, then they said I was making a union of PAC, they did not approve of that. They called me to a DC, when I came there I found that office full of AZAPO members even those who are not on the branch executive. I told them that if they are not going to recuse themselves I was not going to sit down, I was going to go home. Then I was told I was fired, and that was that.

**Facilitator:** Any regrets, because one day you just came back from work and said to your wife you were fired?

**Respondent:** That was that, anyway let me tell you. I didn't just sit down and fold my arms and said no I was fired. Just next to the office, our office along Bosman street, Bosman and Jacob Mare, across the street was a block of shops, I got a shop there and started selling clothing and school uniform just to keep me going. Of course that's when now I started dedicating my energy and everything else towards my political party.

**Facilitator:** You mentioned earlier that you were nearly sent to Robben Island.

**Respondent:** I was fortunate not to have been sent to Robben Island, yes of course that other dungeons I've been to, after detention they would take me to Erasmia, at times to C Smart, different police stations.

**Facilitator:** Any regrets for being involved in unions, was it a waste of your time, bitterness and so on.

**Respondent:** Brother let me tell you, if today I get somebody who says I have got a job for you in trade union movement, I'll go running. I don't regret my time in trade unionism, I'll honestly go running because I know I might be of assistance to the workers. Because as I said to you earlier on, I am afraid, honestly I keep on asking myself a question just where is trade unionism going nowadays, it pains me a lot. So I do not regret.

**Facilitator:** And these bouts of arrest, how did they impact on the family.

**Respondent:** Then my daughter was, how old was she, she was still young, I was still staying at home with my parents, that impacted a lot on my parents, more especially my mom. Because they would come right in the belly of the night to pick me up. And mind you when getting a visit they don't make an appointment and they don't knock like they are gentlemen. Yes of course that impacted a lot on my parents, on my daughter as well. I remember on some occasions my daughter would swear at them.

**Facilitator:** Really?

**Respondent:** Really. For instance the last time they picked me up was in 1983, during the PAC shoot, remember?

**Facilitator:** I remember those (not clear)

**Respondent:** I am the only one who was picked up in Attridgeville, my daughter became sick and tired of police picking me up from time to time, now she became brave. That maketh her a woman, she is today married, she has two kids, she's ok, she stays out in Midrand.

**Facilitator:** In 1990 you actually began to, after being expelled from the union, worked for the PAC. What did it take to reorganize the PAC, it had now been banned since 1960, it now operated for the first time in South Africa.

**Respondent:** The organization was unbanned in 1990, then we started working. I became Secretary for a local government, I think civic affairs and local government, something like that, local government, Secretary for that desk in local government. And of course we worked,

represented communities, different municipalities, and at the same time organizing for PAC.

**Facilitator:** Was it worth it, as the last question, to get involved in the unions.

**Respondent:** Yes it was worth it.

**Facilitator:** In what way maybe, self fulfillment?

**Respondent:** Yes, self fulfillment and of course the chance, I shant say the right, the chance to be able to organize people who are in a work situation, organize them into this political organsiation of mine, that was a good chance for me. As I say, self fulfillment, being happy to stand up against employers, and of course I excelled, I must say. I was a Julius Malema of the time.

**Facilitator:** Any cases that you can sight that still stick in your memory, I am sure some of them you will find in journals. Right, several of them, one case I remember is when I represented a fellow who worked for an electronic company at Hercules. Now that fellow had been given several warnings and written warnings by management. And then he worked at their reception area, stores, so it happened one day that this fellow be tempted to steal a TV set, he got caught. So management fired him. He came to the office and gave me the story, I phoned management to arrange for a meeting. Of course they agreed, I think I went there the following day, sat down with management, the best part of the day. Things did not go away on the day, anyway we ended p at the industrial council. It was a lengthy process it took more than two months. We ended up at the industrial council, and I won the case. They found him with the TV having stolen it, but I won the case.



That is one case that gave me a good standing in that company with the workers. One other case I won, it was at Grenel for two fellows who fought at work, usually management says fighting is dismissal, but anyway I was able to represent those workers, the coloured and the white person. They were both members of my union, but then anyway, they were not fired, instead they were given warnings and they continued working, that was one good case. Other cases, at Tedalex, because the driver and his crew stole more than one TV, but anyway I won the case, they were reinstated. At Rayrol in Olifantsfontein, it was a case of one employee clocking for the other and it's a summary and (not clear) dismissal case, it also took some time, but ultimately I won the case. Those are the cases I still remember, I won't forget.

**Facilitator:** And the industrial council was it effective, the perception of it.

**Respondent:** Yes it was effective, because that was the only recourse one had, industrial council, from industrial council then to industrial court or maybe arbitration. Yes of course, I'd say it was, because one would be in a better position to argue with the employer at a neutral place. Because when they are at their places of employment they tend to gang up against you, they would call a manager from such and such, and at the industrial council, no you are just two, it's either he is with his assistant and I am with somebody who is taking notes, but we are just the two, facing one another. So I would say yes, it did help in a way, it did honestly, yes it was effective. Well it depends on the individuals on how they view the industrial council. But I would say yes, it was effective.

**Facilitator:** Is there anything that you think is important, which should have been part of this interview?

**Respondent:** Anything important, regarding?

**Facilitator:** Your experience in the unions, any (not clear) or challenges or something you think we should have talked about in this as well.

**Respondent:** I think you have covered most of the things (not clear). No that's about it.

**Facilitator:** Any closing word maybe.

**Respondent:** First and foremost let me thank you for having phoned me to arrange this interview. To be honest with you although of course I did not know what is it that you were going to interview me about, however I honestly feel good, I feel honored to be interviewed by you today. It reminds me of those days, the olden days when I was still in the trade union movement. It makes me think back and it makes think of going back to the trade union movement to work again, unfortunately my years are gone now, nobody will employ me. However I will keep on making contributions the way that I am able to and from where I am. I hope honestly speaking what you are doing now goes a long way and the world reads about what you are doing and then let most of our people know, most especially those trade unionists and government officials who keep on exploiting our people to enrich themselves. Honestly, this is not what we struggled for, we struggle for liberation of the masses of our motherland, not to be exploited by others. Maybe if they read your book they will come to their sense, and I wish you good luck and Ndlelanhle from here.

**Facilitator:** Thanks for that....

**END**

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