

## Osborne Galeni

### Summary

Osborne Galeni was born in the 1950s in Barkly East in the Eastern Cape. The son of a farmer he experienced how apartheid and the policy of forcing Africans into homelands, coupled with a devastating drought in 1968, resulted in his father losing his livestock and being forced into wage labour in Johannesburg.

Galeni finished JC and then poverty forced him to go and look for work in Jhb with his father to help support his mother and younger siblings who were still schooling. He completed his matric through Damelin in Jhb and found work first in the Post Office and then the mines where he spent almost 2 years – underground and on the surface. He then worked for General Erection on the East Rand (now called Genrec) and then the railways.

He became unionised while working at the railways (he worked there for 11 years) where he joined the parallel union for Africans called the SA Boilermakers Union (SABS). However he realised the limitations of the union – it was not a fighting union, it just took workers' money and failed to take up unfair dismissals and health and safety issues. He then took his whole department across to Mawu after the Wiehahn Commission allowed African workers to join trade unions.

The interview relates his involvement in Mawu as a shop steward, local secretary and then a local organiser. He schooled with Gwede Mantashe and Enoch Godongwana in Cala and this friendship continued in Jhb through their union involvement. He describes how they set up street committees and how these linked naturally to the work of a shop steward. He also talks of the stayaways and consumer boycotts during the time of Fosatu and how these were organised together with other trade unions.

He defends Fosatu's argument that it should first build strong factory floor organisation before taking a more overt political role. He describes how the formation of Cosatu with its size allowed the federation to take on much more of a political role. He believes that Cosatu's decision to deploy its leaders to the first parliament was a mistake.

Moving on to the present, he criticises the Seta system that he believes has destroyed the training of artisans. He criticises the transformation that is taking place now and comments on previous CEOs who worked their way up through the ranks of their companies before being appointed CEOs and how this enabled them to know how each and every part of their company worked.

Facilitator: This is an interview with Baba Osborne Galeni, we are in Germiston, the date is 31 September 2011, interview is done by Brown Maaba. Tata thanks very much for your time, you can speak any language you are comfortable with. Please give me a background as to where you were born, your background, your family, whether rich or poor and how you eventually ended up in the world of unions?

Respondent: I am from a very poor family, my father was a farmer, he used to have a little stock of cattle and sheep and he used to move between the farmers around Elliot and Barkly East and when there's drought he would move away from the rural areas and ..(unclear) at the farms. I was born on a certain farm in Barkly East in the 1950s. I grew up around Eastern Cape. I started schooling when my father settled at Cala, originally my father was born in Bazier in Umtata. Our clan is Mpondomise.

Facilitator: so your father was a farmer in the 1960s?

Respondent: when I was about 11 years, he used to go to farms and hire a span of oxen to to plough so that his cattle and sheep can stay in the farms when there's drought. We were in Barkly East most of the time up in the mountains.

Facilitator: What kind of challenges did he face as a black farmer?

Respondent: A lot, because if you remember by then, I think tools like tractors were not so many, even the white farmers did not have so many. Some of the white farmers were still very small and they wouldn't want to see a black person which a huge stock or herd of cattle and so on. They would even reject him and not allow him on to their farms. Some of them they would want him to reduce the stock that he was having if he was in their farm. The other thing that was very pressing to him, a challenge that he faced was the drought, when there's drought some of the stock would die. In rural areas because there was a congestion of people and cattle, the cattle would die – that frustrated my father, that made him to be very bastorial to simply drive and move out. The other challenge that he faced is when he started to count cattle, taking them to the dipping tank and all that, with those numbers. Just imagine going beyond the Drakensberg in Barkly East. During the day cattle would be taken for counting and so on, if you look at the miles that he would travel it was a problem when he started the process of counting the stock.

Facilitator: you said you lived in Cala

Respondent: We stayed at Cala and came back, he then didn't want to go back to Umtata, he decided to settle because he was running away from the family, we have a very large family in Bazier, then he decided to settle in Cala. This is where I grew up and went to school

Facilitator: Did he stop farming?

Respondent: Yes when he was no longer bastorial now, especially the drought of 1968, it devastated the majority of the stock that he had and then he went through a severe reduction, I think by the 1970s he had less than 20. He was devastated, the stock was almost finished. The only stock that he was left with was goats which he resisted up to the 1980s, he even had donkeys. The stock was with the Dutchman

but he resisted up to the 1980s, even after my father he is still there. There's nothing left now.

Facilitator: How did you end up in Gauteng, what about schooling up to how far did you study?

Respondent: I attended school in Inxenga, not very far from where I stayed, and then I completed my Standard 6 I think it was in 1969, then I went to Matanzima High School it was a Senior Secondary then. I did my Junior Certificate there because of my problem, 1971/72 and then I left because I could see that my father was no longer fit to work. He was sickly and then my mother became my pillar of support. I was accepted to go to high school but realised that if I went to high school my mother wouldn't be able to afford the fees. That's when my father brought me here and got me work. I then left and went to work in the mines. After working in the ...(unclear) mines, I left and worked for General ..(unclear), and then I left and went to work for Dorbyl. After that I joined the trade union. I did my Matric privately, I attended.

My first life of politics is when I was doing Matric at Damelin and also doing classes at the SA Institute of Race Relations, that's where I got my experience with people like Mashinini, Tsietsi, Sithuso and many others now I see they are ..(unclear), we met and we studied together at the Institute of Race Relations. Do you remember Solomon Mahlangu, we had his commemoration there, at ..(unclear) to do his commemoration there, where we were planning even the Soweto Uprising, we planned them there before 1976, we used to meet there and so on, we studied at the SA Institute of ..(unclear). That was my political life.

Facilitator: You first worked at the Post Office and then you went to the mines?

Respondent: To the mines

Facilitator: I thought Post Office would be more comfortable as compared to mines?

Respondent: Yes ..(unclear) but what interested me was I was not very far from the mines, it was ..(unclear), we used to see people full of mud, with maps etc., from underground ..(unclear) I was interested to see what is happening, how can thousands of people come out of a hole everyday, I used to see them everyday and I had an interest. I then went to see the mine manager and told him I want to see what is happening, I want to go and work there and so on. He was also shocked. Then he said to me "you are a real man". He then took me to an acclimatisation centre in Anchel??, then I resigned from the Post Office and went to this acclimatisation centre and went underground. I worked there for six months, I went all over. Actually I never worked, I was touring because this white man was an old man and people working in the mine were very old, and he sees this young boy who is bold wants to go there. Then he sent me there. I was first in the acclimatisation centre for about 18 days. The 18 days I went down there the mine managers were showing me all the sections of the mine, how things were done, he showed me everything all over for six months. He moved me around. The mines were still operating at the time. There were two shafts, the one where I used to see people coming out of, and then there was another mine, currently it's a shopping centre, the place used to be a mine. So all those mines belonged to one group of mines, East Rand Property Mines ..(unclear).

Facilitator: What did you learn exactly from the mines, you were there for six months?

Respondent: I learnt a lot of things, what they call timbers, when the rocks fall how do you deal with the rocks, how do you monitor .. (unclear) even when I was outside I was doing studies but I couldn't stay – before a rock fall you will hear cracks, even the timbers that we used to support it they would crack, there would be cracks

within the timber, then you will know that it's coming. So that's what we learnt. And also methane, you could smell it – it had a very funny smell. And also the escaping route, Enzular was the second deepest shaft by then, the second one was the one that was at Boksburg station – underground it was about 3 to 4 miles. I learnt how they work and how people are managed. After 6 months I was taken out and started working as a DPO, sort of a human resource manager, I would look at people who would go down to keep records and so on. When the miners come from underground, they were in thousands, if somebody got hurt underground and was not able to come out, you would see his lump on the rack and then I had to go down and see what happened to him.

Facilitator: And you were there for six months?

Respondent: Underground 6 months and then I came back and worked for another 6 months, I almost took about 2 years. I then got bored and left the industry.

Facilitator: So which industry did you join after mining?

Respondent: I went to what they call Genrec today it was General Erection in Wadeville, I worked for that company for a year. I worked as a junior in the drawing office and the accountants – we were doing frames. I had a fight with a white guy and I left. I then joined ..(unclear) the Railways, I stayed there for 11 years. I was older then, this is where I joined the trade union. I joined the union, South African Boilermakers Society, I was then elected as the Regional President. In those days we had Liaison Committee laws, you first had to join the Liaison Committee before you joined the union. We were divided into four sections: white workers, Indians, coloureds and blacks. So I was the president of the black section. And then when the Wiehahn Commission passed a law in 1979, I decided to take all the members that we had, we were about 6000. We had three sections: we had the engine

department, the department which was building railways, - we joined MAWU in the 1980s.

Facilitator: So your first interaction with unions, when was it exactly?

Respondent: 1975/76

Facilitator: How did it happen?

Respondent: When they were forming Liaison Committees, what happened is trade unions were organised to organise workers according to their race. So a certain guy, Mofokeng, he worked for the South African Boilermakers Society, he advised us not to join the Liaison Committee but rather to join the union, which we did

Facilitator: But were the majority of workers willing to join the trade union?

Respondent: Yes they were willing to join, it depends on who is recruiting, the majority joined, we managed to recruit all of them, and also the attitude of the company was not bad ..(unclear) which was white.

Facilitator: The kinds of problems that needed to be addressed when unions were formed?

Respondent: What made me leave the South African Boilermakers Society is when I realised that it's toothless. From 1976 the struggles we had, the need to take up arms, issues of transformation, the training of the people and so on which we

managed – black workers were trained as welders, artisans etc., I was trained to be an instructor (interruption – phone rang) – I was trained to be the first black worker, as an instructor, I trained people to weld, to operate overhead cranes etc., Wits University assisted us, I passed my courses, I became a crane overhead and mobile crane instructor as well as welding instructor. When we were at South African Boilermakers Society, cases of accidents where the company was negligent, nothing happened.

Facilitator: What was the problem?

Respondent: Our issues were not taken seriously, we struggled before MAWU was accepted and recognised. The South African Boilermakers were not around, they went to departments, collecting papers from 6000 workers and did not do anything for them.

Facilitator: What was the problem?

Respondent: They didn't want

Facilitator: Why, because it was not a sweetheart union?

Respondent: yes they could see that things were changing, there were a lot of strikes in 1982/83 and they knew that MAWU was behind the strikes

Facilitator: But eventually did they accept MAWU?

Respondent: They accepted it, we forced them

Facilitator: How long did it take, one or two years?

Respondent: The Recognition Agreement took about 6 months to organise workers, they recognised us. I went around personally and encouraged people to join – we went around and organised everybody

Facilitator: What was your position with MAWU?

Respondent: Shop steward, I became the first local secretary, we had educational secretaries that were stationed as organisers in the office, they collated information about the education of workers – it was myself and Charles Bezuidenhout, we were elected and worked with Adrienne Bird, he was sitting behind me

Facilitator: The challenges of being a shop steward?

Respondent: I was dismissed

Facilitator: After 11 years or before?

Respondent: Before that, I think it was my fourth or fifth year, they dismissed me and I won the case and came back, the Initiator was Tim Trolley and I was represented by Thompson. I was dismissed for insubordination. It was myself, Dlamini and Sydney Maxabashane. They reinstated us. From then onwards they never troubled us, they worked with us and allowed us to deal with issues. We changed managers. At one

stage we dismissed a manager and did not allow him to come back, we slept in the factory and he never came back.

Facilitator: What challenges did you address, the workers demands?

Respondent: Issues of wages, in 1981 MAWU decided not to negotiate at a ..(unclear), we formed the first Industrial Council. If you go back to the 1980s, you will get the history about Industrial Councils were scrapped - ..(unclear) they created an environment of acrimony – workers did not want Industrial Councils because they were not doing anything for them. When we went back in 1981 Bernie Fanaroff will tell you, it was a debate in FOSATU that they were .., some of the people were saying it's dangerous to take .., we are killing the very ..(unclear) aggressive and progressive union by going there, they said we must learn to ..(unclear) union that became sweetheart and did nothing for the workers. We debated that and said we don't believe that. We wanted to grow within Industrial Council and use the levers of powers that we had within and achieve more. We joined the Industrial Council in 1981, 1982, 1983 and then in 1984 we had about 14 000 members, by 1984/5/6 we were the biggest, so South African Boilermakers that was very dormant ..(unclear) and Steel Engineering and Allied Workers Union, they all collapsed. We became the giant union. In 1986/87 we dominated ..(unclear) – this created a situation whereby the workers attitude in the industry changed. We pulled a big strike. We declared strikes, by then COSATU was not there, it was FOSATU, MAWU declared a stay away as MAWU which became a national stay away. We managed to bring workers together across the country. It was very powerful.

Facilitator: Were the stay aways effective?

Respondent: Very effective

Facilitator: In what way?

Respondent: Stay aways that we had is we developed a song .., what we used to do is, when we met at a certain place, we used to meet at Kattlehong, ..(unclear) the place belonged to an older funeral undertaker. We would meet and discuss issues, we would get students to join us, and other unions CWIU, Sweet Food not FAWU, Sweet Food became FAWU, Transport and General Workers, Textile which became SACTWU, we would all meet and discuss, decide on a date of the stay away, because the students were part of us, transport was there also, it was mainly trains and buses. We would go to bus stations and train stations and stop people from going to work, this was very effective. We also had boycotts, we monitored the boycotts, we would stand at bus stops and check people that are coming from town with purchases and we would throw them away. The same we did at the train stations. We won't be able to do that now because people have cars, and there are too many taxis, in those days there wasn't such a lot of transport, we were able to mobilise people.

Facilitator: The strikes that you were involved in?

Respondent: The strikes that happened were not informed by trade unions, in some cases we would be demanding an increase of 10 cents. They would refuse and we would go back and come back and renegotiate. So the strikes that happened around Wadeville which drew the attention of Bernie Fanaroff, they came up and organised people to join MAWU. Strikes were all over the East Rand in various industries. There was another strike, Scaw Metals, most people were dismissed but after MAWU's intervention some were reinstated, so there were various strikes. The most important ones were stay aways, national stay aways, resisting against apartheid.

Facilitator: what about go slows?

Respondent: Yes, for instance we were building a railway line, if we were angry we would dig the welding rods in water, a welding rod if is put in water it dries up but would create a lot of pores in the iron. The other one we did was all the wagons that we produced using those rods would be scrapped or sometimes we would just work very slow – we used to produce about 20 wagons a day, we would produce 9 or 10 instead of the 20. We would plan this, they would come and try and find out what is the delay, we just worked slowly. We knew the work and we would deliberately delay the process. The senior managers, superintendents and directors would come and fight with us and we will say what is the problem, we knew it was deliberate. In some cases they would call engineers who did not understand what was going on, there will be more delays. That was our go slow.

Facilitator: Other problems like safety at work and so on, those were major issues?

Respondent: The major issues ..., my reason for leaving the South African Boilermaker Society were issues of safety, it was terrible, people were burning, people were getting hurt at the workplace, nobody cared if the workers were injured. The union South African Boilermakers I used to go every week to fight cases of injury. After joining MAWU that's where we saw cases being handled. The Industrial Council which was formed in the 1980s was not yet powerful. I remember, the Minister of Trade and Industry, Danny he once came to a meeting and appreciated that we did a lot about safety issues, it was tabled in the PFP party.

Facilitator: What about issues of exploitation, how rife was that?

Respondent: People were not getting paid and they were dismissed at any time. Most people were employed on contract basis. Those were the issues, a foreman can wake up and decide he doesn't like you, he will just dismiss you for no reason. When MAWU came in they started representing the workers. Some of the cases

would start at Industrial Council to the Industrial Court – for instance Matlala, he was working here, the factory was closed ....(unclear) – I was ready to handle his case, to date the case was never dealt with, it was referred to the Industrial Court and was never heard. People were dismissed and not getting paid. After joining MAWU we had forums where we would negotiate. The South African Boilermaker Society, there were no negotiations, the president of the union and the general secretary would take the side of the employer and decide the workers' fate, and their increases without involving the workers. The Industrial Council introduced forums where discussions were held. Other industries joined after they saw the success of the strikes. We were chasing cases like the current disciplinary hearing of the ANC. We went all over.

Facilitator: What were the issues around racism and so on, were those challenges in the workplace?

Respondent: A black person, we had separate amenities, you would be dismissed for using the coloured toilets, you would be dismissed. We did not share canteens. There were certain jobs that black people could not do. Black supervisors were not allowed to instruct white workers, if you are black you could only supervise black workers only. Any white person was allowed to instruct any black person. There was a huge gap in the salaries/wages. Training was not offered to black people. Black clerks were not doing anything except to collect clock cards. White officials would handle clock cards for white officials. It was terrible. We also had separate change rooms, you would be fired if you went into the white change rooms. What was ironic was people who smoked they would share cigarettes/dagga there was no discrimination there. Others would go and drink behind the toilets, no discrimination. This would not happen during the day only at night shift. There were some elements of integration. At night they would cook together but not during the day when their seniors are around, they did not want to be seen to be friendly with blacks.

Facilitator: The issue of racism at work was it solved after 1990 or before that?

Respondent: We fought hard for it. Towards 1986/87 all facilities were open to all races. At train stations the board blankes/whites boards were removed. We no longer had separate amenities. Some of the offices insisted on keeping things as they were, we fought until we won, it was done away with. The problem was now with senior positions. The higher positions were still kept by whites, they would employ black superintendents – but the highest positions were given whites. They employed black people as personnel officers, instead of monitoring the clock cards they were now employed as personnel officers. Unions were becoming strong – some power was given to black people. Blacks were never given managing positions until recently. The highest level was personnel officer – their authority was weakened. The white personnel officers had more authority. When black workers took over as personnel officers, a white supervisor still had more power than the personnel officer, they had the titles but no power. They would not upgrade your salary or give you any form of training. Black supervisors were there to discipline other black people, they had the title but no power. They virtually had no power. To date, all the black managers, I don't think they have the power. If you go to Eskom, I am still organising at Eskom to date. Allen Morgan would stop a power station as the Chief Executive, he would walk around the power station and simply instruct a company to go and service the machines. This is not happening today, black chief executive officers will not do that.

Facilitator: What's wrong with today's CEO's?

Respondent: They are useless, they are clerks, actually they are appointing people to be chief executives, the people that do not understand anything about the business, they just sit there, drive German cars. But when it comes to the actual work of the entity it is zero.

Facilitator: Didn't you complain about issues of transformation? Is this not transformation?

Respondent: What I'm saying is the current transformation is not really transformation, they just put you there for the integrity of the entity. Some people are given the jobs even though they don't have the knowledge. All the Maroga's .. in Eskom, I worked for Maroga and ..(unclear) many of them, but when I compare them with Allen Morgan, as the chief executive, he had started as an apprentice he was promoted to artisan, he then grew to be a power station superintendent, he then became a manager and then general manager of the group and then finally chief executive. When there's a problem in any power station, with or without engineers, he would be called in, he would know what to do. He would come here and deal with the problem himself, he would go as far as Ellisras. He understood the business and would work with the people. The chief executives that we have now are there in name they have no knowledge of the industry. Go to Railways, it's the same, go to Iscor and look at Hans Smith. He started as a labourer and worked his way up and became the chief executive, he knew the work. When there's a problem at a plant he would go and lead the delegation to deal with the problem. The type of arrangement that we have today, an accountant is given a job for a company that builds engines/blocks/cars, an accountant understands finances and does not have any knowledge of the industry. What value is this person going to add to the performance of the engine and building up a car. That is a problem we are facing. People who are occupying those positions are black people. I'm saying it's deliberate because they've taken the knowledge away from the black people so that they won't be able to do it.

Facilitator: What needs to be done to transform the industry?

Respondent: I think that is a problem, our people need to be trained, we need to develop people, so that people can be able to perform and know what is going on outside. I worked with Nampak, they developed their own managers, their own artisans from the plant. The problem with Nampak was they used to train people, develop them, once they are qualified they would be poached by other companies that were not offering training. They were running at a loss. So

sometimes developing people is a disadvantage, because people are being poached it should not be an excuse not to develop them. For instance if you look at transformation, when we took over in 1994. We have an apprentice system that produced skills for white workers, excluding blacks during the time when there was trade embargos, countries did not want to trade with South Africa. We produced skills where we were able to forge and develop people, building institutions that were exclusively white to the apprentice system that is growing up which produced skills for white workers – those workers I met them all over in the world, leading huge institutions, managers, directors etc. They were trained in this country but they left after 1994 and also late in the 1980s, others left before that. When we took over in 1994, we destroyed apartheid and the institutions that we should have saved. We now are lacking in skills. We have what we call SETAs, what are they doing? They are not producing engineers. People get government certificates, they have no degrees but because ..(unclear) they became engineers – when you look at what's happening right now, Setas got a lot of money, they are board room institutions that produce nothing. Do you know any engineer that is produced by the Seta's, do you know any artisan that was produced by the Setas, they are board room institutions, they have all resources which are not being used, our children are walking the streets and not being developed. The institutions that were there before produced skilled workers for the white people (phone rang). We need to go back to basics. I told you how I went through the mining system, I know what is happening in the mines. I learnt a lot from the mines, you were not allowed to go underground without understanding how to block the blood vein and so on if there's an accident, whether you were educated or not, you would be given practical skills. They were properly trained. They developed a language because they could not communicate, Fanakalo – but they somehow managed to communicate. They had to use pictures and so on to communicate, you would find that in some cases a person is highly qualified .., what do we do today? We are glued in books, we think people were wasted because they couldn't do that. We had a system that was very racial, but when you look at the basics that were established, we had very good foundations which we could have built from, we destroyed it.

Facilitator: That is true and it is gone

Respondent: Now the education system is just as bad, I never went to university, I studied through the Bantu Education. When libraries were opened at Wits University we used to walk into Wits University, we read and developed from a very bad foundation. Maybe we are not good in Maths and Science – although the education system was bad it was good for us. What I'm saying is although it was bad, I think the new one is worse. Everything is collapsed and I think they want us to do that.

Facilitator: What were the benefits of the workers in the 1980s, did workers have benefits?

Respondent: There were no benefits in the 1980s, there were those companies that because they were liberal in the industry, they were few. Some companies would go to a bank or to IGI Insurance company and buy insurance policies for workers, or pension funds etc., because there was no legislation forcing employers to buy pension for its workers. Workers were completely disregarded until 1979. The mining industry had something called TEBA, monies were deposited into TEBA on behalf of the workers. Black workers did not have pension funds in the 1950s/1960s up to 1979. The Wiehahn Commission introduced benefits for black workers. After that collective bargaining of engaging employers also assisted. We first had pension fund which was converted to provident fund, etc. If you go back, companies like the South African Railways had a pension in place. State institutions were putting money aside for their workers so that they can have money when they retire. There was no legislation forcing employers to do this, some would get it others didn't, nobody knew whether they will get it or not.

Facilitator: The position of women in the workplace?

Respondent: In the food and chemical industry we had women, they were absent in the steel industry, very absent in the mines, they didn't even exist in mine hospitals. In those days it was very rare to find a female doctor in the mines. The sectors were dominated by male. It is only recent that we have women. In the canteens, food was prepared by men.

Facilitator: Did that affect the structure of MAWU in some ways, the executive and so on?

Respondent: In the union, the first general secretary of MAWU was a woman, her name was Thembi Nabe .., (unclear), she was black I think she emigrated. What I'm saying is this thing of non racialism, non sexist etc., when progressive trade unions were formulated, it was fundamental to a male dominated situation. We began to see and discuss the issue of gender – trade unions tabled gender issues. The workplace was changed, across industries women were slowly being employed. That was the transformation agenda. I never expected especially the mining sector to employ women, I've seen it now. The agenda was initiated by women. The hostels were huge, you wouldn't see a woman, you would only see them waiting around the gate. Men would strip and walk naked to the showers because they knew there are no women in sight. Women are now working in canteens and clean the offices, I have not seen them on the production line. They were sometimes appointed as operators. At Bell Equipment this is where I first saw women welding, I was shocked to see women welding. Young articulate women were trained as welders.

Facilitator: The whole issue of non racialism were you all in agreement with non racialism?

Respondent: We had politics, for instance we had the politics of 1976 where we equally died,. we were beyond sexism, girls were killed equally in the streets, serving

in structures of the youth movement equally. When we held discussions this is how we saw a need for equality. I almost left the country, I could not because my father was sick. There was no question that others had to leave. The trade unions nowadays have created disparities in salaries, in the early 1980s if people were earning R400 it was the same for everybody. Now there are different levels.

Facilitator: And the formation of COSATU in 1995 did it transform things, FOSATU to COSATU? How were things affected by that move, the transition?

Respondent: There were many unions that were engaged in the process. The split of NUM from a union that was very big in mining, the split of NUM, Ramaphosa and them – it changed the landscape. What was centred around the formation of COSATU is the politics. If you remember FOSATU, when in FOSATU we didn't want to entertain an engagement with the organs of the state. We didn't want to talk to the ministers. We wanted to build the muscle of the weakest so that they become organised and strong. Unions like SAAWU, Siza Njikelana, Kikine were very critical and also other people from exile, they were critical of FOSATU – ministers wanted to engage with FOSATU but it was a policy that we do not engage with them. I agree with the people that were leading the process. The criticism was that as a union we should not get too involved in politics because we might lose. We needed the capacity to build the organisation. SACTU was an example, they became too involved in politics and we didn't want to find ourselves in such a situation. We formed an Industrial Council that fought for worker benefits, fighting the employer, fighting the state indirectly – criticising apartheid. We wanted the employer to pressurise the state to do away with apartheid. But when COSATU was formed, we were forming a giant union movement that will take us to liberation. We had a song "*i COSATU si yo nyuka nayo ma singena enkulekweni*" – that is how we launched COSATU. COSATU will not only be in the workplace, it is the political power that will transform our state. Look for Barayi's speech when COSATU was launched in Durban. His first speech to PW Botha. He said "now we are forming a giant that will liberate the people in the country" he said I will never go to jail. His arm was broken in detention. He said my arm will never be broken again because we are building a giant. He

said Botha is elected by a few individuals, I am elected by millions. It was clear that we have moved to the second layer of politics. The formation of COSATU was a break away from dealing with bread and butter issues, to transform politics of the country, we did that proudly (interruption). We were very fortunate, we had very powerful leaders. We had people like Jay Naidoo, Elija Barayi, Xulu. We also had white liberals within the working class, Cheadle Thompson, Phil Bonner, Chris Bonner, Alec Erwin, Dr Fanaroff and many others who were instrumental in building COSATU to move for transformation. We have very few white liberals in the labour movement now. We don't have a powerful legal entity now. We now have labour brokers. I'm sure Wits University is no longer doing anything, I am shocked. Wits was very instrumental in building the union movement, they became part of the people on the ground. This is no longer happening. Why would Wits allow labour brokers into the university. If you look at the history of Wits, we used them as a vehicle. We were called to Wits in the afternoon, they empowered us. Nowadays nothing is happening.

Facilitator: So you were there for 11 years in this industry?

Respondent: Ja in Dube?? and from there I joined trade unions

Facilitator: At an invitation or how did it work?

Respondent: I was developed as a shop steward, worked. I went around organising the group of Dorbyl factories around the country, all over Cape Town in the docks all over. I also went to PE, the automotive industry, using my own money, I would take leave and go to recruit there. When the uprising in the 1980s started, the sanctions against South Africa. I looked for employment, actually I did a diploma when I was working there, I have a diploma in Industrial Relations. The factory was closed and I had a good CV, the company recommended me to other companies. What they did with me is I would go for an interview, get a job – my reference informed other

employers that I should not work with other people. Initially I was appointed as a crane driver, they gave me an office. The workers were happy that I joined them, I was then given the position of the personnel officer. I resigned because I didn't want to work away from other workers. Oren Wire, I left and went to Wadeville, I went to Orin Wire a big company, today it is called Cape Gate in Vanderbijl. They also wanted my reference and were told the same thing. I knew the workers there because I had organised them, so it was nice. I worked for a month and I was promoted to Job Superintendent. I must now go and give instructions to other people. I had already joined the union. They told me that they do not have a problem with me joining a union. When I investigated why the promotion I was told it's because of my reference. I resigned again. I didn't want to work in the office because I didn't want to work against the interest of the other workers, they were trying to isolate me. I then discussed this with my fellow union colleagues, they offered me the job, I didn't go for an interview.

Facilitator: What have been the challenges of being an organiser?

Respondent: It's wonderful. When you work as an organiser the first challenge that you face is to deal with the issues of the weakest at the workplace. Workers come from different walks of life, different backgrounds. When it comes to workers you've got the tsotsi element, you have the religious people, you have people that are not religious, you have the thugs. As an organiser you must be able to unite these people; you also have the youth. If you cannot get all these groups together then you will fail. What you do is you centre around the issues that affect them; they can be dismissed equally irrespective of the group you belong to, you can get hurt; you can be retrenched. You need to have a skill to unite the people in their different groupings. The other thing is to demonstrate the capacity that you are capable to work and try to resolve the issues that are facing them at the workplace. Workers look upon shop stewards as a Messiah. Find a niche that enables you to work with them, make them aware that they are playing an important role because they deny that they are playing an important role. You need to inculcate an understanding that you want to work with them, it's a task because some of them are terrified of

the employer, they do not want the employer to know that they are affiliated, they want to hide their membership. Work gradually with them so that they can have confidence with you, they must feel part of what you are doing.

For instance if you look at the labour broking system, the employer employs you today and they can dismiss you tomorrow. When they join you, you need to inculcate an understanding that this is a struggle, there will be challenges but eventually the matter will be resolved.

Facilitator: Last two questions. You mentioned that you nearly went into exile but you decided to stay, what happened?

Respondent: I decided to stay because Michael Nzimande from Swaziland who was recruiting, he came here – he was very instrumental, I don't know where he is now. He taught us about politics. I also met him through a friend of my mother, who was involved in the march to the Union Buildings against pass laws in the 1950s. He was a philosopher. I learnt a lot from him. He encouraged me to leave through Swaziland into exile in the 1980s, people were getting killed. Because I'm from a poor background and my mother was ill, my father had died very ill. I had to educate my brother because I was the only one who had some education, Matric. I had my brother and two sisters to look after. I didn't want to sacrifice them. I then made a decision to struggle with them. I almost left in the 1980s. I pulled out from Duduza, I felt it was not fair for my family.

Facilitator: Was there a relationship between township struggles and the worker struggles?

Respondent: In the 1980s they were linked. We had what was called Street Committees. There was a very strong link. We met at hostels, we had people like

Innocent Ntuli, Enock Godongwana – I went to the same school with Mantashe, Enock Godongwana we went to the same schools. What he used to do is, Enoch used to stay in Khalanyoni which was a huge hostel, it was where we now call Phola Park. Enock stayed in that hostel and worked at the beer hall, Mshayezafe. Mantashe worked at the mines in Witbank. Enoch and I met there, we had studied Latin together. When we were building trade unions, we organised in hostels. When we were reacting to what is happening now, the resistance of building *mkhukhus* (squatter camps) against The Bantu Advisory Board. We started to organise street by street, each street would have its own street committee. There will be block committees in hostels. That is how we became established, when we wanted to boycott something we would discuss in the street committees, if we decide to boycott rent this would be discussed also in the street committees. There were links. We used to say the struggle cannot be a clock card. If you are an activist at the workplace, when you knock off you must go and be active in community issues. This does not happen anymore.

If you remember when Inkatha was escalating war, we wouldn't have defeated Inkatha if the Street Committees were not strengthened, we were able to defeat them without as much weapons as they had. We supported each other. There were strong links, this was a transmission of what happened in the trade unions at the workplace and also to the community structures. PAC was refusing to take part in those they said the structures were ANC structures. Unfortunately Inkatha utilised hostel dwellers, in terms of ethnicity that is how they were able to take over and we had problems. The hostel in Thokoza was sold by the Alberton Town Council. We went and occupied Council offices, a shopping centre was supposed to be built, the block committees were controlled by Sam Dube, he was the Civic Leader – they killed him because they knew him. A lot of people were shot in those days, Dlamini also. They didn't want resistance because of the politics.

Facilitator: Are unions still relevant today in the post apartheid South Africa? Especially considering that the government is now run by the people?

Respondent: It is not a government by the people, it is a government by the rich poor, those that are poor pin themselves and hope things will change, that is why there is this huge gap. Those that are supposed to be struggling to transform have surrendered – the ones at the top have a different agenda, all they want is to enrich themselves. That is the problem. So to me it's still relevant because ..(unclear) is not initiating. Why are people still protesting, why do we still have uprisings? People pinned their hopes on the new government but very little is coming to them. Other people are becoming richer, there's a problem. That is why we are having so many protests, it is more relevant than before. The poor are not getting any support, those that are up there are not supporting the poor. There is a lot of disorder. I believe that we need to find a way of taking up issues.

Facilitator: Is there anything that you think is important that we did not talk about?

Respondent: I think we did not talk about is we made a mistake, we shouldn't have despatched the union intellectuals to the ANC ranks, to be part of government. Union officials should not have been deployed to government. When they get into parliament they forget about the worker. I think that was the mistake. For instance in COSATU when we went to MEDUNSA, among the people we elected, Alec Erwin, Jay Naidoo, etc., we should have asked them to represent the workers in parliament. When they get to parliament ... – Mandela fooled us – he said if the government does not meet the demands of the people we must do as we did to the apartheid system. He was right but not practical. 20 years later not a lot has been done, and we still believe there's a lot that will still come, nothing is coming. We shouldn't have deployed our leaders. We were not able to criticise the RDP houses. Do you remember how we criticised the 4 roomed house, they are solid and much better than the RDP houses, they are good quality even to date, we called them match box houses, our own government gives us half of that (interruption, phone rang). Do you think we would have accepted the RDP houses in 1976. We are having more and more squatter camps. Squatter camps are structures of resistance. All we want is a decent structure. What we are seeing is government officials driving expensive cars. Such officials will not care about fixing roads in the

townships because they are able to drive their 4 X 4's in the township with no hassle. I phoned Railways and asked how can a train be stopped for the ticket examiner to check tickets. The boers were doing corruption but it was not as bad as what we are doing now. We've created a problem, what are we going to do?

**END**