

## **Andrew Blaauw**

The interview covers very briefly Blaauw's personal life and his political awakening. However the bulk of the interview is an honest account of what a shop steward needed to do to build strong organisation in a workplace in the 1980s and 1990s, despite many obstacles. The interview is very important for giving a shop steward's account of his life and growth as a shop steward in his union first as a NAAWU shop steward and later as a NUMSA shop steward. He describes in detail the thorny issues that surrounded trade union debates that many times delayed trade union unity in the 1980s and 1990s: the registration as a trade union debate, participation in industrial councils and the workerist/populist debate. It also gives telling detail of the face of the shopfloor in the 1980s/'90s with its racism, discrimination and divisions amongst workers. He describes strikes and struggles over various issues like disinvestment, maternity leave as well as what did and didn't change on the shopfloor after 1994.

Facilitator: This is an interview with Andrew Blaauw, we are in Port Elizabeth, the date is 28 March 2011, the interview is done by Brown Maaba. Daddy thanks very much for your time. Just give me a background of where you come from, the family, poor or rich family and how you ended up in the world of unions.

Respondent: Alright, thank you very much Mr Maaba. I grew up on a farm about 160 kilometres from here in Port Elizabeth. I stayed with my grandmother who happened to work on this farm, for the owner of the farm doing normal cleaning and other duties like kitchen duties etc. So there was no school on the farm so I then went to do my lower primary school at a place called Kleinpoort up to where I landed up in Uitenhage for my senior secondary school to proceed there from 1976. Up to there

really I haven't really been involved in any politics you know but in 1979 we had a big boycott, you know that really opened my eyes to some of the things out there, school boycotts. 1980 I became involved in the Student Representative Council and we had a big fight with schools, school system and I think that really laid some foundation in my political life. In 1981 I started working at a company called Goodyear, Tyre and Rubber company which is still there in Uitenhage as an ordinary worker, an operator. In the same year I attended a general meeting of workers, at the time they were fighting for their pension monies, people wanted their pension monies

Facilitator: at Goodyear?

Respondent: At Goodyear, so I, they didn't qualify for those monies but I just out of interest attended the meeting, but before the meeting I had already had some exposure to the way some representatives would behave, we didn't have a union at the time we had what they called, there were people appointed by management, I will come back to the name they used. But it was people that was appointed by management who would represent workers when there is a problem. And I had seen the way they were doing, they wouldn't call you in, they would first sit with management and discuss and when you are called into the office they've already decided that you're dismissed so he would just relate to you that look there's a decision that you must be dismissed, not really fighting for your rights, nothing.

And in a way I felt very bad when I could see some people being dismissed out of the company, to me I could see that there was a problem. So in this first general meeting. I remember that I posed the

question, I can't even remember what the question was, but everybody was very happy about this question I posed and I got elected, they wanted to elect the branch executive committee for Goodyear and I got elected as the Chairperson, really not knowing a lot. But fortunately with all these local meetings, where representatives from all factories, from your Goodyears and all of those, people like John Gomomo and Daniel Dube and many others from the various companies, very experienced people, they went to those meetings and you had to give reports. So I had to then report of the activities inside Goodyear and what we were doing, and they would advise you, try this, try that from their own experiences. And that really sharpened me a bit. I remember in 1989, we had various strikes and things. But in 1989 really was the turning point in the history of Goodyear. We had a 13 week strike, it was about disinvestment. Goodyear was an American company but shareholders had bought it so we had a big strike demanding that Goodyear pay us like a severance package for what we have contributed to them and they can't just pull out here and leave us with nothing and just dump us with this new company. So that's where I really started off with the unions it was in the 1981 where I really became involved.

Facilitator: You also mentioned that you grew up on a farm and you were raised by your grandmother?

Respondent: I was raised by my grandmother

Facilitator: what happened to your parents and the other siblings?

Respondent: Unfortunately I've never seen my father, I never knew him, I was born out of wedlock, my mother was never married to my father and

he then got married to another wife and they stayed somewhere else. But you know when you're young you don't ask those questions, you just accept that you stay with your grandmother, you don't know your father that's it. So my brothers and sisters all grew up with my grandmother, my mother had to work here in PE, she worked as a domestic servant.

Facilitator: and your politics at school how, was there someone who was influential in introducing you to politics?

Respondent: yes there is a guy called Ashraf Karodia, I don't know how involved he is till today with the politics, but he is the one man who was at the forefront those years, very well known in Uitenhage in the school politics, but also well respected in politics in Uitenhage in general, they respect him. So he is the one who was at the forefront, and he really was the one I looked at him, he was like a role model to me, he didn't fear anybody you know, I know that the police were hunting him down and he would go to them even without fear, he would face them. I believe he is a manager at Volkswagen now, IT manager or something.

Facilitator: so when you came to live at Uitenhage did you come to live with relatives or ..?

Respondent: I first came down just to school, because I had to come to high school and my grandmother still stayed on the farm, but the owner of the farm passed away in 1980, that's the year I Matriculated, so we had to then move, so we came down to Uitenhage looking for a place to stay.

Facilitator: so after Matric what were your other options other than looking for a job?

Respondent: I was accepted by Peninsula Technikon, I wanted to do Health Inspector, but unfortunately because of this thing where we had to move now from the farm and my grandmother no longer had a job, I had to become the bread winner, I had to now look for a job and leave this university thing.

Facilitator: and your introduction into Goodyear how did it happen, you just went there?

Respondent: I just went there, stood at the gate looking for a job and by the third time I went there, the guy who is doing the intake he just called me, he just said "yes you come here" and I just went in for a test and I got employed.

Facilitator: and the conditions at work, you said there was no union there?

Respondent: There was no union at the time, I know that the guys like Koos Goliath was one of the first shop stewards at Goodyear, that was a liaison committee, those years we had a liaison committee, people who would from time to time be appointed by management and when there's an issue the liaison committee would be called in the management and they would discuss things. So there was no union at the time.

Facilitator: until when?

Respondent: Until late in 1981, when I started, when I then became the chairperson, when I was elected, we were looking at this thing of this

union, so I was elected in a meeting because they said people are now recruiting, there's a recruitment drive where we went from department to department, under very difficult conditions because some workers would tell management who these people are but we just said "look let's hang in there and continue with this thing", so we then had the majority of people, 50% plus one, we managed to get that number, in fact we had more than that, over 75% of people were recruited and we then .., the union outside them went in to negotiate rights for shop stewards. So I was one of the first shop stewards at Goodyear.

Facilitator: and the name of this union?

Respondent: It was National Automobile and Allied Workers Union, NAAWU

Facilitator: was it affiliated under FOSATU?

Respondent: Was affiliated to FOSATU yes

Facilitator: and you also mentioned the fact that at these liaison committee, which was just more of a mouth piece of management. Was there anything good that came out of this liaison committee?

Respondent: not that I am aware of I think there was more bad coming out of it. I remember one day there was a problem on the machine I was operating and I was then summonsed to a hearing. My experience was the liaison committee member was called in by management, they sat there for about an hour then I was called to the office. I just came in without him asking me what happened, he just told me that I must sign

here, the warning was already prepared and that was the experience all over in the company. But when I said to them let me explain what had happened, it came out that I wasn't guilty, there was a problem on the machine and it was not my fault which I have reported. So the liaison committee they were not reporting, they didn't take mandates from us, they were not defending workers at work, they were just a mouthpiece of management as you correctly said, telling you that management has decided this and you must accept it.

Facilitator: and what became of them when the unions were formed?

Respondent: Management wanted to have a parallel structure to the unions and the shop stewards, they wanted to .., when we had a meeting with them, whilst we had recognition, they wanted to in the same meeting have the liaison committee also sitting there and our question to management was .., we refused, we said "who were they representing because we don't know where they were elected, what recognition agreement do they have with the company, are they a registered body, who are they?"? Management couldn't respond to those things, they didn't know what to say, we have every time refused to sit in a meeting with the liaison committee up to a point where management just decided to discontinue because every meeting we had, on the agenda, before we could look at the issues on the agenda was this issue of the liaison committee. We had to fight whether they should be in or out of the meeting. So management decided that this thing is in a way hampering our progress, let's get rid of them. They just phased out or died a natural death.

Facilitator: but did they ever join the unions?

Respondent: they never, they were very anti unions, they were always anti the unions.

Facilitator: but over time, you were there for some time at Goodyear, were there no regrets from their side, for when encountering problems along the lines which required the intervention of unions?

Respondent: You know the more we matured also, because you see at first we thought that fighting everybody and marginalising everybody was a good thing, but at the end we realised as we also matured as shop stewards, we realised that it's not a good thing to have people outside your organisation and we realised that who ever is not with you can be used by management. So we decided to recruit these people and work with them and get them to join and I remember the one in the department where I was working. He used to have endless problems with management because they now wanted to dismiss him and I defended him. So they then, some of them joined the union, others were close to retirement and they just left but this old man he .., I convinced him to join the union and I've assisted him many times when they ill treated him.

Facilitator: so you became the first chairperson of the branch?

Respondent: I became the first chairperson

Facilitator: you were young, the challenges and expectations from your side?



Respondent: the first thing is you know to start with something that you don't know, you don't have predecessors that you can relate to and say this is how they did it. This was a new thing to us. Our only hope was the union as a whole outside, the structures that were already in place, like your bigger companies like Volkswagen, when we had a problem we had to now go to them, your Gomomos and those guys and ask them what do we do here. Those years it was very difficult. I remember many times the special branch police would go to your house, you received threats you know people coming at night to your house, whilst you sleeping you could see ..., one night I saw people moving around my house, and you could see through the curtains that they had the barrage of the guns on their backs, so you knew that there were these people and they don't talk to you but you know that your life is at stake. Yes it was difficult but you know with all your other comrades you decided yes whatever happens let's proceed, we will survive and things will change one day that's the hope we had.

Facilitator: ja. Also talking about that particular angle, I'm now thinking about the struggles of the workers in the workplace, and then the struggles of the people in the townships. Was there a connection between the two?

Respondent: Those years you know there wasn't really, our focus was that at the workplace we should make sure that people know what the union is, it should sharpen their minds and organise them in such a way that they know their role inside the workplace. We never thought that we should divorce those two, but I think our strategy was to say "its pointless to mix the two and the place where you operated work you're not even sure what to do". So our strategy was to say in the workplace, where

everybody is, you spend a lot of your time there, you are different cultures, you are different people, different languages but when you're there you face a common enemy and our strategy was to say look, in the workplace let's make sure that you organise every worker and help them to fully participate, to change the working environment because in the workplace you are together, you forget about your other problems, you forget about where you come from, the colour of your skin, here you are faced with the common enemy, not that outside the township you are not faced with the enemy, but you are scattered. If you remember that those years were the group areas act, coloureds were on their own, blacks on their own, but in the workplace you're all on the same shop floor. So you could effectively use that platform to educate people and make them to be excellent in what they are doing and I think that was our strategy in those years.

Facilitator: but was it easy to recruit people to join the unions?

Respondent: it was never easy. People were brainwashed and people were so used to being ill treated, management was using a strategy of dividing and ruling. They would treat other groups and give them preferential treatment over others, so there was mistrust amongst people. For example if you had a black area manager, he would give preferential treatment to blacks and ill treat the so-called coloureds. The same if it's a coloured, white people in superior positions, they liked to use the coloured people because they're speaking the same language. So you will find that blacks and coloureds do not trust one another. So you had to work hard. We also had, in whatever we do, if we had leadership, we had to make sure that all races are represented. You had to have so-called coloureds, you had to have blacks so that people can relate to their own

race if you could call it like this in this organisation. So it was difficult. We had to work at night, go to people after hours, talking to them at home, having meetings after hours, mobilising to have success.

Facilitator: was it more black or more coloured than black senior..?

Respondent: The union look, because of the demographics in our area, there were more black people employed, and a fewer so-called coloureds

Facilitator: but why did you have few coloureds, what was going on in their minds about unions, the coloureds..

Respondent: because of this mistrust between blacks and coloureds, which was inculcated over the years, it was difficult you know to make coloureds to join, but as I said to you earlier on what we did was to make sure the coloureds, when there's a committee that is formed, coloureds are on that committee. We made sure that when we have a general meeting, we do not just report in one language, we will have translators so that everybody is on board they understand, we will go out of our way when we see that there are people, a certain group, who don't want to come in, we would make means to get them in and discuss with them so that they could come in, we never wanted to marginalise anybody, you see this thing of .., when somebody is seen to be problematic, you don't just discard that guy, you go out and you reach to that man, you reach out to him and you get him in. Because many people are having a following, there are people who believe in him, and when he spread rumours behind your back, it is difficult to go around to defuse that situation, so where somebody is seen to be problematic its better to make

ways and means to reach out to that man or person to get him into the organisation. That was the strategy we adopted.

Facilitator: so was this the only union in the workplace or there was maybe a counter union?

Respondent: There was a trade union also called MACWUSA, they were an independent union. MACWUSA I'm sure you must have heard of them, motor assemblers, and component workers union. They were a union that in those years was not registered, they did not believe in registration. They were saying how can you fight government yet you subscribe to some of their policies because it was a requirement from government, if you wanted to sit in the industrial council and represent workers, that you had to be registered, as a registered union, you had to have a recognition agreement with the company, and they said they didn't believe in having recognition agreements, they didn't believe in being registered because you cannot register with the same oppressor who is oppressing you but you register with them. We adopted a different strategy, we realised that yes we have an oppressor, but the problem is if you do not register which was by law a requirement to sit on the industrial council, and if you look at before we got registered, before we became part of the industrial councils where we negotiated better conditions for the employment. Management would sit there and agree to 5 cents and 2 cents per hour increase, we could do nothing because we're not represented. The moment we joined the Industrial Council, we were able to go in there and demand more and fight for better conditions and for the first time people enjoyed better benefits. So yes there were the other union that was also operating, yes they were very few but they were in the factory and they had members that they said were their members.

Facilitator: and what happened to them eventually?

Respondent: MACWUSA eventually joined, when we formed NUMSA, remember NAAWU and other unions under FOSATU, metal unions MAWU and other independent unions in 1985 all amalgamated and formed NUMSA. So at that point MACWUSA then also decided to come under the umbrella of NUMSA.

Facilitator: but was there an advantage in forming NUMSA?

Respondent: Look with everything you do there are always pros and cons, yes the advantage was that we were bigger and stronger union, at Goodyear definitely it was on the one hand good because management would in the past before the formation of NUMSA play us off against one another, if we come to a meeting they would say but we have agreed with MACWUSA, and MACWUSA didn't have a recognition agreement but they would use that and say we have another union here so we agreed, they also came here and we agreed to X,Y, Z, instead of pursuing management on the demand we have and we would turn around and say "these guys are sell outs" and they would do likewise because we did not talk to one another as the two unions. Management was able to use that issue against all of us. So in that sense yes it was good, now management had to speak to one organisation.

Facilitator: what were the burning issues that needed to be dealt with by the union at Goodyear?

Respondent: One big issue that normally unions deal with is issues of rates of pay, and also one of the biggest issue that at a later stage, after the formation of NUMSA was the issue of the make up of management, you know very few blacks were in management positions, especially if you look at your middle to top management. Blacks were only allowed at a supervisor level where there is no decision making powers, nothing. So those became some of the top issues on the agenda that we change the colour from middle to top management. We were successful, we had a structure in the company where we did not just have an agreement to change the make up on top but where we started identifying people on the shop floor who already had some of the qualifications who could be placed into some of those positions. So we had a committee that actually went around to look and acquire people's skills and whatever qualifications people had and they would be identified for higher positions. That committee would do that, would place people into those positions.

Facilitator: what about the issues, I don't know the composition of women within Goodyear, whether it was large or small?

Respondent: ja, in the earlier days because the tyre industry seemed to be a very physical job, it's not an easy thing for women, however there are areas where you could use women on your lesser physical areas, like in your bead rooms where you make the bead of the tyres. So at first very few women were there, few white women, but I remember during our strike in 1989, the company employed, during the strike they employed a lot of coloured and black women during the strike. And because of the length of the strike, 13 weeks, management didn't end their contracts, I think management adopted a strategy where they think that when we go

back to work we will now start fighting these people, so there was going to be animosity between us and those people because they came in whilst we were on strike. But I think the union was very matured at that time, we organised those people into the union and some of them became shop stewards at a later stage, ja because of this thing. We knew that management wanted to always use any tactic to divide us and we wouldn't allow that. So yes after the strike a lot of females were, even whites were employed.

Facilitator: and issues around maternity leave and so on?

Respondent: before that, because we didn't so many people, during our negotiations, yes that became part and parcel of our demands, but towards the end of the negotiations some of those issues we would just leave, because the union, I don't think we did have any female employees who were part of the union. But after that we were very serious, we went back to the negotiation tables you know with those demands, things like your pap smear, management would pay for your pap smear, maternity leave, we then became aware that those had to be granted by management.

Facilitator: Issues around exploitation, how rife was exploitation within that particular industry in Goodyear?

Respondent: Look Goodyear is one of the companies that I can say that in the Uitenhage area that was a company that was a union basher, they would do anything to kill the union. Exploitation was rife, yes even when the union was formed, we would see many of the shop stewards being dismissed, shop stewards going to hearings everyday, being victimised by

the immediate superiors, we had to every time, even if the shop steward is elected and we had rights for shop stewards to defend workers, they would not be released to attend to union duties. So yes we were victimised big time, but we also realised that we had an employer who was out there to smash us so we have to stick to each other and also be sure of what we're doing and build the union into a strong union, we knew that our own weapon was to form a strong union, if they dismiss, if they touch one of its leaders the workers will stand up, and that was the thing we had, all the years we managed to, in any company, when workers became aware that their shop steward is being victimised they will stand up and fight management. The majority of our strikes were as a result of union leadership being victimised.

Facilitator: did you win those funds?

Respondent: We won them, some we wouldn't win, I mean there were casualties, there are cases where I remember in 1987 we had a strike, it involved a shop steward in our radio department, the tyre building department. Management victimised the shop steward and we saw, is there where we saw that management will do anything, they would dismiss the whole workforce. They dismissed all the tyre builders. Some of them went back but that shop steward together with other people whom they saw as instigators never went back, management refused to take them back

Facilitator: then you never won that one?

Respondent: we never won that as a whole, some went back in drips and drabs here and there where the need rose to have more experienced



tyre builders because every time you dismiss people your tyre builders are experienced, it's actually a skill to be able to build quality tyres. And some of those guys who were dismissed were there for years, so management did not agree, we never won the demand to get them back in bulk, but some of those guys got re-employed here and there. But the union never won that battle to get all of them re-employed, including their shop steward.

Facilitator: and you also mentioned the fact that this was a foreign based company, Goodyear

Respondent: Goodyear was an American company

Facilitator: and how was their reception to a union then? I don't know maybe perhaps in my mind I am thinking they will be much softer because they are not the Afrikaner raised people ..?

Respondent: Look these companies, what they do, their shareholders might be Americans but the people running the show everyday are the white Afrikaners and they are the guys on a day-to-day basis who would make the rules and they are the guys who would suppress us. The Americans when they send their representatives down here, they were not interested in the workers, they come, the only thing is to look at how their shares are doing and how much profit they could make, what changes are there to increase the profits. I mean I never remember anybody from top management in American coming down to address the workers, asking them about their problems. They would never do that. We would only be told that there's a manager or somebody is coming, you must clean the aisles and paint and everything and clean the

machines, sometimes they would hide some people and say .., some management would hide the supervisor because some of the supervisors were not supposed to be employed, white Afrikaners, they would hide them because (1) they didn't have the qualifications, but they were useless in a sense. So when these guys come from overseas they would tell them "no don't come to work, or hide from these guys", so all they would do is to walk through the company, and we will realise that somebody was here we don't know where he was. But they would never come to the workers. So in that sense they were never interested in our day-to-day problems. We were faced with the Afrikaner guys who were managing the company here, they were the guys who were suppressing and oppressing us and that was a reality.

Facilitator: And did the union have to deal with issues of racism at work?

Respondent: You see shop stewards, on our agenda, it doesn't matter what issue it was. The issues that we were at logger heads with stemmed from the issues of racism. If it's a shop steward who is being victimised, or an employee who is not promoted or whatever is because of the tactics that management was using or giving whites superior positions, even if they didn't have the qualification. I remember many of the supervisors those years, they couldn't write, their level of schooling was very low, they would come to the workers on the shop floor and ask them how to write things, their reports, they could not go to any production meeting somebody had to speak on their behalf, yet there were black people who were qualified, they had the necessary schooling but they were never given any of those opportunities. And also the day-to-day issues that the unions had to take up.

Facilitator: And the relationship with FOSATU then later COSATU, was it worth it for you to affiliate with COSATU?

Respondent: It was worth it, you see what we did, once we've build our own structure inside our own company, we were not just happy with the progress we've made in our own companies. We knew that in FOSATU there are other unions, there are other comrades who might be working at Shoprite and Checkers, OK Bazaars and the textile industries, and we would in FOSATU now devise strategies to assist them. I remember being a worker at Goodyear, I went out to represent people working at OK Bazaars, I remember working at Goodyear going to organise workers at Hella who were not even at the time a part of NAAWU, they were in a different union MICWU, so when there was a problem in our own area, we believed that it doesn't matter where the worker is working, if there's a problem we should reach out to them and help them. I remember being seconded to NAAWU for sometime, in other words, we negotiated with the company to second me to NAAWU to go out and work as an organiser, assisting the organiser there to reach out to other affiliates and other companies. Your smaller companies, the garages those people, other people who were not part of NAAWU as it were, of other affiliates we would go out there and assist wherever there was a problem.

Facilitator: so it worked

Respondent: it really worked. And also to build solidarity, if we had a problem. Like for example I remember the OK strike, OK workers were victimised. We organised in all the companies a campaign not to buy from OK Bazaars and that campaign was effective. And that we would do anywhere where there was a problem.

Facilitator: What about the international exposure?

Respondent: International .., okay Goodyear as a company, for those years had very little international exposure as a union and with other tyre and rubber companies, we didn't have that international links with those companies. Fortunately Volkswagen and other companies because of their years of trade unionism they had links with their mother companies, we didn't have that. What we did was to just build our own companies into strong, make the union strong in all these companies and then go to other tyre companies you know like your Firestone and Continental, we became very strong. It's only in 1995 that I attended an International Tyre and Rubber Conference. But the national union had links with your international companies, like the IMF, they were very strong. The union would, when there's a problem of its tyre sector for example it would use the links it had with the IMF to speak to the tyre and rubber companies overseas but we didn't have direct links with them.

Facilitator: what about in-service training with regards to unions, did you guys receive that?

Respondent: by the union, that's one thing that really assisted to educate shop stewards, the union had very effective education systems. It managed, through its links with these international unions to secure funding for training. I remember that we used to be funded by the IMF and that is specifically for training of shop stewards. So otherwise how do you train your shop stewards, how do you have effective shop stewards if you don't train them. We would be trained on the things that, practical things, day-to-day things, how to represent an employee, what the law

says, what are your rights, all those things and the union was very good at that. I also served on the education committee, in Goodyear, in our company because you have your education committee outside for the region and then one for the local but you also had an education representative who would then do education inside the factory. So we forced management to grant us time to do education inside the departments, train them on what the union is, what to do so that people understand what their role is in the unions. That is one of the effective tools that the unions had, training.

Facilitator: and the role of the bargaining council, was it effective?

Respondent: The role of the Industrial Council was effective because yes the union could now, remember if you are out on your own, if you bring your company along, you're just on your own, but now we were three companies, so obviously we were stronger, we had a stronger muscle and we were speaking the same thing, we were all demanding the same thing and as those three companies we would also form solidarity committees whereas when there's a problem at one of them we would put pressure on our management to put pressure on that company to change. So the Industrial Council to us was an effective tool to use. We were at first reluctant to think yes, because of the things that people blame us that you registered, but we could use the Industrial Council as an effective tool to mobilise other companies and we did so.

Facilitator: the white workers, did they have their own union?

Respondent: yes the white workers belonged to a union, those years it was the Yster and Staal, Iron and Steel Union. As time went we managed

to organise them, they were in the minority and also because they didn't have as much muscle as we had. We would, the workers' tool in the company is to strike, we would strike and come back victorious, 99% of the strikes were successful. And the white guys were standing outside looking at this, so we said to ourselves, again using this .., our strategy was to organise everybody into our union. So we managed to win some of those guys, because we're stronger. When we represent anybody, management knew that if we lose that case, we have the workforce behind us. The white workers knew that if I join this union I have like a guarantee that at least I stand a better chance of keeping my job. It was tough because management would try and victimise white workers even if they were members of the union and those that are not our members they would give them preferential treatment. I remember one stage where we wanted to prove to management that we will fight for a white worker and go out on strike demanding his re-instatement, and we effectively did so and that really was .., all the white workers were looking at the strike to decide whether they will be joining us or not and we were successful. The guy was taken back to work, management paid him back, paid for the period he was outside, and from there onwards a lot of .., about 50% of them then joined our union.

Facilitator: So the issue of sanctions, I know to some extent it would affect Goodyear, in 1987 a bigger strike and wanted to shut down and so on, what were the view of the unions about sanctions?

Respondent: yes the national view of the union was that companies that .., from outside, your Americas whoever, those companies, they come here they make a lot of money, yet they don't .., they are not interested in the working conditions of workers in South Africa. All they are interested in

is the profits they make. So the union was in agreement that we should put pressure on America to disinvest, to pull out of the country because they are not adding value to the lives of ordinary workers. That was the stance of the union. The 1989 strike, that came about when Goodyear disinvested and that disinvestment was because of the pressure on America to pull out of South Africa because of the conditions. They are here for so many years but workers still live in appalling conditions, they don't build houses, they don't better the lives of workers and they then agreed that they will pull out.

Facilitator: and also what you said there was a fight over some money and then other issues that union ...?

Respondent: look we demanded that yes you must leave, but don't just leave as if we didn't contribute, you've made huge profits from the sweat of the workers, you must leave some of those monies behind and we were successful in that strike and workers were paid out, what they called an extra ..(unclear) payment.

Facilitator: and what became of the workers then?

Respondent: the company didn't shut down, South Africa took ownership of the company, so it was really taken over as a going concern. So we just continued with the new owners, this time South African, and they were part of the Consol Group.

Facilitator: 1990 came, the release of Nelson Mandela and unbanning of liberation movements. Was this the sign of change for the workers on the ground?

Respondent: yes, without, yes, politically speaking a lot of changes started to happen, yes people could now stay where ever they wanted to, if you wanted to buy a house in town, yes, there were those type of changes, but you know what inside the factories. Those changes never just came about on a plate. Management was the same old management, you would find that some management would go to a meeting with Nelson Mandela to a lunch, where they meet him and they come back they oppress the workers in the same way that they used to do. So you would find that management was playing double standards. On the one hand they wanted to portray this image of being a good company, they know Nelson Mandela, they have photos of Nelson Mandela all over the company but the conditions on the shop floor remained the same if not worse. You still had the same arrogant management who did not want to upgrade black workers, black workers were still seen to be good enough to be ordinary operators and still whites had to make the decisions. It was because of our everyday struggles that we managed to convince management to agree that our people should be in better positions.

Facilitator: so that remained the same struggles post 1994?

Respondent: it remained the same, today still you will find that the people are still struggling over the same issues, they will go to Goodyear today, you will find that yes there are maybe a little bit more black faces up there, but when it comes to decision making you will find that it is still the same old white males that make decisions.

Facilitator: and the labour laws did they impact?



Respondent: I must say that yes from the labour law side there are things like your Employment Equity, which now compels companies to change some of these things, yes, on that side it did have a bearing and a positive bearing. But again if you don't have you know the organisation, if you don't have a strong union to make management to implement whatever has been agreed because sometimes the Act will just give you a framework of things, and say this is the grid that we want you to work with, but the practical application thereof had to be worked out in the companies. That's when you find where sometimes you are lacking, if you don't have a strong union and people who know these issues, you find that management still get away with these things without implementing it.

Facilitator: How long were you there yourself?

Respondent: I worked at Goodyear until 1996

Facilitator: why did you leave?

Respondent: It just got to a stage, you see after the formation of NUMSA, alright we now together, we started having a lot of problem of youngsters who were joining the company, who would now start fighting the shop stewards, and you know okay, we can't prove it, and I don't want to say .., we at the time we believed that these guys were being used somewhere, either they were working with management or they were working with the system, but these guys would .., when I go to a meeting I'm the senior shop steward. When I go into the night shift workers, and report to them at 3 o'clock in the morning, some of these guys would come there and oppose what I am saying. My question is, where do

these guys get access. I had to now get special permission from management and these guys they would come in and what upset me most was that the workers would not defend me. They wouldn't defend and see that something funny is happening here, we must now stand up and speak for the union and make sure that the union is not going to be destroyed by these guys. So it got to the stage where I decided that look I've had enough now, we not making progress with ..., we don't get to the issues, we've won so many demands. Workers in our company were given things like housing loan, which is the first of its kind. Management would just give you a loan and you don't repay the loan amount, you just repay the interest on that loan. So it was part of the 1989 strike. And there was so many things, it was like workers were spoiled, they had too many rights, yet now you had these guys coming and they were just fighting against us and you had no protection and it got to a stage where I decided look I've had enough let me leave.

Which I don't think was the best thing if you look at generally speaking, in other companies you have the same situation where very experienced guys, I am not saying I was the best, I am saying experienced people like myself and others, there were people who were much better than me, more experienced than me, they encountered the same type of thing where they just became fed up and said let me leave and we left the union into the hands of people who were not that experienced. Unfortunately some of us have left the company, we were not there to go back and say look guys this is how we did it. So these guys started to grapple with the issues and many of the demands we fought for hard, we struggled for years, those things were just taken away from the workers and today as we speak I am told, at Goodyear I am told workers don't have those rights anymore. That housing loan thing was taken away,

shop stewards rights, those things, we had hours allocated to us, over and above what the Industrial Council agreement said. We had hours where we would go out as shop stewards as a group to companies, to other areas and speak to workers, address them and if there are issues we deal with those issues. We had .., we could have general meetings of the whole company, shut the company down and deal with issues of the whole company in that meeting. From that meeting, formulate demands and go to management and start discussing these things and solving them, we had structures in management where we at top management, sitting in these committees, where we don't have to wait for them to go and get a mandate from somebody, they would there and there agree that listen this thing we agree to and we go and we implement it, as opposed to a situation where you have management representative like your HR guys who would come to a meeting and say alright we hear what you are saying we must first get a mandate. We said look we're fed up with that we want top management, they must make a decision there and there and we got it right, all those things have been taken away now. So workers are back to the old same tactic where you have to wait two/three months for management to come back to you, they delay. And its actually heart breaking to hear that look workers were very much advanced in the struggle against all these ill treatments and things at this day in age you find that all those things have been taken way, workers are again ill treated you know. But yes what else would you do, but I left in 1996.

Facilitator: so in other words you're saying NUMSA is no longer that effective?

Respondent: I don't want to say its not that effective, because I am not there, it may be construed as I am now standing outside pointing fingers t the inside, if you listen to the workers in general it would appear that people all they remember was those days you know when you had a very strong union. And they say those days the unions were very strong, much stronger, I'm unfortunately not working inside the unions anymore but I had some exposure in 2008 when I went back as a union organiser and I realised that yes things are no longer the same, up to where people negotiate, whatever they negotiate, the organisers at the local level don't always understand what the agreements are about. It comes to the local organisers in drips and drabs. Sometimes you are given an agreement but there's some part of the agreement that is not in there and you don't know these things. In 2008 I was an organiser, NUMSA organiser for two months, I was told that this is the agreement that everybody in the motor industry was going to be given an increase. So I went around to all companies, in the motor industry, in my area and I explained to workers that no you are going to get an increase. The day the increase was implemented, we realised that there were what they called the .., the guys who put in petrol, petrol attendants, they were not part of the increase. I called this man, who I have spoken to before, who assured me that no everybody was going to get an increase. I phoned him and he said to me management is misreading the agreement, everybody is going to get the increase. I went back to the workers and said "sorry, calm down guys you going to get your increases", it came out that no as part of the agreement that was signed, their increase was linked to the price of the petrol somewhere, depending on how much the petrol price was increased by and if it was increased beyond a certain limit they ere not going to be given an increase. So all along we were lying to them. And when I phoned all other organisers they had the same

understanding as me. Those things never happened when I was an organiser, the guys would come down. At one stage I was the national negotiator for the tyre and rubber industry, taking over from guys like Les Kettledas and Gavin Hartford and Tony Kgobe, what I would do is I would go, send reports to the locals, I would also have local general meetings of the tyre companies, where you report to these guys. We would fly to Firestone Brits and report to the General Manager so that people understand and you would never sign an agreement when even your organisers don't know what the agreement is. When we sign the day we sign, you sign because everybody there in your branch, people know what you signing, you've acquired mandates, report backs were given. Now you get the feeling that those things just don't happen anymore. People are not held accountable to the things they do. And when I questioned it, it came out that look that this guy, the negotiator did his own thing. How do you allow those things to happen, to the detriment of workers?

So I don't want to be, I don't want people to think I'm just pointing a finger, I love the unions, it's where I got my training, it's my training ground, when .., even if it is a perception that the unions are no longer as strong as they used to be, even if it's just a perception, I say that look there's work to be done, to make sure that people enjoy the same rights or better rights than they used to enjoy, that people are proud to be members of the organisations they belong to.

Facilitator: After 1996 what happened?

Respondent: After 1996 I went out of the unions, I went to work for Alexander Forbes doing medical aids and provident funds, and from there

I went into other companies, up to where I went back to the union for two months and then joined the bargaining council in 2008 October.

Facilitator: And just the last question, has it been effective, the bargaining council?

Respondent: you mean where I work now? In general the bargaining council across, bargaining councils are an effective tool for unions if they are used correctly. You cannot just rely on a negotiation process but when it comes to the implementation of the things you've agreed to, you don't have people to make sure that they are adhered to, and I say you are lacking something. In the industry where I work, my job is to make sure that the Bargaining Council agreement which is negotiated by the unions and employers, my job is to make sure that it is implemented in the different companies. Not all bargaining councils have people like myself, ..(unclear) they sign an agreement, the tyre industry, they sign an agreement and that's it, its now for the shop stewards to grapple with the issues and not all shop stewards understand these issues, they don't always know the agreement. So it's important that you train your people on the agreement so that they know that these are the rights in terms of the agreement. How do you defend workers if you don't know what your rights are? So yes it's an effective tool provided you have people where ever in your different companies, who understand what the agreement is and who will make sure that the agreement is adhered to. In the absence of those people, it's just a nice document that is lying somewhere in somebody's office, but workers never get to enjoy those rights. It's my experience that you have to make a follow up on employers, to make sure that they grant you .., in our industry I've come across how many companies, the law says you must give an increase

from the 1 July, companies ignore it and say look I don't have money. So if we don't follow up and make sure that those things are done, workers are the losers at the end of the day.

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

Respondent: I think you've touched on the most important things. I think maybe if you look at all the things that are happening today, and you know the complaints from workers on the shop floor, and I think really maybe unions are maybe in a way lacking the capacity to deal with the day to day problems of workers. Maybe it's because of unions being too much focussed on the broader struggles, which I don't say people must ignore, I don't say workers must not be workers of the SACP or of the ANC, I don't say that, I say it is a good thing. I also think that the workplace is an effective place to mobilise people, but I think people must get back to the basics and organise workers in strong trade unions as a start. First and foremost, the workplace, workers must be sharpened about their role in the trade union, and when they have a strong basis and a strong base in the factory, then educate them on their role in broader community issues. But I think there's too much emphasis today, you will find an organiser busy with, or the training department and the union speaking about the ANC's strategy to deal with the government, the elections and whatever, which is a good thing. But if you do that, yet you don't have a strong organisation in the company, you're doomed to failure because first and foremost workers must be organised and be strong in the company, they must have faith and trust in their leadership. Today you find that there's too much fights and things because the shop stewards are said not to be accountable, they are said not to be receiving or getting the correct

training because they go there and they are told about their role in the ANC and in the party, alright but their primary thing inside the union they not trying too hard. I say unions must get back to the basics, where first and foremost they train people and build strong unions, build industrial unions in an industrial area, you make sure that the shop stewards and workers in that industrial area are strong, you have your industrial area committees, where workers share their experiences and they are able to assist one another in that industrial area and you know you have a solid union there on that platform you build your community issues that workers are faced with because yes workers are faced with, because yes workers are faced with these issues, you cannot divorce the issues but you cannot put the cart in front of the horses. You must make sure that you effectively use your shop floor to sharpen workers for the union and make sure that they trust the union, they love the union, they have the passion for the organisation, they trust their leadership, when the shop stewards come and report to them they know that these guys are honest, they can trust them and they are there to build the union. In the absence of that you'll have your problems in the township people are fighting. You will have your problems where a worker walks out of a company, he doesn't want to involve himself with township politics because he is not united from the place, the very effective platform that he comes from and nowadays that's the platform we wanted to organise, that's the platform we used to build the ANC, you know, a shop steward, when I stood on a platform in the factory, talking to the workers about the ANC they could trust me because they could trust me when I defended the worker who has been victimised. But when you want to come and stand there and tell them about the ANC when you don't even know your ordinary duties here, that's where I think this whole thing falls flat. So I believe there must be more emphasis on building the union, to me that is the cornerstone of any



political party outside, is your effective use of your people in the companies, organise it into a solid union, irrespective of their political belief. I remember at Goodyear we had different political affiliations, we had AZAPO, we had PAC, we had people with the ANC, UDF, we had people from the labour party and in party politics these people sometimes did not see eye to eye but we managed, on the same committee in the union, at Goodyear, sit down, because we knew our common enemy was not our difference of our political party differences but we knew our common enemy is here to exploit us and let us join forces, being different politically is key, but for the purposes of achieving our objectives, let's put those differences aside. And we managed at Goodyear to have all those forces on one committee, we went out of our way to when there's a political party not represented, we will get somebody to come onto the committee, be it a shop steward committee, be it just a committee that we formed, we would make sure that these people are represented so that no one feels marginalised or that they are less important because small organisation can cause a lot of problems so that's how we managed to manage all these different people be it from different churches, whatever, but for the purposes of achieving your objective in the company, you work on those people. Today I think there's too much pushing of people aside, you not important, you're from a small company and at the end there might be a small entity organisation that tells you but in your company, some of those guys are very effective and influential and you have endless problems. So I think the unions must go back there and make sure that in companies, irrespective of political affiliation and belief, irrespective of whatever belief, religion and whatever you organise people into an effective organisation and make sure that they are represented, you make sure that you cater for their needs in your organisation.

Facilitator: When you look back was it worth it to be involved with the unions?

Respondent: Look I can tell you one thing, you know what before I joined the unions I was a guy who was, I could never speak in front of people, I was very ashamed of people but the union helped me to where I am today. I remember my English I mean I couldn't speak English, I went to school in Afrikaans, even the English classes I sometimes boycotted I didn't want to go there, so the union helped me with all those things, but of course, yes there's a good side to it, but I've said this once before there's also the downside, unfortunately with your involvement with unions or any organisations you sometimes neglect your family because I look at my family, my children, three of my children grew up without really knowing me as their father, I come home late at night, I wake up early in the morning, I was never there, and you have to balance these things, your activities in organisations, you have to balance it with spending quality time with your family, that I would advise people – you lose people who are a part of you, they wanted to be part of what you did but they can't if you leave them at home, you are well known in the township, you are in meetings, people all know you but they don't know that you actually have a family. I would say make sure .., I regret that really I didn't make my family part of what I was doing, today when I speak, when people speak about me they don't know my family, they can't share the same experience that I am sharing because they never .., I never even told them about it, there wasn't time to talk to them. You come from work you go to a meeting, at night you go to another meeting, you have to run around, you come in its late you want to sleep that's all. So yes I think

people must try and balance their lives and take their families on board, spend more quality time with them.

Facilitator: any closing word maybe?

Respondent: In closing I just want to say I love the trade unions, as I earlier mentioned, what I know today is what I've learnt in the trade unions, my heart goes out when I see people today who are faced with the same old problems, I'm not sure whether there is going to be a solution if the unions have the capacity to deal with these things. I just want to wish the unions well, I know it's not nice out there and maybe I speak from outside and I'm not necessarily pointing a finger, if there's anyway that I can offer them my assistance from the little bit that I know I will be glad to do that because I think they've invested in my life if there's anything I can plough back to them I will be happy to do so.

Facilitator: Thanks for your time.

Respondent: thanks very much for the interview.

**END**