

## Pitso Megae

Facilitator: This is an interview with Ntate Pitso Megae we are in Galeshewe in Kimberley, Northern Cape the date is 14 October 2011, interview is done by Brown Maaba. Papa thanks very much for your time. Please give me a background as to where you were born, how you were raised, and your family and how you ended up in the unions? You an speak any language you are comfortable with.

Respondent: I was born here in Kimberley, Galeshewe in 1967, and raised here, I went to school in Kimberley and I attended an Islamic Religious College in New Castle where I furthered my Islamic Theology. I studied Islamic Theology through the media of Arabic. I was an activist member of Gayo which was the Galeshewe Youth Organisation where I was the treasurer of the youth during the time of the UDF. I completed my Matric in 1987 and joined the South African Railway Services where I was then appointed by members of the union to become a full time organiser of SARHU (South African Railway and Harbour Workers Union).

Facilitator: so you were a full time organiser of the region?

Respondent: yes of the region. We in fact gave birth to COSATU in the province during the time of Naidoo, the time of Mufamadi, Martin Sebakwana who was then the general secretary of SARHU. I think Vavi then was an organiser of SACAWU

Facilitator: was he here in Kimberley?

Respondent: We knew him from Free State and people like Thami. We did not only cover the unions that we represented, because the Northern Cape is a very big

province, it is vast, places are far from each other. It is not really that industrialised but where we could cover, Sizwe Mbi was the secretary of COSATU. We used to cover even unions that had no representation in the province, like the domestic workers, truck drivers, where truck drivers encountered problems with the companies they were working for, we also assisted domestic workers. Any other kind of worker for that matter we covered in this province.

Facilitator: so all the workers thought you are more or less the face of all the workers?

Respondent: Yes

Facilitator: Didn't that cause confusion or a heavy load on you?

Respondent: Not really because we would then, mostly we were dealing with cases as they were coming. The secretary of COSATU Sizwe Mbi would then call me and say I'm having a case here, this man is a security guard, he is being fired from work and he has some problems can we go together and attend to the problem. If I had nothing to do in the office or a case I was busy I would go and assist. Sometimes, in Barclay West we also did some domestic cases where he had to send me because he was attending a COSATU meeting in Johannesburg, so I had to attend to those kind of cases. We were a group of four to five, union organisers, including the ex-minister Daisy Dikgetsi, Connie Seoposengwe, Buni Thekisho, the late Fikile Jodo who was a full time organiser, he became disabled during the process of his work. He was coming from a meeting of the union and on his way, he was involved in an accident and became paralysed. He died two years. Luckily now with the new changes, the union was able to look after him, although he was on a wheel chair they still had a place for him in the office, he would come and help, they would pick him and take him to work etc. That is how I feel sometimes, the good in somebody must be seen and the bad must be forgotten, or the good must replace the bad.

It was tough being an organiser in this part of the province. We were mostly dependent on our head office. In terms of moving money it was a problem, COSATU did not funds, some unions did not have funds in those years. Sometimes we would be paid after three months, sometimes you would be paid once in four months. This did not create any pain in us. We had challenges from the system, when they discovered that we were moving faster than they were, they started petrol bombing our homes. My house was petrol bombed the day after my sister had given birth to a child. We had nowhere to say, we were continuously followed. We were determined, we knew it was for a good purpose, although today we seem to be forgotten. The freedom charter to us says we are fighting for the empowerment of the people, that includes ourselves, not necessarily ourselves, but our people. At least today I'm happy to see the difference the unions made, I was instrumental between the unions and the youth. I was part of the young lions, we used to roar very hard. When there were strikes, here we had de Beers ferrying workers by bus to work, we would stop the busses at the four way stops, we would engage the youth and .., some of us, old activists and unionists, sometimes it hurts us when we see the level of corruption currently – it was never the intention of the organisation. This is causing a lot of discouragement amongst others. We would also fight those that were involved. In some provinces .., there are provinces that are vibrant, where you would see activists are being cared for. In some provinces people did not care whether a person was part of the making of the new dispensation and we are just dumping him and saying these are outdated politicians, those kinds of pressures. We need to understand that we need to work harder.

Facilitator: Just to go back, you mentioned that you went into an Islamic school, that is kind of unusual for a black person to go an Islamic school?

Respondent: I'm Muslim

Facilitator: were your parents Muslim?

Respondent: No, my father was a church minister, very staunch Christian and a member of the ANC, he has worked a lot in this community. People are having houses today because of him. I embraced Islam at the age of 10, I was very young. My Islamic conviction in fact later on came as a result of the political scenario in the country then, that encouraged me to .., then I met with a lot of learned Muslim politicians, like one, Molan from ..(unclear) – he was from the South African Students Association in those years and we used to share a lot of ideas, global Islamic Politics, the problems, Zionism and so forth. But during my political involvement, taking my Islamic background it gave me strength politically then I found Islam to be more responding to my political needs as a young boy. I have nothing against Christianity, I was born in a Christian home, I went to Sunday School, you know my father was a church minister. I developed so much that now I just see religion as a means of worshipping the creator but not as a fight amongst different people and different religions. I see it as a means, a vehicle that takes you closer to your creator.

Without the political pressures that we somehow got in Islam, we happen to grow in this part of the country and I was also arrested for that because I was aligned with the *Rooi Doekies* at the time in 1985, when the *Rooi Doekies* would do something in Cape Town I would be penalised in Kimberley, I would get arrested. They would say you are going to spread this because you are even attending meetings of UDF and they would arrest me, even during Ramadan when I was fasting, executing a very important pillar of Islam of fasting. During that month I got arrested and we embarked on .., because I was fasting already we embarked on a hunger strike of about 30 days with Base Dikgetsi and Shaka Mohale, he is now working for Economic Affairs. When I say I do not see any difference between religion and politics, I refer that to the religion that I am following currently because there was room for politics. That is how I got in fact to the Islamic College where I did a three year course of an Islamic teacher. I'm teaching Arabic mostly basics because it

would be young children at church. Adults I've got about 8 adults. I once helped, even taught someone from Wits who was doing Arabic as a language, from Durban Westville also, we used to come for Arabic grammar and so forth. So I picked up quite a lot. I've been to Asia, I've been to Africa through this religion and I've learnt quite a lot.

Facilitator: Interesting, but still at the age of 10 how did you bump into Islamic religion, you were a Christian?

Respondent: I had a brother in law, somebody who got married to my sister, he was from Johannesburg, he happened to like me as a young boy and we used to move .., I used to move with him to the mosque. Sundays I will go to church but eventually I ended up in the Islamic religion. I wouldn't say there was a debate that said to me Christianity is bad, Islam is good, there was never such a thing, there can never be better than the other – is only what God wants (phone rang).

Facilitator: You also mentioned the fact that, I'm trying to go back to catch up with a few questions, you also mentioned the fact that you were involved in these structures, these organisations in the township, UDF and so on. The interaction of UDF here, how did it happen?

Respondent: The very first person I met from the UDF in those years was Terror Lekota, and Popo Molefe, I even used to drive them around in the province when they used to come to the province, Thandi Modise, Jomo Kgasu, those were the people who introduced the UDF in this part of our province, some of them were coming from Vryburg, I think it was North West in those days, but it is closer to us here. So we then caught up with them, myself, Baze Dikgetse, Jomo Kgasu and the other comrades. Baze was the one who used to liaise in fact with the UDF then. I also volunteered in DPSC (Detainees Support Parents Committee) because then also they used to arrest us quite a lot, so DPSC used to look after us when we are behind

bars. During winter they would send us tracksuits and so forth from Kgotso House in Johannesburg, their offices were there. That is how we, as youth got ourselves aligned to the UDF.

Facilitator: What were the burning issues for this province of Kimberley and in the 1980s as youth structures, that needed to be addressed?

Respondent: One was from a schooling point of view you know, we had problems with the type of education we received, we had problems how this education was given to us, we had serious problems with certain languages also rising from 1976 of the youth of the past. Some of the burning issues were known issues nationally, poverty, being oppressed, not happy, you know how we were treated, the facilities we had in our townships compared to other areas, the rents that our parents had to pay for the kind of homes we had and how the township was then, issues of workers, people getting arrested for nothing, rights of black people not being recognised, their humanity was not seen, that these people are human. So if you could see our time was but a follow up from 1976.

Facilitator: After Matric was there a chance for you to go to university or you were happy with just looking for a job?

Respondent: There was no chance because also I was staying with my mother then, my father was no more there, life was a bit tough, even at the Islamic College, I had to come back and work for a year and go back and complete my studies. In those years they were throwing black people out of the houses, they were evicting them, they would open and take furniture out and lock the house from outside. It had happened twice and I had to leave New Castle and come home because my mother was sleeping outside. So it's where I had to start working.

Facilitator: How were you introduced to SARHU to Railways?

Respondent: when I was looking for a job now, you know you go all over and fortunately I got a job with the Railways, it was where I was introduced. I was already known as an influential member of the youth by those black workers who were working for Railways, that is why I did not even work long for Railways, I worked for about 6 to 8 months and I was taken out and requested to serve in the union.

Facilitator: Your impression of the workplace when you came there, Railways is something else?

Respondent: I saw apartheid in its true sense, racism, privileges were strongly on the side of whites, and on the side of blacks there was none. Our working conditions, the kind of jobs we used to do and to think of Railways carrying the majority of the illiterate whites in our country but quiet skilled. It's where we really felt it, physically in fact, with the massive strike that SARHU had when white guards were killed in Gauteng, a follow up, as I said we are a small place. When things are burning in the big cities, we would also take it up to put more pressure on government. So this ..., we were like working hand in glove with some comrades in Johannesburg who would then feed us and update us on certain issues, which campaign was it ...? So this province, even currently things are still being done that way. You will see when it started in Johannesburg when people were throwing dust bins in the street because of councillors etc., after two weeks it would start in Kimberley, it was always sort of being provoked by another activity elsewhere.

Facilitator: when you joined Railways in 1997, was SARHU already there in place?

Respondent: It was in 1988, SARHU was being organised but very weak in our province. Later on when we met with Martin Sebakwa, he was then the general

secretary of SARHU, we learnt quite a lot from him in terms of organising an area like Northern Cape (interruption) – so we then had to strategise from time to time as to how to strengthen the province, so he started advising us in organising across certain groupings where we had .., like Kimberley was one of the main bases where you would get workers from Taung working here, from Upington working here, from Kuruman, Danielsdale, so we would then train those workers to go back in their areas and start mobilising in their areas. Like I said things did not always start here, when something starts we were able to co-ordinate it throughout the province.

Facilitator: As an organiser of SARHU, you walked in there and ..(unclear), what were the other pressing issues that needed to be attended to in this line?

Respondent: The hardcore issues was recognition, they did not want to recognise us. So you would find that even if you have a case they would make it difficult for you in the province, taking also transport availability to certain areas in the province, because of its fastness. You would find that they would make life difficult in terms of recognition. You would go there and you would be turned down for a case, you would go there for a meeting. They will agree and when you get there you would be given another date. So we had quite a lot of .., and because of the weaknesses that were existing amongst workers, also we had a lot of job losses. When comrades become active they would then deal with them immediately by dismissing them from work and so forth. So we had quite a lot of job losses which made them afraid to join unions unless you the organiser of that particular union would be strong in educating the workers. What we discovered then, when we were about to gain strength, it was then when they started targeting us, so much so that they .., because of what was happening at work, I one day went with UDF t-shirt to work and had a SARHU overall tied around my waist. They would call the special branch, they came and told me “you don’t want to listen, we’ve been talking to you, now you are working, you have no ears” that was the very same night my house was petrol bombed. So I learned that to be outspoken created more pressure on the enemy’s side. As I said we had weaknesses in structures of the unions and not all



unions were represented in the province, it then gave us a lot of challenge from different companies that existed then.

Facilitator: Issues of exploitation at work, how rife was that?

Respondent: It was very tough, exploitation existed in a true sense, you could see it through a naked eye, racism, divide and rule, you could even see that what government was trying to do at national level, they used, especially Railways was very instrumental in using whatever system of apartheid to black people then.

Facilitator: The positions today in this field of Railways, in terms of exploitation is it still rife, or did things change after 1994?

Respondent: After 1994 I was no longer with them but we are still having a bond with workers, even SARHU office is still my office, I would go there, in Bloemfontein, in Gauteng, comrades knew me. You know when you come from a small place people happen to recognise you, especially when you've got energy, you're young. Today the working conditions, when talking to comrades, some of our comrades like Charles Tlangula, the brother to our present Mayor has some management position in Gauteng, not only him, the late Yusuf Soedi, Donald Maxujane, comrades who were in the forefront, at least today they are holding big positions in the Railways, that could only have happened through pressure from the workers. At least the working conditions have changed, although we are seeing the Railways are going down, but some comrades who are there are happy with the conditions compared to before, they were not happy, but today a lot of comrades are ..., and when we meet also, we meet socially and we would discuss the current issues at work and they would breathe and say our efforts are counted and recognised, at least today we are having this and that. We are having women who are in the shanting department, so much so when they are having some big events they at times invite us. They once invited me to their national votes for leadership as

an observer. That link is there, depending on the organiser who is there, does he know the people, does he mix with comrades but at least I can say the conditions have changed, although workers are not happy, they will never be happy anyway, there will always be something that will not satisfy them. By the look of things, we see little change. I think sometimes it's good policies that people fail to put into practice, that makes us all go ..

Facilitator: and back then in the 1980s the issues of safety, I mean also Railway is a very ..?

Respondent: Ja, the issue of safety, safety was only seen viable for whites but not for us. Many times black workers would be shunting, they would lose their hands, their arms you know, they would work in areas where whites would not be deployed, very unsafe areas. Like for example, I refused to work shifts because where they were deploying me was close to a very rough township and I would be alone at night. So I refused to work there. It was dangerous, there was basically no safety, it's a township called Old Green Point, people were getting robbed, even those who were working there used to get robbed because they know you are alone. They would come and steal the coal from there and no security sometimes, and you who is there as a worker your life would be in danger and there's nothing you could do about it. Just before me there was one worker who got fired for refusing to work there but when they deployed me there I openly refused, they then knew about me, they immediately transferred me from one depot. At some stage I did not know where I was working, where my clocking office was, where I had to go and clock, because they took me from ELD and took me to the station to work there but they took me from ELD to the station and just left me outside by the station, telling me somebody will come out of this office and call me. There was nobody in that office and I stood there. I left 16:15 and came back the next morning, this thing happened for the whole month. I would go to Summer Building which was the Provincial Head Office then, I would go and complain there and they would tell me "*jy's te slim, is jou bek wat jou ..*" – I asked them to clarify me whether I'm still employed or fired. It was

a burning issue up until the workers decided go to the office it has been our intention that we need you in the office. So we then started the office.

Also what they did, they then broke into our offices, the special branch. We were sponsored with machinery from Johannesburg. I remember the PFP, I forgot the names of the organisations, they were liberals, they gave some donation, the special branch came and took our photocopying machines, COSATU t-shirts, as I said we were depending on Gauteng, so our t-shirts used to come from Gauteng, before we could sell them they gained entrance into our offices and stole our t-shirts. They would follow me, at some stage they drove me off the road, I was driving a bicycle, they came with two motorbikes, I was from the office, they drove me off the road. It was the very same morning after they broke in and took our machinery and t-shirts and documentation, whatever we had. The people they used to break came to us and confessed. Our copying machines were found by special branch officers and they brought it back to the office. We really had a hard time with the system.

Gauteng is big, in those years comrades could ..., here the people were also ..., some sort of really Afrikaans orientated and were afraid of the boers. If you would say something against the whites, they were terrified, simply because the province was Afrikaans orientated. So even information to the enemy was very easy because of the language that is spoken here at home. You would find whatever we had to do, the system would counter, to me it was simply because of the language. You would find Xhosa speaking coming from Transkei, they would come here and learn Afrikaans, even Zulus, you can go to our hostel which is predominantly Zulu, you will find the Zulus speaking Afrikaans fluently because they married coloured women. My father is Tswana, and my mother is coloured, it's what you get in Kimberley. You find a Zulu man gets married to a coloured woman, a Xhosa man would get married to a coloured, just like that, even the Basothos from Lesotho, they work in the mines, they would get married to ..., so Afrikaans, there is nobody who can say they cannot speak this language of which we saw it as the language of the enemy in the past.

That was it, everything could just go up, sometimes we would sit and make jokes and say (he spoke in Afrikaans).

Facilitator: Talking about the issue of coloureds and so on, what was their position in terms of the union, were they willing to join SARHU or ..?

Respondent: we had a few coloureds who would join SARHU and others who would join BLATU, it was an in-house white union and coloureds. You would find that some coloureds would share them, you will find those who will go for the whites they would join BLABU and those who were with the comrades they would then join SARHU, but very few of them would join SARHU. Their numbers picked up in 1994, then we started to see .., even in the ANC, in this part of the province, we started seeing coloureds coming in big numbers during 1994, but prior to that we had very few coloureds who were involved in politics in this part of the country.

Facilitator: what was their problem?

Respondent: I think because of Afrikaans. You know Jo'burg has got some coloured Afrikaans like Eldorado Park, but you do not find them very close to Soweto or even having a base in Soweto. Here in Galeshewe we have a base right in the township which we call a coloured area, we call it Grikwastad, but it's a township, it's that side of Vergenoeg because the area has got a lot of coloured people coming there, coming Conwall??, coming from the coloured area Rodapan, they come and stay there, compared to Gauteng, it's very rare where you will find, even in Cape Town, I worked in Cape Town, I worked for the ..(unclear) City for about five years. You would find in Gugulethu, you will find four or five streets, just coloureds staying there and then the rest is African people. Here we have the whole location, within a township, part of the township, which we call, we know that area is for coloured people, we call it Grikwastad, but when you go there the names of the streets is Maputle, slow campaigns but it's a lot of coloureds who are staying there.

The coloured issue in this province goes up towards the Cape, it's very big. I think it's even bigger than the Western Cape if I'm not mistaken because when you look at Kimberley and you take Upington you get very few Xhosas, predominantly the African people are Xhosa speaking people, very less Tswana speaking, Tswana's are from Kuruman but the coloureds are dominating there, you've got only Pabalelo, all these other areas are coloured areas, it's part of Northern Cape. Worse now when you go up to Springbok, then now the Batswanas and the Xhosas they become very fewer, in fact most of them are based in Kimberley, Kuruman, Danielsdale, but you would find a very big number of coloureds. So coloureds in this province are the most. That is why even the opposition parties they would target coloured areas, when they come fighting the ANC, they would start in coloured areas so that they get their bases and they would develop from there. Like DA, if you can look at DA reps in Kimberley, Northern Cape if you go up to Upington you will find that most of them are coloureds. Here and there you will find an African guy but most of them are coloureds. So the coloured following here .., so much so we used to call coloureds *draad setters*? we would say to them are you National Party or are you ANC, these kind of jokes, but the province, through its vastness is predominantly coloureds. You go to Priska, Xhosa speaking people, very few, they get married to coloureds and end up speaking Afrikaans. You come back and speak to a guy who speaks Afrikaans, but their surname speaks Xhosa, if you ask them they say they don't know Xhosa. It is the background. It's a coloured province.

Facilitator: How is it that the ANC is able to win this province, if it's a coloured province?

Respondent: As I say we saw a lot of coloureds coming into the movement after 1994, simply because they are being called *draad setters* they may have discovered that they ANC is now taking the lead and now we need to jump the fence – they saw the ANC's strength, they recognised it and that's why they had to jump the fence, as a result the activists are bitter in this province, they would say some

comrades sold us, Jon Block they sold us, today when you look at our premier he is coloured, when you look about four or five ministers, MEC's in this province they are coloured, they go to Arts and Culture there's a coloured, you go to health well it's a Xhosa, but when you go to Social Services it's a coloured. You've got more coloureds taking the lead. Even in our municipality, last year the time of ..(unclear) – we saw a lot of coloureds coming into the municipality, to date, if you go there you can see a lot of coloureds are working for the municipality. And the Indians, because of Gulam, who is our ex-speaker from parliament, he is now the MM of the municipality, now we are seeing a lot of Indians now in the municipality are working there, a lot of Indians are doing business with the municipality so much that SAMWU has got a very serious problem, they even want to march because of that. Gulum would give Indian companies to supply soap for clothing of the workers, the soap they are getting is fong kong, simply because it comes from Indian guys, it's the kind of problems you encounter which is true. I don't say everything must be given to activists, even businesses, but I'm saying all of a sudden an Indian takes over black people get pushed out and the Indians start dominating. The coloured mayor took over, black people again gets pushed out and coloureds are taking the lead. But the real people who really got hurt, who suffered, who went through pain .., I mean when we were boycotting coloured children went to school, coloureds and Indians were treated the same in this country. When you go to Durban you will get trade schools within Indian localities, which you do not find in Kwa-Mashu – you would get that .., I don't know whether is it because of some of our black politicians are not authoritative when given a chance to lead, I've got a problem. Just last night we were talking at church that why must we always be followers and not taking the lead as African people. When we talk there must be another race that seems to be more superior to us, that would say things better than us, where even our own people would listen more to them. We discovered that when black people take over, they lack authority, the knowledge of what they are doing. You know we even had problems with the manner in which people were deployed even during 1994, we had people whom we knew as nurses, like our first MEC for Safety and Security here, she was a sister in the clinic, she was taken out of nursing and made MEC for Safety and Security which did not make sense. Thus we say in terms of authority, our people, our black leaders are always weak, they won't have any

success. I mean it's quite a lot, even on the side of the enemy we used to know who was good and who we could use etc., people just became ignorant to certain things. I think that is what is making it tough today for the organisation.

Facilitator: And the position of the ANC and COSATU to say after 1994 people could be deployed to parliament and other structures and so on. Was that sustainable in terms of the position of the unions? Did that weaken the position of the unions?

Respondent: It did, you know after 1994, comrades, their vision started to change, they now started looking for money, positions where there was big monies, and then the level of commitment became very weak, to date. People are only position crazy and when you take the deployment system, sometimes it can be a pain for the organisation. I deploy someone I like without the knowledge of that particular field he is in, then the blunders happen. We see these things, they are evident. You would go in the streets and people will tell you "but that guy was a drop out, I went to school with him, he was a drop out in Standard 6, today he is a director". You investigate and you find that this guy is just earning a salary, he is sitting on top of other people. Those who are not clever enough they lose those positions very easily, but those who are clever stay, learn and develop themselves which is very good. But you will find those who are just being deployed there, because they are power hungry, they like money, they are not serving the .., in fact when people are being deployed, they need to understand that they are serving an organisation that fought for their liberation, for the freedom of these people, for the people of this country, they need to understand that they are being given a trust, they are having a trust of the nation in their hands because of the background that we are coming from. For example in the police when we deploy a comrade in the police, we expect him to do good, we expect him to develop, we expect him to look at what the needs of people were in the past against the police then and to change those kinds of lifestyle or change those approached. You would find the opposite scenario of what in fact people fought against in the past and what they are receiving today. In some areas work is being done well, credit needs to go where it

belongs. In some areas you would really see, then the question comes, people would say "you took people from the street and put them there, took their girlfriends/boyfriends/aunts and put them there" that's why the organisation is suffering. When you take the problems in our province also, currently between COSATU and the ANC, these little fights that you see. You ask yourself is that the structures that fought together to have this.

Facilitator: But you also mentioned earlier that you founded COSATU, SARHU led to COSATU in some way? Can you unpack that for me?

Respondent: Ja, when we started in SARHU, we had this comrades from the UDF who would educate us, we were young boys. They would enlighten us about certain things, about how the alliance work. To me, when I need to take COSATU and ANC or government today, I ..., the problems that are there prevailing, whether it be the worse kind of problems, I still do not see room for them. To me this is mother and child. You will find that the ANC, people who were in the ANC, who were in COSATU, are people who built the ANC, people who come from UDF, they must have a history of some kind that he comes from this structure into this structure, developed into another structure. The Communist Party, you would find amongst the trade unionists there were those hardcore trade unionists and there were those soft ones. You will find those that were hardcore there are there with the Communist Party and you will find those that only joined the union for the sake of joining remained in the ANC. It's almost ..., the background where you were recruited, where you were schooled politically, but the pressure between the two, I don't see it as something good for the country itself, for our young politicians. People growing up today, students, young boys, they are being taught the history of the ANC but what they are seeing today is a different thing, they see two alias at logger heads/battlefield which is quite confusing and also breaking that interest in politics. ..(unclear) come from one camp, what is happening today, the whole Vavi scenario, the opposite.



The strength of COSATU in our province died as early as 1997 because COSATU closed their office in 1998/9, they closed their office, they moved to Bloemfontein, and only some affiliates, and some bigger union organisations had to move from Kimberley to Bloemfontein. Kimberley when the mines started to close, the closure of the mines has killed even COSATU because now the workforce was going down, that's why they had to close the office here and move to Bloemfontein, even some big unions had to go and open offices and service Kimberley from that side. They had to move some organisers from SACAWU and the like over to Bloemfontein, have an office there but then they would service this part of the country. My worry also is, this province is not much industrialised since the closure of the mines and people are moving out. There's a rumour that a university will be built here, which is good, but we are asking will it get the necessary support from the people it needs to serve. Northern Cape has got a lot of poor areas, areas far from cities, areas far from a lot of resources, and I'm just asking myself, I'm looking at near, and I'm looking at students who are attending, they are not from Kimberley, very few are from Kimberley then you will find about 50 students from Gauteng studying here, or a 100 studying here, doing some studies here. I'm just asking myself, the level of education in our area. You can do research, even Phatshimang, our teachers training college we had a lot of teachers who graduated here from Gauteng from North West, we had a lot of teachers from Klerksdorp, Potchefstroom, Pretoria, Jo'burg because at some stage I became involved in taxis, a friend of mine had taxis, so we used to drive, take them back home, they used to hire this, a lot of people came from outside places. I'm asking myself if a university is going to be built here, will it really serve its purpose, will it do justice to the province. A lot of our academics here in Kimberley they come from Fort Hare, Sizwe Mbi, Manne Dipico, most of them are from Fort Hare. It's now of late that we have people graduating from Wits. The province, the schooling, I am asking myself what happened to the Matriculants after every year. One other thing I discovered here was the level of pregnancy, it seemed to be higher than in other provinces. Drop outs etc. The ANC sometimes invite me to open parliament because of my religious background, but they would also invite me at schools, sometimes at Social Services, but I'm telling you what I am seeing here in our place, even our nurses here they come from outside, others from as far as Cape Town. My worry is what is happening to the people of Northern

Cape, poverty here makes people to jump out at a very early stage and leave the place and go and work. I also worked for sometime outside, I was deployed in 1994 into crime intelligence and I did some cross border raids. I was deployed in Natal I worked at CR Swartz, I did some political orientated murders and so forth. I've seen people from this place scattered all over where they can get a job, Gauteng. When you take Eldorado Park, we've got a lot of ..., Eldorado Park and this other one next to Tokoza, lot of Kimberley people there. But as I say things became worse after the closure of the mines. The Chairperson of de Beers today, nationally, he is from Kimberley, Manne Dipico, so the mines had to close. You can take a drive in this place, people are not working, it's tough. You will see a lot of markets. And then we have the overflow of these foreigners with the tuck shops all over. Some of the tuck shops here are closing because there are no jobs, people cannot buy from them. Poverty has hit this province very hard. Even as an organiser in those years, an organiser in Gauteng could get R500 – or R200 for transport because in Gauteng transport is easy, you jump into a local train, the organiser goes to another place. In Kimberley for me to go to a place, to Upington, it means I must take effective two days to get there. In those years we only had one bus here before Majakathata bus service was introduced, we had a bus that would go to Upington or Railways, the Railway buses. Transport availability in terms of organising, we used to have it very hard as organisers and we used to fight with our head offices in terms of allocation of funds for travelling, especially travelling allowance. You can imagine going from here to Beaufort West or you go from here Springbok you talk about another 800 in the same province. It is only in this province that you can travel up to 900 to 1000 kilos in the same province. So to mobilise also was a pain the past. Hitch hiking was a problem, organisers got killed because special branch would then follow you, they know you are supposed to go to this place, people are waiting for you there, according to the information they received, they would then wait for you. Most of our organisers were ambushed like the very same Manne Dipico when he was an organiser for NUM, he was ambushed by these whites on his way to Finch Mine. But I still say to change the province, irrespective of its fastness, how big it is, I still say it depends on a very intelligent clever politician. Otherwise if we still have politicians who are there to work for their pockets, we will die poor in this province. When you look at Gauteng, a clever politician came and said let's have a the Gautrain you

see something is happening. Here the mines are closing, no clever politician, instead Tokyo come and open one mine here, he will go to Kuruman and open one Manganese mine there, have some shares there with some local guys from here, that's the end. What are the politicians doing that we have appointed, that we have elected, that we stood in the sun with the whole day just to go and vote. What are they doing for this province. Now there are problems in this province. The health department dropped a sick person, not in front of his gate, they dropped him off in front of that school, that person is sick, he got into trouble some people had to help him, they called the police, he was discharged from hospital and dropped in the street. Now my question is what are you doing to this person who did this. The ANC is coming with very good policies, we fail to implement them. The issue of coming up with the transport system that would help people who are being discharged from hospital, which we did not have as blacks in the past, which is something very good. A lot of time we used to see people calling for taxis, "phone, here my child is being discharged from hospital, don't you want to help with your car to go and fetch my child". You know all those things. The health department came with a system of transport, now this is what we're experiencing, now we're saying "what are you doing, what are you saying now when these people are doing 1,2,3, it means implementation of these good policies is still failing". Thus I would say a very intelligent politician for this province. You can go around, you can go the day hospital, we once came up and said we are old activists, we are not employed some of us, what we are saying is "can't we clean this hospital so that we can get something" - they told us they already have a company that is cleaning, that is when they were appointed. Up until today that hospital is dirty. We are saying a lot of things changes, we are saying there's no wrong in copying something good that the politician is doing in Mpumalanga, in Western Cape, where ever, just to copy it and develop the province. Here there is basically nothing. I was also involved in skills development training, I did electrical courses on distribution and installation, transformers. I am from here, I approach these people they gave me one training at Upington Prison where I had to train inmates. Since then we are only seeing people coming from Bloemfontein, from Gauteng doing the very same training that we have, the very same expertise that we have of skills training in our area. We see people coming from .., even Sita Construction is appointing people from other

places to come and do the training here, but when you look at what you have with that company, at times you find that you have better than what that company has, because you find some of those companies would then sell that training to you, because they had no insight of any electrical training. Those guys came and spoke to me and said look bro, we know nothing about this thing but we hear that you are involved in this, won't you do this training for us and we will give you a certain percentage. I still say our politicians in this part of the country, I'm sorry they are not really growing, honestly, from one to the other, the other one just .., most of the changes here in Kimberley are still the fresh changes of 1994. Most of the MEC's today are working on what those comrades freshly did after 1994

Facilitator: they never bothered to change anything?

Respondent: Nothing, here we have this big hole, they've closed the main road saying the mine is falling in any time. They have closed a garage, they have promised that businessman he will be paid out, to date he has not been paid. The very first MEC who promised him has left, he is fighting with an MEC who is no his second or fourth term that he is fighting with. Things in this province honestly, at times I sit down and say to comrades why don't we just come together go and meet the leadership at national level and then give them .., unpack what is in fact happening here. A lot of things are happening. I mean we are government, the ANC is encouraging people to engage themselves in small business, to come up with business initiatives, but you will find that these things get blocked somewhere. You would come up with a very good proposal, you would put it there, but I'm telling you, right now I came up with a proposal, there are people cleaning the streets, the snakes are biting them, these people have no first aid, they have no knowledge about it, they also don't know anything about snake bites. I can show you the proposal, I sent a proposal to say I want to train these people, OH is the one who trains these people. They took the proposal and kept quiet. The other day I was talking to the Chairperson of the Mayoral Committee, he said to me currently we have no money. But I said comrade money does not come from the

municipality, the municipality must make a proposal to the appropriate sector where funds are and these people will get training. We are not saying the municipality must pay us for the training. We are saying the municipality must play a role, facilitate this process, we will do the training, we know the Sita's, we know what the Sita's want, we've been involved with the Sita's, some Sita's you know. So we know what they want. What we are saying is the municipality must just facilitate them. Alternatively we then got Taung Greater Municipalities where we got training up to Ventersdorp for about 800 students in every small municipality. Also a plan that we had to sit with comrades and show them that comrades this is how your area is, if we could do this and that and they accepted it and successfully we trained about 800 electrical learners in the North West, from Taung to Ventersdorp, it was multi-skill, brick laying and plastering and other construction skills. Thus I said to you, a politician with no authority to me it's like an empty gun. They become politicians, they are not authoritative, they are still depending on what the coloured is saying who comes from the previous government who is still involved today, what he has to say, his advisor. Based on that advise of the apartheid regime, he wants to implement that thing, they find themselves fighting with the people. That's what we are saying. That is my personal problem with politicians.

Facilitator: How long were you in SARHU?

Respondent: four years

Facilitator: after that?

Respondent: The ANC took over I was then deployed into crime intelligence

Facilitator: but when you look back, your stay at SARHU do you think there are certain milestones that you can talk about? You were there for four years

Respondent: Ja, what I can say is that the commitment was there, simply because we understood what we were undergoing. Today there is less commitment, there is too much money. In the past we did things knowing that we are not going to get money for it and it was done properly, people were comforted. The only thing I can say is the level of commitment has changed in the union, currently compared to the past and I still want to believe that if the level of commitment could be regained, unions will do good. People will stop being blind, to see other relevant issues, they will see things properly because they are committed, thus if the level of commitment would really be regained we will see vision, you will see we will have direction. But for now, even in the unions, organisers are not staying for long. He comes there, the salary, there are no privileges, he leaves for another. He comes there, he uses the union to get a position in government, he dumps the union he is gone, that is the level of commitment. We had Shilowa doing very well in COSATU, at some stage he left, today we have a different Shilowa, you understand.

One of the guys I still really respect as a unionist is Sydney Mufamadi, he was my boss also in the unions, he was my boss after 1994, he was the Minister for Safety and Security and I in fact worked directly from his office, Unit 15 in Pretoria. Popo Molefe also, we had some good footing. One of the people who taught us about trade unionism, Martin Sebakwana, I think he is somewhere in the North West, they are eying him I think for the next premier of that province if things go well. He was one of the people who were instrumental into trade unionism, building our morale, even taught us negotiations, how to negotiate. He used to sit in a very simple way, without a workshop and tell you comrade take a pen and paper I want you to do this and that. He would write down and find whatever points, however he used to teach us, whatever he used to tell us, the terms we needed as organisers, as we were growing in the field. He is one of the people that I also have very great respect for. There was one comrade, Bheki, I saw that man when I got arrested here, since I was released, I never saw him again, but I saw him now the other day on TV and I was very excited, it has been almost 20 years, Bheki Mohojane, he is somewhere in Mpumalanga, he is a legal advisor there somewhere. I saw him and was quite

happy and excited. People who taught us how to help fight the apartheid monster in this .., as I said in this Afrikaans Province, we learnt quite a lot. From Gauteng there were comrades who dedicated themselves to certain provinces – I have discovered the weaknesses of the people here, I will work in this province, quite a lot of comrades. Like U Daki Afrika from North West, Jomo Kgasu, he dedicated himself to this province, even before the Manne Dipico's, you know we saw comrades who were .., Paige ..(unclear) was also instrumental in the trade unions, in fact he was like our guide here. He is in fact the guy introduced us even to Kgotso House, to a lot of organisations in Johannesburg, that is why you see when Terror moved, Paige also moved. They are very big comrades and very close friends. It's like teacher and student. I know Bates when he used to talk about Terror, everything had to come to a standstill and you must listen to Paige, those years.

Facilitator: In terms of in service training, did you receive in service training when you were still at Tsatsaro, acquire certain skills to run a union?

Respondent: No, you know how we were appointed, you were appointed with the knowledge of your background of throwing stones in the township, these young lions, the young boys who ..(unclear) in the township. We were also used in fact by the unions here. One of the biggest unions in Kimberley that used to engage in strikes was NUM, the mines. They also used the youth, it's how in fact we were recognised, when they used to come and ask for help from the youth, "please from 4 in the morning roads must be blockaded, busses must not pass", that's how they got us involved. Most of us in fact, even Mali, when he became organiser, it was because of his background from GAYO and GASO the youth structures, most of us. There was really no training that we received. Training that is being received is now that people are receiving training on certain skills to pursue whatever, but in those years no skills. You had to learn, and even writing reports we had to learn from how reports are being written, union reports. Each one teach one.

Facilitator: and in terms of recruitment, were people willing to be recruited into the unions?

Respondent: Ja, we used to like ..., when we go to Posman, we used to target ..., you know because of the area, we had Mazwai who was from SAMWU, the late Mazwai Mushudule, we had Paige, we had Machoba, we had Mohale. One of the well up unions was NUM as I said before, they had a car, at least the organiser had a car, so we used to mobilise we then used to move with the comrade who has the transport into that particular area, or that direction. Like when we have to recruit from Barclay West, we will go Barclay West, Delpont's hope, Alco, Bosmansville, Kuruman, it's one area. We would go with Shaka. When we need to go that way, there was one comrade from SACAWU, they also had a car, comrade Fikile Joda, he is late also. We then would use their vehicle. All the organisers from all the two/three different unions would then move as one to that area. We would come there and just mobilise and recruit. That one will meet SARHU people, railway workers, that one will meet hotel/restaurant workers etc., we would move in a group simply because there was no money, resources were very scarce in those years. So we would move in a group and organise, even cases, like I said we would do them in a group. We would even cross the line as I said by organising other unions, like the domestic, because Connie then became, the UDM then took Connie from here and deployed her in Gauteng. So she was the one who was doing the domestic with Dipuo Pieters, then Dipuo was wanted and she had to leave the province, she ran to Gauteng. You know it was tough honestly here to organise workers in this province it was really tough, especially Railways, because you would find them along the rail and they would be busy, whites would be ..., sometimes you would target their compounds, and still there you will find that we are being followed by special branch.

One of the unions that was doing really good was NUM and SACAWU, they were doing quite good. SARHU picked up as the years were going and the other unions that came up they ..., but this part of the country, in terms of trade unionism, life was very tough. Honestly we depended on what Gauteng does, NEC's, meetings,



Gauteng, the province was really and very dull. We tried because commitment was there. Today we have all the resources there is no commitment. Those kinds of things are weakening structures.

Facilitator: In terms of salaries was this ever an issue?

Respondent: ja salaries was a problem, you would get paid this month and then next month you would not get paid and then the other month, Martin Sebako would phone us and say we have money from Britain at least we will be able to give you salaries, not back paying those months that they did not pay us, just going forward and say to us this is what you will survive on. You could see it even from the NEC's, you could see that things are tough. From the hotel you could see that really things are tough, even food. You would get somebody paying for the food when you attend NEC's, but guys in Gauteng they could manoeuvre, they could move also, resources were there

Facilitator: and the workers on the ground, from SARHU were they happy with salaries?

Respondent: Not happy because we had a lot of wage disputes, Mjanji workers at some stage said they don't want to talk percentage because most of them were not learned, they wanted R1500 across the board for a labourer in those years. You know when I was working for Railways I was earning something like R92/96 but we survived. That R92 I remember when I had to stay with my mother when we lost my father. We survived with the R92. When I come on the 27<sup>th</sup> things were happening in the house. My mother felt that I have a son who is working. From R92 I could buy myself a bed and I could pay off my cycle that I used to work because the depots are in the industrial area, far from the townships. So one could .., we don't say it had value, we say that people had, because of poverty, they had a manner, adopted manner by which or through which to work with this little money.

Facilitator: and cases of dismissals, you guys had to deal with such cases, did you manage to work on those cases?

Respondent: Dismissals we had very few successes in those years, to a level where we then had to involve a legal practitioner on certain issues. We had quite a lot of dismissals and very few successes. But close to 1994, the success of our cases started to grow, we grew up, we were quite successful. We could re-instate, there were old cases also – close to 1994 the Railways started to try and change from inside, the colour of management, they had a 1,2,3 black guys there and we then made use of that opportunity, we could even re-open, like I said old cases of comrades you know and pensions. We had a lot of cases on pension problems that comrades encountered with Mjanji, some were robbed services and it was a challenge to challenge management in terms of the services. They would say this man started working for us in 1976 and in 1979 we took him as a full time worker, now he had lost all the three years, and he was not aware that he was casual for three years and the like. So we had these kinds of cases, the worker thought he was full time employed, management does not inform him, management regard him as a casual for three years, we had those kinds of cases. Quite a few of them we did win, they won back their services.

Facilitator: and those people who got injured at work or people who lost their limbs and so on, were they compensated, did the union do something about it?

Respondent: ja the union did quite a lot. Those were one of the successes of SARHU because a lot of our shunting personnel, most of them .., whenever we see someone losing his arm or leg at the Railways we knew he was from the Shunting department, so a lot of them had these problems. Again the very same Martin Sebakwana came with the strategy of how to fight it through the labour court and other resources and through negotiations that he engaged management from Railways where they had

to commit themselves by agreeing to certain issues that we came up with, saying this man lost his hand, this was the scenario, a proper investigation was not done, may we please have it re-investigated, come up with a conclusion, make a proposal to management – we have one guy, Reed, who worked with us, he lost his arm. After 1994 they bought him a very expensive arm from Britain because Martin Sebakwana had contacts there, I think he studied there so they had this beautiful hand that he is using, you can't say it's artificial, beautiful, expensive. Since then they started giving everybody who was there. So it became uniform. Even in terms of them receiving something from Railways, that one was settled also apart from other policies they may have where they get disability etc., and the like, Railways had to come up with something and they had to compensate these people. There were quite a lot of successes in 1994 under the leadership of Martin Sebakwane, there were quite a lot of successes that the union reached in terms of cases, job losses, accidents. Even our travelling passes, black people never had a pass to travel on the aeroplane, they could only get free pass on the train. After 1994 after the leadership of Martin Sebakwana black people started getting free pass also to use a flight which we never had before as Railway workers.

Facilitator: just lastly, was it worth it to be part of unions?

Respondent: Ja I've learnt a lot, I've learnt also to be on my own, you know many times things would go tatters at home I would go to Jo'burg and look for a job. If I have a contact I would go there and meet my old union friend or my Railway friend, I would go there, I've learnt quite a lot. In fact it exposed me to a lot of things. I was but just a youth, I used to throw stones and here I am being taken to go and defend people who are losing their jobs quite a lot.

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

Respondent: One is that, whatever research, whatever results that people may come up with but if people can try and instil, bring back the level of commitment I think, even in implementing good policies that government has got today, these things will work out. So the lack of commitment if that can be sort of re-generated again within the people. People need to understand that the struggle remains the struggle, we still have the struggle as much as we seem to be liberated, we have a struggle of illiterate people, we have a struggle of sick people. It's a struggle on its own, we don't have proper doctors, professors who can come in and chip in, if the level of commitment would come back, people who then go into other fields and study with the intention to remedy the kind of problems that we are encountering today in the country, whether it be political, whether it be personal, whether it be where, today these things are seen as one. When a person is sick he goes to a doctor, a doctor is an academic, it's somebody who comes from there but he will be dealing with this person. So problems are one to me, people are losing their jobs, they going to lose their houses, their children won't get good education, the level of commitment, we are no more committed. You know it's like now we got what we wanted and we are now relaxed, we don't care.

Facilitator: comrade, thanks very much for your time

**END**

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