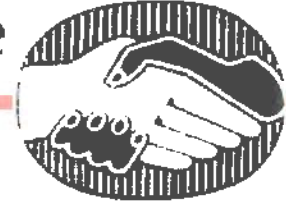


**The Alan Paton Centre
& Struggle Archives**



RECORDING THE ANTI-APARTHEID STRUGGLE IN
KWAZULU-NATAL

Oral History Project of the Alan Paton Centre,
University of KwaZulu-Natal,
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Interview with Phillip Dladla
conducted by Ruth Lundie
on 2 April 1998
at the Alan Paton Centre
University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg

The interviewee has agreed to open access for use by researchers,
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1 **KWAZULU-NATAL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

2
3 **INTERVIEW WITH PHILLIP DLADLA, CONDUCTED BY RUTH LUNDIE AND**
4 **S MKIZE, AT THE ALAN PATON CENTRE ON 2 APRIL 1998**

5
6 (‘L’ AND ‘M’ SHALL INDICATE THE INTERVIEWERS (LUNDIE AND MKIZE
7 RESPECTIVELY). AND ‘D’ SHALL SIGNIFY THE INTERVIEWEE.)

8
9 L. This is to introduce an interview with Mr Phillip Dladla, of NUMSA, on the 2nd of April.
10 1998, at the Alan Paton Centre. Phillip, it’s always interested me, the Union activity in
11 Howick, because I had a strong feeling that Baba Gwala was at the back of it from the 1950s
12 Would you tell us about Gwala approaching the BTR and the way the Union had roots in
13 Howick and how this whole situation developed?

14 D. Firstly, BTR is situated in a small town called Howick, the township that is nearer to the BTR
15 is Mevana. In 19 - that township was established to accommodate the people who were to
16 work in Sarmcol. It’s quite a small township and in 1955 I was, as I was not able to meet
17 some, then to give the background. Baba Gwala had interest in the worker issues, he had
18 tried to organise Sarmcol and issues that were prevailing then. The main issues that the
19 workers were earning starvation wage. That the demand was to workers to be paid one
20 pound a day and also they were demanding to have overalls, protective work clothes in the
21 company. So all these activities and the - was happening outside the company because the
22 Unions then were not registered. But there was - were attempts to push the company for
23 recognition of the Union and also to work with the Trade Union. But from that time the
24 company, BTR, closed its gate to work with the Union. So that meant that all activities of
25 the Union were done outside the company premises. One of the route which enters to BTR
26 Sarmcol is a road called Induna Road. The workers used to meet by the station and it was
27 surprising, just people when they have met with Baba Gwala explaining, and also in educating
28 of the Union we find that the police intervene, and there was harassment of Baba Gwala and
29 sometime he was taken to the police station. So all these activities was disturbed by the

1 police which we strongly believe was not - it was not - the police were not claiming accidental
2 there - there was a link between the company and the police to try and crush or diminish
3 whatever organisational activities could be carried on by Baba Gwala for that time.

4 L: So the Union was in fact operating but it was operating outside, and the crisis with which you
5 were concerned, was precipitated in 1983, when out of the 2 500 workers, BTR retrenched
6 about half of them. This was the first major event, and this has been the influence ever
7 thereafter.

8 D: Yes as we understand that Baba Gwala eventually was banned and there was nothing so the
9 one said there was a period where there was nothing else organising the workers.

10 L: They were oppressed but there was nothing that could be done at that stage.

11 D: Yes, and I tell you that was a victory from the company, as well as the government, to press
12 down the Union. But there were people who then started the Union called MAWU, and the
13 organiser was Baha Makhathini, who started to reorganise the workers under the Union called
14 MAWU, Standing for Metal and Allied Workers' Union. In 1983, the question had been
15 posed by the company that the company embark on a massive retrenchment of its workforce,
16 which cut its workforce from 2 500 up to half. In doing that it was - the Union now took the
17 company to court. In fact it was not that they were just - they had approach the company to
18 court, there had been attempts now - after reorganising the workers, for them to enter to the
19 company. The company was adamant that they will not have dealings with the Union which
20 was not registered. So the Union went all out to register and it approached the company but
21 this coincide with the event whereby the company had to retrench half of its workforce. So
22 the Union took the company to court, whereby it was found out by the President of the Court
23 that the company did not follow procedures. In other words, the retrenchment was unfair,
24 so the court ordered the company want to compensate those workers and also because there
25 were two issues on the table - is the recognition of the Union and also the compensation of
26 those people who were unfairly dismissed. So on the question of compensation, the workers
27 were compensated, the court ordered them to be compensated; on the question of recognising
28 the Union, the order, the court gave an order that the parties should endeavour to reach a full
29 recognition agreement. At that procedure, the preliminary agreement was struck whereby it

1 gave just basically that the Union was obliged to enter into the company, got the right to elect
2 the shop steward, but in dealing ? The whole full recognition agreement lacked the peace
3 obligation and all other clauses like the retrenchment procedure. So it was then the starting
4 of the struggle with the company to reach a full recognition agreement which took almost two
5 years, and it was clear from the Union point of view - exchange of drafts that the company
6 was still maintaining its old position of not wanting to deal with the Union. Instead, trying
7 to cut the workforce and also to smash the Union. We are saying that because now the
8 momentum and the support from the workers has been now gained - it was very much high.
9 has been gained because of - most of the people saw that their work was insecure. Having
10 other workers been cut to half, so there was no way the company could succeed in smashing
11 the Union. It was a matter now of negotiating in good faith and reach the recognition
12 agreement. So as to start a new of work between the Union and the company. So in that
13 company, in that proceeding of trying to secure a recognition agreement, I think we were at
14 the verge of striking a recognition agreement, but the company, because of its position, felt
15 that that recognition agreement could not be signed. They submitted to the Union their
16 version of a recognition agreement, whereas on the other side the Union also present its
17 version, which in fact was not unfair. Some of the company - like - which the Union has dealt
18 with - like Dunlop, has signed the same recognition agreement, so we saw no difficulty from
19 the company to sign this agreement we made. It was not a recognition agreement that was
20 only designed for BTR Sarmcol, as it was claimed for BTR Sarmcol that the signing the
21 recognition is taking their rights to manage, in fact it was not aimed at taking the right, but
22 it was merely aimed at having the relationships and mutual sort of working relations between
23 the company and the .

24 L: They were deliberately dragging their heels, anyhow...they were doing it on purpose.

25 D: Yes, and that has caused, that division caused the workers to be frustrated and there were a
26 lot of actions, illegal actions, were go-slows, there were stoppages as a way of demonstrating
27 their frustration from this process which has taken two years. Eventually in this period of '83
28 to - of two years, workers reached a stage where they balloted to for them, preparing to a
29 legal strike. The result of that ballot was in favour of the Union. The majority of workers

1 balloted for strike and it was now a matter of -and we informed the company the result of the
2 strike, of the ballot, which was clearly showing that most workers were supporting the strike
3 Now it was a question then of timing as to when the actual strike started. On the - on
4 preparation of the May Day, we approached the company, the shop stewards, seeking to
5 attend the May Day. The company had also, reluctantly, the workers for May day, but
6 eventually we - the company agreed that the day shift will go from midday but the night shift
7 will have to report to work. So on the 30th of April, 1985, we went to a May Day Rally
8 where we had - we were at that time very much militant because we organise, having also that
9 pressure from BTR Sarmcol, and coming from May Day, one would see here already on the
10 strike, was coming from the May Day on the 1st - on the 2nd, the strike had already broken,
11 so we were then on strike - on a legal strike. The company also, we believed was aware of
12 the strike because it has in a relatively short period, it has organised a lot of things, a loud
13 hailer, it has organised using the SADF, because we were - we came on the 2nd, having the
14 gates closed and we were told that because of the strike, we have - all workers have their job
15 - they have lost their job. And immediately after that there was sort of SADF protective
16 element? Guarding the company and it - the company gave us no way of - no chance even to
17 pack - to picket. So, in fact at that time there was even, in the Labour Relation Act, there
18 was no clear or right to, for workers to picket. So in their view, we believed the company
19 was saying no, if they thought that people were just dispersed, and that would be the end, and
20 their sort of strategy of breaking would have been achieved.

21 L: May I ask a question, was it legal for them to use the SADF, because this seems to be a most
22 drastic measure?

23 D: It wasn't legal, but also - since the company is also hard to get a protection from the
24 government, it took that opportunity that should anything happen, they must have protection
25 from the government, hence there were sort of supplied with the SADF to protect the
26 company. And from the gate I think it was a wise wisdom of the Union to direct, not just to
27 disperse, but to direct the workers where to go. We then were ordered - all workers were
28 ordered to go to the Mphoheni Community hall, where they will now organise themselves
29 and also wait for any development on the strike, which will - at that time we thought it would

1 not be a long strike as it is. Fortunately, again, before embarking on a strike, we had a
2 meeting with the community because we believe that the community should aware, since most
3 of the people live at the Mpophomeni Community. We invited the women, the youth, and the
4 strikers coming from all out Mpophomeni and inside Mpophomeni, where we explained that
5 starting from when we approached the company, what obstructions we were faced with the
6 company and at what stage we were now - we were - were envisaging going into a strike -
7 so we had already informed the community, we had also a support, because the support was
8 still ? Because the money, or the wages that the people were earning - it was a starvation
9 wage, people could not live on that wages. So even the families could see that they were not
10 surviving on the wages, so they were fully behind pressurising the management to recognise
11 the Union, to improve the condition of work, to improve the workers inside the company.
12 So from 19 - from May 1985, after we have now been meeting at the Community Hall, where
13 we also decided that it would be important for us not to confine ourself in the community hall
14 since there was no sort of new development for the company. Either approaching the Union
15 to sit around the table and at that time also we felt it was an issue between the Union and the
16 company to sit around the table. We didn't believe that it was an issue for - to be taken to
17 court. So that - we left that open - we were open to that course - to take its place. For
18 actually thinking of taking the matter to court, if we were ever to take it to court. But it was
19 clear that the company was closing all its doors for sitting around the table and negotiating
20 on the issue and numerous attempts to the MD and there were only always referring to the
21 lawyers, to their lawyers and also saying that they have no issues on the table to discuss, in
22 their view then it was clear they were saying that we have dismissed the workers, so it's the
23 end of everything. But we are saying, no the people are still there - they are still prepared to
24 accept the work and we need to sit around the table and negotiate with a view to reach the
25 recognition agreement.

26 L: Did you get - was it at this stage that you got public support from the town? With that
27 stayaway that happened?

28 D: And as I have said that we now were thinking not to confine the strike in the community hall,
29 we were making plans to take the strike out of the community hall. We then planned to take

1 the strike - to popularise the strike to Pietermaritzburg and its surrounding, we had been
2 meeting the COSATU, which has had its affiliate - transport and general workers all other
3 affiliates. we then planned to hire ten buses to start popularising our strike and demonstrate
4 in the Pietermaritzburg City. On the 29th, having sort of done all our preparations and plan.
5 we also have our stickers. the plan was to stop everything - all activity that Saturday, in the
6 township and also inform the people - more especially because we have heard information that
7 most of the people were from Pietermaritzburg, either Imbali or other rural areas. who were
8 taking the jobs. So it was now our task to inform those people that they should withdraw
9 their service or their labour and manpower. because there is a dispute existing

10 L: Yes. Sibongisizwe, please feel free to put in any questions. If you would like to, because this
11 stage concerns you particularly. doesn't it?

12 M: The whole concern, but I'm interested in the way Baba Gwala explained this thing because
13 it seems that BTR, being an international company, so to say, and the preparedness of the
14 government to protect it at all costs is like maybe making sure that they bring the SANDF,
15 and I think I even - when MAWU came - I think it came in 1974, it started negotiating for -
16 I think it almost took a decade until the - ja the beginning of the strike. MAWU negotiating
17 with the company then the company not being prepared to give a - I think it was at the time
18 of - I think Moses Ndlovu, as well was involved and he was banned after that, which explains
19 the problem between the Security Police and the BTR, you see. Now that kind of maybe
20 collusion within - because Moses Ndlovu was banned after that while he was busy, ja.

21 L: yes, getting him out of the way

22 M: Ja, so I think ja, the - this - ja, relationship between Sarmcol and the Security Forces. I think,
23 goes back a long way and that's why you find that in 1985, with the Security, with the
24 SANDF coming very quick to protect, ja.

25 L: Yes, yes, it was simply a continuation.

26 M: Ja, because they had been doing that for many years and I think BTR had that history of also
27 oppressing its workers - wherever was BTR Sarmcol - there was Sarmcol and all these other
28 " They had a history of oppressing the workers.

29 L: So when the workers were spreading their net, they were informing people who were hungry

1 for jobs, that in fact if they took up these jobs they'd be scab labourers?

2 D Yes, not actually, ignoring the fact that the people were desperate for the work, but we were
3 saying that BTR should put its records straight. Whoever worked in BTR should be treated
4 as a worker and also the condition must be improved. We were trying to pave the way for
5 whoever employed at BTR Sarmcol to be recognised a decent worker in the company and so
6 our plan then with that bus procession was that we would block the town, and also whilst we
7 were in town, and also deploy people to Sobantu and to Imbali and there will be marches, all
8 those areas, sort of dividing those ten buses. So we came in town with our stickers which
9 was surprise to me because people - well - all people were just busy doing - prepare for their
10 shopping, but on find they were taken by this event where everything was - all people - their
11 eyes were attracted by this blockage right in the centre of town. And people came up from
12 the buses and start putting the stickers to people. It was surprising because people could not
13 think what was happening.

14 L. That you were taking over the town and taking it over in a very attractive way.

15 D Yea, yea, and even some people would not - maybe the traditional, would not like the stickers
16 on their clothes, but because it happened unexpectedly, they found most people, read, having
17 these stickers, were painted red. . people had red sort of mouths on their sort of - their
18 clothes, but the message, I think, went very far, when true people understood that there was
19 a strike and also that people should not take job in Sarmcol and again there was even in the
20 township there - in Sobantu, there was a march and also distribution of pamphlet and stickers
21 as well as Imbali. I think it was the first time, from the Union point of view, or from any
22 organisation, to ever think of marching and especially on the point of at that time or era in
23 South Africa, where there was either illegal to march, and even if you were to ask for march,
24 you would not be granted because it was something new here in South Africa. So even the
25 organisation that now are start marching after us, they took it now as not a peaceful march,
26 but marches that ends up in sort of death of people. But this one was peaceful and was clear,
27 sending the clear message to the people. And to our surprise, because our sort of
28 demonstration in town, and take over the town was to proceed to the Lay Centre. Before we
29 reached Lay Centre, we had a roadblock so we are also surprised as to how the coordination

- 1 from the government and the police to block us from the Lay Centre
- 2 L: Where was the roadblock?
- 3 D: There was a roadblock.
- 4 L: But where?
- 5 D: Smith - it was
- 6 L: Pietermaritz Street?
- 7 D: It was in Hulets, in...
- 8 L: Oh, as far out as that?
- 9 D: Yes, there was a roadblock point and now we were sort of , we were now guided by the
10 police and also just directed for them to make sure that we don't go to other areas, we
11 actually go straight now to Lay Centre. And even to Lay Centre, when we reached Lay
12 Centre, we spread the news and our meeting went very well. And I think we were successful
13 in that way of spreading the strike
- 14 L: I'm sure you were
- 15 D: And from that we then again sat down and planned as to how we will make people survive
16 because it has been after six months or more than six months of them sitting down, so the
17 Union and its shop steward and sat down and think as to what other activities could the Union
18 be engaged on in order to make the people survive, since the spreading and the - the
19 spreading of the strike has reached other organisation, there were organisations, sympathy
20 organisation, around the strike here in Pietermaritzburg, which involved a lot of - most
21 organisations. The banned government organisation and the Trade Union and interested part
22 - individual parties, so they knew. And in that way we were now trying to raise funds to
23 support the strikers. From the Union point of view, we then thought of embarking on
24 projects. The first project that came to our mind was the T-shirt project where we were to
25 print the T-shirt and sell through the Community, and also supply the other trade union when
26 they have got conferences or major events. And the second project was the agricultural
27 project which was to supplement the food parcels that were received by the strikers and the
28 third project was the health project. That developed from the - from sympathetic doctors who
29 came and have a mass health screening of the strikers because some of the people, whilst they

- 1 were inside the company, had indication - sort of - they had treatment inside the company .
- 2 L Which hadn't been continued..
- 3 D Which has been not continued, yes. Now, we felt that we should embark on that massive and
- 4 see how the lives of people, since they were not now having that treatment from the company,
- 5 and Dr Mark, who organised the sympathetic doctors to come and conduct that massive
- 6 health screening. Now then that gave all people who - because there were referrals to the
- 7 hospital, who will direct and assist those people and keep a record of what all had been - so
- 8 hence we have that health screening project to monitor the situation. And the fourth project
- 9 was the - the news project. The news project was aimed at giving a report - what is actually
- 10 developing within the project and with the strike because the papers could no longer take our
- 11 stories, it seems now it has been a long story and maybe it's not that much attractive, but we
- 12 thought in order for us to have - to inform the community - and other interested party we
- 13 need to have a news project where we will be providing and also informing the people. The
- 14 fifth project was the play. That was merely aimed at popularising the strike, popularising the
- 15 strike through a cultural way, in a play form, and where the major events, we were - we used
- 16 to send like in the May day, in the rallies, we used to send the play team to popularise and
- 17 show the people how actually people had suffered whilst they were in Sarmcol, how they
- 18 were evicted from the areas - because there was a removal of people from Lions River, from
- 19 KwaZenzele, to Mevano, and also how they have been the cooperation between the Great
- 20 Britain, which is the mother of this company and also link the support of Margaret Thatcher
- 21 So one would clearly see that Margaret Thatcher became also the
- 22 I. The She-Devil
- 23 D Yes in that play. So that was the aim for the play, we didn't think that it will go even abroad,
- 24 but, even it reached a stage where we had to send it abroad. Also we had some contact - mac
- 25 Mayfield ? Was assigned by the Union to try and establish a group - a support group in
- 26 Britain, of which we nearly managed to get that support group.
- 27 L: I must tell you Sibongisene that Margaret Thatcher, who was some worker, wore a huge
- 28 paper mache head, exactly like Margaret Thatcher's - it was most effective, who made that
- 29 head?

- 1 D Uh, it's
- 2 L: It doesn't matter - it was just a very clever way of dealing with it, yes.
- 3 D: These projects then, sustained for quite some time which was eventually added by the sixth
4 project - it's about buying. People were sort of gaining experience from buying in bulk, and
5 give distribute food parcel. We found that we should have also a bulk buying team, with the
6 experience, they can develop managing sort of finance and also ordering which would be of
7 assistance to the community if the community can now start to be involved. Because if one
8 looks at costs of all these projects, it was not only run, or the involvement of the BTR
9 Sarmcol workers, that also drew in the community, the youth, like in the news printing, there
10 were people who were volunteered to work on that - some youth. In the health screening
11 there were also people who volunteered to work in that health screening, so it was a way -
12 this was the way of joining in the projects and drawing in the community to work now close
13 in with the strikers. The - at the point of time - the only existing project is the agricultural
14 project, the health project was the first one to be closed because we felt it has fulfilled its task
15 because we had people who were not trained as nurse, it was just from the family. So we
16 decided to close and the funders of that project felt that it has actually reached a stage where
17 it could no longer fund it. The T-shirt project also closed later on because the unbanning of
18 the organisation - they came up with their own projects, printing T-shirts, so there was a
19 massive, sort of competition in the market of? And it's also with the influx of cheap T-shirts
20 from Taiwan, we felt we could not meet the - in the shops
- 21 L: You couldn't compete.
- 22 D: The shops, they were selling political organisation T-shirts at a cheap price so we find that
23 there was that competition which we could not match and the play, lasted for quite some time,
24 but because of ...
- 25 L: But you took it overseas?
- 26 D: Yes, we took the play overseas and it was successful, it toured.
- 27 L: Where did you go?
- 28 D: It toured...
- 29 L: Did you go for that?

- 1 D: Even at the end there were two groups of play, one was the Bambata's Children, the Long
2 March and the second was the Sisters of the Long March. I happened to join the Sisters of
3 the Long March, it was the second group, it had a great success and support, popularising the
4 strike.
- 5 L: In London?
- 6 D: In London, we toured the entire sort of cities in London. Because the people had to stay more
7 than two months in London - sort of with a specific visa..
- 8 L: And whereabouts in London did you - can you remember?
- 9 D: In Devon?, Yorkshire, in ...
- 10 L: So you went as far off as that?
- 11 D: Yes, yes, yes
- 12 L: Goodness.
- 13 D: Yes, we covered quite a long of the spectrum of London. And even Scotland.
- 14 L: Oh really?
- 15 D: Yes, yes
- 16 L: That was lovely. It - my memory tells me that when you first started all this, trying to find
17 money to keep the workers going, each family, Sibongisene, was given R4 a week to live on.
- 18 D: There'd been a food parcel worth - out of R4, it was just sugar, a small packet of sugar and
19 tea and then mealie meal, and then we had to - if at the time of - I mean, reaping, cabbage,
20 and then we had to supplement with the cabbage from the vegetable garden.
- 21 L: But, you see it wasn't enough for a loaf of bread a day.
- 22 D: Not at all
- 23 L: Not at all. Mmm
- 24 D: But at this period of time also we need to, we need to thank the churches, especially
25 Archbishop Hurley, who, because of his sincerity and sympathy, in raising funds through the
26 church structures and so, he succeeded in sustaining for some time issuing these food parcel
27 because we had to pay cash at the ..
- 28 L: .. To get it at the supermarkets ..
- 29 D: Yes, the supermarket, yes, had to pay cash, and so the other churches like the - when it comes

1 to Christmas, it is very, very tough with food, you see that their children are expecting
 2 Christmas, we had to figure what to do and come up with ways to show the people that there
 3 is no way we could enjoy Christmas because we are in this situation. And one of the
 4 Christmas, we called it a Black Christmas. We learned that the Church Leaders marched from
 5 Mpophomeni, which is a fifteen kilometers, about fifteen kilometers from Mpophomeni to
 6 Howick, and to Mr Sampson's Church, right in Howick. At the Christmas Day, where we
 7 demonstrated, as a Director or a section in a high position, we thought we would negotiate
 8 after the company, we are trying to highlight from the church and also from the people whilst
 9 we were marching from Mpophomeni to Howick that the strike is still on. And that was a
 10 successful sort of Black Christmas, because it moved the focus from people, thinking what
 11 they would and how they would enjoy Christmas.

12 L: To see that other people are not in that position.

13 D: But even on the Christmas Day people felt that we are not enjoying Christmas, we still on the
 14 strike, so it became a Black Christmas. Even that extent we see that there was no support to
 15 give pressure to the Howick as a whole and all the shoppers. We tried to raise some
 16 donations for them to support, but we could see there was a reluctant to most of them. We
 17 embark on a boycott of the shops in Howick and most of the shops closed in Howick at that
 18 time because there was nobody was buying at the

19 L: So it was a successful boycott.

20 D: Yes, it was a successful, yes

21 L: Mmm, good.

22 D: It was 90% a success, and some of the people could not absorb that boycott closed their
 23 shops. Now within the frame of 1985, onward, the strike was happening, the establishment
 24 of the project, and in 1987, or earlier than that, you know, we...

25 L: December '86?

26 D: December '86, yes, it was, in 1987, we could see now this issue, this strike was changing its -
 27 it started to violence.

28 L: Had there been much police attention given to Mpophomeni over those two years, two or
 29 three years?

1 D: The tension only occurred when something new is happening, but the visible and the very
 2 tense force happened in this day in December, 1986, when the organisation, Inkataha came
 3 to Mpophomeni. And their threats, if I could explain their threat is that here is a strike which
 4 is organised, here is the township which they are controlling, which is out of their government
 5 and here now is political changes, of COSATU moving from being a sort of a just a factory-
 6 related organisation to a political. So there was now a campaign of organisation to recruit
 7 for their member and this trike coincided with that time, time frame. We find that it was the
 8 starting of Inkatha issuing cards in the school, if you were to - if your child has to go to
 9 school, you have to have Inkatha Membership, so that was now a clash ...and here this
 10 Township, which, is by virtue of being there need to be under the KwaZulu Government
 11 Here is the strike which is organised by one of affiliates of COSATU, which is now seen as
 12 a political organisation. So in order now to smash the organisation as well as the momentum
 13 which has been gained by the strike, we see clearly that there was again, cooperation between
 14 Inkatha and the company. Because that day, in, the people were working with Sarmcol could
 15 be seen at lunchtime, going out, having sharp weapons, which they had made inside the
 16 company, and the police were not doing anything. They come this day, the company was
 17 aware that there will be an attack, to Mpophomeni, in fact information came when we were
 18 on the ?meeting, but we - Inkatha was intending to visit the township, to our surprise, there
 19 was no Inkatha member there. We could see that they were just planning for trouble, so on -
 20 with - the information was that they would be coming on Saturday, but they didn't come on
 21 Saturday, they came on Friday...

22 L: A day earlier..

23 D: A day earlier, which was Friday, and they abducted our Chairperson, a shop steward and
 24 father of our Chairperson, Subiye Makisibiya, And one lady, who was involved in one of the
 25 projects. So they brought them into the community hall and tortured them and ...

26 L: In the community hall?

27 D: In the community hall - that's where they gathered themselves, all these people in the community
 28 hall and they were tortured and they were taken by car to Lion's River where they were shot
 29 and burnt. Fortunately one of the - the brother of the ? Shop Steward, escaped, and he

1 managed to tell the story - what actually happened. On Saturday, the whole township was
2 alarmed with hearing with what has happened and also seeing these people inside the
3 community hall so they surrounded the community hall in trying to ? But there were a lot of
4 poles which protected them and gave Security to these people and sort of drove them out of
5 the township. And the inquest around the issue had revealed that the people were responsible
6 for killing, were Inkatha, they weren't - nobody was arrested and the magistrate got to refer
7 the matter to the High Structures of the Court. the court, to our surprise, never really had the
8 court ? On this matter

9 L: I see, yes.

10 D: Yes

11 L: And tell about us how the men escaped by staying in the river.

12 D: Yea, hearing the story from the men, who happened to survive, is that while they were
13 shooting these other people he saw a chance of rolling himself, because on the road there was
14 a sloped place and he rolled himself down and he was teared by barbed wire till he reached
15 the river, and even before that there was an attempt, when he was trying to escape, they shot
16 him on his hand, and he rolled himself into the river, that's where he stayed for the whole
17 night, just breathing his nose out. And after that morning, when he was sure that people have
18 searched and they were no longer there, he then tried to contact through one of the farmers
19 around there, to ? His whereabouts... so he...

20 L: He must have been very weak?

21 D: Yes, yes. he was frightened, very weak, especially, in a trauma, because his brother had been
22 killed. Now we could see then that this strike is no longer in a controlled situation because
23 of these ? And so on. We approached the company to one, that we were prepared to go back
24 to the company unconditionally and we discuss about the recognition agreement, but even
25 then the company could not agree. And we ...

26
27 End of the first side.

28
29 Second side

- 1 D: Before we actually took the matter to court. having also relate this to the incident of killing
2 of these four people, Inkatha, that morning. and so on - that Saturday morning. marched
3 through the town and they killed one of the community - Nkabinde - who was not even aware
4 what was happening. So their march was not even peaceful. it was aimed at killing and
5 threatening people to - to join their organisation. And now we had to prepare for burial of
6 those four people who were killed, the Union took over sort of the whole expense, because
7 we - for a - in fact they were not employed, they were on the strike and even those who were
8 outside the strike, but the Union took over and they buried. And to our surprise, we were
9 served by interdicts. and even the route where we should go and how we should conduct
10 ourselves - it was not - it was inhumane, because people could not do the normal sort of thing
11 they would do when burying their family. And they make sure there was also a very, very
12 tense presence of soldiers on that day and to our most, most, painful thing is that we were not
13 allowed to bury those people at once - we were to take one body at a time to the cemetery,
14 about which - we had to drive about ten or five kilometers, when we were finished with them,
15 then we have to come back and take one more and people were coming from outside to try -
16 to come and pay their respect to the late - they were all chased back. There were a restricted
17 number of people, we were not allowed to sing. We tried to, the Bishop Hurley tried to open
18 up a way, maybe that he see dignity in a manner in that sort of burying people, but the police
19 were sort of instructed not to allow it. So it was a very, very painful sort of ...
- 20 L: They were interfering with your dignity? and to your rights of burying the dead properly and
21 ceremoniously
- 22 D: Yes, yes. It was very painful. And we also, because we were organised, any mistake that
23 could have been done on our side, would have caused more death. I think the aim was that
24 we bury these people next Saturday, because of our mistake, we'd be burying some - and then
25 another mistake, it would have been an ongoing burial until people can see that being
26 organised it caused death to them - it was a threat itself. But we were fortunate that we
27 controlled the youth, we controlled people who were organised. But, yes whatever pressure
28 we have got but we must absorb and make sure that we bury the other people because that
29 was the last task that we were faced with to date

- 1 L. No, it was your duty, yes. Sibongisele?
- 2 M. Ja, I would like Dladla to tell us about the stayaway and how they organised it and how he
3 sees it even today, its impact in history
- 4 D. Yes, in fact, one - looking from that stayaway, no stayaway has been experienced around
5 Pietermaritzburg or any other area, other cities that were going to have to draw lessons. But
6 to our surprise, that we sat down with the Union Officials and the shop stewards and planned
7 now as to how, because people are aware of the strike, how could we show exactly that they
8 are all in support of us by calling a - by calling a stayaway. We informed all organisation to
9 a meeting where we were requesting a support - church organisations, political organisation,
10 irrespective of which organisation, that we were planning a one day. As we all know from
11 the youth side, they were not saying well this is a job that we are calling one day's stayaway,
12 what about five days? We were saying no, it's a, it's a first stayaway, it may develop out of
13 that, but our aim was first to make a success. I remember that - that night before the
14 stayaway worked, we had to go door to door, just in - the Northdale area, assisted by
15 SACHED and other people who were asked to join us. She couldn't just pamphlet? And we
16 came and slept in the offices, in Berg Street, so as to be able to - we tried to ? To be able to
17 wake up early in the morning and catch Mafunsa train, in the rural areas and distribute the
18 pamphlet, and from there we knew that - because it was easy for somebody to be detained,
19 we had to be underground until we have done our work. But not to sleep at home, we had
20 to hide somewhere, but also monitoring the success of the strike
- 21 L. I remember waking up that morning - I was living in an old age place near to East Street, and
22 the total silence over the town. I had never known anything like it. The Sobantu people must
23 have been well grouped because not a kombi came in from Sobantu, not one.
- 24 D: The township, or the City, became total empty, even the bus rank, in - the train station, there
25 was no one.
- 26 L. None.
- 27 D: No one. I think by that it - it strike a point that our supp - our strikers know, and we are also
28 support, and our sort of strike also had - we were striking on ? But our rights needs, as a
29 workers, need to be secure...

1 L: Yes, yes, indeed.

2 D: But it's a pity that we were faced with a giant company, BTR Sarmcol, ? Union, not caring
3 about the lives of people, if they were to do any research for Mpophomeni would see that the
4 majority - 45% of people came from that township. they were suffering, children could not
5 go to school, as we all know that then children have to buy books, have to pay for school
6 fees. so everything - it was also teach the shop steward - we had to meet the Principal,
7 negotiate, can you allow the children to come to school. try and raise fund to buy books,
8 everything was through negotiations. And some were cooperative, some had to chase the
9 children out. others on the other hand were to raise money for - not for high class, for what
10 you call it. but for lower classes of children to make sure that children does not suffer when
11 ? People on strike But we were saying - we were saying - even if there was no strike, from
12 the money that people were getting at Sarmcol, could not afford to take children to colleges,
13 to universities. it was clear that their children would end up from Standard Six. or Standard
14 Eight. they could not afford to take their children to university. That's what we were trying -
15 that a lot of these children should benefit like all other children. So we take the matter then
16 to court and the President ruled. and the way he was conducting the proceeding - the first
17 hearing, the first sitting of the matter. we could see that - the way he was treating other
18 witnesses. Our first witness was Geoff Schreiner. He was really like interrogating the box?
19 And so we were sort of following his whole behaviour in a watchful eye until such time we
20 got after the president of the court that he was invited to one of the company advice lawyer
21 associates Andrew Lim? Then we advise him, because he was still presiding on this matter,
22 should not go to that conference, but he insisted. He went then, so resuming the case, we
23 asked him to recuse himself, recuse himself, which he refused. So that gave us a point. a base
24 to argue then we actually give out his outcome, his findings. the verdict of the matter that we
25 have been seen watching him and most unaccepted practice that he has done is to attend this
26 conference. He gave his verdict, which was against us and we took the matter now, the
27 tactical matter to - but he refused to recuse himself and up to an appeal: we won. the
28 company took us to further - uphill division, on the technical matter, not on the matter itself
29 and we also won that - an appeal division. The matter was then referred back to the Industrial

- 1 Council, now years go back then we are - I think it was up - after five or six years, if - that
 2 the matter has to go back again for the actual matter to be heard before a new bench and that
 3 president we also - we were - the judge, or the president of that proceeding, ruled against us,
 4 and he took the matter, again, to the appeal and we
- 5 L: Another sitting?
- 6 D: No, it will be a review, here in the small court and we also lost, and actually we took the
 7 matter to Bloemfontein. Now the actual matter, not now on technicalities, that is when we
 8 have had a good and very happy news that we have won the case and that at the end of the
 9 day we just to have ?
- 10 L: Well, yes, Phillip, it was a long time.
- 11 D: Yes, if one counts the years that has gone by, it is now thirteen years
- 12 L: Thirteen years?
- 13 D: Yes, thirteen years
- 14 L: And there were things that have been won, like the solidarity of the people of Mpophomeni
 15 and there are things that have been lost.
- 16 D: Mmm, yes.
- 17 L: With all those deaths, and the unhappiness, and the poverty
- 18 D: If one looks - when we reach this - one would say a happy stage - when this issue come to
 19 its finality, is that most of the people - also people have died, either illness or in violence or
 20 some of natural death, because of old age. And a lot of suffering has occurred and if some
 21 of the children, if they try to follow up what happened to our father, what was happening in
 22 this - looking at the past, they would not like to hear or hear this history of BTR Sarmcol, but
 23 we believe that we have made a mark in the whole trade union movement because this is the
 24 longest strike, in the whole trade union movement and ...
- 25 L: I'm sure you have. And Bongji might like to ask here - you've made a mark on the midlands.
- 26 D: Yes, yes, yes ... And also you would coincide that Howick is a small place but that's where it
 27 started by old veteran Baba Gwala, it is also where President Mandela was being arrested .
- 28 L: Yes, indeed. I hadn't made that connection...yes, of course
- 29 D: You could see that major things happening in Sarmcol and the transformation of the whole

1 sort of- from apartheid struggles, a lot of struggles have happened, starting from the Sarmcol
 2 and trying to also educate people organisationally, to a point where it comes to an election,
 3 they elected, under this stress of being on strike and so on, but they could now see how to
 4 organise, drawing the experience from BTR Sarmcol, and the - although we - here in the
 5 midlands we couldn't sort of have more than two-third majority vote in our favour, but
 6 organisationally, we could we have gone very far.

7 L: I think so. I think so

8 D: So what is awaiting now, we have given the report to - the report has been given to the
 9 workers that we have won the case and that the judges could not give what compensation due
 10 to the fact that they have not enough information as to how much individual has been earning
 11 and how much losses have been made so they have referred the matter to the Industrial Court
 12 to determine what sort of compensation will be given to people and we also foresee that again
 13 another long, long fight, because each party has got a right to appeal because, appeal to
 14 Bloemfontein...

15 I: Oh, don't say so many more years, because one press report said - I can't remember how
 16 it was, but I worked out that it would be a thousand rands per worker and I thought what's
 17 a thousand rands to a family man, or indeed, to anyone these days - it would be spent soon
 18 enough

19 D: The company once tried to settle this matter with R1,5 million, but when we are count how
 20 much could be divided among the 967, it was R1 500 - so we believed then - this - we all
 21 going to look at the compensation, we look not exactly as to how much one was earning, but
 22 take the morale, take how much suffering and put all that into perspective in order to come
 23 to a frame of sort of figure to compensate these people - the workers, yes. And the mandate
 24 that has been given by workers - there are three areas - one, let's look at what company, what
 25 Sarmcol could offer as compare - because they were holding the upper hand then because we
 26 have lost the case, but we have win the case, what of other people could obtain. That's the
 27 first area, and secondly and see if then we could agree as speedily sort of resolution to have
 28 an arbitrator to arbitrate on the whole matter and if those two fail, then we are left with no
 29 other alternative other than following the order of the appeal division to refer the matter to

1 the Industrial.

2 L: Yes, yes. Industrial Court, yes Phillip, ten out of ten for tenacity, you get. I really do think
3 so - you must look back with great satisfaction that you were able to do what you have done.

4 D: It's been very difficult

5 L: Oh, very hard

6 D: Yes, when the Chairperson died. I had to take over as a Chairperson of the strikers and
7 nobody was prepared to take because there was a fear of death - all over - from political
8 organisation, from the government, but in order to take the struggle forward, one has to take
9 the spear, the fallen spear, so again.

10 L: And if you don't you have to live with yourself for having not picked it up

11 D: Yes, yes. Today I am happy that I picked up, and after this point, yes, I am very much happy,
12 not easy because, I was like a father now to 900 and something people. After the meeting -
13 people have to queue and come with their problem, their houses, their furniture is being taken
14 away by the shops, they go to school. They seek .

15 L: Oh, all these things..

16 D: All these things, so .. I didn't want to act like Moses, everything, whereby every thing is
17 taken - expecting to get us out? I started to make area committees, because some people did
18 not live in Mpophomeni, they live from outside. We had area reps who try and come with a
19 solution which pertained to that area. If they could not solve it, then come to the shop
20 steward committee. That was an - somehow, a relief, although at the end of the day that could
21 come, and also it was surprising because in each and every worker who happened to approach
22 the shop steward committee, you know that his assistance will be - will need finance, but in
23 some cases, we had to talk and explore ideas that the finance is not something that is there -
24 but yourself, if you can think like this, the person can't come out from that - from that office,
25 or from that committee, he had to declare 'try this.'

26 L: Yes, yes, and I do think a great deal of South Africa's economy is going to be from the
27 informal sector and I think we're learning that more day by day, that people can use their
28 talents and their energies.

29 D: It's not that everything can be solved because someone has got money, but it - there are other

- 1 ways, it's just that one needs to explore. That's all.
- 2 L: So, development of the individual, that's what it is.
- 3 D: Ja, then the relief, and also open the perception of people here - to prospects and
- 4 development
- 5 L: Of course. Is there anything more you'd like to ask, Bongi?
- 6 M: No, I'm very satisfied, really.
- 7 L: I'm very satisfied, I can only thank you, gratefully for giving us this interview
- 8 M: Ja. Siyabonga Gakulu.
- 9
- 10 End of second side.