

When I worked at Transman in Germiston, workers were subcontracted to work at other companies. Management deducted a quarter of our salaries for this 'service'. They were able to do this because we were not registered workers.

NUMSA

Up until this point, my political activities were at the community level.

My union involvement dates back to 1989, when I got a job at Randscrap in Germiston. I immediately joined NUMSA and was elected as a shopsteward. A few months later, workers elected me as secretary of the shopsteward committee and I became the vice-chairperson in 1991.

For the first time, I felt a sense of belonging. We fought discriminatory and exploitative practices. Workers were constantly downing tools. I led many stoppages, some of them illegal. At the time, the LRA was not labour-friendly. I led Randscrap workers in marches to the old Department of Labour. We also participated in the stayaways. In 1992, we brought the company to a standstill when workers joined in the rolling mass action. NUMSA was also mobilising support for a national strike around wages and conditions. Our method of struggle was mobilisation. Our goal was basic worker rights.

On the shopfloor

NUMSA's relationship with management at Randscrap was hostile. The most memorable campaign was for a new clock-in system. Workers did not want to be clocked by management. We also did not want to clock in after changing into our overalls. These grievances might seem trivial, but the campaign grew into a three day strike.

Today, our relationship with

management has changed. We can sit at the negotiating table and talk in a civilised way. We regularly meet to discuss issues like health and safety, productivity and restructuring. Previously, we were not involved in these issues. We also get time off for education and training. In the past, this was unthinkable.

Confusion

Despite our gains, these are confusing times for workers. Workers sometimes get upset because they don't know what is going on in centralised bargaining forums. They struggle to understand issues like workplace reorganisation and productivity improvements. Before 1994 things were simpler.

Today we are told that there is a new government and that if we strike we are striking against the new government. We don't understand what is happening in the economy. But we do understand that there is a difference between the government and bosses. The bosses, even though they speak a different language, are still out to weaken us.

For example, at the local level, we understand things like exploitation and discrimination. When workers' wages are cut or they are dismissed we see this as an attempt to destroy us and our organisations. We were recently called into a meeting and told that the company has to reduce working hours. We were not given reasons why. But we suspect that it won't be long before we are told that there are going to be retrenchments. They are talking about getting rid of contract and temporary workers. I suspect that they are looking to cut costs as part of a restructuring plan.

We are often told by the bosses that we are building a nation. The question is: In whose interests? COSATU has a key role to play in clarifying the current situation. The

union leadership must give direction

Since 1994, we have seen an attack on workers. Even though COSATU has come out against GEAR, there is no clear way forward in the alliance. Our support for the ANC is not based on a common vision. But I think it is premature to break from the ANC. The bosses and the National Party would like to see us fighting

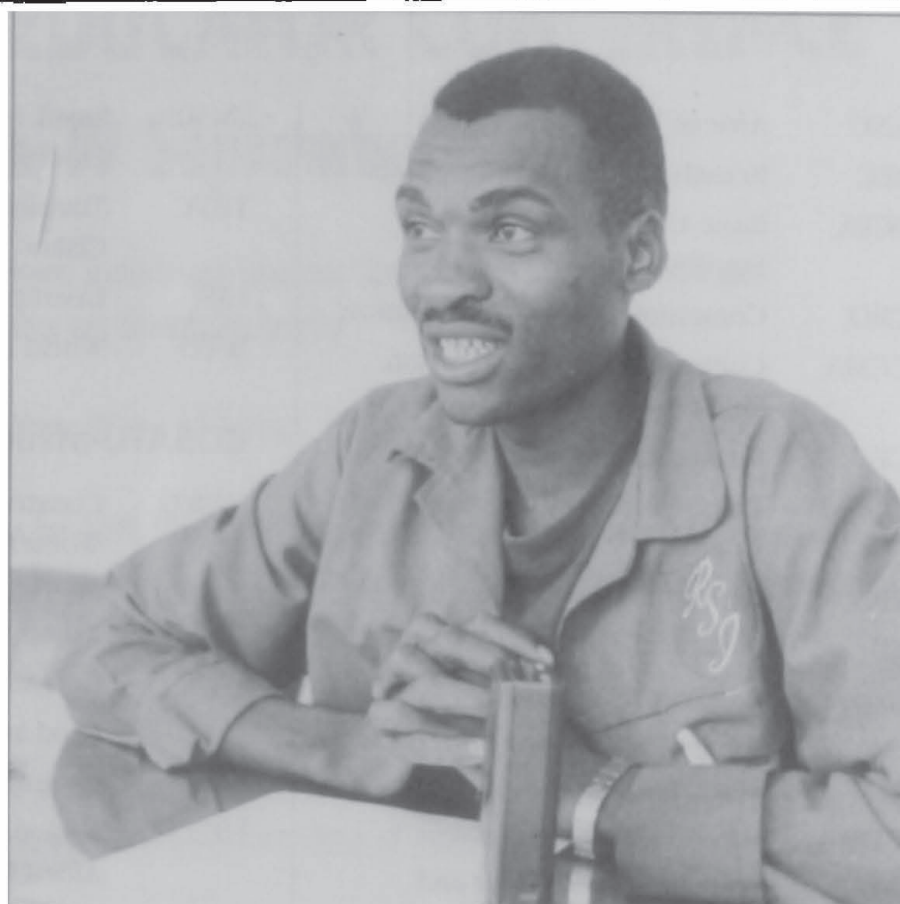
among ourselves. This will play into their hands.

Our task is to strengthen COSATU in the alliance. In the Germiston local, we are strategising on how to get workers involved in the bigger issues. We have identified the need to call some of the COSATU leaders to address us on the issues. We realise that COSATU and NUMSA's policies will remain on paper unless we actively support them.

Challenges

The tradition of campaigns to defend workers must be revived. Our first task is to organise the unorganised. There must be a commitment in the alliance to address workers' needs on the ground. At 'Randscrap, the challenge is to upgrade the skills of workers. Unskilled workers will be retrenched and it will not be easy for them to find jobs.

This will not happen without strong worker organisation. The way forward is to



rebuild our organisations from the bottom up. There is a problem of poor attendance at union meetings today. Membership must be taken along in negotiations around policy issues. Workers do not want to attend meetings where reports are tabled about talks at the leadership level. They want to own these processes by mandating their leaders.

Workers have been relaxing since 1994. They believe that Mandela will change everything. We must get active and militant again. The struggle continues. It is through struggle that we will build strong organisation and win our demands.

Family

I live in Katilehong with my wife, Julia. She is doing a BA at the University of Vista. My two children live with my parents in Pietersburg. We decided that we need to find a secure home before they come to live with us. At the moment, the union is my home. ★