



SACTWU

WEAVING OUR STORIES, TOGETHER!



“I wanted to be judged on the ability of my brain and the quality of my work, not on the colour of my skin! It was this lack of equality that drew me into politics. This was the engine inside me that drove me”

Norman Daniels

Age: 87,

Ex-General Secretary of TWIU

(1967 - 1987)

Ex-Cape Town City Councillor, Ward 8

(1963 - 1972)

Stories from the Worker History Project

The Worker History Project was launched in January 2008 and seeks to collect the stories of the lives of our members to help us get a better understanding of our own history, as a union.

Every worker has a history.

We are all the children of the people who raised us. They are part of us, and we carry their history in us.

As we have grown older, we have all had things happen in our lives that have shaped us and influenced us. Maybe our families shaped us? Maybe it was our school? Maybe it was our communities? Maybe it was our working life? Things have happened that have made us into the people we are today.

*Today many of us are mothers and fathers to our children.
Today many of us are people with special interests.
Today many of us have hopes and dreams for our lives.*

Today ALL of us are clothing, textile or leather industry workers.

We are also ALL members of one of the biggest unions in South Africa, SACTWU.

Today every worker has a story to tell: The story of our lives.

SACTWU Worker History Series:

Produced by Worker History Project

Book 170

Edition 1

November 2009

Mr Norman Daniels



Background:

I come from a very poor background. I was born on the 9th January 1922 in District Six. My parents were Dina Izakse and Joseph Daniels and they had six children. My father was very sickly and so he couldn't work. My mother looked after all of us by working hard at low paying jobs. She worked as a serving lady in hotels and such places. The money was bad and things for us were not good. It was poverty as far as we were concerned.

My mother was a very strong woman. She was able to carry all of us financially on her shoulders. When things were tough, she would hold us together. She was brave and she loved her family dearly. There is a story I was once told about my mother that shows her bravery well: It happened when my brother was in court and being sentenced to jail on Robben Island Prison. When the judge passed his sentence on my brother, he called my brother a skollie! Well, when my mother heard that she got up and shouted at the judge: 'You can't call my son a skollie. He is not a skollie!' Imagine

that! Shouting at the judge, especially during the apartheid era! She really was a brave woman.

Our family lived in a little house on the ground floor of the Winter Gardens, a two-storey building in Ayre Street. My parents and the little children shared the bedroom whilst my two brothers and I shared a shed in the yard. Ayre Street was a small street. One reached it from a dead-end on Tennant Street. From there, pedestrians could walk down the Seven Steps into Hanover Street or up to Caledon Street.

There was a furnace in Ayre Street. It supplied hot water to the wash-house on Hanover Street. My mother would send me to the furnace with dough to request the person in charge to please bake the dough into bread. Near the wash-house was a small swimming pool that was fed with water from the mountain. The entrance was on Hanover Street. I never saw anyone swim in that pool.

When I was 6 years old, in 1928, I went to Sydney Street Primary School. The next year, in 1929, things started to get tougher for my family. In South Africa, and internationally, the world was going through a financial crisis (the Great Depression). There was no work whatsoever and we had to live on government welfare. It was administered by the Board of Aid and I remember that the Board used to give us coupons to get mielie meel. We ate mielie meel in the morning, mielie meel at lunch time, and mielie meel for supper. I still hate mielie meel today!

Education:

In 1935 I completed my Std 6. That was as far as Sydney Street school went. If I wanted to further my schooling, I had to go to another school. The high school options in my area were Trafalgar High School and Zonnebloem High School.

I really wanted to do my Std 7, but my mother didn't know a lot about schooling. She didn't know that I had to register for Std 7. I

remember going to school on the first morning of Std 7. My mother dressed me; I walked to school and I joined the other youngsters in the queue in front of Zonnebloem High School. The bell rang and the teachers came out to call the students by their names. They read the names from the lists – but my name was not on the list because I hadn't registered! I was left outside alone, so I had to go home.

Finding Work:

Since I wasn't at school during the day I decided to look for work. I went to work for a jeweler in Plein Street in Cape Town. It was near Spin Street; near the old Slave Tree. Every time I went past that tree, I would visualize what had happened to the slaves there.

The jeweler was a Jewish man. I showed him my school report and he employed me. He paid me 5 shillings a week, which was a lot of money to my mother.

Night School:

I had not given up my hope of getting my Std 7 education and so I registered for night school. Most of the other people in the class were much older than I was. I found that I was a lot quicker than them. They were slow. They were struggling with things that I already knew from Std 6. The education didn't challenge me, so I decided to leave.

Applying For The Army:

After working at the jeweler, I had a number of temporary jobs. By the time I was 17 years old, World War 2 had started and I decided I would join the army. We needed the money so I was prepared to take the risk of being in the war. In fact the risk for so-called coloured people was even higher than for white soldiers because while we could be sent to combat zones as a driver, we were not allowed

to carry guns! This meant that they couldn't protect themselves. Maybe I was lucky that the army rejected my application? They said that there was something wrong with my ear.

United Tobacco Company:

In 1940 I went to look for work at the United Tobacco Company in Kloof Street in Cape Town. The company was manufacturing cigarettes for the soldiers in the war and at that time they had two plants - one in Kloof Street and one in Observatory. The company was huge; in Kloof Street alone they employed about 4000 workers!

When I arrived at United Tobacco, the manager was confused. He could not establish whether I was white or so-called coloured. I was classified as 'coloured', however he did not ask to see my I.D. The manager then said that if I was white, I could become a machine operator; if I was not white there was a broom. I told him to give me the broom. I started off in night-shift and worked for 4 years on night-shift until 1944, when I got married to Linda Case on 26 August 1944.



The Colour Bar:

Remember that at that time, when the Nationalist Party became the government, so-called coloured people like myself had very limited job options. The government would only let us do menial work. We could work in places like the City Council as a sweeper, or a cleaner or a driver. We could work as a teacher or a nurse. Or we could work in the storerooms at places like Garlicks or Clicks. But we could never progress beyond those jobs and this discrimination made us very angry.

Even in those days as a young man, the problems of job reservation was something that made me angry. I wanted to be judged on the ability of my brain and the quality of my work, not on the colour of my skin! It was this lack of equality that drew me into politics. This was the engine inside me that drove me and shaped my political development.

Learning Politics In District Six:

I learned politics in District Six. It was not something we only discussed in our home, but it was something that was being discussed in the community. We had very political people in the community – people like Dr Abdullah Abdurahman, founder of the African People's Organisation. Residents of District Six were members of all sorts of organizations: The United Party was very popular, and so was the Communist Party. The communists found a fruitful basket in District Six. They attracted local residents like the famous South African writer Alex La Guma. I used to see Ray Alexander and other in Caledon Street in Cape Town. It was the heart of District Six! If one wanted to learn and get involved, one would go there and listen to them. They would tell people why they should belong to the unions. But it wasn't just unionism, it was also politics! Yet even though there were lots of different views on politics in District Six, we all had one thing in common: we wanted to remove the chains that the government had placed on so-called non-white people!

The Tobacco Workers' Union:

When I arrived at the United Tobacco Company, I realized that wages and working conditions were not good. The workers were given a half a crown increase once a year, which really wasn't enough. Nevertheless, I needed the money so I worked hard to keep my job.

When I moved to day shift in 1944, I began to hear stories about something called the Tobacco Workers' Union in Johannesburg. I learnt that there had been once been a successful Tobacco Workers Union in Cape Town in 1906 but that it had stopped working shortly thereafter. During the time I was working at United Tobacco, the only kind of service that helped workers with their problems was the Welfare Officer of the Company. But the Officer was a supervisor of the Company and thus we as workers distrusted it.

From the talk at my factory, I learned that the unions in Johannesburg wanted to help workers in Cape Town to form new unions. In those days the unions all worked together and shared their expertise; organizers from one union would help to establish new unions and strengthen existing unions. I was also told that two well known Garment Workers' Union organizers – Anna Scheepers and Johanna Cornelius – had come to Cape Town to help re-organize tobacco workers.



Johanna Cornelius



Anna Scheepers

The fact that there was an organization like a trade union made me excited. It inspired me to begin to organize a Tobacco Workers' Union in Cape Town. I was instrumental in getting membership. We held meetings at Kloof Street and also at our sister company in Observatory. Some of my colleagues and I organized for Johanna Cornelius to come down to Cape Town again to address the workers about being in a trade union. I remember Johanna well. She was such a bright person!

We also arranged for Johanna to meet with the management of the United Tobacco Company. On the day that she came, the management cleaned up the factory and made it look nice and clean. Since I was going to be in the meeting, they called me and told me to get ready. I was filthy from tobacco dust but they told me to go and shower and change into clean clothes! They wanted to pretend that everything at the company was great. But it was a charade, pure and simple!

In the end most of the workers at United Tobacco Company in Kloof Street and Observatory joined the union. It was a national union, with Anna as the Chair, Alec Calmeyer as the Secretary and myself as the Treasurer. Alec Calmeyer worked at the Observatory plant and had once been a teacher.

We tried to bring others workers into the union. We approach a company called Cavella as well as Rembrandt in Paarl. But we couldn't get in there.

On the 9th May 1945 the Second World War in Europe and Africa ended and the soldiers came home. This meant that demand for cigarettes decreased because we didn't need to supply the army anymore. A year later, in 1946, the Kloof Street plant of the United Tobacco Company closed down. Many of the 4000 workers from Kloof Street were laid-off; some of us were transferred to the Observatory plant. I was one of those who transferred.

When I arrived at Observatory, I saw that it was different in some ways to Kloof Street. There were many more so-called white people working there. But luckily the union was still strong! Management gave me a lot of latitude to do union work and I could still hold meetings fairly easily. Unfortunately though I found myself beginning to do wage negotiations alone. My Secretary, Alec Calmeyer, disappeared. At first he left me alone to do the negotiations because he didn't like to fight. Later though he left the company, and as such I felt I was left without direction.

In the late-1950s, the United Tobacco Company in Observatory also closed down. The company was feeling the effects of the changing market for cigarettes and they were struggling badly. They told us that we wouldn't get an increase at the end of the year, and since we were angry about it, we decided to go on strike to force the company to pay us. We took our strike very seriously. I remember standing at the station at Observatory making sure that workers didn't come into work. No-one came. Later though, the employers called me to one side and tried to negotiate privately with me. They asked me what kind of job I wanted and they told me that they would give me the job, on condition that I called off the strike. I thought to myself 'I can't sell out the workers by taking this job' so I told them I wouldn't accept their offer. Their response was to simply close down the company! We all lost our jobs. Thankfully though the union had some money saved up for this kind of crisis and it managed to give each of the workers a pay-out. It was after I was laid-off from the United Tobacco Company that I began to work in the textile union, an industry that I worked in for almost 50 years!

Joining The Textile Workers' Industrial Union:

The full name of the textile workers' union at that time was the Textile Workers' Industrial Union (TWIU). Unlike the young Tobacco Workers' Union, the TWIU was quite an old union. It had been founded in Durban in 1932, however because of leadership problems it had to be re-launched in Johannesburg in 1934.

For its first few years, the TWIU had organized workers of all skin colours into a single union. However in 1936 a new law was finally passed called the Industrial Conciliation Act. The Act made it illegal for black African males to be legally considered to be 'employees' unless they had been granted a pass. The TWIU was firmly against this racist practice, but it decided not to fight the law and rather to open a parallel branch of the union for black African workers. By 1950 however new legislation had caused the TWIU to create an entirely separate - though in practice linked - union called the African Textile Workers' Industrial Union (ATWIU).

Like all the new unions, many of the leaders and officials of the TWIU (and the ATWIU) were communists. They were very hard-working people who didn't get any money from their jobs, but they were nevertheless very dedicated. They were concerned with the problems of the poor and they wanted to make a difference. It was people like Nancy Dick, Pauline Podbery, Ron Press, Wilton Mkwai, Piet Beyleveld, Don Mateman, Mike Muller, Aaron Mphahlele, Cleophas Nsibande and Betty du Toit who worked hard to build the TWIU before Calmeyer and myself.

Unfortunately, in 1950, the South African government passed the Suppression of Communism Act. After the Act, the government started to ban many of the union officials – either confining them to their houses or simply preventing them from working. The State targeted many of the unions since we had many communists in our ranks and also since we belonged to the socialist trade union federation, the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU).

The banning orders caused huge problems for the unions because most of them were left without leadership since everyone was banned. It was a terrible time.

The TWIU had been a major player in SACTU - the union's previous General Secretary Piet Beyleveld had even been chosen as the first President of the Congress in 1955! As such, some of its union officials (and ex-officials) like Nancy Dick, Fletcher Melville, Don Mateman, Piet Beyleveld, Mary Turok and Leon Levy were all banned.

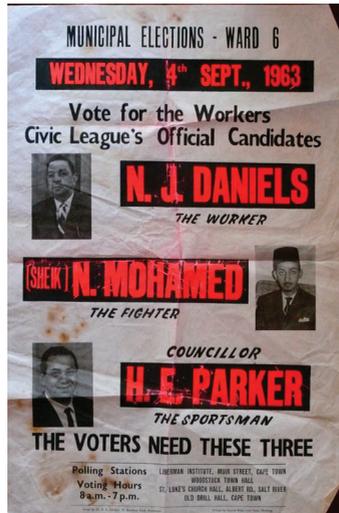
By the time that I arrived at the TWIU's offices in Woodstock to ask for a job, Alec Calmeyer had become the General Secretary of the union. Ray Alexander had asked him to take the position. Alec referred me to the Secretary of the ATWIU, George Kika, and George gave me a job in the Sick Fund. While I was in the Sick fund, I would go with the doctor to various companies, such as SA Fine and SA Woolen Mills. I began to understand the conditions of the workers in the industry in the Western Cape.

After working in the Sick Fund, I became a union organizer in 1954. I looked after workers at companies such as S.A Woolen Mills in Observatory.

When I came to work for the union, it was suffering a lot. Members were resigning in large numbers since they were disillusioned by the fact that so many of the new leaders were inexperienced. Others were upset about the fact that we had amended our Constitution to cater only for coloured and Indian workers. This happened after another Industrial Conciliation Act was passed in 1956, which made it illegal for multi-racial unions to exist.

Becoming A City Councillor:

By 1963 my activities in the union brought me closer and closer to formal politics. In that year I was elected to be a City Councillor for Ward 8 (District Six) in the Cape Town City Council.



An election poster from District six featuring Mr Daniels

However in 1972, when the government declared that only white people could sit on local and national political structures, I had to leave the City Council.



Mr Daniels with other Councillors

During my time in formal politics I served on the Executive of the Coloured People's Convention, an organization that was supported by many so-called coloured people.

I remember a time when the Convention had been due to be held in Athlone. I was elected to be one of the speakers on labour issues. Before the Convention was held, the government banned the area on which it was to be held. I was with 4 or 5 other officials who were eventually arrested. We held a meeting in a caravan and were debating labour issues. We were therefore very surprised when a group of police and other officials walked in and arrested us for violating the banning order. They locked us up in Athlone Police Station for about 3 weeks. We appeared in the Wynberg Magistrates court and Advocate Donald Molteno represented us.

The court was packed with Convention supporters, ministers of religions, leaders from all the other organizations as well as the Executive of the National Convention. We were found guilty of violating a banning order – namely holding a meeting in an area in which the Convention could not be held - and let off with a warning.

Becoming General Secretary Of The TWIU:

In 1966, Alec Calmeyer was also banned by the apartheid state. It left a big vacuum in the TWIU; the job of General Secretary needed to be filled and so I took over as Acting General Secretary while Alec retained his formal position. We even still paid his salary. Some people complained that we were paying Alec for a job that he wasn't doing but I argued that he had been banned because of his passion to support workers and that we, as a union, owed him our loyalty to support him. By 1968 or thereabouts, I formally became the General Secretary of the TWIU.

By the time that I took over from Alec as Acting General Secretary, we still faced the problem of low membership. The union had been destroyed by banning orders from the state. There were

no organizers! People were afraid. I was the only official still working.

I started with a very low membership and low self-confidence. But I was determined that I at least had to try. I would go out as General Secretary and recruit workers. I would catch a train to Paarl, organize at the companies there and then walk to Wellington to organise the workers there.

My strategy to grow the union was to find workers in the company who were sympathetic to the union. Then I would get them to work internally and recruit. These workers helped me even though they were aware of the risk of being banned.

To help me in the task of re-building the union, I also appointed new organizers in the Western Cape, as well as in Johannesburg, East London and Durban. We worked hard to increase the membership and by 1969 we had begun to regain the confidence of both workers and employers.

Hextex Strike:

Between 1969-1970, we had a big strike at Hextex in Worcester. We had organizers up there, Mangale and a muslim lady whose name I cannot recall anymore. Unfortunately we weren't able to negotiate the workers' demands. The workers there were not covered by an Industrial Council and they couldn't participate in negotiating their wage increases. Furthermore their wages were very, very low: the reason was that there was an agreement between Hextex and the farmers in the area about wages. The farmers were worried that if Hextex paid workers too much, workers would leave the farms to go to the company. Obviously the problems with their wages made the workers angry and they decided to strike. They had well over 1000 people at the company.

When I arrived in Worcester, I stayed about 3 or 4 nights in the

town and waited for Piet Beyleveld. I had arranged for him to come down and assist me with the negotiations. In the end he negotiated a successful agreement that terminated the strike.

Joining TUCSA:

Despite our efforts to grow the membership of the TWIU, we found that our success was limited due to the fact that our membership kept on being targeted with banning orders. How can you grow a union when organizers are banned?

The choice facing us was difficult: we could keep being in SACTU and possibly be destroyed by the state; or we could leave SACTU and try and survive alone (a very difficult prospect); or we could leave SACTU and join TUCSA, the Trade Union Council of South Africa. TUCSA was the biggest trade union federation in the country, but it had a number of highly conservative unions affiliated to it. As a result while TUCSA didn't mind maintaining the existence of interracial unions (unions that accepted white, coloured and Indian members), it did not accept any black unions. They said they only accepted registered unions, and since black unions could not be legally registered, they were excluded.

We didn't want to have our union destroyed. After all, what can a dead union do for the workers? But, obviously, we also didn't want to go into a racially segregated federation like TUCSA.

But then, in 1962, TUCSA changed its stance - it allowed black unions to join the federation. The first people to come into TUCSA were Solly Sachs and the Garment Workers Union of South Africa (GWU-SA). We stayed out for a long time but eventually we began to think: 'We are keeping our credentials and our dignity, but what are we really accomplishing?' In the end we decided to affiliate to TUCSA. This happened some time in the early 1970s.

In the 1970s, the textile industry in South Africa was flourishing.

In the Western Cape, Berg River had about 2000 workers, Spilo had about 1000 workers, and Hextex had about 1500 workers. In Kwazulu Natal too the industry was strong. The Frame Group alone employed almost 40 000 workers!

The National Union Of Textile Workers:

In 1971, a group of students from the University of Natal began to be active in the union movement. They were part of something called the Wages Commission, a student-activist body that was looking into the wages of African workers. Their actions were part of a bigger attempt to re-grow the union movement. They frequented our Durban office and were most welcome.

Partly as a result of their work, and partly for a lot of other reasons, there were massive illegal strikes by African workers in Durban in 1973. Textile workers dominated those strikes and in September of that year they formed the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW). One of the Wages Commission students, Halton Cheadle, became the first General Secretary of the NUTW.

We in the TWIU were pleased that the workers in Durban had begun to organize themselves. Our own African textile workers' union, the ATWIU, had stopped operating in 1972, and so we saw the NUTW as giving us a chance to be involved with organized African workers again. In those days we worked closely with the NUTW.

In 1974, a new young white man arrived on the scene; Johnny Copelyn. He started off with the South African Labour Bulletin and then moved to become part of both the NUTW and the TWIU. With the NUTW, he sat on the Secretariat. He was also the TWIU's National Organiser. Both Halton and Johnny played an important role in the unionization of textile workers.

Although the TWIU and the NUTW were legally distinct and

separate unions, Halton, Johnny and I used to go to each other's meetings. When I went to the NUTW meetings, everyone would be speaking Zulu – even Halton and Johnny. They could speak it very well.

I struggled to fit into those meetings because I didn't have the same kind of connection with Kwazulu Natal as Halton and Johnny had. They knew the language. They knew the local politics. They understood the culture of the area. I was from the Western Province, as it was known then, and so I felt distant. It would have been the same for Halton and Johnny if they came to meetings that I held in Cape Town. There I had a long history with the workers; we knew each other. Halton and Johnny would probably also have felt more distant.

A Strike At Frame:

During the Halton's involvement with the union, there was a big strike at Frame Textiles. I was in Cape Town when it happened. Halton was involved in his capacity as the Secretary of the NUTW, and the union arranged a meeting for the workers. When I got to Frame, the workers were locked out. The police were there as well as the army. Halton told the police that he wanted a meeting with the workers. They said 'there is no room to have a meeting with the workers here'. Halton then insisted that he address the workers on an open field nearby.

He led the march and I walked alongside him. An army official accompanied us, and as we neared the field, he said to Halton: "Jy se wat se jy moet se! Anders skiet ek jou vrek" He held the his weapon close to Halton's head. It was frightening, and Halton told the workers that as they could see, it was not possible to have a meeting while the police and the army were around. He then called on the workers to disperse, which they did.

Signing The Smith And Nephew Agreement:

I was given the honour of signing the first agreement between the union and a company which covered black textile workers. There was a factory controlled by Americans in Natal called Smith and Nephew and it had always refused to negotiate with the black workers there. But Halton pushed hard and eventually I was asked to go down to the company and I had the honour of signing an agreement between the workers and the company. It was the first time that a so-called coloured or black person had signed an agreement which was applicable to all workers.

Negotiating For Frame Workers:

I remember that Halton, Johnny and I once went to a conference together. When we left, we found out that our people at Frame were striking! Alec Erwin was with us at the time and since we had to negotiate, Johnny and Halton mandated Alec to draft a letter for an application for a conciliation between the workers of Frame and the boss, Philip Frame. I didn't really look at the letter because I was very busy.

As a result of the strikes and the letter, the Department of Manpower, as well as Philip Frame, agreed to meet with us in Pretoria to negotiate. When I went to the meeting I took the entire executive of TUCSA with me. I opened the meeting and thought we had a very good case. But then Philip Frame asked the Chairman of the meeting whether the hearing was on behalf of all workers or only employees. Remember, black workers were not considered employees then.

The Chairman responded by saying that conciliation could only be held on behalf of employees, since that was the law. Then Philip Frame objected that our application said it was on behalf of everybody, not only employees!

This presented me with a serious problem. I had expected to do what we normally did - which was to negotiate on behalf of 'employees' at the Industrial Council level and then, once negotiations were finished, we would request at the factory level that the increases be applied to everyone. We did this to get around the law since if some workers got bigger increases than others, it would create tensions in the workplace. That was the strategy that we always used. In the context of black workers not being legally considered 'employees' it seemed the logical way to fight.

But now I had a problem. The union's letter had asked for a meeting to negotiate for all workers. This was different to our usual tactic. It said upfront what we had always tried to do by the backdoor, but the problem was that we as the union now had to decide whether we were prepared to change our tactic. Could we change our stance and demand to negotiate on behalf of all workers when this would break the law? Remember, to break the law and risk the power of the apartheid state was a huge risk! Yet if we didn't break the law, and if we only negotiated on behalf of 'employees', we would be seen as having sold out the black workers.

I was in a quandary so I asked for an adjournment. I consulted the executive of TUCSA but no-one could provide me with a way out. Whatever we did it would not be satisfactory. At the end of it I had to say 'It would appear as if we have an illegal application'. I went on to say that we wanted to negotiate on behalf of all the workers because we didn't discriminate on the basis of skin colour. If we couldn't negotiate for them all, then we would not negotiate at all. I had to sign an agreement which stopped the conciliation altogether.

Talking With Philip Frame:

I remember once getting a lift once in the car of Phillip Frame. We had been at one of the Frame factories outside Durban. He offered me a lift back to Durban. During the course of driving, he told me

that whilst being a Jew and acknowledging that most Jews were against the Nationalist government, he was proud to be serving on one of the highest advisory bodies of the Nationalist government.

TWIU, NUTW and Membership Challenges:

In the early 1980s, the TWIU began to experience a drop in members again. This happened, for example, at our East London branch. It was a big, big branch and we had a very good relationship with workers and with management. But when I went down there once to have a meeting, I found the union office was filled with members' resignations.

The problem arose because the relationship between the NUTW and the TWIU had become more hostile. I didn't really feel as though there was rivalry between our unions. I felt like we should work together. But our unions had tense relations because of the fact that TWIU was affiliated to TUCSA. I suppose if we hadn't been part of TUCSA, we probably would have merged sooner with the NUTW. But TUCSA had a policy that its affiliates could not represent black workers, since according to the law black workers were not considered to be 'employees'. This made bargaining on their behalf very difficult. TUCSA was hesitant to break the law by trying to negotiate on behalf of black workers, but it didn't take that decision easily; we constantly debated whether we should include so-called 'black' unions.

I think Johnny Copelyn was probably a hell of a lot more mature than I was because he could see into the future. He knew that the struggle against apartheid, which we were all fighting, could only be won by strengthening black workers. Black workers formed the largest part of the workforce and their size could only get bigger as the industry grew. Johnny knew this and he realized that we would have to break the law in order to change it.

In the mid-1980s the union began to experience terrible times

in Kwazulu Natal. There were political conflicts between the IFP and the ANC; the majority of the people in the townships were supporters of Mandela. But the people in the rural areas were supporters of Buthelezi. The problems spilled over into the unions and members of the TWIU were warned about belonging to the union. People were thrown out of third floor windows. Women in particular were threatened. They were told 'if you don't resign from the union, we will harm you!' On one occasion, when I was in Durban for a meeting, one of our guys was even shot dead at the bus stop!

Even when the law around black workers being employees was changed during that time, workers were hostile to us. They said to us: 'Why should we be part of your union now when you never let us be part of your union in the past'. We would say 'But we fought for you, even though we weren't allowed to let you be our members'.

Conflicts At Bargaining Level:

In those days the TWIU was still doing a lot of its' bargaining primarily at plant level since there were very few established Bargaining or Industrial Councils. For example, although there was a Worsted Council in the Western Cape, it only included Hex River Textiles. S.A Fine Worsteds, which also produced worsteds, was not in the Council and negotiations had to take place on a plant basis.

In Durban there was a Textile Council, but it covered only blankets and wadding. Other textile companies also had to be negotiated at a plant level. Finally, in Cape Town, there was a Cotton Council.

My whole life was spent negotiating. It wasn't just around wages though; it was about everything. Sometimes it could be about an issue like workers having their lunch break. I remember negotiating for lunch once at Spilo in Paarl. Their machines used to run continuously, all day round and the workers were told to stay at

the machines because they were still on. On one occasion I went into the factory and just turned the machines off, one by one! The supervisor ran up to me to say 'why are you turning the machines off?' I said "people are entitled to one hours' rest. I am making sure that they get their time".

By the time we had established a number of Bargaining or Industrial Councils, negotiating became easier for us. Plant level negotiations were frustrating because they would use up a lot of our time and resources. With Bargaining Councils on the otherhand, things went smoother.

The way our negotiations at the Council worked was that when we arrived at an agreed decision, it would be implemented in all companies that were covered by the Council. However generally the increases that the Council could offer were limited by the existence of less profitable companies in the Council. As the union, the TWIU therefore decided that once the Council negotiations were completed, workers at more profitable companies could demand higher wage increases that were in line with what their company could afford.

Unlike us, however the NUTW didn't negotiate at the Bargaining Council. They negotiated at plant level with each individual company. With the richer companies, this generally allowed them to get more than we could in the Council.

In the Cotton Council, the existence of two different bargaining methods – the TWIU's and the NUTW's – became too much, and the Council collapsed. It happened on one year just after the NUTW had negotiated fairly good increases for its members, I then asked Johnny Copelyn to come down to Cape Town to negotiate a wage increase for the workers at the Cotton Council. Johnny could be rough with the employers whereas it was harder for me; I knew them well and had long-standing relationships with them. In the end Johnny managed to negotiate an increase at the Council that

was on par with the increases that the NUTW had negotiated with individual companies!

But then the problems started. After the Council's wage negotiations, the NUTW members at three big companies (including Berg River Textiles) asked to be included in the Council's wage increase. This would have meant that they had received two increases in one year! In the end there were strikes at the companies and the employers pleaded with me to help end them. They said they had already given the workers an increase. I didn't know what to do. I couldn't handle the different tensions and eventually this problem broke the Council.

Merging With NUTW:

We began to realize that it was sensible for us to negotiate with the NUTW about a merger. We chose John Eagles to lead the negotiations and in the end we arrived at a solution. The TWIU, the NUTW and also the National Union of Garment Workers (NUGW) – the union run by Lucy Mvubelo – all merged together in 1987 to form the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers' Union of South Africa (ACTWUSA). At the end of the day, the coming together of the unions was very rewarding.

I was instrumental in getting the NUGW to merge with us to form ACTWUSA. They were suspicious of Johnny and his motives. Their suspicions were about finances. You see Johnny had a philosophy that the union's Head Office should be in control of the finances. I agreed with that; for me it was a requirement and there could be no alternative. But the NUGW operated differently. The branches there controlled their own finances – which of course created a problem because they always spent the money very quickly and then had nothing left. At first the NUGW argued, saying they were suspicious of handing their money over to a Head Office and giving it too much power. But in the end they agreed that it was a good idea and they joined the merger.

As part of ACTWUSA, I found myself interacting with a different layer of unionists to the ones I had been with in TUCSA. The ACTWUSA people were closely linked to COSATU, which was formed in 1985, and so they were more forcefully against the apartheid system. They challenged it. They condemned it.

While I was part of ACTWUSA I represented the union at a number of COSATU Executive meetings. That is where I met the big shots. I also once made a speech that Johnny afterwards said was the best speech he had ever heard me give.



SACTWU

MODERNISE, INNOVATE, CREATE DECENT JOBS

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