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TM: Tshepo Moloji

MPS: Mncedisi Prince Sibanyoni

Interview with Mncedisi Prince Sibanyoni

NN: This is the second interview with Mncedisi Prince Sibanyoni at 793 Endulwini section and I'm with Tshepo Moloi, me Nonhlanhla Ngwenya and uncle Prince on the third of November 2010. This is a follow-up interview, so uncle Prince if you don't mind can we please start in 1985 on the student stay away.

MPS: Yah, thanks Nonhlanhla, as I've said that you are all welcome and thank you very much for your time. In fact I've mentioned earlier on that in 1985 there was a massive stay away, a two day stay away that was organised in Tembisa, then the stay away was organised by the so called MDA (Mass Democratic Movement) which consists of various structures in Tembisa that were fighting for the emancipation of the people of Tembisa. That was a very, very great mass action that took place here in Tembisa. It took about two days, somewhere in November, I don't remember the dates correctly. So that action, in a way it had an effect and a very serious one, both economically and politically... ehh... If I remember well, places like Kempton Park, you know, I would say is 90% containing people from Tembisa and you can imagine places like Kempton Park and its industrial areas like Isando and Elandsfontein where people, you know, completely 100% not going to work, the economy gets affected. Then the very same two days it had an effect politically in the municipality. I remember in Tembisa there were places called Slogaartbears that were the barras (beer halls), so those places were places that, when there was a disorder in the community, that's where people would go and burn their anger there. So on that two day stay away then... ehh... We've made it a point that by the third day there was no longer a barra outlet, except the one that was operating at Ehlanzeni hostel. Because of people living there we couldn't enter the hostel and destroy it. So if you look at the formation of these barras - why they were targeted by the young people of the day - was that... ehh... we believe that in a way they were the economical hub of the authorities... ehh... because, you know, that one has to generate revenues for the municipality, but on the other hand we saw them differently. That... ehh... you would find that if there was a stay away or there is a mass meeting, we expect people to go there in numbers, but you'll find a situation that the vast number of people, they don't attend those meetings, instead they go to these places. So we believed that in a way these things were meant deliberately to marginalise people so that people mustn't think of their future, instead they must drown themselves having those beers. So it was for that matter for us to decide that we should get rid of them. Then... ehh... taking note also after the mass stay away, also it was an issue of dealing with the issue of black local authorities, because we believed that by then they never had interest of local people, those counsellors, and we believe that they were not democratically elected by the people, by the majority of Tembisa, but instead those people used to suppress the people of Tembisa. So it went back to the extent that whereby their properties were vandalised. In fact, there were some meetings whereby we would try to communicate with them that they must leave their positions but they have refused, completely refused and then the masses used force and then the campaign... It was pre-headed by the Tembisa Youth Congress (TEYCO) and the Tembisa Resident Association (TRA) with the blessings of the then UDF because they were operating under the offices of UDF in overseeing the whole political activity.

You know that the ANC was burned by then so their mouth piece was UDF, so then we were with them, though things were kind of nasty, nasty in a sense that then the system they would put in soldiers all over. They would get these other operatives, we don't know where they're from – Namibia or Ethiopia, because they didn't understand our language so to say it, but they were our black brothers here harassing people.

TM: They were soldiers?

MPS: Yes, they were soldiers. We used to call them Tambai because they couldn't understand English or anyway, and then the next state president declared a curfew here in Tembisa. Though I'm not sure on the date, but it was somewhere in 1986 whereby we would be given time that we need to be on the street up until the particular time, so I think it was round about nine o'clock in the evening. Then after... ehh... those commandos they would start to operate. Funny that you need to have papers in your own place that will give you permission to move around, so if you don't have that paper, normally they're not going to arrest you, but beat you so nice that the following day you won't even think of going around. But we the activist of the day, we managed to move around in most conditions. So personally I believe that those types of actions were much more brutal for people and also they were acting inhuman for people that in their own place have to be monitored by people with guns. But by bringing also those commandos it didn't make the situation any better because it worsen the situation whereby now the people of Tembisa were mobilised in large numbers. Now they began to... Tembisa, it was very dilapidated by then, people used the so called bucket system and all the stuff, so after that we began... now people began to get mobilised. Then people now use whatever they've got at their disposal to find a system. Then now people would take this bucket system and go to the Mayor's place. Then the Mayor was Lukas Mothibe, who used to own quite a number of shops and the night club called Oasis. So people would know women would put these buckets on their heads and march to his place or club and just pour everything there. It was just like a mess. Then the authorities on that life then decided that... ehh... the great local authorities who came to power, they brought in the administrator... ehh... which the guy, they sent an email which the guy was Mr Haines Eybers. So again now Tembisa began to be controlled by Kempton Park so as I've mentioned that on the street there the authorities are second powers. It was then controlled by Kempton Park and also Kempton Park it was controlled by Germiston - it was like the chain of locals. Then... ehh... the bringing of Mr Eybers and then we know the line that they use, they would be like "Yes, we've got the ear to listen". So then we began some talks, you know, talks after talks... Then we began some talks with Mr Eybers, but now we find that... ehh... our talks were mainly interacted because there was now confusion between the civic movements. They were Tembisa Civic Association (TCA), which we believe that it was a part of the system and then the TCA, it was led by the late Mr Gobandlovu. He was the founder and the president of the TCA, and then... ehh... TCA involves all these noble people of Tembisa - the business people, the likes of Mr Rev Namala, and then the likes of Mr Sothula and then on the other hand... ehh... We had Tembisa Resident Association, the TRA, the leadership of the TRA by then were people like... ehh... Mr Ali Khiyane was the president... The founders, Mr Japi Mokoebob of the Tembisan newspaper - they were the founders with Timothy Mabena. You name them, Mr Paul Maseko and Greg Malebo - those were the founders and also we, the so called ehh... They used to call us the young lions. We were growing up as well by then. Now we began to live the politics of the youth, we became the part of the TRA as well. I remember in early nineties I was a... I got onto the leadership of the TRA.

TM: So where did you start?

MPS: I started at a sectional chair of the TRA and then later I was elected on a zone nine as a chair person; as well a zone nine was compiling with the number of sections. Then later on I was elected as a deputy general secretary... ehh... of the TRA and then, while I was serving on the deputy secretary, then I was also taken out of TRA to be the deputy secretary of the ANC - the Tembisa branch - then I served and worked myself up to be the general secretary of the Tembisa branch whereby Bheki Khumalo, you know Bheki Khumalo? Bheki Khumalo took a race on me as TS, so... and then the TRA pushed the struggle of the people. You know, we brought about a lot of changes. You know things were difficult, ehh... We organised, you know, things like rent boycott because we wanted the authorities to talk with us... We organised campaigns like rent boycott which ultimately the authorities were willing to talk to us, but the very same issue that the talks cantered it was an issue of electricity in Tembisa... ehh... whereby we wanted the type of resource must be moved from the town council and be run separately by Eskom, as other townships are doing, but we couldn't win that battle on the basis that... ehh... Eskom has sold the infrastructure to the town council. So now the town council owns all the infrastructure, and then when Eskom wanted the infrastructure back the town council want the large amount of money that they couldn't afford. Then, after the release of Mandela, we began some talks after Codesa. Then we began some talks with the local authorities. Our point of focus now, it was no longer the issue of electricity and rent, etc. Or another thing that I've left out is negotiations that we had with the town council. It was an issue of Eskom and the written off of RES, which... ehh... on that one, we managed to win it though the authority didn't want to go like... ehh... a... approach then now they must pay these and stuff like that...

TM: Just to take you back a bit, ehh...you were at the march of the stay away?

PMS: Yes

TM: Were you in the structure then or you were just an activist?

MPS: Ehh... I was in the structure then, I was in both COSAS and also the TEYCO, yeh

TM: Tell us a bit on how you joined and became a member

MPS: In CO.....

TM: In politics...

MPS: (Laughs) That was very interesting you know. I think last when I was talking to Nonhlanhla ehh... I've tried to bring a break down. Apparently ehh... I wasn't born here in Tembisa. I spent my first 15 years in the rural area somewhere in Rustenburg.

TM: Whereabouts?

MPS: There is a place called Khaya Khulu in Rustenburg. That's where I've spend almost my first fifteen years and there we were living with our granny who is my mother's mom. We were living with our granny and she was a not well and she was under pressure of a heart problem so she would be in and out of Johannesburg taking treatments, up until she couldn't anymore. Then the parents decided that we move to Johannesburg permanently, which lead to our movement. Then on my arrival here ehh... ohh... in Rustenburg I used to know myself as a rural boy who never thought that

I've got other abilities in life like Nonhlanhla. The first thing that I've discovered about me on my arrival here, I've never knew that I can play soccer (laughs) up until I went to primary at Difateng. So they were like "Can you play soccer?" "I'm not sure, but I can kick the ball". So I just grew up with the occasion you know. I ended up being the best soccer player in Tembisa. I played soccer with people like Shoes Moshoeuwu. The last time I played soccer I was playing for Moroka Lions with Gordon Mkotshwa.

TM: From Alexandra?

MPS: Yes, so I played with the likes of Shoes Moshoeuwu, the likes of Gomagoma. Then you will find people also like Jerry Sikhosana - they would be coming just to watch you know, which is a talent that I've discovered when I got here in the urban areas, that I'm somebody that can kick a ball. Then later on only to find that my friends at school...

TM: How old were you?

MPS: I was fifteen years, I was born in 1965, permanently in 1980, but as far back in 1973 I used to visit during school holidays, so... and then I used to have friends... ehh... Then my friends at school were politicians, you know, and I was the only one that was playing soccer, so every day after school we would take separate ways, the likes of DR Semetsi... yah... Those are the people we used to push the struggle with - Makhasi here in Tembisa, Doctor, Kabelo and quite a number of people and Mthofu. Those were the people we were pushing the struggle with, so now...

TM: So Mthofu and Kabelo, where do you attend school now?

MPS: We attend at Tembisa High School, even though they were ahead of us with the grade and you know, these guys, they would speak English so fluently (laughs) and I was used to speaking Xhosa. So one day I didn't attend soccer practice. I went down to the meeting there near Oakmoor Station at a section called Exubeni and then there is a complex there... was a hall up there... we used to call it Uncle Charley. That is where they would conduct their meetings. So the first day I went there with them... Okay, they used to have their meetings here at school, but normally every time when they say meetings I would have an opportunity to go to soccer practice and not attending these meetings. Then I went up there with them. When I got there the guys were appointing various leadership from different schools, okay the guys were talking there then... It was the first time, you know, hearing people talking freely and mentioning the name of Nelson Mandela, and I was like Tjo... my granny told me not to mention the name of Mandela (laughs)

TM: (Laughs)

NN: (Laughs)

PMS: I would be provoking the whites if I mention that name out, then I came back home with a stress that these guys are so brave that they can even say Nelson Mandela. I began to gain interest and I started to want to skip the gyms on the other side and start now to attend those meetings. Then they gave me a job there that when we got there, when they were brain storming before the meeting, I would start cleaning that hall, you know, putting chairs in order you know... (laughs)

TM: Who gave you the job?

MPS: Ehh... it's the gang, the leadership and they used to call me "Comrade Prince, you must make sure that the hall is clean". Then I was like "Sharp, no problem", then I would clean, put the chairs in accordance and then the comrades would come in then I would sit there listening as they talk. Gradually interest developed you know.

TM: What is being discussed in those meetings?

MPS: Ehh... main issues were both student matters and residential matters because, you know, these two things were going hand in hand. We couldn't separate one from another, so there I was also appointed as a person to maintain order there. It was more like when the meeting was in progress, you know, these comrades would start to speak loud and then they said "Comrades Prince, you must maintain order there", and then I took my chair to the door like the real police man. Every time they start with disorder I would be like "Comrade, comrade order there or I would take you out of the meeting".

NN: (Laughs)

MPS: Then came the election of COSAS, the Tembisa High School branch. Then I got myself a position on the top five as an organiser, so that's where the whole complex changed now.

TM: Who were other members in the top five?

MPS: The others? Ehh... we used to have Makhasi who was a very clever and smart. Doctor, I forgot the name, but now Doctor is a name and also as a professional but somewhere at Lesotho...

THERE WAS A DISTURBANCE WHILE BUSY WITH THE INTERVIEW

MPS: That's my mother

TM: Okay nice meeting you

M: Thanks

MPS: So, the formation, I don't remember it very well, but we used to have Doctor, Kabelo, Girt Thulare who is a deputy chief here at Ekurhuleni Metro Police. We used to have these people you know, so I used to be around them and then after my appointment as an organiser of COSAS, Tembisa branch now the whole complex began to change. We came up with all these programmes, but now the whole situation in our school sucks, you know, we are having problems with this and that...

TM: What sort of problems?

MPS: Ehh... you know, at first we were treated so badly, both by the department and by the teachers themselves, whereby we believe that as learners we need to have, you know, we need to have a say on the day to day problems facing the school but you know, on the other hand you know they were suppressing us and then on the other hand, we had the department itself that didn't want to listen and all these things. Just there the first thing that we wanted in our school was the introduction of the SRC, which they refused. The second thing, what was it for? I'll remember it and come back to it and then just there we ended up taking resolutions that we are going to boycott the ... of corporal

punishment. Yes, it was another issue; I would keep on remembering the other ones, so nobody wanted to intervene in that regard. Then it led us to boycott classes, but it was before 1985 when this thing started, so which led to the boycott of classes then ehh... we had problems that now on the one hand the state will ehh... PW Botha introduced the state of emergency, which now they began to harass the so called leadership at any levels. I remember I've been in and out of Modderbee (prison) for more than seven times, so to say it ehh... under Section 29, and then on the other hand I've been in and out. There was a police station there at Isando, it used to be under Section 29, whereby we would be caught and be tortured, interrogated and all the stuff and they would realise... you whenever then wish to... Yah, so we used to undergo such problems and the ehh... the school got suspended and sometimes it would be suspended for a week and then we go back and push the struggle, got suspended. Then things got worse, I think it was '85 or '86, whereby the chief inspector of the Department of Education, Mr Pretorius, the surname was Pretorius,... then we had a student parent teachers meeting here in Rabasotho hall. On the one hand I was already the target of the system because they were looking for me high and low and then ehh... on that meeting. Then this white guy Pretorius tried to outsmart me on the meeting, insulting me that you know right in front of our parents that I'm talking shit, then I slapped him.

TM: Mmm...

MPS: Slapped him badly that things got worse and then I was burned by the department ehh... I was doing grade eight form three, I was doing standard eight and I was burned by the department. Then the parent tried with them that...

TM: What were you saying in that meeting?

MPS: Ehh... it was an attitude, his attitude ehh... that you know we've got issues on the table, that he needs to give us you know... ehh... that he had to respond on that one, but no, he decided that I'm not going to entertain this and the people like Sibanyoni here in our school they will call the students and talk shit to them and then it just erupted to violence. Then the guy was taken out by the police and it was chaos. The students then ehh... on the very same evening I got arrested but not for the same thing, for another thing, but that one also. Then there was also a stay away, a very huge one that took about a day, whereby all the high schools, you know, they marched to the police station and they wanted me by force so the police tried this and that and they were like, if you don't bring him then we get inside ehh... that area there where there is a police station. There was a park at first so it was full of students and by then when they wanted me I was at Kempton Park, so they went to fetch me. They didn't bring me through the gate and then they opened the other side at the back, then brought me there in the front gate. So I sat at home not attending school with the other guys up until 1987. I go to a school at Phase, that's where I did my matric. So by then Phase was said to be not under the Department of GNB... stuff like that... Yes that's where I did my matric there at Phase. Then in 1988 I had no funds to get further schooling. Then I had to work... then I had to work, but what I'm saying ehh... Tshepo is that.....

RECORD BROKE.....