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In 1974, on the 6th of June I left my job at 'General Plumbers' and joined Dunlop. I was fed up with doing skilled work for nothing. I felt cheated, exploited and angry.

The first thing I was asked to do was to fill in forms. These pieces of paper asked: where was I born; my last standard at school; where I started working; why I left all the other places I had worked. And in these papers there was a trick question: "If you are requested to work overtime will you agree or refuse?" You could say nothing but "yes" - if you said "no" you had no chance of being employed at Dunlop.

While all this was happening we were cautioned to watch out for Dunlop's resident doctor, who made people fail their tests at the drop of a hat. If this happened you would be diagnosed as unfit for work.

We saw this horrifying doctor on the 7th of June. One of us was so afraid that even the doctor noticed and asked him why he was trembling. The male nurse (who was also black) was quick with an answer: he explained that the man was troubled because he had received a message in the morning that his niece had passed away. All twelve of us were hired on that day.

On the 8th we went to the chest clinic and were certified in good health. It was only then that we stopped being afraid. On the 9th we were given

overalls, and in our new uniforms we were sent to "school" to be taught the rules of the firm and its history.

Our "teacher" told us how John Boyde Dunlop was a veteran doctor when he saw his son coming from school, riding a bicycle which was in a bad state. This pained him a lot and he began to think of a way to improve the tyres on his son's bicycle. He immediately went to the rubber manufacturers to ask them if they could make something to put on his son's bicycle tyres, so that the bicycle could travel smoothly on the road. They sat down and made the bicycle tyre. It was then that the Dunlop Company was formed, in Birmingham London. It spread to South Africa and is spreading still.

Duma, Langa and the writer of these pages were singled out and taught to drive the "Hyster", the fork-lift vehicle. We were told that we would work on a three shift per day, 17 shift per week system. Little did we know that the 17 shift system had caused the 1974 Dunlop strike, which caused dismissals, which caused the vacancies for our employment. The shift system plus the company's wage policies had incensed the workers.

Before 1974 there was a fifteen-shift system. People demanded higher wages because the cost of living was rising fast. Dunlop said alright, but then we have to get seventeen shifts out of a working week. In the old system, shifts were from 6am to 2pm; 2pm until 10pm; and 10pm until 6am. Working on Saturdays was overtime, and paid as such. Workers would average 37 hours of work per week plus the Saturday. With the extra two shifts, work would start on Sunday evening, making people work 45 hours before overtime. So the wage increases were not really wage increases at all.

The 1974 strike happened because the workers did not want the 17 shift system. In the mill department the whole shift was dismissed and we were employed to replace them. We were hired as scabs. At first we didn't know that the section leader of our department was in hospital. The striking workers almost killed him because he went to work. They caught him outside the Dalton Road hostel - he spent many months in hospital.

I will never forget what the other drivers did to me. They claimed that we had come to rob them of their jobs (ukubephuca umbele emlonyeni). They had been working overtime (from 6am to 6 pm), receiving a lot of

money - and our employment threatened their overtime. Some of them did not give us proper training.

One day my brother Langa was trying to drive the Fork Lift Truck but it ran down an embankment. Not used to driving a car, he stepped on the clutch instead of the brakes. He could not control the steering wheel and the truck went right down onto the dangerous rail ramp, hitting a big wall inside the factory.

Fortunately Langa escaped unhurt. Afraid he would be fired, we advised him to say that he was too short to reach the brake and clutch. We put pillows in the driver's seat to bring him closer to the steering wheel. When the inspector came, he exonerated Langa because he saw the pillows and saw that Langa was driving well.

People repeatedly threatened that I would not work for long at Dunlop. I told myself that whatever happened I would be patient and prove them wrong. I survived their taunts and threats until, after a long time, I was accepted.

I worked on the fork-lift, feeding the milling department's machines with chemicals and raw materials to make rubber. I would spend my days and nights driving from the base stores to the mill and back.

That place is hell: all the workers there are pitch-black from the black dust and powder that pollutes the place. I was pained by the way people were exposed to such harmful powders. Some had plastics over their overalls and wore masks on their faces. I remember Mr G. Mbele who, after weighing a chemical, needed to go and bathe his body and throw away his overalls. There was another wool-like substance which also produced a need to have a bath after you had weighed it.

It is said that people who worked in these departments were once given milk rations. But these were stopped, as it was claimed they cost Dunlop lots of money. A person works under difficult conditions at Dunlop. He works for one day on a job meant to take two days.

When we arrived we were shown around this weird jungle of machines spinning and clanking away: "This is a Banbury No. 1, Banbury No. 2, this is a storage compound for the Banbury No. 3, which grades the final

compound, the stage compound Banbury No. 4 grades stage C which goes down to pour out the rubber to the mills, which go to pipes which have water with soap so that the rubbers do not stick to each other. These rubbers enter through the conveyor belt. These rubber stacks are 2 ft 6 ins wide. It depends on how the mill man has taken it out, he is the guideboy. At times the rubber is a long stack, at times it comes out in pieces which are separated by plastic, so that it does not stick together."

There, on my forklift, most of the time isolated from the world, I would spend my working hours composing songs about our situation. I suppose this was my little resistance struggle in my head, zooming up and down to the Baser Stores and back. When the tunes rolled fast I would work like a maniac, driving my co-workers insane because the materials would pile up fast in front of them. When the songs were slower then I suppose life improved for them.

But there in my head: those forests...

They still lingered on in my memory - the only refuge from my father's beatings, my hunting ground which used to provide me with all kinds of birds, my prey, before I was turned into prey for others, the hunted.

I remembered how the honeybird was for us the most sacred of the birds. With uncanny accuracy it lead one to the beehive. The only reward it sought was a piece of honeycake. To the ungrateful and greedy it retaliated just as swiftly: it led them with the same accuracy straight into a venomous snake or a wild animal.

The forest was its own universe full of wild fruit and dangers: mambas and crawling creatures of all kinds.

Always a source of refuge for the homeless and the frightened, I remembered how during the Mpondo resistance it housed the Congress fugitives. It hid away teachers and commoners, it covered their tracks But policemen and soldiers would also enter and ransack its goods.

It was a retreat from the wilderness of the world outside: the harsh world of beatings and torture and interrogations; the so-called normal world marked with murderous lists of names.

A source of fear but a source of awe and admiration.

The honeybird was effective in demonstrating its dissatisfaction. It refused to work for nothing. It demanded its just reward. This was also our position as toilers; we left for the forest when we refused to surrender our land, when we rejected the rule of the chiefs who sold our land without consulting us. But we were less successful that time.

When MAWU got entry at Dunlop I knew that the march through the forests had restarted. The Dunlop officials knew that they had to respect their workers, that they had to pay their workers an adequate wage, and that the voice of the workers would not be muffled. But they continued in their old and cruel ways.

IN THE TRACKS OF OUR TRAIN

We assembled its pieces together
and it grumbled and roared.
Its grumbling and churning
has caused unrest
in the stomachs of the capitalists.
They shout from the top in Pretoria:
"But, what IS happening?"

There was no answer from Pretoria's hills
but the Drakensberg mountains
and the plains of Ulundi shook.
And they said there:
"Yes, this engine is powerful
and it raises great flames and much uproar
It was ignited on purpose
to choke us
and punish us with fumes and heat.

God created bees
and they produced sweet honey
and the people praised God for the bees and their honey.

Satan was angered again
so he created flies to destroy the honey of the bees
and the flies sprayed and relieved themselves on it
and the people were angered by Satan and his flies.

Satan said: I know, I know.

Typical.

Everything done by me is never praised
it is always criticised and scolded.

What we have made moves forward
When its wheels wear out, our unity jolts it forward
When they block it on its way to Capetown
it does not lose its power, it roars ahead.
When they block it on the road to Johannesburg
it does not lose its power, it roars ahead
it grumbles on, with flames and fumes and anger

But they gossip and plot out its undoing
and they accuse its anger of a communist plot
and its roar of subversion

And we follow its tracks, also singing

The powerful ask:

Who allowed these stalks of cane, these blades of grass
to sing?

Songs are the property of trees, you have to be tall
you have to have stature, substance and trunk to sing

But we sing

Many with eyes get confused by the stature of trees

But at least our song reaches the blind

They listen to it closely

and understand

That the deals their capitalist suitors
have struck up at the Sopaki grounds
might feel like a bangles of gold
but they rattle like chains

Across the river the grumble is heard

There is motion and uproar
The people will it to cross the waters now:
 To jive and to dance on new grounds
 To hum more pleasant sounds.

We agree.

I continued working at Dunlop. The foreman of our section hated me for no reason at all. He always accused me of not listening to instructions, but when I asked him why, he could not answer. He would give me work to do and then, after I had done it, would complain that I had not done it properly; that I was very slow, that I had no respect for authority. Then he would threaten to fire me.

One day just before I started work, when I was still reading the progame, he said that I had disorganised his section, that I had delivered half-standards and rejects. I called the chief officer to question the foreman about this matter. He repeated what he had said and the foreman insisted that he would fire me if I continued with my behaviour. The induna came to my rescue.

The section-head supported the foreman, accusing the induna of protecting me because we were working together and were very close friends. He said we loved each other as man and wife and he wished to know who was the man and who the wife. The induna was wild. But nothing came of it.

One day I had gone to the store, where we fetched material to make rubber. As I entered the stores, an order-slip fell off. I climbed off the fork lift truck to pick it up but the wind blew it away. I ran after it and when I reached it the wind threw it further away. Eventually I caught it. The place where I had parked the Fork Lift Truck is near the platforms where machines are off-loaded from the railway trucks. When I picked up the order-slip, I saw the Fork Lift Truck falling onto the railway lines.

I thought to myself: "I am already a fired person because I have forgotten to pull the hand brake." Other drivers appeared on the scene and tried to help me formulate a story based on lies.

I refused and told them that I would tell the truth and get fired because I had made a mistake. I went straight to the Internal Transport section to report the event. I proceeded to my milling department and told the section head, who hated me, about the accident. He laughed so loud that his last teeth could be seen.

He said: "I have long told you that you are very irresponsible. Today is your last day here, you are a fired man. Internal Transport is going to fire you before I have done so."

I replied that I knew I would be fired and went back to the scene of the accident. The manager and engineer were there when I returned. They said not a word but the Fork Lift Truck was taken to be repaired. The manager said I would have to wait for the engineer's report, but that he liked the fact that I had told the truth and had not lied.

I knew that there was only one way for me, that there was no parting of ways, even though the manager had consoled me. I had already told myself that I was a fired person. Many days elapsed but nothing was ever mentioned about the accident.

In our department we had to buy safety boots. I organised all the forklift truck drivers of my department to go to the shop manager and demand free safety boots. We went to him three times but heard one story: the company could not give us free boots. The fourth time I told the other drivers that I would go alone and demand free boots.

"You will get nothing - you will be fired," they said.
"Even if I am fired, I won't mind," I replied.

It was Friday when I planned this idea. After finishing at work, I went and bought myself a pair of sandals. On Monday, instead of wearing boots, I wore my sandals and started to work. A senior foreman said: "Alfred, you are not supposed to wear sandals in this department, do you follow me?"

"Yes, I follow, but they are all that I have."

"Tomorrow you must not come into this department without your safety boots."

"I will because these are the only thing that I have."

The following morning I came in wearing my sandals. He came to me and said "Alfred, you are still wearing sandals?"

"Yes."

"I do not want to see you in this department."

"Thank you," I said, and went to tell the manager the story. He said the senior foreman was right but that he was going to write a requisition so that I could get boots. But, he said, the company was going to deduct the money from my wages slowly.

I said: "No. I do not want my money to be deducted because I have bought sandals which also let my feet breathe."

He asked me if I signed the book every month. I said yes.

"Why do you think you sign every month?"

"I do not know. I was told to sign and all the workers were signing, so I signed it".

The manager called Khumalo, a member of the liason council of the department, to explain the law of the company. I told Khumalo that I understood what they were saying, but that my problem was money. And that I was not prepared to buy boots while I still had new sandals. The manager told Khumalo to go back to his work as he was going to sort me out.

Together we took a fast walk to the gate where we meet a security guard. The manager asked where the Safety Officer was.

"In the Personnel Department," answered the security guard. Without even saying "let us go," he just walked off. I followed him. We entered the Personnel Department where the Safety Officer was talking to another man. The safety officer asked what had happened.

"You see this man? He is wearing sandals."

"What kind of job is he doing?"

"He is a forklift driver."

"Do you remember what happened last week next to your department? A forklift fell down near the ramp. If that driver was not wearing safety

boots he would have lost his feet," said the Safety Officer. "If he is a driver give him safety boots."

"You see," replied the manager, "I would give this man boots but tomorrow six men will come and demand safety boots."

"Understand what I say. Even if there are six hundred; if they are drivers give them safety boots."

The manager did not say thank you or goodbye, he just turned, opened the door and we left together. We walked back to the mill department without talking to each other. We entered his office. He opened his desk drawer, took out his requisition book, wrote the date and asked for my employee number.

"41061."

"What size?"

"8."

"Go to the internal shoe shop and get your boots."

"Thank you," I said and left his office singing: "Amandla ngawethu siyonqoba simunye".

I gave the requisition to the shop man, and he gave me the boots. I tried them on and they were alright. I went to the changeroom, opened my locker, taking a towel and soap. I cleaned my feet and my sandals. I kissed my sandals and put them in my locker. Then I went back to my old horseback and work.

After lunch the senior foreman came to me praising my boots, saying they are very nice.

"Yes. They are very nice and I just got them for nothing - they are for free". He was very disappointed and I started shouting to the other drivers that they must go to the manager and demand their boots.

"I have opened the closed gates," I said, waving with my fist. "It's a victory comrades! We will overcome these employers. Let us be together and fight the evil employers. Amandla!"

All the drivers came and said: "You are very brave. We were afraid, thinking that you will be fired. Forward with our struggle!"