

Q: And you come from?

A: I come from a place in the Transvaal called Klerksdorp. My family's a sort of middle-class family. My father's an estate agent and they still live there actually. Then when I finished school in Klerksdorp, the Milner High School, I went to university in Johannesburg at WITS, and then came to university here, which is in about 1970, and I've been here ever since then.

Q: What year were you born?

A: '49.

Q: So, do you think, I mean did you say anything to your family about having (? -008) kind of values and was there a liberal or conservative

A: No, a kind of liberal background. I mean, not terribly so, but I mean liberal. I mean you know, my parents today would be sort of PFP supporters and I guess that's probably in some sense what they would always have been. They're quite interested in politics and there was a background, a fair amount of interest in the sort of issues of the day. But I mean in all other respects, they're just ordinary South Africans middle class family with servants and you know all that goes with that. And that's how my parents are today, but they are kind of liberal sort of people. Definitely, and they always have been, and obviously are more so today, if you like, than they have been partly because of the way in which their children have gone and partly because of just circumstances in the country. They would probably be more liberal now than they were twenty years ago or whatever.

Q: So, how would you explain or view your radicalisation?

A: I don't know. I think it's a fairly natural progression from, coming from that kind of family. I mean more liberal in what they would have allowed their children to do than necessarily politically liberal themselves. **Having been** fairly liberal in the sense of allowing us to move in whatever direction took our fancy and then having got to a place like WITS, that being a fairly important aspect of it and then having come to Cape Town to UCT as well, that having been a very important aspect of it as well. I think also I was never a very active student politician. I don't really come out of that background much at all, although I was kind of involved peripherally. (I think) a lot of (it though was intellectual influence that pushed me in this sort of direction. Coming into contact with socialist writings) and that type of thing (in the course of my studies. Also a large measure of guilt, which I think to some extent propels a large number of white South Africans that get involved in this kind of thing, the notion, rightly or wrongly, that one bears a greater responsibility for the) sort of situation...

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Account: of situation in South Africa than say maybe any black intellectual would feel, or should feel. I'm sure that's another thing that has propelled me and that to some extent continues to propel me.) So I think it's a combination of like family circumstances, very heavily influenced, initially at any rate, by the kind of intellectual input that I got at University and that I came into contact with at the University. It certainly wasn't the predominant influence at university but it was an important influence. For me it was the predominant influence. And then (you know, being a white South African and having to pay your dues, if you like, for being a white South African, that also I think is a really important aspect of it.) → to p. 3

And I think it was those things. A couple of people that I met here as well, that I came into contact with as well, who were involved in the beginnings of this union. Somebody like John Frankish, who was very active student politician is still involved in the Union in a part-time capacity. He was a very important influence. Two other people who are very sort of NonU like Paula Ensom, for example, she was a very important influence and they were all people who were either banned or involved in the Union at the time, and who I was friendly with through being involved at University with, and then got to be interested in their work and then got to meet people like Zora Makulu who were working with them here and those kinds of influences were very formative I think. Ensor

Q: So it was white intellectuals and black intellectuals at that stage?

A: Yeah, and not a great many black intellectuals at that stage either. I mean there certainly were. I mean Zora who I referred to is not an intellectual, I mean in the sense that she's not a university educated type of person.. I mean she's an organic intellectual in every sense of the word, but her background is sort of political organisation, if you like, rather than formal intellectual training. And those were very important influences, initially people who I only knew socially, and then started to get involved peripherally with their work and started to be interested in their work and it seemed to give expression to a lot of the sort of reading that I was doing and the research work that I was doing and that type of stuff. So I suppose those were the most substantial influences really. They were very substantial personal influences from whites and from blacks, but in the nature of things, just in the nature of our sort of social context if you like, maybe more from whites initially than from blacks.

Q: Are you sort of saying that the blacks you met you didn't meet in the townships?

didn't meet in the townships

A: No, no most definitely not. I mean I sort of met them most generally in the houses of my friends.

Accont: friends and occassionally at University through those type of connections, yeah.

Q: Would you say before that you, like so many white South Africans, didn't have contact with blacks at all?

A: Wegh, I had, well I mean you know as a child I had contact with servants, that was all. We were always brought up to treat well and the long standing ones to treat as part of the family which I don't doubt I sort of half believed for a large chunk of my school years. But, no, I certainly hadn't met any blacks who would challenge my views or who would really contribute hugely to my views until I got to university. Then I did start to meet people like that, but it's mostly through the Union that I have. Always through other sort of left wing whites really.

Q: In that, I'm sort of interested in that guilt stage, the way you would articulate it, cos I mean so many people speak of that. I think they all have different understandings. I mean Sheena Duncan would speak of it in a different way to you probably or that kind of thing - was that, that was part of trying to figure out what your role as a white, was that tied in with it?

A: Yeah, I think that I always thought when I was in the last years at school, and ^{from p.3} when I started at university, I always expressed my opposition to South Africa, which was always there, it was always quite deep, I mean even at school. I remember often arguing with friends at school about politics which I was always quite interested in and I would have seen the expression of my abhorrence of South Africa as leaving South Africa. I would have left South Africa and that's how I entered university with the notion that I was going to be at university for three years, and for some reason or another I had some idea that I wanted to go to LSE because that seemed to be ¹ really kind of vibrant and I think radical place. in '68 and times like that. And then I mean ^{Wits} a large portion of my years at WITS were kind of dedicated towards leaving South Africa, to see if I could get scholarship to go to London University or somewhere in England which was the kind of obvious connection for any South African. And that's how I would have seen myself relating to South Africa, relating to ^(I) my guilt about South Africa, that there was no way that a white could do anything in South Africa but sustain the system. Whatever he or she might have thought or might have done that's what would have happened. And there were very important formative periods in that. I mean Sharpeville was a very important thing. I just remember as a kid reading about it then and thinking the same thing then. And then just ^(I) directing a lot of my life to getting out of South Africa, not only because of political things, because I felt South Africa was a very kind of culturally under-developed place, that the big wide world outside was much more exciting, universities were better, a whole sort of array of life was better and I guess the most important thing about the whole array of life that seemed to be better was that one could go and live in a place like England and not feel guilty about doing) → p.4

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Acont: doing (all these) kind of (things one wanted to do. I don't think that I really would have seen myself as *taking*) going to England and having taken (a very active part in politics in England, necessarily. Politics seemed to me to be divided between what was South Africa and therefore unacceptable, and what was out there and acceptable - and that I wouldn't have to be really heavily involved in.) So I think that's how I would have originally seen my evolution vis a vis South Africa developing as one which ~~necessitated that I leave South Africa~~. I don't know what really changed that. I mean coming here and, you see, also (at WITS) I mean I was in contact with a whole lot of like student politicians, many of whom were really up there, (very impressive characters) some people, (but very inaccessible.) And, (but then) *me* (coming here) and meeting through university a lot of (I met) ~~people~~ people who were doing a lot of very serious work, particularly in the Unions. - which, (there seemed to me to be a real distinction between Union work and student politics) without putting down student politics in any way. It (seemed) kind of (more attractive and) it seemed to hold out a greater possibility for actually (staying in this country and doing something.) I mean I don't think that I've ever stopped being driven by that very basic guilt thing, though. There's no question about it.) It's very odd doing this interview - i mean it's a personalised interview, but anyway.

(Union work)

Q: I know all those Is start slipping away as you get more used to it, but it's useful for me to ask intelligent questions. So why did you come to UCT?

A: I'm not really terribly sure. I started off at WITS doing law, doing law and economics and then getting more interested in economics as a kind of intellectual exercise. And then UCT had a more interesting economics department and I think it had a more liberal economics department. It had sort of characters like Francis Wilson, and that was a kind of important reason. Well not Francis personally, but there was a whole ethos surrounding the UCT economics department which at that time seemed a kind of leftie economics department. I mean little did I know that that's the furthest one could possibly be from the truth, but there it was. That's what sort of brought me to Cape Town. And I liked Cape Town for coming on holidays, that's an important part of it as well.

Q: And did you come in your honours year?

A: Yes, I started doing honours here and then I did a masters here. And then I started a PhD and that was about the same time as I started kind of part time work in the Union, so I never carried on with that.

Q: Did you have a kind of disdain for NUSAS or did you just not see yourself involved in it or just interested cos that's ~~the~~ *S* white body that for a lot of people is ~~il~~ illogical?

A: I didn't have disdain for it. When I was at WITS I used to get involved in things like protests and getting arrested and going on marches and all that kind of thing. I personally found it very difficult to get into the kind of clubby thing of NUSAS. You know it had a social identification which I was never able to identify with as wholly as, it's the same with the Union movement actually, as I thought was necessary and I think it's that. I think in the later years of my political development I would have considered myself, rightly or wrongly, as I subsequently discovered, completely wrongly, to be sort of to the left of NUSAS. But that, I don't know what that was based on, but it was just based on really immature, sort of student type reading more than anything else. Although I suppose there was a slice of truth in it certainly.

Q: And then just getting involved in the Union through your wages comm or how did you get into the Union?

A: I was a little bit in wages Comm, again not very much. I used to do kind of research for wages comm, and I was like a, by the time I got here I was sort of an honours student and a masters student so I was this kind of senior student and I used to do research for them and odd papers for them and that type of involvement. It was very little kind of licking stamps and envelopes ~~involved~~ in it. I mean that has been much more in the union that I've been involved in that very nitty gritty menial kind of way. But I was involved in Wages Comm, certainly here, but not at WITS. I'm not sure there even was a Wages Comm while I was at WITS.

Q: And along the way had you decided not to go to the UK? or what happened? I mean I'm just interested in how you found this emphasis on the Unions and solved that, where you didn't see a place for yourself as a white South African?

A: Yeah, I made then, you know from the time that I was here, I may very well then, I can't really recall, have still decided that the place that I wanted to be for a whole lot of very personal/political reasons, but I mean to be out of the country. From meeting people like Johnny and a number of others, I could no longer hold to the idea that there was no place for whites in South Africa. I very soon dropped that belief because I found that there were people and there still are people, (whites here who were) are doing active, valuable work-and after all it is our country. I'm not saying that the kind of work that they're doing could only be done by whites, but I think the symbolic significance of whites doing it is quite important. But it is my country and (it was gratifying to find that I could be here and could do something.) All those contradictory feelings that I felt at the age of eleven are still there, but you know nevertheless I'm satisfied that I would never say it to a white South African, you know never think about a white South African, I mean what are you doing in South Africa? (I get very, very irritated when the insinuations are made when I'm overseas, for example.) Although I understand why people feel that way, because obviously I also felt exactly that way for a hell of a long time. It doesn't stop

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Acont: It doesn't stop me from being very aggravated by people who say that, people who I think should know better.

Q: Kind of impressing people to not just talk theoretically. Could you tell me a story of that? Do you have (?-223) Can you recall any incidents where that was said?

A: I mean, there're many incidences, ^{from p. 5} I mean, the incidences all of which are varied. You know (I remember on ~~holid~~ ^{holi} day in the United States), soon after I finished my honours a long time ago, (getting involved with a guy in a bar,) some black guy, who I started off having a very, a musician actually, which is another one of my sort of deep kind of interests, (a black musician and talking with him and drinking with him and then asking him if he knew of) I think (Dollar Brand,) in fact, (and him then suddenly discovering I was a South African and getting very, very heavy and me getting very, very heavy with him.) Now, that is one incident. Now in places like the United Kingdom I've come into contact with that lots in the Union. (I think it's a fair question to ask about the Union,) like what is a white doing in the sort of (senior official staff position) if you like? (of a black union? I think it's a fair enough question.) But, it's very difficult for me to capture it. It's not so much the intelligent questions, like that one is an intelligent question that has to be faced and has to be answered if indeed it can be answered. It's rather (the notion that by being here, the automatic assumption that by being here, I am part of apartheid South Africa.) I don't find that valid. I mean (maybe I'm just being defensive, but I) think that when I come to think of it I (don't find it valid.) I can't really think, maybe as I think along I'll be able to specify a bit more, but I can't at the moment.

Q: OK. I guess, I still would like you to articulate it, I think you've talked around it, or I didn't ask properly to get the answer, How you ~~became comfortable~~ comfortable with the choice of working with the unions? as being your emphasis, I mean how you came to decide you didn't have to go to Britain. Did you just see some whites and think well, they're doing a good thing and that's what they're doing and I could do that? Was it a logical extension of your intellectual beliefs?

A: It was a logical extension of my intellectual beliefs. I mean you know having all, I think most white lefties move from a position in South Africa where they're ... interruption.... (I think that the kind of typical development of a white South African) ~~is~~ (within the sort of left) of the government type of (paradigm) is to be a sort of liberal and then say that there's no place for a white opposition in South Africa and therefore the place to express your abhorrence about South Africa is to go to England, and express it there. If you move beyond that point, if you only move to some Marxist-Socialist position, and when you're a fairly naive sort of student, then the whole question of race disappears into the background; things are only about class, Race is just some sort of) → *could do*

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Acont: just some sort of (irrelevant superstructure that gets grafted onto the thing,) so no racial thing is of significance and for a very short time I don't doubt that I was part of that paradigm as well, and that would have changed my view about whether I was going to leave the country or not. And (I guess when I was involved in that type of thinking, then I started to get involved with other whites who were) here and didn't express things as crudely as that, ~~thought too~~ were socialists, but were (involved in very basic, low profile, if not underground) work that impressed me. → to p. 10

And also it was with (workers), which (impressed me also because that was the direction in which my intellectual input was carrying me, towards a sort of interest in the working class and their power and their position and their deprivation and) all those type of things and (that's when I guess I changed my mind. It was a combination of a changed perception of what South Africa is, a notion that not even all blacks are necessarily on the left side of the fence and a notion that there were some whites doing some ~~really good work that was~~ really appealing.) It was very intellectually appealing, assuaged a lot of guilt.) Yeah, I guess I can't really, I don't know if I was ever more self-conscious about it than that (and then I got involved in the Union and I just specially liked it so much, (enjoyed it personally so much and it was so fulfilling and there were so few of us with so few resources that any thought of leaving South Africa then kind of dropped away.) You know, I'm now at the stage when I could comfortably leave South Africa for six months or nine months or something if it was, if it fitted in with what the Union was doing or whatever, you know and I think there's value in it and I'm really interested in some developments overseas vis a vis South Africa. But I would not now very easily consider leaving South Africa and I don't feel that I have to leave South Africa at all.

Q: Can you just tell me a bit about, concretely, what's ..I think some of the people who aren't in the unions it's a bit alien as to what you're actually doing with the black people, the workers, the management. Yeah, I mean what did you first get into - DL: Now? - No, just even chronologically, what did you first do that you found so fulfilling? I mean I would actually like to take it up to what you do now.

A: Well, (the first) kind of really, what I considered to be (active grass roots, political work I got involved in, was literacy work, actually.) I didn't do much of it, but that was very enjoyable. (It was) also (very instructive) → to p. 8

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Acont: instructive for an intellectual to see how long it takes to develop anything. I mean a literacy class of six people can take you ~~also~~ years to develop. It was very good training for that reason. (A lot of my impatience was blunted by that kind of experience) and through the literacy stuff and through my honours course and everything like that, (I got friendly with) a lot of people who were involved with what was then pretty much an advice bureau with a whole lot of other motives and everything like that, but I mean nevertheless was an advice office for black workers. And then in 1976, a lot of those people were banned. Those people who were involved in the literacy project that was here at the time, (and) people who were involved in (the Union). And I knew then, and I knew many of the black organisers in the Union at the time, there were very few of them, but I knew them also. (And I started to get drawn in on) a kind of (voluntary basis) to help people and that's how I started here. (And when we started here, it was just like one little office and we had a couple of factories,) we used to have the advice section, which we still have to this day, which is a very much expanded thing, and we used to also organise committees in factories. (Zora [Mehlomakhulu] was really the organiser and I used to do training and education work and write letters and all sorts of things like that. And the Union has just developed from that.) I mean, our Union, it's kind of developed from that, it's kind of also remained like that. It remains still quite a rudimentary affair with a lot of close personal interaction between the people who work in the organisation and between the staff of the organisation and the members of the organisation. There's a lot of that, it's a slow growing organisation for that reason as well. I mean now and in latter years my work has been far more, my personal work has been far more sort of high profile which at times I've personally enjoyed, at times I've not enjoyed. I'm not enjoying that aspect of it at the moment. And a lot of intellectual stuff as well that centres around dealing with the bosses, which is becoming a very sophisticated affair. I think we in the unions have allowed it to become far too sophisticated an affair. In political developments dealing with other political organisations that too has become quite a sophisticated business with a lot of intellectual input there. (I've always held a lot of store by intellectual work, by producing articles, by publication of the Union's views, of my own views. I do a lot of that sort of stuff as well.) I sometimes get a little scared by the consequences and the reaction to that kind of stuff but I still do a lot of that. (So that's the kind of work that I do.) But then a hell of a lot of my time is taken up in very basic organising work - a lot of time spent in the hospitals and the townships. That I do a lot of still. I used to do a lot more of it in the past and I kind of regret that I don't do enough of it. Sorry, am I speaking for too long?

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Q: No. OK, I've got the sequence a bit out. Those folks were banned in '76 that you worked...side ends.

Begins: 017:

A: Been involved a little bit, before '76, in this kind of student stuff I was telling you about, the Wages Comm stuff I was telling you about, the literacy stuff I was telling you about. I was involved a little bit with that. But I got very much more heavily involved after that. I also expected when I came to work in the Union, and I think so did everybody else who had been banned at the time, that I would probably be banned very shortly afterwards. I never expected when I came into the Union to be working in the Union ten years later. I really didn't. I imagined that I too would be banned within a year or something of getting involved in the Union and I never have been.

Q: Why do you think that might be?

A: Um, I think that a lot of circumstances changed. I think that for one thing it came to be realised by the State that it's not actually such an effective means of killing any organisation. It obviously has dramatic effects on the ability of individuals to be involved in organisations but it doesn't really kill an organisation. Trade Unions grew very, very quickly in that period '77, '78, '79, a lot of international support for us and that type of thing, so the ~~ir~~^{banning} banning orders were no longer seen as being terribly effective. So you know that just dropped out and not many people were, not many trade unionists have been banned after that period. A lot have been jailed for different reasons and for varying reasons and that but you know I think it was more a change in the State's approach to banning orders, a change in the State's approach to Trade Unions, that sort of thing, but dictated the likes of me would not be banned.

Q: You said, I'm just going to catch up with a few questions I never asked, tonight about (?-038). You had one point where you said admired these people doing low profile but not underground. What do you mean by underground? The kind of manyama, those things, where they had to do it...

A: No I mean ~~I don't know very well~~, they may have been doing underground work and they may have been part of underground organisations, I don't know. But what they were doing at my stage of development, I felt I could do and that was gratifying. That was all I mean about it. It wasn't... you know they weren't making bombs and kind of things like that. I mean, you know I'm not putting down that sort of work, but uh....

Q: I thought you meant that those ... you might have meant those people, you know like when he was showing off all this old issues off last night and you know we discussed - do you mean that in that was low key and they had not to be too high profile about it?

A: No, what I mean, is that it didn't involve. I meant that in a far more personal sense. It didn't involve standing on a stage and making big speeches and everything like that. It meant just doing - I meant low profile in a sense that personally low profile, it meant somehow it had the impact of being real work. Until that time all I knew about political leadership and political work were people who stood on stages and got interviewed and all that kind of thing, and this work seemed more attractive to me because I didn't think that I was really made for that kind of high profile work. Not that I abhorred the idea of being a political superstar, but just because, ^{but} just didn't seem that I was capable of that or that it was my thing and that this **seemed** nicer, more basic work. That's all.

Q: And that, I'm just interested in that step. I mean it's a very simplistic kind of approach, but I'm interested in how when you said you didn't have much contact with blacks and you ~~stand~~ how any white would have that experience especially being in an intellectual environment. The stages of getting involved and going to the townships, I'm just trying to picture it. People giving out leaflets at bus stops, when before that they'd been writing economic history papers: I mean (was that a big step? How did you feel in those first contacts with blacks?) Are there any kind of anecdotal things you could tell me that would..just interested in what it was like then, I mean ...

A: No, I don't really ...yeh it was very important, (it was very personally important to come into contact with black workers, especially migrant workers,) and I mean (the first time I saw how a migrant worker lived was in 1976) or something. I think it's something that is still denied in a lot of left-wing whites just don't know that. But (there's a world of difference between the townships and the hostels, ~~there~~ really is. I was very impressed by the political perception and) of contract workers, by the (political background) of contract workers, by the extent of politics (that existed among ~~them~~ ^{contract workers}). I don't really remember the profundity of (those early days) although they (were very, very profound.) They haven't actually ceased to be, I must say that. But (it was) very, very (profound to come into contact with old people, really deeply intelligent people who) also (seemed to come from a family background that was so much more substantial than my own. In many ways older ~~workers~~) amongst the ~~people~~ (are treated with much more respect than older people are in middle class homes, and with good reason) for that. (They actually deserve to be treated with more respect. They have done more with their lives, somehow.) Without romanticising it, (they've had horrible lives), (but mostly). They've done

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Acont: (They've done more) with it, (they have a lot more wisdom and a lot more knowledge about how to treat other people, how to fight their way through the world,) and those were very profound days. It's interesting now that I've talked about it, it would be interesting to write up some of that stuff, the little that I can remember of it. But (it was very interesting and important. It was also quite scary. I felt very much like a fish out of water and I still do sometimes. It was also sometimes scary to see the inordinate respect one was treated with by black workers just for having involved oneself and their side) as it were. And that's how I remember those early periods really.

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Q: What about (the profundity of) experience of (understanding workers' lives) what hostel life was ~~like with the~~ contradiction of returning to your white suburban house? How did you handle and feel about that?

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A: I never felt sort of strongly about...I mean there are times when I've felt strongly about that, I mean, I felt there was nothing I could do about that. I mean it's not as though I returned to a Mercedes Benz and a great sort of lifestyle that involved me heavily in the exploitation of other people. I felt the kind of style of life I was leading was the ~~style~~ of life which most people should be entitled to: be leading - you know, with kind of (carpets and bathrooms and that kind of thing. I never felt a great deal of guilt about that and I still don't. Also, I think that (one of the things about our union is that) we always, (the wages of the staff in the Union) their sort of wages, (have always) been set by the sort of average wage of the members of the Union. That has obviously had a sort of (constraining effect on our lifestyle, even of the whites,) although I have friends who will make sort of leeway for me, who will take me to restaurants now and again so I'm not as constrained and I'm also a single person, so I'm not as constrained in my financial needs as say many of our members are. But you know, nevertheless, it acts as a constraint on one's lifestyle, but I've never really felt guilty about it. I mean today, I don't particularly either. I don't know how that sounds but that's how I feel.

Q: Did you feel any, you know there was that inordinate respect that you called it and did you feel any need to have blacks vindicated or did you see, I mean there was the respect thing you were seeing as not quite the way it should be or did you ever feel that there were the beginnings of an assertion from blacks to vindicate your role, or did you feel challenged or hassled? Did you look for blacks to vindicate what you were doing?

A: Yeah, there must have been a very powerful element of that in it. I mean, for sure I did. Obviously. Without that vindication it would probably have been quite difficult personally to carry on at times. But, with that inordinate respect at the same time there was also very quickly a sense that I kind of didn't know everything and there were many black workers who taught me that and taught me that very quickly. There were also people like Zora who told me that and taught me that very, very quickly indeed. But I had a lot to learn. Even in an intellectual sense I had a lot to learn. But like the way, the little things that oppressed people I knew all about systems of exploitation and theories of exploitation, but I didn't know terribly much about the daily lives of people or the daily working lives of people, when I came into the Union at all. I mean I didn't know about workmen's compensation and accidents and pass laws and everything like that. They were all very vague theoretical concepts to me, so that, so at the same time as I came into a situation where quite a few people felt that I was going to be able to do something for them, that was a very gratifying and at the same time very scary and also very quickly (I found) that I learned that until I started to learn something from them that I was in fact not going to be able to do ~~very much~~ much for them as it were, anyway. (So, it was a kind of dual thing. At the same time it was a gratifying vindication, it was also quite a sobering leveller, in a way, working in the Union, and knowing that with all my kind of education and training how little there was that I did know. I mean, I know that too sounds like a very egocentric thing to say, it's the kind of thing that everybody who knows a lot says, but it was a very immediate sense, there was a very immediate sense of that.

Q: OK, Well, what, how did the membership figures arise? I'm spending too much time with this, because there's so many questions I need to ask you about, specifically about non-racialism and how you see it. But, just in a brief point, could you let me know how it went from an advice bureau to a Union?

A: Yeah, I mean, from kind of '76 to '79, and say 80, it was a very grinding process. Factories gained and factories lost and ups and downs and roundabouts and it really sort of took off in about '79. We were also then involved in a cataclysmic strike, for us, in 1980, or '81, I can't even remember the date anymore. I think it was '80 or '81, a strike of meat workers, where the Union was very nearly devastated in fact. Then the laws changed and the Wiseman Commission, and then other Unions started growing and then we really took off, and we started organising in other centres as well. And started to be treated with a little more respect and care by bosses, and all sorts of things like that and got very heavily involved in

Acont: involved in the dockers. I mean that was Zora's work. Very long painstaking grinding work it was. From the moment that we got the docks in Cape Town the Union really took off. When I say, really took off, ja I mean it took off, it's still taking off, still taking off very slowly, but it took off. And it became part of a community, of community of Unions. Up until then Unions had been very isolated, regional affairs, with us always in a wierd position, somewhere on the left. I mean that's an interesting story in itself, but not for now. But, we sort of became part of a community of Unions, our worker leadership was becoming very, very much more sophisticated and very, very much more politicised. Control of the Union was genuinely coming into the hands of the workers. That was a very, very exciting period. And it's continued to some extent. It's had a, there's been some ups and downs in that partly because the Union work has become inordinately sophisticated which is a theme that I know I return to quite often but it does accentuate the role of intellectuals very, very **enormously**.

Q: What accentuates the role?

A: The sophistication of Union work, the sophistication of negotiations. I mean, we negotiate agreements that are as complexed as the agreements that are negotiated anywhere else in the world. And that places a lot of the responsibility on the shoulders of the intellectuals. It can also potentially place a lot of leadership in the hands of intellectuals, not only whites but blacks as well. So you know whilst I think that continually the curve in the Union between sort of official leadership, staff leadership, intellectual leadership, it tends to move towards worker leadership and the the big **taketoff from that point was** in like 1979. It's also had its downward phases, partly because of the increasingly sophisticated nature of our dealings with the bosses which had moved a little bit into that sort of phase. I'm not sure exactly where I was going to with this, but that's how the Union took off. To now, we're based in four or five different centres and have officials in these centres and executive committees and about sort of 12 000 members and whatever.

Q: OK. It started out as the What advice office?

A: It used to be called The Western Province Workers Advice Bureau.

Q: And then the Western Province General Workers Union and now just GWU.? - DL: Yeah. - OK. There's lots of other things I'd like to ask, but because of time it's not really my (?217). So let me just get right in and continue. That meat strike of 1980, there was a relationship with the community, I can remember being in Cape Town and not knowing very much about the stickers and collections and this kind of thing. Now, what about your role as a white in the Union versus People's roles who are white in community groups? Would you say that

Qcont: Would you say that it was important that the community groups supported that boycott?

A: Oh, yes. O, it couldn't have been done without them.

Q: Now how does that fit in with your feeling about community groups now, and how does that fit in with your feeling if someone were to come and say, I'm white I've just gone through what you've gone through maybe ten years later. I was thinking of leaving, now I want to get involved here. I want to go and work with some civic or do grass roots or do some kind of work but not with the Union." Would you say, that's not a place for whites?

A: It begs the question of what you think my views about the community groups are!

Q: Yeah, I'm just wondering within the context of whites.

A: I think, No, I think not at all. I think that you know in much the same way as I can be general secretary of the General Workers Union, I can't be Chairman of the Shop Stewards committee, at South African Stevedores because I don't work there. And there are particular places in the Union that are confined to particular people only. I think it's difficult for someone who lives in Observatory to be on the Executive of the Mambenberg Residents Association, because they don't live in Mambenberg. Unquestionably. I don't think there's anything contradictory or anything wrong with white intellectuals going to work for Grass Roots or a community advice officer or whatever the case might be. The structure of those community organisations as such. But they generally tend not to employ staff. They generally tend not to have, yeah they tend to be drawn from the community in which they are. That's very different from the Union. Unions aren't community organisations.

Q: All right, I'm - that was a stupid way to ask it. It's just that I don't know if I want to just get into a debate about that because that's been debated before I'm trying to keep it in context maybe very unsuccessfully. You know, it's just the whole challenge of whites in the Unions and whether a whites should just be sitting in their white area and get involved in the various groups that have sprung up in Johannesburg and other places and area committees here and that kind of thing. I mean would you get involved in the area committee where you live? or can you say you're too busy and I'm sure you are. But I mean do you think that is not the place for whites?

A: No, I think it's a good place for whites. I don't think it's the only place. I mean the truth is I have been a little busy to get involved in my area committee for example, the UDF. Where I've been able to I have been. You know I think it's quite valuable.



② Acont: I don't know that there's all that much percentage in organising whites. I think that there's a little bit of potential and there's a little bit of potential for taking up issues in white areas. I think that there's a lot of importance in ~~maintaining~~ close relations with like-minded whites and if the ~~stewy way~~ way of doing that is ~~withugh~~ through UDF area meetings that's great. I do think it's a valuable exercise. (I don't think there's much percentage in expending a hell of a lot of energy in trying to change the perception of the white citizens of South Africa, not because I'm cynical of them but just because I don't think their attitudes are really going to determine what happens in South Africa.) → *dep. 16* or what doesn't happen in South Africa. So, I just don't think, (in input/output analysis terms, I don't think the output warrants the input) that much. But certainly I would say the University context, white lefties/develop out of a whole lot of other contexts white progressives develop I think that there's much point in having some sort of a rename(?) in which they can lose some of the isolation which they, which we experience. The UDF, for example here, there isn't a white organisation of the UDF here and I think that's had a beneficial effect on the UDF because it's meant that the UDF, somehow here there's a lot of interaction between white members of the UDF and coloured members of the UDF and African members of the UDF and that's another step that's very very important. For example denied to me in the earlier stages of my development when there was very little contact with black/intellectuals. Today and maybe especially in a place like Cape Town and maybe in Durban to some extent there's a lot of interaction between white and black, ~~petty~~ **bourgeois**, ~~for the sake~~ of a better word, and I think that's very, very important maybe more important amongst the whites than the blacks. But I think it's very important.

Q: I guess what I'm really trying to understand what your saying the implications are for the future of South Africa - I mean if the whites are immovable, will they be driven into the sea, I mean how do they...are they just going to ...this is not Rhodesia. It's not a tiny, tiny white population that can go anywhere else. And I'm just wondering what you'd say, I mean when I wrote that book, I didn't even mention the whites really. I mean ~~to mention~~ the(?) was distorting the picture and I couldn't even do that really. Even tho' I felt a bit sad because it made the implications for the South Africans situation I thought.. I actually felt a bit bad about that. ~~But it was the reality.~~ Here I just see a different reality. I do. Now I don't know as much as you do about the context. What are the implications of that?

A: For whites?

Q: Well for the situation. I mean how will the workers take over if that's what's going to happen deal with this ~~intransigent four and a half~~ million by then ...

A: I don't say that the whites, when I say that there's


Acont: that there's not much percentage in organising amongst whites. ^{from p. 15} I don't think that whites are a lost cause, that they will not change. I don't think that they will not be able to fit into a different kind of South Africa at all. (What I do think) though (is that what is going to make them change is) not trying to organise them with the forces of progress but rather what goes on in the townships and the way that is brought over into the, into white South Africa. That will make them change. (They will have to change or they will go.) They'll have to go (and there's nowhere for them to go. So I think they'll have to change.) that way. I'll tell you one of the most gratifying experiences, almost one of the most gratifying political experiences I've had in a long time, was recently....it was a funny incident about two months ago..I don't know if you've read that the city council in Cape Town had opened the beaches and most pertinently for the people of Cape Town the Seapoint swimming pool to blacks which had not been the case until a couple of months ago. And there was a meeting called in Seapoint which is probably one of the wealthiest neighbourhoods in the country and I live next door to that in Greenpoint next to town and the Seapoint, Greenpoint and some other point rate payers association which is dominated by sort of really right wing National Party sorts called this meeting, this public meeting, to protest at the inclusion, the decision of the City Council and I went along to that meeting as did a lot of people from a lot of areas, at the UDF-nicks, students and whatever all went along to that meeting to sort of heckle and jeer and throw tomatoes and that sort of thing. In fact, there were a lot of really ordinary sort of residents of Seapoint, many of which one could cynically say, if one wanted to be cynical about it, they don't need the Seapoint swimming pool, they've got a swimming pool to build their own swimming pools, they've got enough money to sort of buy their apartheid even in a non, even in an integrated South Africa. But I don't think one has to be cynical about it to that extent, because there were a lot of ordinary people there who I mean some expressing themselves in a horribly paternalistic fashion, who were nevertheless saying that there's no way we can carry on how we've been carrying on and that things have to change and we have to change and we might as well change now before we do get driven into the sea. Now, that might sound like a vindication for the line that says we must organise amongst whites and to some extent it does vindicate that position I think. But I think that the reason why they were changing why they are changing, because the circumstances around them the chickens are coming home to roost it seems to me so quickly that they have to confront the fact that either they're going to leave South Africa or they're going to have to change. There are a lot who can't leave South Africa, there're a lot who don't want to leave South Africa and therefore they're going to have to get used to the idea of blacks in their swimming pool. Now, that might not sound like the end of the world, I mean that might sound like the biggest thing that they're going to have to get used to. But nevertheless, they are judging from

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Acont: judging from that meeting in Seapoint they will get used to that idea, and that's how they'll change. But I still don't think that theres much effort in expending a whole lot of energy in **propagandising** amongst the whites of South Africa to effect that sort of change. That sort of change will be effected by factors sort of (external is) you like to (the white community.) It will be effected by things like what happened in Uitenhage, and the various (stay-aways and the strikes) in the factories and all that type of thing. That's what's going to change them and I suppose once at the same time additional work is grafted onto that specifically orented towards the white community, it maybe would help things. But that was a very profound experience. There were people there, there was one guy who said that his grandparents, he comes from a very srt of predominantly Jewish community, that his grandparents had come from Lithuania sort of 90 years ago, and they didn't have sort of swimming costumes and suntan lotion when they came here. They were veryvery easily accepted into the community and had become sort of leaders in their community...um... TAPE ENDS.

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TAPE TWO: 000

Acont: no reason why the same thing shouldn't happen to the blacks. I mean, one might interpret that in a very paternalistic sort of way, cos I mean there is a very paternalistic tinge to it. But I mean I found a lot of that quite gratifying in the extent to which specially certain basic humanism came across at that meeting from a lot of people from whom one wouldn't have expected it. And also to the extent that people were beginning to be sensitive of where the doubts were falling and how the doubts were falling in South Africa and were therefore beginning to think of the necessity to change some very comfortable and hard **firmly** held views.

Q: I guess the differences, you know, of you counting on this cowed white population, threatened, confronted with reality amid siege, which is certainly going to be problematic. I mean in the tiny Rhodesian ~~population~~ population I mean that kind of percentage of agents, you know kind of historical compared with some effort to move them further and to bring them to enlighten them to co-opt however you would like to see it. I mean what if some devil's advocate said to you well that's not as glamorous, that's not as enjoyable work I mean that's really slog work. I mean at least what you're doing you can see yourself in a politically correct position in this country, but if you were to decide now and in five years when the Union really gets on its feet and there're more black organisers around you should move into Greenpoint one night a week. You know would you just say Ag spare me! I mean I'm sorry to be so crude, but ...

Q: No, possibly I would, well no, i don't think so. I think that there would be a certain ... I mean one of the people + stay withfor example, his father is the leader of the PFP in the provincial council, and

Acont: and he's a man that I've had a lot to do with. I mean there's a hell of a lot that he's doing that I don't agree with. But there's a hell of a lot of work that he does that I find very, very valuable and there's an importance in white politics in that sense as well. In the sense of politicising a white community also, I remember Helen Suzman used to say when she got sort of shouted at by the Rads at WITS, that You'll all know where to come to when you need a passport, kind of thing. I think there's a lot of value in white politics for that reason. But I wouldn't like to spend my life organising in Greenpoint, no doubt about it. Partly because it wouldn't really interest me that much, and partly because I don't think it would have all that ~~valuable at the end of the day~~ ~~value~~, value, it would have a value, there's no doubt about it.

Q: Was it the son or the father you said you don't agree with everything he does?

A: The father.

Q: Yeah, well I guess that right away. I'm not talking with the PFP or actions in Parliament or the Provincial council. I'm talking about UDF area committees or End Conscription or just the various things. Maybe I could ask you, it seems easy to divide South Africa into areas and there was an era of Trade unionism that you been in the front of as a white, as a person who happened to be white. Would you see another era where there would be more involvement of these kinds of things that have come up? Where young whites who would have been jeering at Helen Suzman have decided that is a bit of wasted time and she has served her role and that if you take a place like PE and Molly Blackburn's actually made a few more bodies be discovered and that kind of thing. Would you go so far as to say that you see an era where this would become more relevant in the future or do you still think Ag, they can do it, I don't really think it's that useful it's not for me?

A: No, no, Julie I think, I'm sorry, I ~~think we've~~ spoken a lot at cross purposes during the whole interview, which is a pity, because I'm interested in what you're saying. I had just not geared my head for this kind of thing at all. But, what Molly Blackburn, what the PFP are doing is something else altogether. And whether that is valuable or not I can say. But I mean I'm not as cynical of that. I mean we've used for example, PFP MPs on too many occasions to be absolutely cynical about the sort of role that they play, so it's a really complex sort of question. Whether I as a white leftie would wish to spend a lot of time amongst the whites of South Africa

Acont:whites of South Africa as opposed to sort of debating, and writing and strategising and planning with like-minded whites. Now that is, or with like-minded intellectuals I won't call them whites, ~~with like-minded~~ intellectuals, there is an important role there and there's an important role in us old intellectuals, if you like, in developing younger intellectuals, in working with people at universities, whether they're white, whether they're black whether they're Indian or coloured or whatever the case might be. But whether there's much point in going, as a leftie, to sort of organise white john citizens, I'm not sure that it's work very well spent. I mean what does one goes into the white community as, ~~as a UDF person?~~ Does one first distinguish oneself from the PFP? Does one take up a position to the left of the PFP? On what basis do you organise there? The PFP, I think is trying to change the ~~perception~~ of the ordinary citizen of South Africa, white citizen of South Africa to accept the changes that are coming about in this place. They're going to have to get used to maybe a non-racial South Africa. I think the PFP are doing that. Im not terribly sure that I could do it anymore effectively. If I ~~were~~ a socialist on the other hand were to think about where to spend my time, it would not be with the citizens of Greenpoint or Seapoint. You know that's pretty much all that I'm saying, so that I think that a white UDF area or organisation or something is not there to organise the whites of the area, it's there to provide some sort of arena for like-minded white/intellectuals/liberal/professional people or whatever to come around and to make sort of plans and to make contact with black intellectuals and to sort of see what relevant political work there will be to do. And there is some to do in white areas. Like this whole thing about swimming pools. Now, they've just jogged up the price of the swimming pool from 50c to R2.00 to exclude blacks effectively. Now the PFP have got together with a petition thing about that. Now I would be quite happy to tart around my sort of street getting other whites in the area to sign the petitions and I speak to them quite a lot of the time and that will have a possibly politicising effect on the people in the area, but the real reason I would be doing it would not be to politicise them, but to get them to sign that petition so maybe to the PFP could take it to the City Council and reverse that. decision. You know, cos I don't think that one as a kind of white socialist, I don't think that there is much value in trying to draw ever ordinary white citizens. I think the PFP are doing that.

Q: I just wonder if your..I don't actually know anything about what the white area committees do and what the debate about if Kadak should be established is about. But I'm just wondering are you caricaturing what the options are. I think the ~~PFP~~ option is being rejected for a lot of reasons, onw of which is

Qcont: one of which is just that it's time and place seems to be being overtaken by events and I think for a lot of reasons the people have a kind of agreed definition for your base. I mean I think we can leave it, and I think you've given some good answers. But I mean have you kind of caricatured what could be done? I don't think I've ever heard of any of these young whites who would've been in the wages comm five or eight years ago, but there isn't one now and now there's Joda@ or this or that, but they never told me that what they're doing is helping PFP on swimming pools. I mean they seem to be doing things like moving mothers about conscriptions, I don't know, - DL : but are they really? → or sure, am I reading you correctly, I mean do you think it's on a level where they're duplicating the PFP?

A: Fairly much so. I mean I don't think that they're duplicating the PFP because they don't have the resources (a) and (b) the suss of and the sympathy with the constituency to do that ~~work~~ very effectively. Maybe not even the time, because they're all involved in doing a whole lot of other work as well. Maybe more valuable work. I don't know, I haven't thought that deeply about them question, but I'm not sure that they would not just be duplicating the PFP to the extent that they define their constituency in broad terms sort of white constituency of Observatory, or Gardens or Constantia or whatever, I'm not sure that they would not be duplicating the role of the PFP. Maybe in a somewhat different style and whatever, but I'm not sure that they wouldn't be. I think that there's a lot of politics in South Africa that goes under the general rubric of left wing politics that actually are not doing much more than duplicating the role of the PFP. Quite honestly. Even some of those who involve themselves with blacks. But anyway that's another story.

Q: I guess what I keep coming back to is I'm interested in exploring something that shows ways for people. I mean not just putting people in a little category and look how nicely these people are working. Let's look historically at X and white person and look historically at 1979 through '85 to what you're doing. So, I just wonder if you feel if there are many other whites who could do what you're doing? I heard you're a terrific organiser. I'm sure that's a certain kind of skill - there's an intellectual background you have, I mean does that leave options. I mean what are you saying to young whites? Study law, political economy economic history and then maybe when you move on there'll be one or two places open etc at the same time or aren't you ultimately hoping that blacks take over not just black intellectuals but the organic, the working class people come up? I mean, where are you phasing yourself into? What's this new South Africa? I just don't understand the place of whites in your vision. I'm just really interested in that.

A: I suppose the kind of vision that I have Idealistic as it might be, kind of maybe the same old idealistic phase I was in in those days when I thought that that class was classes and not races is not a vision strictly of a non-racial South Africa, but a vision of a Socialist South Africa - call it whatever you will. Then the place of the - I didn't realise how difficult this would be to articulate - LET ME START AGAIN.... I think that there is a certain percentage and I think that it's had its, its borne a certain amount of fruit and it will bear even more fruit in what the sort of ECC campaigns are doing and what the UDF are doing in white areas. They have certain propaganda values in exposing the horrors of the war that South Africa is fighting, that the South African Defence Force is fighting. ~~They may change marginally in the views of the numbers of the people, but I don't think that they perform functionally very critical organisational roles. I really don't.~~ What I see for whites in the future South Africa (is that they'll have to accept) and, (a non-racial South Africa) and they'll have to live in it, they'll have to work in it (but, depending on the sort of South Africa it is, they'll live in it more or less easily. If it's the sort of South Africa where their economic privileges are maintained almost without a sort of hiccup, then they'll move into it really easily, with or without the help of the UDF or the End Conscription Campaign or whatever. If it's going to be a kind of South Africa where their economic privileges are threatened or overturned, where their position as sort of factory owners, where their very privileged access to educational institutions and all that type of thing is changed, then I think that there are a lot who will live with it far less easily. But I don't know that organising amongst them now, at this stage, is going to be what changes that.) And I don't think that anybody who organises amongst them with that end in mind is going to get much of a reception from them. That's why I say the PFP is doing ~~exactly the same kind~~ of work as functionally the UDF could do amongst that constituency. Because, you can't approach them with questions any more fundamental than the fact that they have to accept integration. The fact of the matter is that most of them will not have to accept much integration unless South Africa changes really radically. But if a couple of laws are changed here and there, South Africa will remain fairly undisturbed for the people of Seapoint. There might be a couple of blacks living in the same road as them and unquestionably there are more in their swimming pool and everything like that. But it's not a very important change, it might be an important change for some people, but I don't think one that you really have to organise terribly many whites in Cape Town, in Seapoint to accept. Try and organise the whites in Parrow, or Belleville or Klerksdorp for Christ's sake, to change that. You'd a) probably get your head chopped off probably, because they're certainly not going to accept the necessity of that from somebody knocking on their door ~~telling~~ them about it. They'll accept the

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Whites will
for radical change
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 Acont: They'll accept the necessity when it's sort of knocking on their door in the shape of a very militant kind of black working class or black community. That's when they'll change and they'll change and they'll like it or they'll lump it, but they'll change. And as for the future South Africa they'll like it or they won't like it and they'll live in it.

Q: So you'd rather be involved in making for real change and that would come for the black working class, you'd feel your efforts in there as most effective?

A: Yeah, yeah, not necessarily for the rest of my life. I mean I think that the work white journalists do is valuable, I think that's one of the most valuable - I'm not sure why, I think that, but I have a very strong bent in that sort of direction. But just because I think that raising the sort of level of consciousness of debate in any society is a very sort of valuable exercise. I don't think that the Cape Times is valuable and Rihan (?-211) work is valuable because it addresses itself to whites and whites start to think - it's valuable because, a good journalists' work is valuable because it's suddenly a whole new dimension creeps into a society when the level of intellectual debate and the level of exposure of that society is raised. I think that's valuable political work.

Q: OK. I think you express it very well in terms of it depends what change you're working for and that you would like to see the fundamental changes that could come through this kind of Union work... (interruption), but isn't there a body of revolutionary theory that actually advocates and stresses the importance of creating divisions within the ruling class and that whole thing? I mean do you just think that they weren't right about South Africa? It's too tough a nut to crack?

A: No, no, no. That's why I think we're talking at cross purposes. I don't think that at all. I think the divisions within the ruling class in South Africa are absolutely critically. But I think that they are divisions that have been brought about partly by the likes of the PFP. I mean I'm beginning here to sound like a real supporter of the PFP. Partly by that type of activity, but mostly by the blacks. Those are where the divisions have been created. The divisions haven't been created by propagandising amongst the whites. The divisions have been created by organising amongst the blacks. That's the only point that I'm trying to make. The divisions that have emerged as a result of that are absolutely key. We insert ourselves I daresay into those divisions. The Trade Union movement inserts itself right smack in the middle of those divisions, and I think that they're absolutely key. But I don't think it's going to be achieved by knocking on doors in Greenpoint. That's all. Or put it this way, I think that it will be marginally achieved, but you'll count it by a sort of litany

Acont: a sort of litany of names of individuals. You won't count it as a sort of social movement that develops. The social movement that develops will develop as a result of first and absolutely foremost as what goes on amongst the factories and the townships and secondly it will develop as a result of those people who have the sort of feel for the white liberal community, who are the kind of Molly Blackburns and Sheena Duncan - well Sheena Duncan you can't count in those sort of terms. I mean she does obviously other work as well. And thirdly, it will be developed by the universities and the university teachers and the Musas's and that but they will be addressing themselves to a very particular kind of constituency that won't extend its barriers much into those who are not already converted.

Q: Coming back to whether it's still presents you as a uniquely qualified and able person who had a place at a certain time in history and that eventually there'll be really qualified blacks because of the work being done in this kind of movement and then where does that leave a place for whites? I'm just trying to be pestering but I'm still wondering because I just feel...

A: No, I'm pretty confident that I'm good at my job. and I do my job very well and in a movement that is a non-racial movement there will always be a place for me. There're a lot of blacks qualified to do my job, there're a lot of other whites qualified to do my job, some better, most probably not as well.

Q: I'm saying what does that say for whites? Does that say that there are some few jobs for whites like you and that you have one of those few jobs in the country. I'm just wondering what that says for whites? What should they do? I mean should they all study, just stay in the ivory tower and get ready to understand the future socialism and write and help and put a little bit of input into the community newspapers? I just wonder what, because there seem to be more and more younge people... I mean again I'm just thinking of my own tiny little experience of '79 till now? Break... Ok we've already discussed it and you don't want to say anymore about it. But it leaves me to wonder what you'd advise people. If someone came to you for a job, would you say, yeah we need people like you in the Union movement? Would you say we need people like you in the next ten years after ...

A: Look, the only reason why we'd say to people that we don't need you in the Union Movement, if I said that to them at all, is that there's a limited amount of space in the Union Movement for jobs. Whites have found very valuable niches..some are working in the industrial health group, others are putting out booklets, others are working in the unions, others are working in the UDF, others of them are...I think that there's a lot of value for all intellectuals in producing intellectual material, in stimulating intellectual debate.

Cont: it's all a valid exercise?

A: What?

Q: What were you going to say, it's all right?

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 A: I think that, it sounds like a bizarre thing to say, ~~about South Africa,~~ but the far more interesting question about my role in the Union movement is (how I, as a white, function is important, there's no doubt about it, and how I, as a white, relate to black workers is important,) as I as a white relate to other black organisers is important. (But my position qua intellectual is actually a more interesting) question, a more interesting contradiction that has to be resolved. It wouldn't make any difference if my name was Sox Outhole(?) who's my key side kick in the Union, if you like, but also an intellectual. His role is as fraught with complexity and angst as mine is and I think that a great problem that I have with many white intellectuals - is that, and it arises partly as a result of the sort of guilt that we experience, - is that they do not do that which they are best qualified to do and that is to be intellectuals. Be people who work in organisations like the UDF, be people who work on community newspapers like Grass Roots, be people who work in unions like the General Workers Union. And that is that (they are only too willing to toe a line because they don't feel that it's legitimate for them as whites to say anything in black organisations, in black South Africa. You can't assert yourself. To my mind that's) the most, that's (absolutely reactionary and there's a lot of that sort of stuff that goes around in) white politics, in (white left wing politics in South Africa. The heaviest sort of Stalinist, the heaviest sort of toe the line (are always whites because they feel that they can't do anything else. Theirs is just to facilitate what the sort of fashionable line of the country happens to be. And I have a great deal of problems with that, you know. That's the reason why I personally write so much, why I get involved in so many) sort of (arguments and) so many sort of (controversies. Because despite the fact that I'm ~~a union organiser,~~ in many ways the thing that I do best is to ~~think and~~ kind of (write and I can think critically and I can write critically. that's not because I'm clever.) That's because I'm privileged enough to be a white South African, that's because I'm privileged enough to have gone through all the education that I ever wanted to go through and that could have been at London, that could have been at Yale, that could have been at Oxford, that could have been at WITS, that could have been at UCT. And (I've managed to do that principally because I'm a white South African and no doors have been closed to me as a result thereof. Having acquired all the critical insight to then get schlurped into some organisation and just toe a line because it seems to be the popular line, it seems to be the popular (spirit), it's to my mind a really **politically** reactionary thing to do and a non-contributing sort of thing to do.) And

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Accont: And that's why I have respect for many whites in Trade Unions, I have respect for whites producing booklets for workers, I have respect for many whites doctors working in industrial health groups. Not because they're whites doing it. But because they're intellectuals providing input into organisations. Like our organisation, where our workers are by and large strong enough and developed enough to reject the line that they don't like. To reject an offer of resources that they don't want, whether it's an intellectual providing them or not. But they're in an organisation and they're self-confident about it and they would really sort of despise a white who came in and said "You are a black worker and I won't provide you with any advice. I'm just here to do what you order me to do." And at the end of the day, because I'm general-secretary of the Union, I am here to do what they order me to do. But I have to spend a great deal of my time doing the things that I really think are the wrong things to do, because my will hasn't prevailed in the Union. (But if I were to come here and say I have no will other than that which is yours, I have no ideas other than yours, then I would be completely throwing away all those facilities which my privilege gave me instead of using that privilege and injecting it back into the people on whose backs I effectively got that privilege - and that is the privilege of being a highly educated intellectual.) And that's the problem that I feel with white politics is people are embarrassed about

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(Some)

Accont: Are white intellectuals and it's (white intellectuals) that form 99% of the progressive white constituency of South Africa, (are embarrassed at their ability to understand, the ability to articulate and they don't do that which they are best qualified to do.) So (they think that the only work that is valuable work - ironically this should be coming from a union organiser - but the only work is valuable work (is organising.) I don't think that the only work that is valuable is organising. That's what I said earlier about journalists. I think that they do valuable work. Not because they're organising propagandise amongst whites but because they raise the sort of level of exposure and the level of consciousness of the, a whole society. Now, I don't know how to put that in less airy fairy terms than that. But (if more intellectuals would use their intellectual tools) and this is obviously, I'm talking a lot here about whites because they form a large part of the body of intellectuals in South Africa, left-wing intellectuals, if they would use their (intellectual tools rather than worrying about knocking on Mrs. Smith's door in Greenpoint to convert her to revolution, then a lot more would be done.) But everybody wants to be a Union organiser, everybody wants to be a community organiser so not everybody can be a union organiser because there's a limited number of places available. Not everybody can be a community organiser

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A cont: body of people felt very powerfully that these things were not to be discussed in public. If you wanted to criticise the Gugulethu residents association you had to ask their permission first. It was exactly the same ~~as the reaction to~~ that UDF interview. Exactly the same sort of reactionary stuff.

Q: You mean your interview from that book?

A: Yeah, the main criticism that came out about that was not the content of what I said in that interview, but whether I was entitled to say anything or not. Now, if I'm not entitled to say anything about anything in South Africa then what did I go through all this ten years of learning principally of how to understand something? I don't say that that learning can only be achieved at university. I think most of the learning that I've experienced has been here, by far and away most of it has been experienced here. But my ability to be able to write and articulate the way I do has been a function of the kind of privileges that I've achieved. The (privileges that have been granted me). The privileges that have been granted me have been (because I'm a white South African) first and foremost (and I still think that my primary way of paying back some of this is to use that, is to say "Look, I don't think this direction that you're heading in is such a great direction. I've great respect for your organisation but I think you're heading in the wrong direction. I may be right or I may be wrong in my assessment, but nevertheless this is what I think, based on sort of ten years of reading Althusser, and Lenin and the bloody newspapers," you know. And I think that part of the guilt of being a white South African is that the minute you get involved in rail politik, you feel that one is an insidious line that is kind of peddled out, that (you can't say anything because you haven't really experienced it), you haven't really felt it (and you are after all part of the sort of oppressors. I don't buy that, and it comes a lot from, the majority of the white community of Cape Town feel like that, far and away, and provide some sort of heavy rationale ~~for~~ it, but it's all a lot of nonsense as far as I'm concerned and it's a sort of selling of your birthright in a wierd kind of way, in a way that certainly doesn't develop the revolution ~~any~~. I don't think.

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Q: So, what does that mean for - one of the questions I'm asking everyone is this a valid thesis and what I'm doing is this at all interesting or useful. I mean do you think it's useful to look at the role of whites or are you dismissive about that? → (DL: No) - Do you think I'm paying too much attention to it to try to fathom how it fits in? Can it give any lessons for the future or do you think Ag, you should rather look at blacks in the Unions or something?

A: No, I don't think it's - I think it's really interesting



Acont: interesting. The whole conversation has really stimulated me. I don't know quite in what direction but ... I don't have a sou to come out with! I've never thought about it that deeply. I mean I've thought about it now and again in my own position.

Q: In the body of an historical survey, looking at whites now, do you think it could have any particular use? You work with black workers and you know what they're thinking, I mean do they ever say to you, do they ever express interest in white politics? Do you think they're intested? Do you think they're concerned? I mean these are people who are interested in non-racialism and that kind of thing, do you think they have any interest in figuring out what whites are up to ?

A: Black workers? Not hell~~o~~^oya interested, I don't think. They're sometimes interested in the big figures of white politics. They're interested in whart sort of motivates the ladies of the Black Sash cos they kind of come into contact with them. They're interested in what motivates me. Many of our work~~ers~~ think I'm sort of motivated by some sort of religious thing. That that's what brought me, that that's what I ... cos that's what brings a lot of black leaders to Unions. They're very interested in the Slabberts and the Suzmans. I'm talking about our members who're by and large contract workers. So it's a very different kind of black working class constituency altogether. But by and large, lets say sort of student politics without being disparaging, they just think students are students are students are students, kids are kids are kids are kids. Now, it's not a very progressive view, it's not a particular view of theirs that I'm proud of necessarily, but I don't think that they attach much significance to it. In the meat strike they were hell~~o~~^oya gratified by the support the black students gave and also this union, white students gave them. This Union was started by white students and ex-SACTU (?) organisers, but there was a very heavy input by white students into Wages Comm and the older members of the Union are aware of that and are respectful of that. They're respectful of the support UCT gave us in the Meat Strike. But I don't think that anybody thinks - maybe this is where we were at cross purposes - that it's going to determine the future of South Africa. I don't think that they think the future of South Africa lies in the hands of the whites, at all. I think that they really believe it lies in their hands.

Q: I think that is my piece. Having said that, where ~~does that leave the~~ whites? I hope you're clear about that.

A: No, I am clear about that. I'm clear that that's what you mean. But where it leaves whites is that I think whoever wants to participate in a way that he or she deems to be progressive, be that to go along to a meeting and oppose the sort of fascists

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Too many whites are
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A cont: the sort of fascists in Seapoint who want to close the swimming pool again. Or be it...But that's one kind of white. The other kind of white are the kind that you are circulating around with in South Africa and ~~that you~~ probably were when you lived in Johannesburg. I don't know, maybe I'm wrong. But their role is not principally amongst their own community. I don't believe that. I mean amongst their own community, ~~not~~ amongst their own racial group. It's maybe amongst their own peer group, that being intellectuals there's a lot of work for them to do, qua intellectuals. And what I'm saying is they are constrained from doing that for which they are best qualified by the sort of guilt and the subjugation that they feel as a result of being white and being privileged. I don't know if I've made myself clear enough on that ground, but I think that, I don't think that there's all that much percentage amongst the, of them working amongst the white population. Where it leaves them all in a future South Africa, where it leaves all of us off in a future South Africa I don't know. I mean I don't think really very much about where I'll be in a future South Africa. I, unfortunatley pretty much the same as I am in this South Africa, but that depends on the future.

Q: OK. I just want to ask you one other thing. You reminded me when you said exactly (?) - Can I have those matches? - and that is the idea of, I mean you talked alot about the recent past.. I'm interested in knowing if you look at the fifties, if you look at the past further back and look at the role of the whites there and feel that there were lessons to be learned in terms of, you know if that contributes to your feeling of about the uselessness of the relatively not such usefulness of working whites. I mean there's always this phrase 'the lessons of the fifties' and I've decided that it just means obviously very many different things to different people and I just wonder what you would say about it. Do you think there's lessons or?

A: I don't really know enough about it. I don't know if there're very valuable lessons to be drawn → I don't know. I mean I'm friendly with a ~~lot~~ of people who were active in the fifties. It seems to be that ~~their~~ role was very much the same as ours is now with all its faults and all its advantages. I don't think that they perceive themselves...well, it actually was different then, there was the liberal party and the torch commando and all those sort of things there where I think that ~~truly~~ possibly whites did have a more deterring influence on how things would devlop in South Africa at that stage. But the real lefties, the heavy lefties that I know, were all sort of involved in ~~congress of demonstrators~~

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Acont: congress^ddemocrats or in the ANC.

Q: So you wouldn't look at the Congress of Democrats, you would see that that wasn't as successful as everyone would say.

A: I'm not sure. I don't know enough about the Congress of democrats to know that. But I think it was always an appendage. Do you not agree? I mean do you think the Congress of Democrats was an organisation that asserted itself amongst the White community in any way? Or that it was a support organisation for the ANC?

Q: I think that they always attempted to not only be a wing of the ANC.

A: Yeah, well you know that's maybe what I think is to some extent objectively the role that whites play in South Africa, but I don't think it should be organisationally expressed as such. Maybe it was appropriate in the fifties to have a separate white organisation like the Congress of Democrats. I don't think that at the current conjunction in South Africa that it would be a progressive step at all. I'm not involved I must add, in this debate here about whether to form a white wing of the UDF or not. I hear very much about it very much at contact parties, but I don't think, I mean my gut reaction is, I really mean my gut reaction because it offends me in my gut quite honestly, I think that there's no - you know things have developed, for example, in Cape Town to such an extent where I think it would be a step backwards.

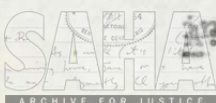
Q: OK. You might want to rush, but I still want to push this book ~~to everyone externally~~. I mean since I left South Africa the ABC asks about the ANC, it all (?-228) in the papers every day. What about the thesis that events are moving so fast. I mean, I don't know about here in your particular Union, but if you take workers generally, and you look at P.E. and the kinds of things that are happening there, do you think that the Union is being moved along by issues that aren't just factory floor and how does that - do you think there'll be a time when issues become so pressing that when workers go home from the factories and the issues they confront are so dire that that would have an effect on your agenda? Your workers agenda.

A: Sorry say that again Julie?

Q: Do you think, again I'm just reacting from Port Elizabeth where one, when things like that are happening, you inevitably don't hear, where the talk of the day is not so much about those factory floor issues as about who disappeared and who got rubbed off and that kind of thing. Do you see things as (?.....242)

A: In looking to the future do you think that those

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Qcont: that those issues will begin to assert themselves? among workers? to a far greater degree than they are now? That because of that the kind of delineation, the demarcation between purely factory floor issues and community issues or life issues or liberation issues will take on a far greater importance than they did in '75 to '79 or I'm talking about '85 to '95.

A: I think that they always have. I mean obviously you know, as the temperature increases they will more, but the temperature is partly increasing because of the activity of workers as well. A lot of people perceive that there's a lot of pressure on, for example, Unions to move from factory floor issues to other issues. I don't perceive that pressure to be very great. I think that pressure was ~~always~~ there. I think it was a pressure we always welcomed, and a pressure that was introduced into the Unions. I think partly that the pressure is there ascribes, is partly ascribable to the fact that a large part of the programme of the unions and the union leaders themselves has succeeded and that is that the Union should take on these issues and take on these campaigns that are not directly factory floor related. But certainly as the temperature of the townships increases, yeah, at particular phases unions will be involved less with factory floor issues than in other phases. But I don't think that there's anything contradictory about that, or mutually exclusive about that in any way at all. I think that the one is a function of the other.

One might also say that as the heat increases in the townships so will the heat increase on the factory floor. just as the heat increases on the factory floor so does the heat increase in the townships. Part of the reason why in a place like PE and Uitenhage they think there's so much heat in the townships is because so many of those workers have achieved so much in the factories and they've achieved a great deal of respect in the factories as well from there oppressors there, if you like, that they're not prepared any longer to bide with the type of thing that is happening in the townships. I think that that's true. There's one thing very interesting thing, to return to this whole thing of whites that happens in PE, that I've just heard about, that I heard from my organisers there, that you know of the conflict between the UDF and AZAPO in PE and you know that it's affected the unions quite grossly as well and for a whole lot of really bad reasons, but anyway, When Molly Blackburn walked into the stadium at which the funeral was being held, 30 000 people stood up and gave her a standing ovation. Now it expressed something about the way in which people feel, because Molly has done a lot of useful work, there's no doubt about it. But I think what it expresses is what people feel about a kind of middle-aged, even possibly elderly, I don't know sort of white woman who's, who comes to the funeral, who's been involved in so much. I really think it expresses that. It makes one feel a little bit odd when at's the same time some of the people standing up applauding Molly like that are also sort

Acont: also sort of villifying black shop stewards at Volkswagen. That to me expresses the complexities of South Africa! It really does you know. And the role of whites and the role of blacks and how much harder it is for a black leader in many ways to achieve credibility and to achieve status than it is for a white sympathiser. Now, somebody like Molly has been doing what I think could be really easily characterised as support work and she's lauded for that. Would it be that Molly came out publicly and said I don't like the way in which the UDF is developing or I don't like the way in which AZAPO is developing or I don't like the way this is going or I don't like the way that is going. She really then runs the risk of being said, but how could you say that, you still white. When John, no we don't want to put names to it, but when a Volkswagen shop steward says that, it's not good enough for them to just do support work, obviously, cos there's no capacity to do organisational work. When he is critical of political organisations and political developments, he places himself in a very difficult position, except that he has the support amongst the constituency and amongst the blacks to say, well, I'll bring this along with me, the black workers and the constituency. And we as sort of white trade union organisers who are not involved in support work, but who are involved in organisational work, very often run the risk of our views being devalued, not because of the content of them, but because we're white. It never happens from the workers at all. It generally happens to the extent that it does happen at all from the other intellectuals. Mostly white intellectuals. Do you understand what I'm saying? But I was very interested in that anecdote about Molly, and particularly the context in which it was happening. It's sometimes an issue here. I mean, I sometimes feel in the Union here that the issue of a white general secretary is never sufficiently confronted, because whenever it does get confronted our members say We refuse to, we're not going to discuss that issue. We're a non-racial organisation and we elect who we wanted to elect and we will not be told that we must consider the implications of that person being a white. Now, that's a short-sighted view. I think that's a silly view. It's an unreal view, but it's a view nevertheless. So the question doesn't every really seriously get confronted and particularly when it gets confronted in an antagonistic sort of way by individuals from outside this Union. There's a very harsh sort of closed response. But you asked me another question altogether, I don't know if I've answered that sufficiently about the Unions and politics and...

Q: Can we close by asking a general question that I'm asking many people when they come from different points of view to answer. It's a question about the future of this country. Do you have any thoughts about how the Government is moving or will move in future to contain

Qcont: to contain the increasingly rebellious population? What kind of strategies are being employed, what kind of splits within the establishment in terms of how they're moving to preserve power, and what the implications would be for any predictions about the future of black resistance?

A: What's been happening in the last six months, I think is, I think that they're moving in a very kind of ad hoc way and that they're drawing their line now at majority rule. That's where they're clustering behind. That won't come to pass. A whole lot of amendments that they're going to make it difficult to draw that line have come to pass, though. Certainly not because of the goodness of their will, but because of the pressure nationally and internationally. A while ago, I think that when they started with those Koornhof bills and all that type of thing, where they attempted to insert themselves between a black middle class that is difficult to define, where it begins and where it ends and the black working class, and to some extent that can be expressed and particularly strongly in some areas, that can be expressed as a distinction between residents, section Ten people and hostel dwellers, some of whom are section 10, but whose families are living elsewhere. I still think that at the end of the day, that is where the line is going to be drawn and that's where the insertion is going to be made, because it's a ready-made potential division that exists in the black community already. And more than anything else, I think that's why Unions are really more valuable organisations because they are the only organisations that have successfully spanned the gap between, and not always absolutely successfully between township people, section 10 residents, and between hostel dwellers and migrant workers. And, I think that at the end of the day, the state will reform here and reform there and form there and maybe there'll be a fourth chamber, maybe there'll be certain political rights accorded to blacks, but where they're eventually going to gather and draw the line is on separate development, on the position of migrant workers and hostel dwellers and their families. I really do think that that's what they're going to do. They tend to do it too crudely in those Koornhof bills, but I think

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