

- J.F. Can I just start by asking you when and where you were born?
- JAY Born 1954 - 20th. December - in Durban.
- J.F. In what area of Durban?
- JAY It's a place called Greenwood Park, which is now a Coloured area - you know we were moved out by the group areas, when I was still quite young - four years I think I was.
- J.F. Do you remember at that time any people expressing any resentment about being moved, or any resistance?
- JAY Yes, I think it was especially with that area - we'd been brought up, and basically in the whole - number of other people in my family had been born there. I didn't quite understand at that stage, but felt some sort of resentment towards being moved out of a house in which I'd been born, and for no clear reason - also moved out of the community in which you had friends, and developed some relationships with other people. *See →*
① Anti-white
- J.F. Was there organised resistance, or
- JAY I can't really say - no - I don't think there was.
- J.F. as you got a bit older than that - was the resentment - looking back at what had happened to you, and the decimation of the community - was that focused against whites - was there any resentment to the Coloureds - was it an anti system thing, or was it racial?
- JAY I remember from a very early age being anti - (what I used to call the Boers,) and that they were what I felt were responsible for a whole lot of things - even schools - (I remember as a kid writing white with a small letter, and black with a big letter, and Boer with a small letter. - so I grew up in that environment - also because I'm the youngest, and a lot of other brothers and sisters had gone through some university education, and been involved in some activity - like my brother was a medical student, and used to come home with African friends and things, so from a very early age I was exposed to anti-the-establishment-system activity, so I think it started from a very early age with me, where I felt very distanced from what represented the system as organised by the whites. *→ ① cont'd on p. 3*
- J.F. What did your parents do?
- JAY My father was an interpreter at court - my mother was a housewife.
- J.F. Did he deal with cases that were political?
- JAY No, no ... I actually didn't have much of a relationship with my father.
- J.F. And how far does your family go back in South Africa - do you know about when they came ...?

- JAY Not very clearly - they've been - my mother was born here, my father was born here, so were their parents, so - I'm not very clear about that - it was never an issue really discussed with us. I never had any discuss(Interruption)
- J.F. You don't know if they were brought as labourers or anything? You don't know if your ancestors were brought as labourers or anything?
- JAY Not really, no. I think my mother's father came as a trader - I know that. I don't really know further than that. It was never really discussed in our family.
- J.F. Is that anything that you ever got to look into at some stage - the origins of the Indian - origins of the Indian working class community, or was that not anything that came up.
- JAY Well, I never - from a young age, and my family the same - we never considered ourselves as having our origins in India - we considered ourselves as South Africans, and none of my family have had any contact with people in India, so that that type of link was broken off very early. ②
Indian
- J.F. I meant more in terms of the class understanding of how your people come to ...
- JAY No - I think from inside of my family I think - inside of myself - I always felt myself coming from - as my ancestors coming as labourers - never classify myself as coming as the part that became the traders, you know, in South Africa - never really could identify with that part.
- J.F. And as you were growing up (was there much politics in the home?
- JAY There was a lot of talk, yes, because my brothers and sisters were involved as students in the activity of the campuses and so forth, so I was I suppose in a fortunate position of always being exposed to a more enlightened thinking. A lot of it actually came from my mother, though she was not political. She, in many ways represented the first socialist I came into contact with, because she treated everyone the same way, ~~or~~ (whether) a person ^{who} came begging to the door - an African person, or whatever - was given the same treatment as if a white person (came to the house,) or an Indian person came to the house. ③
- J.F. Would there have been whites who'd come to the house? exposure to other races
- JAY I remember some situations where ... you know there used to be white foremen in charge of building roads, and there used to be other people that would give them very special treatment, and my mother would respond by) also - (like serving tea to the labourers on the road, so consequently ^{she} saw people as people, and not as different races, which I don't know how prevalent that was, but that was the environment in which I grew up. →
- J.F. Even whites - were there any good whites you came into contact with?

JAY At early age, no.

J.F. When would the first have been?

JAY The first contact with whites who in some way resembled progressives, who I saw as being part of the struggle, was very late on.) It was past my short period at university, which was around 1978/79, that I really could see a role for white progressives to play, but as progressives separate from the white community.

J.F. Can you tell me a bit about that - who were the ones you encountered that made you think this? (3)
Cont'd

JAY Mainly white students. (In '79 when I started in the unions, I came into contact with whites who were then involved in the unions, and at that level accepted that whites did have a role to play.) Prior to that - '78 where I came into contact with white students who were active in their various campuses and so forth.

J.F. I'm going to take it back a bit then - the university and before the unions. When you say that there was your mother's kind of innate egalitarianism or socialism - did anyone ever speak about the historical movements or anything in the home, or was it not that kind of politics?

JAY No, it was - it was spoken about, particularly around the de-segregation of the university - the fact that you had separate education, and the fact that in - I remember the early days when the Indian university was set up, there was quite a lot of resistance to that, and that was discussed a lot at home, and so I think at the direct political level, yes, quite a lot. Around '72 there were huge student strikes in Durban and Interruption)

J.F. The strikes - which strikes were those - you said student strikes ...?

JAY Yes, you see, in '69 there was the SASO set up - South African Students' Organisation - and (very early on) there - I was still a kid in school, and I used to go, (around '70/'71) and listen to Steve Biko speak, and other people in SASO, and one of my - this (elder brother was in a training college at that stage, and he was quite involved in SASO, and I used to go along with him to a lot of the meetings. I also remember at that stage NIC was trying to be revived, and I went to some of their meetings - I was still very young at that stage - and especially people like Biko, I think, in a way, set up or whatever, the - my thinking in a particular direction) of how one is aware of the situation at one level, but how does one involve oneself in the situation at another level? And it made a big impression on me that - my elder brother was suspended in '72, as well, from the college because of his activities. That, also, was quite significant for me. At that stage they tried to develop something in the school where I was, and not had

very much success because there had been no real link between the universities and the schools.

J.F. So did B.C. as a theory appeal to you or was it seeing a guy like Biko, who was such a terrific, charismatic person who spoke well, or did you immediately think black - this is a good idea?

JAY Well, that's just as (Biko himself, but what he spoke about was reality - the fact that we were so humiliated by whites at every level, and I could feel that myself, from my experiences - and the fact that we had no contact with whites who thought differently - at that stage, for us, all whites were the same,) and one couldn't understand - whether one accepted it as a theory at that stage is very hard for me to say - I think you had to develop much higher level of consciousness to define what theory was,

(but at that stage, he actually was able to put into words, basically, the feelings that one had - was able to communicate that so effectively,) and that's what appealed.

J.F. How many brothers and sisters do you have?

JAY Five brothers and two sisters.

J.F. So by the time you yourself got on campus - when was that?

JAY I matriculated in '72 - '73 and '74 I left home and worked in shops and so forth. I went to university in '75, and that's the year I had tuberculosis, so - and because of that my - I felt very frustrated in '75, but actually couldn't do anything about it, because at one level the positions taken by students at (.....) 144 UDW - the union university was a boycott of everything on the campus, but there was no viable (?) 145 alternative that could be used to mobilise students, so - why our boycott position - non collaboration was a broad position.

It was not a vehicle that could be used in any way to mobilise the students, so '75 for us was not a - it was basically uneventful year (ja) 149 What happened in '76 was what caused, I think, a break from my past, from the type of surroundings I was living in, or was studying at, because (UDW) the Soweto uprisings - the situation at campus built up to a boycott. I became very frustrated with that - that the boycott in itself was not being used as a vehicle to organise people, and I left campus in '76. And then - '76 I actually left Durban and went to Johannesburg.

Then I came back in '77 and went back to campus, and that's when I became involved in the - in SASO - very actively involved in SASO, and we set up a branch of SASO there and became very active in its regional structures, and began, through a process of struggle, (.....) 167 see the role of the community, and the need for a link-up between students on the campuses, and the people in the community, because there was such a huge divide, and began to see that the students - one couldn't actually change South Africa, that one needed to actually broaden one's base,

and very, I think, in a way very naive in the way we saw our involvement (Interruption) Yes, so I think our interaction with the community at that stage was very naive, and we began to see the limits of B.C. as a theory, and began to see the contradictions - the (broader contradictions)

JAY

.... of society - began to see that there was workers - there were students there - there were unemployed people - and began to try and shift the emphasis of B.C. to analysing the system, and also the economic system, and came into some conflict with the ideologues who basically saw B.C. as the enemy was just the whites,

and developing an economic system - (the economic policy of the Black Peoples' Convention - saw a situation in which, if one took everything away from the whites, and then developed a system) in which all of us was free - correction: in which almost was pre-(I think) 192 the settler period, (.....) 193 (Car hooting) black communalism, that one would solve South Africa's problems, and from the people in SASO, there was a lot of resistance to this policy. - that people said: No, we don't accept that your policy - (economic policy) - (can be a solution for the problems of South Africa, and began to move more in the direction of

seeing the class contradictions) in South Africa, (and then seeing the need of very effective and solid organisation within the communities, based on development of community organisations.

And then there were the bannings, which basically suppressed that conflict that was developing, and then there was the death of Biko. So '78 was actually a period in which the activists in SASO were feeling out the direction in which they should take, and there were two broad fronts, I think, that - (one hand there were people who began to see B.C. as a means through which black people develop the confidence of leadership, and develop the skills of organisation, and also broke with the paternalism that we had from say, the white students who were at that stage under NUSAS,) so it

was important for black people - (it was important for the development of our own leadership, to have gone through the phase of B.C., but then we saw the limits - that one couldn't convert that into a theory, and apply it to solve the country's problems, and those people then either went into organising within the communities - some of them like in '79 people like me got involved in the unions, but mainly the communities, and (even I, at the end of '78) - in fact the half of '78 I (was very actively involved in community organisations,

(and the other group who) saw that it was an ideology - and then they had the development of the - they (re-formed the B.C. organisation and formed as AZAPO, which still maintained very rigid B.C. line,) and, like from my side, began to see even - '79 I taught for a while in Johannesburg - and began to see even the limits of just one's involvement within this community based organisations or mobilising of students, and saw the need - that the part of society that can play the most important role was working class, and then actually fully committed myself to organising within the working class itself, and I came back at the end of '79 and became involved in organising, or helping - (assisting to organise in FOSATU - so that's how my involvement in the unions started.)

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- J.F. What kind of school did you teach at in Jo'burg.
- JAY Well, it was a senior primary school - it was mainly Indian and Coloured kids - the type of kids that came there were basically very working class kids, and it was a nice thing. It was important in my understanding as well.
- J.F. When you say you rejected the kind of economic theory, or lack of economic theory of B.C. - was that because it was naive - was that because it was traditional - was that because it was conservative or reactionary?
- JAY I think at that stage - remember in my university days we've never had access to theory - to theoretic (.....) 266 the white students have access to. I was studying science. So I think our rejection of the economic theory presented by B.P.C. was one, on the grounds that it hadn't been discussed and formulated with the proper consultation of all people, and The second is that we began to understand ourselves, by discussions with people, access to very limited literature, that the contradictions in society were much greater than were presented by organisations like B.P.C., and that the solutions were much more difficult than presented by organisations like that. I also began to see the limits of B.C. and that it never actually expanded outside the students, and one would go into communities and come across the reality of how people were (workers) or whatever - perceived their situation, and it was completely different to what was presented to us as students - (in our discussions as students,)
- (so I think we rejected the theory because it was actually empty - it was no solution, and it was - never tackled the real problems that people were confronted with, either as students or as workers, or as people that are part of the community.)
- J.F. This is just an aside and it's not a big thing, but how does that reflect on Steve Biko himself - are you one of the people who think he would have moved or was moving, or do you think that anyone who was really into that was part of their times, and there wasn't anything there to move with?
- JAY One is not too sure, what Steve Biko, I think he was a very clear thinker, but I think he was, to some extent, limited by the - by a philosophy that he had basically helped to formulate, or he played a key role in formulating. There were differences of opinion between the groupings in SASO, and the groupings in B.P.C. and B.C.P., and all the allied organisations, that were becoming very critical, and if the state hadn't stepped in, possibly the conflict would have spilled out into the open. → cont'd p. 7
- J.F. So, in a sense, with the state stepping in - did that obviate things - do you think that that would, maybe, more naturally come to a head, if the state hadn't step

END OF TAPE.

- JAY Definitely - I think the state's action precipitated that.
- J.F. But, in a sense it cut it off - what I'm saying is : if the state hadn't stepped in, do you think that that naturally would have come out - were you looming towards a clash with these other points of view?
- JAY Yes, we were - a clash was coming - we're not sure how it would have gone.
- J.F. So would that obviate .. you told about how you moved into the unions question of trying to unravel the racial contact - what you've seen about rejecting B.C. doesn't mean that there isn't a racial contact.
- JAY Yes, very clearly, and we've never underestimated that we can't say there is no racism, or that race doesn't play a role in South Africa - it plays an important role.
- J.F. How did that factor - when you saw these white students - how did you - you spoke about that earlier - that that was the first group that you met that were ...
- JAY Well, I think that the white students that we came into contact with also recognised that race was a factor, and didn't have the glib interpretation that B.C. was just a negative thing, and we able to see the positive aspects of B.C. I think if they'd adopted a negative attitude they would have alienated us a lot, but I think they were people who were much more clear about the issues of race, and that's what made them more acceptable to us as a grouping who had moved out of B.C. but still regarded racism - race as an important factor, but saw the limitations of B.C. as a theory.
- J.F. So how did you interact with the whites - what was it that you...
- JAY Well, at the level of resources, in terms of one (.....) 023 the availability of reading material or availability of less skills, the resources that they had - but it was made clear that I, as an individual, interacted very briefly with them before I moved out of those circles, but I think that interaction that started very early on laid the base for much stronger interaction between students that you have, in fact, today - between the progressive white students and black students.
- J.F. So that was during SASO times that you had the brief interaction, or was it after?
- JAY It was after.
- J.F. But then you moved out of the university ... and then how did you come back again - you said it briefly, but if you can just let me get a sense of how that happened - that you moved to the unions - which union you moved to and how that happened.
- JAY Well, I taught for nine months in '79, and came up against authority, and at the same time, with developing more broadly my consciousness, and became very frustrated within that environment, because we thought that moving into education was important - becoming a teacher - having contact with kids, and that, at that level you can relate to people and try

JAY

.... and develop a consciousness, but there are obvious limits to that, and that's what made my decision, especially when the conflicts between my-self and a few other people came to a head with the authority - the school authority, which was a very tight system of education you have here,

and I resigned, and I came to Durban, and for a while - a very short while, went back into community based organisations, but then actually came to the unions - spoke to some people in the unions - asked about what assistance we could give, and people basically agreed on the way in which we

could help, and like for me, ^{came when} my first interaction with workers, as such, was - I was trying to organise workers at Beacon Sweets - the Indian workers, and I spent several months trying to mobilise union workers into a union that had become defunct and we were trying to revive to use as a basis for -

to revive organisation of food workers in Natal. It was a very important experience for me. - I spent, what, five months, almost daily, in the field, getting up early in the morning, being there at five, being there late at night, visiting hundreds of homes in the Indian townships, trying to get something moving, and it didn't succeed! (Laugh) because of

the very vicious attack from management, and the fact that, at that stage, we were trying to concentrate on Indian workers because there had been this union that represented Indian workers ...

J.F. Which was?

JAY (The Sweet workers' Industrial Union) it was called.

J.F. Who was it affiliated to?

JAY It wasn't affiliated to FOSATU, but it was a union - an old SACTU union that was being de-registered, and people had approached one or two of the executive approached FOSATU to try and help boost this union, or re-build it, and we tried and didn't succeed, and that gave me one of the most important experiences. Then I said: No, you get a greater understanding - one actually had to interact more deeply with workers in the factory situation.)

(Then I got a job, organised through one of the shop stewards, in a textile factory, and worked in a textile factory for about five months,) and together, (and really mobilised this whole factory - the Indian and African workers - organised them into unions, and saw real progress, and that again was another second very significant influence on my life.) -

like (you had departments that were Indian, and other departments that were African, and separate change rooms, and the tactics that we used were very interesting. - I don't think we have enough time to go into them here, but -

(like very early on, we would have one of the African shop stewards coming into an Indian cloakroom and talking about the union, and straight away the reaction being) that (: No, man, we don't want to hear about the union now. - (and then I would pretend not to know him and then raise a question and say: "Shouldn't we think about this? - (what is))

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- JAY *cont'd* (5) (happening to us here? - we work at least 12 hour shifts, and this is what we're getting paid - what can the union do about that?" And through that we did very - especially on the night shifts we worked through all the departments jointly, and were able to organise that factory - that was a very important influence.)
- J.F. Where was it?
- JAY It was a textile factory in Durban. Then I was offered, or asked to help FOSATU in Pietermaritzburg, and became involved in trying to organise leather workers, who were in a TUCSA union, and we were trying to - the workers that come into conflict - there was a group of Indian and African workers come into conflict with the leadership in the TUCSA union
- J.F. Had to do with - not just black against white, but Indian/African - that situation - can we just backtrack a little - can you speak about that - was that a factor - it sounds like, from your mother and from your personal situation, it wasn't a heavy kind of thing, but did you encounter that in the community - at the schools, and then later, with workers?
- JAY Yes, I think (the workers at) the factory where I was organising - Beacon Sweets - they (had had a bad experience - union workers, because they had been quite strong in SACTU, and they'd gone on strike in, I think it was the early '60's, and it was Indian workers who had gone on strike, and the strike was smashed and some of the Indian guys lost their jobs) - a lot of the Indian guys lost their jobs -
- Indians/Africans* (6) so they were very suspicious of the union when we tried to re-organise them - not hostile to the union - agreeing that the union was a good thing, but saying that: No, (they weren't prepared to take the initiative,) and that was a problem.
- J.F. Would that in no way be related to their - to African/Indian?
- JAY No, in fact, (a lot of them said that Africans should be organised, and that the Indians would then follow, but basically the Indians were not hostile to the union, but - this was from the older leadership that had been in this union, that as Indians they were not prepared to go forward alone, because of that experience that they had when the strike had been smashed, during the time of SACTU.) *cont'd -> p. 10*
- J.F. What do you mean alone - they wanted Africans in the union as well, or just?
- JAY Yes, they wanted African workers organised ...
- J.F. In their union or ..?
- JAY Well, in one union.
- J.F. In one union - did they think - I'm just confused - did they think that would give them protection, or.
- JAY Well, they felt that it was African workers who should take the initiative, and that the last time the Indian workers took the initiative they had been smashed.

- J.F. Were the Africans (.....) 112 or was there..?
- JAY Yes, the African workers had actually gone to work at that time.
- J.F. And then just generally - even back to your student days or before that, did non racialism mean overcoming differences - did you have an experience of Indian/African - I'm not trying to play anything up, I'm just trying to understand the realities - to me it seems that that has to do with non racialism as well, especially from lots of Coloured people that I've interviewed
- JAY We recognised that there were problems, especially with the group areas act, that - whereas previously you can even talk to each other - like Indian people knew Zulu, and now with the group areas act, they couldn't even speak Zulu, and the same applied the other way - that it was an actual breakdown of communication - the people couldn't communicate, because even different languages -
- (6) contd
- we were conscious of those difference, even as students, but the problem is - that the students integrate at a level where everyone spoke English - African students and Indian students, and one could say that at that level there wasn't differences, but as soon as you went back into your communities you found that there was a difference. →
- J.F. As (.....) 127 intellectuals of whatever race group?
- JAY Yes, you could relate to each other.
- J.F. Is that something that you, in your experience with the union, that you encountered later on, or at any stage have you encountered that - talking about organising Indian workers, and the kind of stories about that, but have you had experience of trying to organise African workers as well?
- JAY Yes, in fact my first few years was spent organising - yes, there were a lot of differences as well - (on the factory floor, you had a situation where there are differences between Indian and African workers - there's a lot of suspicions as well, and it's a long struggle to overcome that) -
- (6)
- the one thing is that the one level the Indians are usually organised by unions - that they become very conservative, and even though they've expanded - you know in the fifties the Government prevented the unions - in different race groups - so while the Indian and Coloured and white workers were entitled to unions, the Africans didn't have unions - well, they had SACTU, but there were no organising to one union. (There was very strong solidarity in the '50's between Indian and African workers. (In the '60's) things were whole manoeuvring of the state and capital - divisions started to appear - one, by separation of the communities by the group areas act, secondly by, especially in a lot of industries, promoting Indians to more skilled positions, and that created problems, although in some industries the workers - like in the sugar industry a lot of workers are Indian workers, are production workers as well, and the clothing industry the same - the garment the same, but in

JAY

.... other industries Indians filtered mainly into the more skilled positions, and that created tensions. So overcoming those tensions at one level, and overcoming the fact that people are staying in separate areas, has been a long and difficult struggle, and still a big problem for us even today, and because Indian workers, like I said, in the

garment and clothing industry where it's the most substantial concentration of Indian workers, those unions that operate there have become benefit societies, so the Indian workers, though they were very, very militant in the '40's and the '50's, in fact usually at the forefront, in the '60's and

'70's those unions, or the unions that developed for catering broadly, for Indian workers, became very bureaucratic, on one level - very much benefit societies providing debt benefits, funeral benefits and so forth - very tied into the industrial council system,

and the perception of Indian workers started to change, - of trade unionism, so that, like you have a problem today - if you talk to Indian workers who are in these unions, you have an enormous problem, because their first question is : What benefits do you have? With African workers it's a question of an organisation that is militant, that is able to mobilise workers, that it's able to win things in the factory - not a question of benefits. Indian workers is whether you have a doctor - do you have funeral benefits - do you have these benefits and those benefits? because this is what they've become accustomed to, and that's a big

battle - to break through those barriers, has been a problem for us. →

J.F.

That's interesting because that's obviously a class thing - they're there in that middle ..

JAY

No, not so much that, because the unions like the garment workers and the clothing workers - the mass of their membership - 80% of their membership is the same position as African workers, so the Indian workers in those industries are production workers - they're not skilled, so they're very much workers in the sense that you would take African workers, but their perception of unions now is that a union must provide you benefits.

J.F.

I guess maybe what I was trying to think out loud was that that is just a different and higher echelon that they've moved into, whereas a black in a township who's much - the kind of leap from the work place to the political that seems to be asserting itself when people are dying in the streets - there's no discussion about politics any more - it's there - they're fighting - it's just that kind of fighting stance has a bit to do with the manipulation of a position or a class - I don't know - you should be saying whether you think that's correct at all.

JAY

I think - the political struggles in the townships has - and the political frustrations of black people because they are the majority and suffer most viciously under the system, at the level of workers and starvation wages, with political riots or whatever - pass laws - that that is cushioned in the Indian community, because you don't have that direct control - O.K., you have Indian areas like - places with a

mass of townships like Phoenix and Chatsworth - I mean the majority of people there are living in the same type of housing that one would find in Kwamashu, Umlazi, though there's a much, I think, broader section of professional people in those areas ... (Interruption)

J.F.

... just want to wrap up some loose ends, because of the whole thing that's happening now - this won't come out for two years, but still it's endemic, and it's very hard to actually, for journalists to make the point about the manipulation - of the potential for manipulation of the differences between Indian and (.....) 200 then when it comes to an example where it seems clear that that's going on but hard to prove - I think it would be useful if you could speak a bit about the potential for the manipulation of those differences - from your experience, is there anything you could point to that shows how the state or management or whoever could very much want to play (.....) 204 those differences, and have you ever seen them manipulated?

JAY

Yes, at various levels - like (in strike situations, you would have, like Indian workers coming under very much more pressure than African workers, from management, to scab. it's very easy - like what happened with the tricameral parliament) thing, (even though the majority of Indian and Coloured people boycotted, the manipulation of those collaborators) - played up - was played up very much by the press and the TV and so forth, so I mean (for African people), -

their vision - (they don't look at the fact that 80% of the community boycotted, that - they look at the fact that there's people there who are selling us out.) I think that at the other level, manipulation through tribalism - the whole thing of Zulu nationalism in Natal - and those things are manipulated very strongly by the state and by capital,

so I think the one thing to get very very clear is that (the majority of the Indian community are workers,) and (the problem that we have now is that the exposure of African people to Indian people is through the traders, so their perception) of Indian people is that there's a whole coherent

group - this (is of a group where every Indian person is a trader, which is a misunderstanding) of actually what happens in the townships, and this is how they succeeded to such an extent, to alienate people through separate education, separate universities to a large extent, through separate housing areas - in that sense they've actually manipulated people, and they've succeeded to a large extent as was shown

recently. And through the manipulation of tribalism also - and these conflicts between Xhosa and Zulu huge conflicts in Lesotho and wherever, so there's a very effective play/of race and of tribalism in South Africa - /made to an extent you have never seen anywhere else in the world,...

JAY

... except Hitler and that's what we must come to terms with, so I don't think we can disguise the fact that there is tensions between Indian and African, - African and Coloured, and so forth - Indian and Coloured, - between the different groupings within the African community itself,

and that - the way we percieve things is that the most effective way to counter that would be through the unions, through interaction of workers on the factory floor, because you can only bring people together around concrete struggle. - at the level of the community it's very difficult, because

you've got separate communities. - how do you link up a community like Phoenix and a community like Kwamashu? The problems of Phoenix may be the same to the problems of Kwamashu, they're dealing with different authorities, - the Kwazulu Government - these people are dealing with -

now, with the tricameral type thing and city councils - (the levels of consciousness of militancy are different, so you interact at a political level, but it's not bringing a base together and involving in a single struggle, whereas in the factory you can do that, if there's a wage dispute

involving people in a struggle, whether they're Indian or white or Indian. African or Coloured, so it's only through concrete struggle that one actually sees) that - (an end to the situation, or a way to counter what has happened, and

what's happened in the past two weeks, even though there's been the thug element involved, the fact that they had this conflict between Indian and African shows how tenuous that unity is, and needs to be based on something much more firm than has been done up to this day.

J.F.

Can you just - on the level of the other kind of non racialism of black versus white, and given the fact that you're seeing race as a factor, can you just speak a bit about white officials in the union - how do you find that workers respond to them - is that at all a problem or do you think there is a - can you tell me about the non racialism of workers - does that exist among them and what's it from?

JAY

There's a very strong feeling that - of perception of what our society should be in non racialism - it's a principle very entrenched in our membership,

J.F.

From where?

JAY

From our vision of what we want, and the fact that principles must be firm and non negotiable, but the experience of workers and of everyone basically, is that - if you go to a railway station, some guy unable even to speak English insults you - I mean, you feel that "Oh, Christ, these whites will never come to terms with us" - the fact that in a factory, when you negotiate with management they're all white, and have the occasional black in there -

(for workers) - they see that the problem - the fact that their bosses - that the oppressors, (the most visible oppressors, are white - O.K., but at the same time whites that are in the unions are accepted as comrades - they're not

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JAY

.... seen as whites - they're seen as - he's a comrade - he's part of the struggle, and so would attack - like white bosses and white workers and so forth, in meetings - be very anti the system of control, which they see manipulated by whites,

but at the same time accept whites in the ranks as long as that white actually is operating a clear mandate, is reflecting the feelings of their membership, then they don't see the person in terms of the race. -

it becomes a problem where in some of the unions, like TUCSA, where the white officials are so obviously in cahoots with the Government and the bosses, then for sure the workers - they don't even want to touch the guy with a bargepole. → to p.17

J.F.

What about the factor of the - maybe the intellectual is more important than the white part - just in terms of one could have had this conversation three years ago, before the Government was killing people in the townships the way they are now, before the cost of living was squeezing people the way they are - before people really got the level of militance that made them get involved, and made the political in the work places you seem to come closer together - I'm thinking of all the kind of in a vacuum disputes before the stay-away in November '84, and then like, it happened because people in the East Rand just made it happen - do you think that there are implications for whites or for intellectuals in that - do you think that whites may be further away from those issues that are political?

JAY

I think the general - the white public in general is living in a completely different world. They don't even understand what is happening in the townships, whether it's Indian township, or African township, or Coloured township - they've got no perception of what happens in those townships - the violence, the rape, the assaults, the unemployment, the lack of facilities - just absolutely no perception - they

live in a completely different world - I mean, you can just take a drive from a township - any township - to a white area - there's an enormous gulf between the world they live in and the world that black people live in, and they are

satisfied as long as - even if they know - as long as you can isolate it, the Government, through its apparatuses, can isolate the violence to the townships, they've got no problems, at the general level - absolutely no problems, no matter how many people they kill in the townships,

as soon as it starts to affect them - like the stay-aways - through protests marches in the cities, through consumer boycotts, then they start to feel the pinch, and obviously it's going to alienate - make them even more reactionary than they are, but the thing is that some of the liberals say that the white backlash is going to be bad - people

JAY are not concerned about the white backlash any more.

J.F. I'm thinking - maybe I'm just - been up in the Rand and this is being discussed more in the Transvaal, but just - splitting MAWU - just some of the issues that are coming out which have to do with political - factory floor issues versus community issues.

JAY I think that debate isn't a debate any more - it was a debate maybe early last year or the year before, but now the debate isn't any longer whether you should get involved in politics or not - the debate is how do we get involved, and what do you see as the role of workers in the broader struggle for freedom, and there's very definite positions on that,

because there's a very clear perception from workers in the leadership that we want real change in South Africa - not even the type of change you've seen in other African countries - real change will mean real change in conditions

END OF SIDE ONE.

JAY ... real change in the role of workers in the new society, so that's the level of debate now, but no-one is debating whether the workers have a political role or not any more - that's a given premise already.

J.F. I guess I'm just - I'm not asking ... anti non racial, but I'm searching to see whether some of the things that you can't overlook in terms of race a factor in terms of the idea that you could have had that debate, and you could have had the idea of staying away from politics - there was that kind of, perhaps ... (You are faint in places)

JAY I think that was simplified a hell of a lot, because no-one argued that workers should stay away from politics - I mean TUCSA argued, but on the broad left, I think it was a very simplistic argument to use that, say FOSATU argued that we shouldn't get involved in politics, that's hell of a simplistic.

What FOSATU argued in those days is that we need to participate in politics from a base - from an organised base - not to stand up on a platform and mouth political slogans, but having no effective base which is giving you the mandate. → p.19

at one level, but it's able to effect the political slogans that you're making on the platform, so we still maintain the same thing - that it's useless some individual standing up on a political platform and saying that this type of consumer boycott, when the issue hasn't even been discussed among the communities or the unions - the workers haven't been mobilised yet - I mean that's just totally ridiculous, So it's either taking an adventurist step approach to involvement of workers, or taking an approach that is more

JAY based on the reality, and based on the clearly worked out programme, that has been discussed and debated at length within the workers' movement, and I think that is the difference.

J.F. One other thing is - would you say that if you're truly espousing a class analysis, that you would have something of a - in common with another union official who might be white in that you're more intellectual or closer to (.....) 453

(Interruption - you're still faint!) .. asking about class is a big factor - do you have a handicap at all in terms of seen as an intellectual - how do you - isn't that a gulf a bit between you and the workers, or ..

JAY Not for me personally, because I'm not white (458) whites actually have had a burden - I'm much more acceptable from that point of view, and I think importantly because my involvement in unions was not my first involvement in politics itself, and I think from myself (?) 462 actually gave me a greater understanding and greater confidence at one level, and an ability to relate to people much more easily -

I'm not saying that white intellectuals (Interruption) I think white intellectuals, from the point of view of their - the way in which the system is structured here and the racism of whites in this country, have a difficulty, and you can't ignore that,

but I think, from the membership - once the membership accepts that this white intellectual - white intellectual's involved, is committed to the working class, then he's accepted as a comrade,

not that there aren't any difficulties - there is difficulties - I mean there are difficulties ...

J.F. There are difficulties what - in the class - I'm just saying that that's a bit of the kind of B.C. answer - that because you're black it's fine - I'm saying I understand that because you're black it's easier than for a white, but isn't it, maybe not with you personally, because you've had that experience of having worked off it, and because of your political experience, but just generally because of the fact that you can speak well and been to university and that kind of thing - is that not something that has to be dealt with if you're truly looking at the class positions of everyone involved - is that ever a problem, maybe not for you personally, but for a black union organiser - maybe even specifically one who's been in SASO, because you had, before the interview, said that SASO had that problem of being more of an intellectual think tank, so I'm not knocking anything - I'm just saying : is that ever a gulf that a black intellectual has to transcend with workers?

JAY No. I mean it depends on his attitude, and I think attitude is very important. If a black intellectual, or any intellectuals, attempts to patronise workers, then a resentment builds up, and irrespective of what your clarity of thought or your precision in terms of your educational

JAY

..... training, you never, at any stage, attempt to lay down, or think for black workers, or black leadership. You provide them with the tools that they can use to make their own decisions, and I think where problems come in, with a black intellectual or a white intellectual, is where you attempt to define the whole parameter of what struggle is about as workers, where you define the strategies and

legal strategies, the organisational strategies, and I think, where there's a dependency developing on that intellectual, that's very dangerous. If an intellectual, irrespective of whether he's black or white, goes into, or becomes part of the workers' organisation, doing that, then resentment builds up against that person,

and can be apparent - becomes either in terms of people rejecting him because he's a white intellectual who's trying to dominate us, then it can become quite a racist attack on the person.

J.F. Does non racialism have any connotations of congress?

JAY Not really. I mean, like non racialism is an important principle of any union movement - there is 501 anywhere - and, yes, also very important that non racialism as a concept was built up by SACTU and by the other congress parties - yes - it was an important principle that became very, very defended - really defended by workers, even though in principle, that in practice - that principle is constantly being broken by whites - even other race groups that are treating African workers like pieces of garbage, but workers will still defend non racialism - this makes it sound ridiculous, in a way.

FOSATU membership, I think it's the base (basis) 510 on which one organises - the principles upon which we organise in a factory - any factory - the first day, the first meeting with workers, on the basis that the company is the bosses and the Government are trying to divide us, but we are workers, and defining that workers are workers as a class.

J.F. Would the inevitable escalation in involvement in politics because of what the state is about in 1985 and what's ahead of this country - is it ever discussed - look what happened to SACTU - they'll smash you if you get out of those issues.

JAY Yes, but I don't think any trade union workers' organisation - and this is the feeling of the organisation, and thousands of our members, is in any organisation that attempts to divorce itself from what's happening in the townships, is politically irrelevant.

That's the position of the unions - it's not a question any more of who should only concentrate on on factory issues - it's got much - that debate is long over now I think.

J.F. So there wouldn't be any negative views of SACTU because of that?

JAY No, there's never negative views about one's history - I think they're critical views of one's history, and that one attempts to draw lessons rather than attempt to smear -

JAY

... there's important lessons we drew from SACTU - also the objective conditions at that time were different - in terms of the monopolisation of industry at one level, the much stronger factory based, and national based, workers' organisations that we have now, at present, the concentration - I mean the development of our power within huge

sectors, like the metal sector, the mining sector, the food sectors, you're dealing with a different situation altogether - you're dealing with a much more sophisticated state on the other hand.

So those were lessons that we draw out, from our history. We're critical of some things they did - we take the lessons from other things that they did, so even from our own position, we're constantly evaluating our own position - are we making mistakes? We make mistakes, for sure - and we admit the mistakes we made, but we don't place anything on a pedestal, and that's been our policy as an organisation.

J.F.

So you didn't say anything about the lessons - you kept saying about the lessons, but what would some of those lessons be?

JAY

I think, importantly, the lessons we learnt from SACTU were - the need to consolidate within the factory, and the need to set up very powerful shop floor structures, the need to decentralise the leadership - at the second level, the tactics used by SACTU -

some of the tactics, like the stay-aways, are being used today. At another level there's the problem of having a leadership that is so integrated into the political organisations - we see a problem with that, not because we want

to stay separate from politics, but because that the focus of one's power is still the factory, and that you still have to service that organisation, in order for that organisation to act as a vehicle to bring about real change - what we -

I think, from our position, are very critical of is of unions which have a high political profile, but have no base to bring about the changes they are talking about in their political programmes. We're not saying that was what happened with SACTU, but taking the current situation.

There were other lessons that we learnt from SACTU - the fact of industrial unions - SACTU was the first real move towards industrial unions - the other lessons - the whole debates around registration was a debate in SACTU times,

also played a role in determining what our position should be in respect of registration -

- the idea of a national federation - those were important ideas -

and not only SACTU, but it goes back to ^{CNEFU*} KINETU in the '40's, it goes back to the ICU in 1919, so, as FOSATU, we never, as ourselves, saw FOSATU as a new organisation starting up in 1979. We saw as following a very rich history of workers struggle in the country, and what we're trying to do

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- JAY now at the recent unity talks is trying to, in the end, come to the position where we have the broadest possible unity of workers in the country, and clearly, even FOSATU was an interim step in that - in reaching that('Phone)
- J.F. It's just a kind of an inevitable question that's probably - with all your emphasis on workers struggle, but looking at the situation in South Africa today, do you think that there will be other factors - do you think that the workers struggle will be the factor, or do you think armed struggle is going to be a factor in this country?
- JAY I can comment about the workers struggle - from our point of view, the workers struggle and the workers movement has a crucial role to play - not saying the only role, but it has a crucial role to play in determining the type of society we're going to have.
- J.F. Sure, but I'm saying do you see other factors?
- JAY Oh, obviously there will be other factors - what I'm saying is that one of the pivotal points of any change in the country is the workers' movement - there's no getting away from that - I'm not saying it's the only point of view -
- it's not the only aspect, or facet of the struggle.
- J.F. No, I'm just asking you just to see how you - to articulate how you see
- JAY That's hell of a difficult!
- J.F. no, I'm not trying to put you on the line - look, everybody - you know, you open the paper, and every right-wing person talks about the A.N.C. or talks about bombs - I'm just saying - do you see them being both part of the - both working together, or do you think that - I just wondered if you could put it into perspective, because in a sense we've talked about one thing only.
- JAY Yes, I think the important thing is that, from my point of view, I don't see the unions as a political organisation. The trade union would be able to involve itself in politics, but at the same time, they have different political tendencies all over the country, so while we are taking up issues - we would participate in campaigns - we would co-operate with other organisations, and essentially (.....) 597 of the fact that the trade union is not a political organisation,
- and that's my point of view, and the point of view of other people in leadership in our union, so we're saying that the workers' movement, in itself, would be an important factor in its interaction with other factors, in determining - and other organisations - in determining the future of our country.
- J.F. ... one sentence question - did you organise - do you organise in other languages - when you organise with those Indian workers do you speak ...
- JAY No - all English.

- J.F. And that boycott you mentioned, in '75 - what was that about - that was pre '76 - I'm just trying to remember why UDW was boycotting
- JAY It was '76.
- J.F. Oh, because you said '75 was a lost year - the kids were boycotting the classes.
- JAY No, in '72 there were boycotts - students' strikes in Durban. In '76 there were the Soweto uprisings and people came out in support of them.
- J.F. I thought you said '75. And have you ever been detained?
- JAY Briefly, yes.
- J.F. When was that?
- JAY '78.
- J.F. And for how long?
- JAY Two days - that was about my involvement in student politics and that.
- J.F. Is there anything I didn't ask
- JAY No I don't really think - no. Well, I think you've covered it very effectively, and you've covered everything. I can't think of anything that you've left out.