

Interview: Billy Nair

Q Let me just start by saying when and where you were born?

A I was born on the 27th November, 1929 in Durban.

Q In what area?

A Sydenham, it is about five miles out of Durban, it is a suburb.

Q Was it a difficult process for you to get to the point of seeing people as people and did you come from a background that told you you were Indian, not white, not African...

A Well, in the environment in which I was born Indians, this was actually an Indian area but otherwise Africans lived: we in fact grew up with Africans and from childhood, in fact we played together and although they were a very small community, living with the Indians in that particular area, still, in the very house in which I lived Africans in fact rented the rooms, side by side with the Indians. So we grew up together there that way.

Q And you parents, what work did they do?

A My father was working for a shipping company. He was on the sugar boats, transporting sugar and other commodities in and around... (labourer?) Ja, he was on the boat, not a labourer actually, he worked in the engine...well we could say, how they call it, donkeyman in the boats. He was a donkeyman.

Q Did your mother work?

A She did not work initially but in the, I think for the last five or six years of her life she actually ran a vegetable stall in the market, upstairs.

Q How many kids in your family?

A There were five, one died, therefore two brothers and two sisters.

Q Did you know about your family's background? How they came from India originally?

A Well my father originated from India. He was actually an immigrant.

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A But worked all his life here. He met my mother whose parents actually originated from Mauritius. They married here in SA, so he was actually a SA citizen ultimately.

Q But he wasn't brought here as a labourer here per se?

A No. But on my mother's side, yes. Her grand parents were brought here.

Q Again, rather than what did you do next, what were the important political influences? I mean how did you, do you think you became what you did in life? Was there any particular person? Did your parents talk politics? Were they ANC people?

A Well, my parents were actually apolitical but in the course of time I got both my parents into the movement. Well, I was largely influenced by the movements which began in 1946, that was the Passive Resistance Campaign launched by the Indian Congress, the SA Indian Congress. So I followed very closely/carefully; that was during my school days. After college I attended all the meetings, took part in the march when all the resisters went to defy the Asian^(?) Tenure Act by occupying a vacant municipal ground. So they ? imprisoned so this is what really inspired me into the...into joining the Congress.

I first became a member of the Youth Congress, ie. The Natal Indian Youth Congress and then became a member of the Natal Indian Congress, which is of course the senior body. That was in the late 40s but then became active from about, active member, became an executive member of the Natal Indian Congress in 1951/2. But I was also Secretary of the Natal Indian Youth Congress.

Now of course we were from a very poor family, in fact we didn't own any assets whatsoever, no landed property and so on and felt that through the political education and so on that I received, not only at mass meetings, but attended political classes and so on, found that the only way out was actually organise resistance against oppression and exploitation.

So I felt that I actually worked as a shop assistant first and there after as a clerk in a dairy and while I was a clerk in the Durban Combined Dairies, quite a big company here in Durban, I organised the Dairy Workers Union and became the Secretary of the Union and was fired

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A from employment after just a ⁶ month period.

That was actually my initiation in the trade union movement. This was in 1951. (51?) Ja. I was already a member of the Youth Congress at the time.

Q Let me just..sorry if I could just interrupt, before we go further. What, did you feel you were non racial? I mean can you just explain at that stage back in the 40s, why you got into the Natal Indian Congress. Were there any people who said look, I thought this was supposed to be non racial, why are you just with Indians? Can you explain why then that decision?

① A Yes, well, already in the first place, (the organisations were divided on racial and ethnic lines: you had the NIC, ANC and so on, but it did not follow that they) seperated politically or they (were divided politically. On the contrary, already ⁱⁿ 1947 you had a coming together of the ANC and the Indian Congress, there was a joint declaration by both, that was called) famously (the ^{three} Doctors Pact, which ^{Doctors} Dadoo, Xuma and Naidoo jointly ^{signed}..now the important thing obviously, what you are after is why ^{not a} non racial organisation at that stage.

Now....

Q I am thinking from your point of view..I have read the history but to yourself, someone who grew up, you ? non racial, (I see..) Was there any thinking you had to do as to why you'd just be with Indian people or was it not a debate?

A Ja, well, it was actually convenient for me to join the Youth Congress although they were ethnically seperated, in fact they were expressive of a broader SA; that they united with the Africans in the main and this was to grow later into a broader non racial Congress Alliance.

(Now at that stage) not withstanding the fact it was racial, (I felt that the key factor was what the organisation actually stood for.) It stood for (a non racial ~~democracy~~) and for convenience and (because we were resident in ~~groups~~ Areas; we had Africans living in a particular group area, Indians ~~in~~ in another; that (it was convenient for Congress to actually operate under the banner of the) Indian, or under the (so-called ethnic organisational title.) though it was expressive of...or

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A representative of Indians, it stood for a broad non racial democratic SA.

Q Was it a debate? Was someone as political as yourself, did you just discuss it with friends? Did people say what is this, this sounds racial or was it not a debate?

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A Well, (it was not a debate at that time. Although you had rumblings from the non European ^{Unity} movement, they too were racial in outlook in that they united non-Europeans, so called, into a front, but they were not a very powerful force, ~~It~~ was a very small and insignificant group.) ① ends
They were the ones who engaged in debates but otherwise Congress was the vehicle which mobilised the vast masses of the Indian people under its wing. And it was the most important organisation which attracted all sections of the community across class lines..

Q And for your development you said your parents weren't political, but you moved them, was there anybody who moved you? There were a lot of people in this country who never would have done all the things you've done and I am just wondering if there was any influence, any experience that pushed you in the direction...at that stage even ⁱⁿ the 40s?

A Ja, well, during that period I was inspired by what was going on, what went on (during the passive Resistance campaign. It was a mass movement, tens of thousands of people used to attend the ~~mass~~ ^{their} rallies) and so on. Whereas (we as) students engaged in debates at the college, discussions, and in fact it was a non racial college: African, Indians, Coloureds. attended the same...it was actually a technical school.

There..that was actually the beginning...in fact we looked on each other as equals completely, equals. We had a student body on which I served, the Students Union. (Of what school?) The Emerald (Sudan) Technical College. ?

Originally it was the Natal Technical College. I beg yours, it was the Natal Technical Institute, subsequently to become the Natal Tech. College. It was a part time institution. We studied from 5.30 to about 7.00; to 7.30 every evening, for two hours. There the college was open to all races until the introduction of Bantu Education in 1953, when the Africans were excluded.

SAPSA

There was a mass demonstration by the other students in protest against

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A the exclusion of the Africans at the time.

So in the Students Union, of course there were political debates and discussions etc. In fact the Students Union was also stigmatised as being too political. I remember the principal at the time was a bit of a reactionary and he did not like the political leanings of the union itself. And people who served on it were...trade unionists and people like myself who was on the student body and there were others who were regarded as being too radical but there were largely students who were apolitical, who served on the Students Union.

Of course this was a first experience I had, ie. on the political level in working with other racial groups. This is a completely non racial affair, this student body.

Now, we had debates because current at that time, 46 to 48 period, was this Passive Resistance campaign. I was very attracted, in fact it attracted all sections of the community; there were large numbers of Africans who used to also attend the mass rallies that took place.

Q What about whites? Were they ever...

A Yes, whites as well, yes. You had the former members of the Communist Party or the Springbok Legion and so on, who after the banning of the CP, that was only in 1950; this, the CP, continued to exist during that period. They used to hold mass meetings as well - lunch hour rallies on the Red Square, here in Durban, appropriately called the Red Square. Now this was attended by a number of people. I was one of those who attended; of course you can expunge that from the records.

I attended it as a...you would say one of the interested passers by.

Q Did it matter to you that there were whites? I mean being someone who believed in non racialism, was it a factor for you do you think? There are these whites there, or was that not a big thing? Was there any white that influenced you or ? was that a factor?

2 A (There were a number of white comrades who were very close to the movement,) they were (former communists); there were a number of trade unionists, (and) who were active in the movement in that time. There were members of Springbok Legion in Durban as well, who played a vital role in organis-

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A organising and mobilising white opinion) at the time.

Q Anyone you could name or...

A Well, there were people like ^{Harold} Errol Shandley, Dorothy Shandley, Vera Popen and there were a number of trade unionists in the Trades and Labour Council who I met later. That was from about 52 onwards.

There was a trade union coordinating body called the SA Trades and Labour Council. I served on the local committee here. That was from 52 onwards, until its demise in 1954. But that is jumping the gun.

② from p.5

Errol

Let me tell you about the trade union activities ^{just} ~~now~~. But to come back to the point about the influence of whites, not directly, but trade union, well, you see, (political classes were) actually ^{also} held, conducted by some of the white comrades.) in... together with others; Indians and Africans who had joined political classes and often you had some of the white trade unionists, people like ~~Harold~~ Shandley, actually conducted lectures.

(So there was no antagonism as such, although when I was) pretty (younger, at college) for eg. (there was some hostility to the whites, but) this (with- in a short while, after ^{an} ~~an~~ ^{under-} ~~under-~~ standing of political) ie (theory) of politics, I shed off the bit of racism that I had, of anti-whitism.) ~~and~~ I had felt that all whites were oppressors and that had to be dealt with. §

And (typical of students-)? I also expressed a feeling that, (I suppose this runs through all blacks generally, ^{I had felt} that all whites were opp ressors, therefore they had to be dealt with as a group) and... (I was unable to differentiate at that time because of my own political weaknesses ^{and} lack of understanding.)

Q (So what moved you from that position?)

A Well, (closer contact with the white people) ie. (meeting them as equals) now and having discussions. It was a revelation in those early days that ^{white} people should treat you as an equal, visiting their homes, having political discussions, (engaging in political discussions) through classes (and so on.)

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(This is what help ed to mitigate some of ~~my~~ racist attitudes) that I earlier had. One of the things ^③ (that really moved me) is, that is what 275
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A (what made me become a trade unionist,) ? (was the first-hand exploitation that I experienced, not only personally but of my fellow workers particularly) in the shop that I worked in as shop assistant/clerk and doing some bookkeeping and so on and (I was being paid a pittance,) That was.. I worked there for a short while, then left-the Dairy.

Now there also, in fact, it was a worse than at the shop. (Although I was paid better than the Africans, but in the union that we organised, it was) both a union of (Africans as well as Indian workers.)

Q Which union was it called?

A Natal Dairy Workers Union. (I became the first Secretary of ~~that~~ union (and for that I was fired.) I just worked there for six months. I used that period to organise the workers. This was in 1951.

Now (this was) actually (a baptism in fire for me and soon thereafter I became a full time functionary,) Took part in the Defiance Campaign in 1952. From 51 onwards I became a full time functionary, ie (a trade unionist.)

(Now this was after having experienced exploitation at first hand: The horrible conditions, visited the compounds. In fact (I stayed with the workers in the compounds) and so on. African workers were the worst exploited. (They lived in single quarters) and just simply, (in filthy and horrible conditions.)

(So the object in forming the union was to) actually, (not only ameliorate the wages and working conditions but also their living conditions.) So (in '53 there were a number of trade unionists banned): there was Esp-? Reddy, Kassim Amra, George Ponon and one other, they were all banned (under the Suppression of Communism Act. So I) became, (took over 16 unions: at the time, Of which there were functionaries: had to take them over. And it was just simply one hell of a. (there was no one to assist). In fact we had voluntary workers but one cannot rely on students, well, volunteers to assist.

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(So I had to actually do the typing, correspondence and do organisational work, run the office,) sleep in the office. Well, actually (I worked around the clock for years until we were able to get full time functionaries, Mainly African workers.)

(And how did your wife view your commitment to your work?) → to the very last page of this interview 313 view

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Q This was which organisation?

A There were a number of trade unions, individual trade unions. They were not major ones but for instance, there was (the Tea and Coffee Workers Union, The Natal Box, ^B Droom and Brush Workers, the Twine and Bag workers,) tin workers and...

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Q But it wasn't under any umbrella organisation? You were just at an office dealing with all of them?

A Yes. Then of course, they were all... (most of them were affiliated to the SA Trade and Labour Council) at that time. (It was a) coordinating body, (national coordinating body which embraced Indian, African, Coloured and white workers,) In one big.. It was (the most representative body of trade unions at that time.) → back to p. 7

Q Just turn this over and say again I don't mean to intervene so much, because I am sure you can tell it better. But what I am trying....

End of tape-
Side B

Q Someone who has been involved with the working class, you are undeniably a non racist, so I guess what I would like to try; rather as I say what I can get from books, this history, but to ask questions is along this area. Now I don't know if I'm very good at asking questions but just from interviewing some the people from FOSATU, the minority of people I have interviewed them; Can you talk about why you got involved in trade unions and how that coincided with your views of the need for non racialism. It gets into a lot of questions of people saying the lessons of the 50s were that SACTU was smashed and what is going to happen to the unions now? They are getting too political and that sort of thing. So that is kind of the area I want to deal with. (Ja) It is a huge area and I would like to deal with it historically. I am just interrupting it at this juncture to say can we talk about this with an understanding of you mixing the political and the union issues.

A Ja, now we (take as a) very good (starting point the case of the SA Trades and Labour Council. It was actually a non racial body but of course the dominant unions) were the) white unions, or (white-controlled) unions, and the white leadership. Although the majority of the members, for the Garment Workers Union, (the vast majority of the membership was black; coloured or Indian or African,) → to p. 9

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A ^{from p. 8} But the leaders) in a way, (invariably white.) So.. (Solly Sachs?)

Yes, you take the garment Workers Union, Natal or in the Transvaal or the Cape, they were lead by the whites. So

So (when the Nats came to power the declared policy was to divide the trade unions on racial lines, to institute job reservation, and they passed) accordingly (the Industrial Conciliation Act in 1953 which) in fact became law in 1954. And this (set about a division on racial lines in the trade union movement.

(So instead of putting up a fight against this on broad non-racial lines the white leadership in the Trades and Labour Council decided to succumb to the dictates of the government and agreed to exclude African workers from the new body they set up,) ie. (TUCSA, the Trade Union Council of SA.)

(This lead of course to the formation of SACTU in 1954.) Now what has become clear since the Nats came to power was they were making inroads into the rights of the workers to decide for themselves policies and so on and they were actually dividing the workers on racial lines. And the Job Reservation clause in the Industrial Conciliation Act was a glaring eg. of categories of employment to be reserved for particular racial groups and the white workers were to be actually given the prerogative of all skilled labour etc.

(Now this naturally was a clear demonstration) of... (that the workers struggle) was interlinked, (and) the economic struggle was interlinked to the political. Then of course in the case of the African workers, you had the Pass Laws) and (the) works, you obviously know that: Pass Laws, Land Act, Influx Control, etc. Now these affect the workers and the workers cannot by any stretch of the imagination say that) that is not, that (it should not concern them.) Their living conditions are interlinked, bus fares and earnings and so on are interlinked to the economic struggle.

So the workers cannot therefore, be purists and regard themselves as being...well, TUCSA for eg. is regarded today as being a glorified social club rather than a fighting force for the workers.

(Now this was the reason why SACTU was formed and decided to align itself closely to the Congress movement.) deliberately. (In fact the name, the use of the word Congress, was also deliberately chosen to identify

SAFPA closely with broad National liberation struggle. And in the declaration)

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A (when SACTU was launched we made it quite clear that the struggle for economic and political rights were ~~not~~ cannot be distinguished.)

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Q. You mentioned before that there were some unity movement rumblings about non racialism, did you have any kind of critiques from the left who said no, the union movement must just stay in the work place? It must work for the workers or was that given the conditions for the 50s just not even a critique? I mean did you have any critique?

A Well, (the unions that were affiliated to TUCSA, or at any rate, the white leadership of those unions, were adamant that the unions should confine themselves to the purely economic issues and not the political.)

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Q But were those progressive whites?

A No, on the contrary...

Q No. I am wondering was there any criticism as you have now with FOSATU was there any criticism from the left? Or was that non-existent?

A No, no, there was none.

Q So that was not an issue.

A It was clear cut: You either supported apartheid or on the other hand joined issues with them on those issues.

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Q And (was there any criticism from any) people, of people (saying what are these whites doing in our unions,) at all? Any kind (the way you have ^{from} ABC now?)

(blacks)

A (No, not at all. In fact people like Piet Bevelde and Leon Levy and other trade unionists were accepted without any qualms whatever by the black workers.) and for instance (Now, an Indian was accepted by the vast majority of the SACTU membership here in Durban; there were African workers and they accepted me without any problems and there was no question of racism. They see me as an African now,) so this is this fact now, as you probably know from history ? ie. you.. (the left and particularly the members of the CP did yeomans service in the working class struggle over the years, from the 20s onwards.)

SACPA

So they have a record second to none in the country as militant 168

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A fighters.

(A person was)

So here it is actually a question of the workers regarded? this (on merit and merit alone. Was he with them, and was he actually espousing the cause or not? that was it.)

Q What about something that again came up in the 70s, I don't think it is a big issue, but it had been an issue with BC people. the idea of only blacks can be workers. I mean you can see the, lets not take Piet Beyers, but some of the ones who remained stalwarts. Ray Simons is someone? there was no doubt, but at the same time there weren't any white workers. You couldn't say that the whites could identify with the working class in this country unless it was through a kind of class suicide or movement or shift; was that a factor at all? The way it has been hotly debated? I mean do workers ever bring that up or is that even in theoretical debates, with people like yourself.

that how do the whites fit in vis a vis the working class?
(And the question of class?)

A Well, that was an issue ie. you see, (the whites can be seen in the same way that some of the blacks today can be categorised as aristocrats of labour. You have of course (within the class structure you have categories of workers: ie. you have (the aristocrats of labour, white and blue collar workers,) and then you have, you take (with the shifts that have taken place) even (among the black workers) not only, (not necessarily only the Africans, but) I refer to (Indians and coloureds as well); where you get (through labour mobility and promotions): a structure is being established where (you get the so-called aristocracy being established,) but not a formidable force.

(The are not a force as yet.) But I mean (it is more pronounced among the white workers and no doubt there were) debates. (hot debates,) that (there were feelings expressed often that the white workers cannot be regarded as workers, even and as aristocrats of labour, that they identified themselves with the ruling class and ^{would inevitably} ~~become the first~~ defenders of the system.)

Now you take the Afrikaner worker for instance; he looks at himself as a Nat first and not as a worker and he gives support not only to the Nationalist Party but to the conservative elements, like the ~~Mandats~~ and the Jaap Mandats. So..

So generally (with the white worker,) and (this can be traced back to the deal that the Hertzog, labour government actually made,)

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Since then, white workers have developed an even

A (recognising the white worker as ^{one} whose position had to be reserved in terms of the Industrial Conciliation Act that was passed in 1924) This was the deal that was made. And a white worker who fought militant battles, culminating in the Mine Workers Strike in 1922, he did not turn back since, he shifted; there was progressive shifts and a closer identity to the ruling class, rather than identifying themselves with the struggles) or rather (of the black worker) struggles.

So this was expressed in the divisions that took place in the 50s, in the early 50s when the leadership of the trade union movement, white leadership, that is, although the leading black workers actually decided to accept the racist policies of the Nat government; in terms of the I.C. Act, the division of the trade unions is a question of...now ironically it was the minister, at that time, said..there were 24 trade unionists who were called responsible for assisting the minister in drafting that very law, including the job reservation and so on; that is, trade unionists mainly from the white sector.

So actually (they were) ^(merely) really (expressing the demands of the white worker) generally (for protection) and so now you can see ^(given the) increasing encroachment by black workers into the skilled reserve which the white workers regarded as their own.)

Now ^(since) the Nationalist government made it the cornerstone of its policy that the white worker's position is not going to be interfered with,) There will be no encroachment and this was of course translated into law.

So (what you therefore have is a not) necessarily a class, not (only a class division, but also a race division), or the class categorisation (within the working class,) But (with the result the white workers constituting the aristocracy). I mean (in the main.)

Now you have the other position today, after the recognition of the trade unions and ^(with) the promotion of blacks into) the (skilled and top management positions,) and so on, the black worker by virtue ^(you get) the black aristocrats, by virtue of his position as a...the oppressed and down trodden and ^(but he is still) subject to all the racial laws) and so on, he cannot extricate himself, he cannot identify himself rather, from..with the white aristocrat. (He is still dealt with racially, irrespective of the position that he occupies in the labour category.) → do p. 13

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A So (therefore he invariably), during his work, (throws his support) (behind the broader struggle), this ? black professional: the doctor, the lawyer and so on. (and does not identify with the white labour aristocrat.)

So you have therefore...or on the other hand, what we have been striving for, what we strove for in SACTU was irrespective of the contradictions that may exist among the workers themselves, there has to be a striving for a non racial democratic SA and this was reflected in SACTU's own constitution. It sought to unite African, Indian, Coloured and white workers.

(Having said that)

Q And you took it to a point and then at that point is where unity with; in a BC or whatever would say yes but you see (the black professional or labour aristocrat will) (tend to) always (throw his weight) in (to the blacks); (the struggle); the white can never support the blacks, finished. Why should we trust these blacks. Now (how do you) get over that final step to say no we can accept whites? (then conclude that whites - be they labour aristocrats or members of the ruling bourgeoisie - can further the anti-apartheid struggle?)

A Ja, now what happens you see, alright, (if we pursue a racially exclusivist philosophy it will mean that we are not recognising) the reality, ie. you take capitalism as such has actually broken down racial and tribal values, even ethnic values, for the state to actually set up institutions like the Bantu authorities and all separate and ethnic compartments for Africans - ten different compartments for Africans and Indian and coloured and so on. He has not taken into account the reality, that is you find the forces of production, in other words, actually speeded away, in fact broken down the racial and tribal values and the Nationalist government has not been able to address this reality and hence the contradiction that is between the policies, apartheid policies that they are formulating or have formulated in SA and the reality.

So (our approach is more scientific.) The very shifts that are taking place in ruling class circles) is...or the cumbersome manner in which they are coming to terms with this reality is (are) indicative of the correctness of our line, ie. (the non-racial policies) that (we are espousing.) It is not withstanding the contradictions we have to take a long term view, bearing in mind that the reality is black white workers work in the...under the same roof. They are working..at any rate is fantastic in the early days, from the late 40s or early 50s, workers, African, Indian, Coloured workers playing soccer together long before non racial soccer was introduced. This was a reality; that is not withstanding

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N.B. This is important to read page 6 - he is not over seen



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A the prejudices, you know, that they displayed as foreman and...to his workers, white foreman to his workers on the factory floor level. But come the lunch break you found them all in that field outside or in the factory premises getting together and playing soccer together.

Q That was African, Asian and Coloured, now was...

A No, that was also whites. Oh, yes, in fact in central town here, ie. in Warwick Avenue opposite the place where I live now there was a little testing ground for testing drivers etc. motor vehicles, now this was of course cleared by about 11 o'clock, at 12, between 12 and 2.00 daily we had groups of workers from municipal and all workers in that surrounding area, getting together and playing soccer for everyone to see. Soccer and games, together as brothers; that was a fantastic scene.

Now this is the reality which is missed by our colleagues, the ? and so on ie. while they are in fact, emotionally they are actually appealing to the people emotionally without taking into account the reality that actually exists: even the Nats could not come to terms with that. You cannot imagine you see, that through the struggles of the workers over the years the impact that these struggles have actually had on the black and white workers.

You found this in areas where although racism may be the predominant, may predominate, in the minds of both...of the white workers, this hostility between black and white workers is gradually dwindling and it is largely through the impact of the struggle, extra parliamentary struggles over the years.

Now the shifts, just to give you an eg. the shifts that actually took place (after the defiance campaign), (you had the formation of the liberal party,) ostensibly to break the gap between black and white. (After the Congress of the People in '55, you had the Progressive Party being formed.) - again another shift you see. A parliamentary, although the liberal party was not a parliamentary party, the Progressive Party was a wider one, actually taking up the issue of a non racial SA with all its qualifications and so on. But still...and then you found after this emergency in 1960, or the stay aways, protest strikes, we had massive boycott movement and even the...sabotage movement, with the MK formation in 1961 onward: although there was a tentative move into the laager, but

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A you found the white SA, I wouldn't say radically changing of course, but the vote, the referendum for eg. in 1961 or rather in 1983, of whites only, was expressive of this. They wanted change, now this change, the expressions for change did not come about through the will of the Nationalist government or the parliamentary parties, it was through the impact of the extra parliamentary forces.

Q Ok, let me just say that I'm not, don't think I have a hang up... also move on time wise, coz we still haven't got over the 50s, so just you were involved with the various unions and then just tell me again I'll get the back ground, but was there anything you could tell me about the 50s that enforced your non racialism? Or were there any disputes about it or anythings about non racialism, the formation of SACTU and that kind of thing?

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A Well, SACTU itself adopted a non racial policy, belief that no group of workers could be excluded; this was contrary of the policy of TUCSA which was formed in 1954, where they excluded the African workers. And congresses... ^{we} when SACTU became a member of the Congress Alliance there were misgivings that... ^{voiced} by our critics, that you take for eg. the ^(The) ICFTU ^(ICFTU) (International Confederation of Trade Unions, met some of the delegates, Minada Dejonga 1959 I think, where they offered to give us assistance, providing we broke from the Congress Alliance) and they alleged that SACTU was actually dominated by the other four members of this alliance because we were fifth, (just one fifth of the partnership). The other four actually dominated.

(So we made it quite clear to them that we were in the Alliance as equals and were not to dominate each other and the day that the other congresses forced their will on us,) on SACTU (we would simply pull out.)

Q Did they at all try to tell you that it was whites, or white communists, did they ever pull that one?

A Yes, yes. In fact we realised that the Millard and Dejonga, who were the fellows who we interviewed; Moses Mabhida and I interviewed them here in Durban and subsequently they met the management committee of SACTU in Joberg. But (they were trying to red-bait us,) (suggesting that the communists ~~xxx~~ were dominant) and that..or that the Alliance itself was by virtue of the fact that we were all political, actually would naturally be dominating SACTU as well, in policy making and so

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A on.

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the Congress Alliance

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To come back the Congress Alliance itself, now SACTU found then and with this of course (we ^{in SACTU} expressed to these chaps of the ICFTU that it was the major liberatory force embracing African, Indian, Coloured and white, at that stage the SA Congress of Democrats was already established and you had the Coloured counterparts as well. So the partnership originally of Indian and African Congresses together was expanded to include other groups as well: Coloured and white democrats.

(And SACTU, by virtue of its non racial character, including ^{ed} whites as well, although the whites did not play a prominent part,) they were not dominant; (the African workers were dominant in SACTU.) But it espoused a non racial policy: ie. a non racial democratic SA and ^(we argued that only) non-racial solutions) only (could pave the way for real freedom in this country.) 4 ends

So SACTU therefore found in the Congress Alliance a vehicle for liberation in this country and our policy was, rather our viewpoint was shown to be correct in that the NUM or the PAC which broke away from the ANC or any other political organisation that may have existed were driven into obscurity. They were just a noise, and in fact they were an insignificant group. They themselves were divided into various fragments over the years. And the NUM, you will find there is ...a non European ^{unity} movement ...there has never been unity.

So we disregarded them altogether as a force. Their criticisms we just threw out of the window because they did not actually relate to the reality that..which is SA...(Now tell me..) I don't know if I am drifting, you must put me on track.

Q Ja, I don't even know if I'm on the right track or not. (You must discipline..) We must think about..(I know you want ?) No, but that ^{news}..I think we are doing fine. It is just that I think there will be a lot to talk about with getting to the late 50s, 60s.

So then what happened..you went to prison in 65?

A Yes, in 1964. (So can you just...) But prior to that of course there was the Treason Trial in 1956, I was involved in that trial. This was soon after the Congress of the People. Some of us spoke at the Congress

SACTU

Interview: Billy Nair

5 A of the People. (Ben Turob and I) who (actually motivated the clause in the Freedom Charter, ^{is that} the wealth of the country shall belong to the people". This was cited in the) speeches that were made, they were cited in the (Treason Trial against us in 1956) and other things that we were supposed to have done that were held to be treasonable.

Q Now can you talk a bit about that whole clause because that is the one that causes a lot of people ^{trouble for} peoples' reading. I mean maybe the government because it indicates...

End of tape.

~~It would be~~

(what was the motivation behind that clause, the working class perspective on the Charter?)

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