DW: I started teaching in '71 here, and in my courses in those days, I was just keeping my head above water, lecturing what I was told to in the dept, basically conservative kinship courses and so on.

I was wondering how you could teach a progressive anthropology course because even then there wasn't much going but by '74, material started coming thorough the anthrological literature that was very radical and relevant.

Then in '74, I went to a conference in Amsterdam ", which was a revelation, it was a dreadful conference put on by Americans as it happened but there was one set of papers delivered on colonialism and underdevelopment which I was ...I suddenly met all these guys including Klass de Lange of the Dutch Embassy and I realised there were a lot of anthropologists of a more radical persuasion with something to say.

About reality, for me, and I started to upgrade my courses, and by '75 '76, my courses were becoming more relevant and radical although I was still teaching some mainstream bread and butter courses.

I was saying, '76 was this sort of watershed year where the Soweto revolt group broke out. Taking me utterly by surprise.

JF: Even coming back from Mocambique and being a bit fired up with new thoug ts, was it the case that there was just nothing for a white to join?

DW: Precisely. In the '71, '72, '73 period, I was an admirer of the Helen Suzman lone voice, but couldn't see my way clear to joining a political party in S.A, but towards '75, '76, the Progressive party was beginning to have people like Eglin..

They were shedding de Villiers and were moving somewhere towards the left, but I still found that if I had been pushed to vote I would have voted for them.

I wouldn't have done it with any great will, and I saw myself as somewhere to the left of them, but there was no other party around. Even the liberal party didn't attract me, it went into demise in the '60's actaully.

But there were a lot of liberal party people around, David Welsh and Alan Paton who spoke on platforms and were well known as liberal party people but somehow they didn't attract me in any way either.

JF: Did you know any radicals, people, whites, to the the left?

DW: You mean like COD people. No, I didn't.

JF: On campus, or any other other capacity? Or did you just not know or meet them?

DW: No, they weren't part of my social.. well Ilse Wilson was actually. I remember her fathers death in about '75 quite vividly. What a mean death he had had and how shit the authorities had been to him.

Now that I think about it it was quite a watershed, because I didn't know Ilse from a bar a soap, she was working in the library at Wits, and gave off a very cold and rather hostile image in fact, and I had quite admired her for her courage actually and when her father died I wrote her a letter, from someone she didn't know, saying I really feel something has got to be done about this.

About this society that they can do something like this to someone like your father. I began to read about her father, his death got me interested in who he was really, and I found him quite an admirable guy.

DW: What was he there for all that time and why were they treating him this bad? I slowly began to mix with people who knew her (Ilse) and her sister Ruth.

And who knew people who were fringe political people and someweheere to the left and had ANC or saPC links. But it was all rather tentative and not formed, I had no direction at that time, but it developed sympathy.

Then '76 came as an enormous shock to me, by then I was developing Marxist theoretical framework in my own mind, an analysis of society and S.A in its own way.

But '76 I was not prepared for and my friends in Soweto were not prepared for either mainly I think they were possibly more middle class people than genuinely in touch. There own children were involved in '76 and they had no wind of it.

The spontaneity of it was astonishing for a lot of the grass roots people. Or even middle class people. I don't doubt there were number of fermenting things happening, it was a surprise to a lot of people, including me.

In '76, my sabbatatical came up and I was very lucky to get a lectureship at Manchester for a year, and then it was renewed for a second year there that conincided with a sabbatical leave.

I got to Manchester, and I found with a surprise and a shock, because I had not been consciously developing a politics of my own, I was to the left by miles of any other membeer of the Anthro dept.

I couldn't work out why and I slowly came to terms with it, that I'd lived through more than they had, that for them anthropology was a profession which you did part time.

You were a teacher at the university and when you came to do a bit of research you got the money together and you went off to Ethiopia and off to Indonesia or Barly or somewhere and did a year's field work among foreign people and you always saw them as foreign, they remained so and you didn't live it.

Then when you left that country, you went back to Manchester and wrote up your material and published it and possibly became famous on it and taught it. But the lack of empathy and concern for the people that they studied hit me between the eyes.

It was a stunning experience for me. Also they were conservative people. Teaching very conservative anthropology, for example they never taught marxism there. I suddenly found myself deeply in touch with the students because British students were going through a radicalisation at that stage.

Not just a broad '68 student radicalisim against authority, but a systematic Marxist critique and I joined a capital reading group in Manchester which was a big thing for me, my student friends had said come along and I wanted to know more about Marx. I'd read Marxist interpretations of Anthropology but didn't really know what Marx was about.

So I joined this reading group who turned out to be the most amazing people, from working class people to pretty high intellectuals and once a week we met, read chapters and discused it. I did that for two years and came back here and started groups and did that for 4 years here.

They were actually much more than capital reading groups, the discipline of sitting down once a week and reading chapters and then sitting down with other people and intepreting, and then applying them in a broad sense to one's own experience was a very important part of my intellectual development and even political committment in a way.

So Manchester was a great experince for me because I was lifted out of South Africa, given a whole new self confidence, there were a whole lot of things I knew and experienced that even famous names who I was dying to meet in the dept, those guys had feet of clay it transpired.

DW: Not that I was a genius or anything like that but they just didn't know where it was at half the time, they didn't have half the experience I did.

I'd been there for two weeks and the radical students at the university were trying to suss me out,they had a student anthropology class controlled by the radicals and they asked me to do a talk about what had happened in Soweto.

I suppose they were trying to find out where I actually stood. I took it really seriously. I spent two weeks preparing an analysis of what happened in Soweto,it was fresh in my mind, it had happened June the 16th and this was only October.

I produced quite a reasonable, I think, Marxist analysis of the political economomy and the revolt, as one in those ways writes those tedious words but I gave quite a materialist intepretation of what had taken place.

With a chronology and quite a lot of detail. The audience baffled me there were a lot of anthropology students and a number of outsiders who I didn't know who they were.

One or two black people and one black person in particular asked me a number of pointed questions, and I began to realise that he must be an ANC man becasue my analysis hadn't taken account at all of ANC participation in the building of the Soweto revolt.

He was trying to point and probe me about the role of the Anc and I was saying as far as I could see it wasn't very significant. I met very briefly and to shake his hand and he made no impression on me, Joe Kwabe.

He had just come off the island the year before and soon after went into exile, and I'd heard from some people tha t he had been consulted by some students, but not being a major strategist and planner, so I didn't place any emphasis on the ANC at all at that time.

Weeks later some students came back to me and were discussing what I'd been saying and they were very pleased with what I'd said, these radical students, and became quite friendly with me on the strength of that.

They started to tell me who all was at the meeting and the guy who asked all the questions was a SACTU man called Zolu Selembe, quite an important SACTU person now but at that time, he was a shop steward in a Stopford factory, it's a little town next to Manchester.

Living with a S.A woman, Margeret Franken-something. Ex SAC person but she now lives in Manchester and is an academic.

That was quite a boost in my confidence, I'd always thought of myelf as colonialised, Third world country, very third rate academically. Going to Manchester and suddenly finding I knew just as much as everybody else.

I was a good teacher and the students liked me, a lot better than some of them, because I was engaged and could talk about real things. I talked about them as if they really mattered to me, as opposed to just saying well, there is this and that.

So my confidence grew and my intellectual structures were helped quite a lot by participating in these structures with other people, the reading groups and that kind of thing.

Then I came back to S.A and having been nobody of any particular political interest up unitl that point, came back '78 and almost as soon as I came back was asked by NUSAS to give a talk on education and development.

The conference at Cape Town was called that, and I had to mug up a whole thing about education which I'd never read about before. It was the first public speech I'd made apart from lectures and I'm a very shy and nervous person.

I agonised, I had adrenalin, and they liked the speech to my absolute astonishment. From '78 to now, I've been used a lot by NUSAS on public platforms to push pro-gressive lines. I found out that I was thought of as progressive which again took me totally by surprise.

DW: I'd arried at all my understandings in a farily unhelped, individual way. There was systematic broad left group that was nurtuing itself, and developing it in the way that there is now.

In a way that I try to do with my students, for example, try to teach progressive courses. Pick out good studetns and develop them if you can, push them to take up groups of their own and develop interests and follow lines of research and so on.

None of that ever happened to me as a student,and partly because of that I'm aware of that and try to do that, and I know a number of academics at Wits do that too.

Partly through that I got drawn into discussions, debates, consultancies, to try and get to know more about what is going on, and so I became friendly with a range of people over the years, Auret van Heerden, one of the first.

Fink Haysom next, NUSAS and SRC presidents. I had a very nice personal relationship witha a chap called Sammy Adleman, you might remember who skipped the country. He was quite a sweet grassroots politician, he had no great suss or analysis in some ways, but he appealed to the students and he put his finger on good causes at good times.

We were both very interested in football so we struck up a good relationship, and that was quite nice in a way because it bonded me into students at a time when I might have drifted away.

It was 1981.

JF: So at that time as a white was it the campus that kept you moving politically?If you had been in your 30's, an academic, you could have just fraternised with academics, and not got involved politically?

DW: Oh, absolutely. The vast majority of my colleauges do just that and did just that even then. But by then I was also working in Soweto, doing research inside Soweto and taking a serious interest in Soweto.

Unemployment, informal sector, poverty, strategy of survival, those kind s of questions which I regarded as socially responsible forms of research. That you could use politically against the state in some kind of way.

Could arm people with knowledge of a kind. Even as recently as '81, there were no strong political movements emerging in Soweto. They had the Soweto Sidic but it represented very few people and one must remember in the post '76 period politics was very tough for a white person to be dabbling in because you were told very strenuously, Keep out.

In fact another strand was from '68, when I was in NUSAS and SASO broke away and I was a contemporary like Able Klaso, and Fanyana Makibuko and Biko that I never knew or met mind you but.. those were contemporaries at Fort Hare and we had a fraternal relationship with them up till '68 and then came the split.

That is a whole thing I should speak about.

JF: Your research in Soweto, who were you in contact with?

DW: There was a team of us, there were two whites and four blacks, and we all did foot slogging research, door to door. We did ordinary survey material and se-lected certain places for in-depth interviews.

Certain individuals or homes th-at seemed particularly interesting. Or interested in the informal sector, following up some guy who was a back street mechanic or a thief ar a shebbeen king or that kind of thing.

DW: It was an attempt to create a democratic research structure, and it happened not to have worked terribly well, mainly because the black people didn't have any writing skills, that was the main draw-back.

One of our guys in the beginning was Ntutu Zenamachuba. But Ntutu was, I have to say it, an unreliabe researcher and in a way I got into more difficulties with him than any one else on the research team, not on a personal basis, but he never produced the goods and that was the problem basically.

JF: Did you learn anything from blacks turning out info as well as you?

DW: I learnt things in a very direct way, it didn't help the outcome of that research but I learnt a lot about other things. Because by accident I manged to recruit some people who had been leaders in '76, in the Sedition trial but were aquitted.

In the Sedition trial a whole lot were found guilty and given ranging sentences from 12 years down to 6 months, and then about 5 were aquitted.

Some of those five worked for me in this programme. There were two structures. The team of six who did the door to door kind of stuff and then the other group of people when we wanted just demographic info, a blanket kind of swoop on Meadowland(?) say, those guys were the sedition trial guys, who did that, feed material to us on that.

We employed them very briefly because they were totally unreliable and I learnt quite a bit about honesty and integrity and politics from those guys, because they had none actually.

They would sit in a shebeen and fill up these forms. We just scrapped the entire piece of research that was supposed to be structured around the stuff that they pulled in.

A guy called Nboge Nkombazulu, the organiser for AZAPO now, he's quite an important person in the sedition trial. All the guys who didn'T go to the island, and didn't get put into the progressive camp, their contemporaries are Murphy Morobe, Dan Mutitse, those kind of people who have moved.

JF: But they didn't move? They went to AZAPO?

DW: They all went to AZAPO. In a rather indirect way, these guys intellectually were not very bright, one thing I learnt from working with them. Secondly, they were thoroughly unreliable. I don't know if they thought these are whitey academics and let's rip them off,...

I did them lots of favours though and I was a bit shocked when I found out who they were, and I wasn't terribly happy but I supported them through a number of things and gave them good money for what they were doing.

JF: Why weren't you happy?

DW: I wasn't terribly happy about their political outlook and didn't think they would make good researchers partly because of that. It was an emotional thing rather than a deeply analytical one.
.... Sass Cooper being maybe the worst.

JF: Do you think he had no integrity?

DW: Yes I do. His politics are very bad, and he resorts to very dirty tactics actually. He's partly responsible for a pamphlet which circulated on campus in the black residences about two years ago when they blacked..

DW: a whole lot of names. They tried to discredit me because I'm close to AZASO, saying the trouble with AZASO is it hangs out with whiteliberals who are thoroughly unreliable. Take David Webster, his wife Lulu gave evidence in a treason trial against Brown Fisher, and Sass Cooper knows me well anough to know that that was a lie.

It's a filthy tactic and when I checked he was one of the authors of the pamphlet. It was a real kind of mucky thing to try and destroy people's confidence in AZASO by using really nasty smears.

JF: We should lead up to the present and what your involvments have been. Then we'll go back and talk about '68 and talk about what it specifically means for non-racialism.

DW: I want to go back to this point. In the '74, the African Studies Institute started a seminar serieswhere a lot of overseas people came and local people who had studied overseas and learnt Marxist intepretations.

Papers that influenced me a lot were by Dan O'Mara, case in point. I thought this is good academic, I want to look more at this kind of stuff. It was on the '46 miners strike.

I can't think of specific names but the African Studies seminar at that time had a buzz, a vibe and was opening new areas of interest and research. Multi disciplinary etc, and I became very intrigued by that.

It went through a subsequent stage more recently from '78 to the present, a sort of brief flowering of about four years when it had that very progressive thing.

It began to dissipate from about '78. It's still quite a good program but it's lost that drive and energy that it used to have. But I developed intellectually a tremendous amount through that and I started to build good relationships whith co-Academics at that time, Phil Bonner probably being the main one.

Eddie Webster another, Peter Calloway to a lesser extent. He is less reliable politically I would say. Sheldon Leader was around. It was a good time and there were good people around and one learnt a lot from them.

Just the general comradely atmosphere of the time as well. So that was very important in my development as to where we are now.

Coming up to the '80s period, I got sucked into student politics, and got very close to NUSAS people and worked very closely with them and still do.

And then came a time when something had been very good in that experience but something was lacking. It was an academic experince and I was struggling to work out how you could make that academic experience real in the real world.

to people like Phil Bonner, Eddie Webster, Sheldon Leader, it was easy, not easy, a long hard path for them but they joined the union movement. They were in at the ground floor. At the formation of FACATu, and Mawu and those early unions.

But what they did was got in early and then exerted closure. They got in and they were the white intellectuals who ran the show, and made it almost impossible for anyone else to come in unless you were a total devotee of their line.

If you were any way dissident you were considered unreliable and not allowed in at all. I never tried to get into that field but I began to feel that there was this rather unfortunate cliqueishness about the way that that show operated.

Obviously unions are a major and important progressive force but the kind of people that they nurtured were rather difficult people, the Johnny Coplans, the Alec Irvins, Mike Morris, Dave Lewis who is awfully nice and an exception.But he is a C ape Town guy and they operate differently there somehow.

DW: Anyway, there emerged this group of people who were both academics and engaged, but engaged only in the union movement and by 1981 it was beginning to be apparant that the union movement could have been playing a much more progressive role politically and in the communities that they came from than they had been.

They'd been playing a very narrow bread and butter struggle for survival partly, and they did have a terrible struggle for survival, they were severely repressed.

They came to a stage though when they got beyond that, they had won some space and the respect of their employers and the security police, but I thought they kept on their conservative path.

It was pretty clear that to get into the trade union movement was difficult and at that moment too, Sawu emerged and I'm an East London boy actually and I knew people from East London through contacts and friends of friends, who were trade unionists and very charismatic and interesting ones, Tosi and Sisa and the Wilson -Rowntree boycott emerged at that time and it invited people to join it.

I was part of the support committee in Joburg and Chief Indinsdwa, a wonderful guy, would come up to Joburg and address meetings, and help organise the support work and so on.

You were dealing with real community people and somehow your academic committments were somehow beginning to link in with these guys and you began to realise that actually rank and file trade unionists were not nearly as conservative, politically that is to say, tactically maybe, as other unions' white intellectuals were.

I'm thinking of Phil and those guys.

JF: You are using the word 'conservative'..

DW: They were amazingly conservative, for them politics were dangerous, their first concern was the only the workers, don't dabble in politics. The only concern was the factory floor. I think that is conservative.

And hostility towards any other committee. So the Wilson-Rowntree committee emerged, and it was very interesting. One could, rather vecariously it's true, begin to link in with the trade union struggle of a real kind.

To know these people, and their struggles and start to write it up and understand it a bit. I found that very nice and got involved. And also at that time community organisations did begin to emerge.

There was the Anti-Republic day campaign which began to make links with community people on a serious basis. And it was a student and community thing. And the student based unions, Gowu, especially up here, and Sawu in East London.

These guys were coming to Joburg often from East London and needing places to stay,so one got to know them better and better as time passed. When I went to East London, I'd go and see them and work with them a little bit.Nothing really union much, but keep in touch with what they are doing.

Then it became clear that politics weren't happening very much in the community because people weren't letting it happen and encouraging it or involving themselves. And from that period on I became more and more involved in the structures which have subsequently emerged,the Act stop, the anti-~~SYRE~~ SAIC campaign, the anti-election campaign in the Indian community.

Began to be drawn in with indian activists who had been around for years and I hadn't known who they were, or even that they existed. And partly through them into other links with black community organisations that were starting to emerge.

Then came the emergence of the UDF where I was very keen and involved as well. Also in '81, Barbara Hogan detained, that changed my life totally.

DW: Because she was my MA student and I helped form the DPCS, andDescom, and kept that until now, every week we have descomm and dpsc meetings, around detention causes and now I spend a good percent, maybe 30 % of my time on detention work.

70% on academic work.

JF: There were a number of detentions then, but it was her that affected you the most..

DW: She was someone I knew really well, and was my student and friend so that was crucial to me, and then Agate's death, suddenly I realised that jesus the police were serious about what they were doing, and we all developed amazingly politically at that time.

Empirically as well, because up unitl then it had been a rather abstract kind of game, and then suddenly it was the real thing, torture and life and death, and by working in the detention field one...

TAPE 2 SIDE 2

DW: .. In a very empirical way, saw what you were up against, the power of the state, the ruthlessnessness of the state and what it is capable of in terms of broad raw power.

It was an alarming thing, I was quite naive unitl then about just what one was against. That had been amazingly politicising. Our first response to the detentions was utterly defensive, retreating into a shell, can't be us, what is this all about.

There must be a mistake. That kind of stuff. Then a second angry phase ofI know Barabara really well, and these other people really well.What are they being detained for, these are my best people, the people that I have immense respect for and I believe in their integrity.

There is something wrong with the police that they can take such good people, to an analysis of oh well, I'm beginning to see why the police are going for them.

Some of them are linked to the ANC, but many of them are not, and are involved in good democratic issues and struggles and started to broaden out to monitor the police to make their life as difficult as possible.

Make each new detention a high political price to pay, and then finally taking on the state itself because it becomes clear that apartheid is undemocratic, and that the only way you can maintain such an undemocratic and illegitimate structure is by repression, in terms of not having the will of the people.

If you really want to end detentions you have to end apartheid, that kind of a building of awareness, from really a very kind of defensive start to a slow filtering out of experience and understanding actually.

JF: It took the white student being detained to politicise you. Is that important in understanding S outh African political development? On an intellectual level you could have read in the papers and gained about events that kind of understanding.

DW:No, my response has always been rather a personal grassroots, experiental thing rather than a fully intellectual one, I must say. It partly realates back to that other thing we are going to talk about, about whites being excluded from democratic processes, and struggles back in '68.

DW: When I was in Nusas, '68 liberal,wanting to work with black people on common causes and did quite a lot and in the '78 period. I mean '67. Then came the split, and suddenly the black people that you had been interacting with civilised and well, became very kind of angry and radical and you could understand it.

From a white liberal guilt perspective, why they resented your rather patronising involvment in their issues and NUSAS lost its direction. Round about then, there were some good people but it didn't really have a coherent policy of its own and there was this confusion, and lack of direction amongst most white liberals to left people, and certainly I was nothing more than liberal at that time.

A lot of my contemporaries in those days, like the first students that I taught at Wits in '71, the radicals left S.A and they went to Norway, Canada, there is no role for us to play, by being here you prop up the system so get out.

I understood and sympathised with that view as well, and by '76 NUSAS just collapsed, and had to be rebuilt partly by Jeff Budd in the first instance although he is basically a liberal person too.

Later by people likeAuret van Heerden and Fink Haysom,who gave it a really new direction and dynamism, moved it from high profile platform politics to grassroots organising and making projects committees and things like that.

But the change that really took place, round about '76, post '76 let's call it, it had begun a bit earlier by people like Glen Moss on the Wits campus, he had a very clear political suss at an early stage, he was actually bloody good, first development studies students too with a clear Marxist perspective at a very early stage.

But he was ahead of his time by a few years, as it happens. There came a time when they restructured NUSAS on campus around '77, I think with Auret in the forefront probably. And Fink.

When NUSAS president lasted for two years and not one so an influence could really be exerted. A move away from Bobby Kennedy being brought out to address mass meetings, or to march around the Grahamstown cathedral in your academic dress to protest, to urging people to work within structures like wages committees, '73.

Projects Comm which is the Nusas committee on campuses, education committees and stuff like that. Specialist committees where you work at a low level, not high profile, constructively and fairly democraticaly with other people, every person with an equal weight as such, although charismatic leaders can emerge in such situations.

A whole new brand of people began to emerge, a whole lot of people who had been too shy to stand on platforms, like myself for example or many others, and who wouldn't make good speeches even if they did stand on platforms.

They found a role to play, a real role that they could actually get involved with and that was a very important thing, and those people are now the people who form the white left off campus.

The white liberals of my generation are people like Derek Jacobs, the MD of Metal Box, but a good number of our people are very senior business people and are conservatives, no question.

They have been lost to any kind of left cause. A large proportion of the people, post '77 say, who worked on campuses in these committees and so on have stayed committed and are now the backbone of JODAC and area committee in the Cape and that kind of stuff.

They are good people, no question. What came with that restructuring was a self confidence that actually whites do have a role in the struggle. Their role will always be a secondary onebecause you will not ever be the majority or lead S.A to liberation.

DW: but you have a lot of good skills which can be put to use workimg in conjunction with other progressive organisations who share your ideologies and so on.

So there was an attempt to put one'S skills at the disposal of other progressive organisations, initially the trade unions was the place that opened up, people went into it.

Subsequently community and then political organisations, UDF. The black people of the '76 generation, convicted and sent to the island, and those guys convicted in the '60's for ANC activities were starting to come off the island and acting like yeast in the townships, places like Mdantansanne for example.

All the guys who were in the Eastern cape from P.E don't get sent back to P.E when they come off the island , they get banished to the Ciskei and end up in Mdantasane, and they start to kind of bubble and ferment down there.

It's astonishing to watch. So there has been a rise of non-racialism in the black community as well, and suddenly there were individuals and organiSations that you could link into and you were welcome with and you could place what skills you had at their dipesal.

So things began to take off in the early eighties in that kind of way. And incidentally DPS descomm likewise has been a thing where one has been able to link out, descomm has got branches all around the country from Petersburg to Durban to Cape Town to Kimberly.

That has put you in touch with black people 90%. It happens our DPSC in central Joburg is 90% white but nevertheless we are linked into all these structures and people.

That has been fantastic.

JF: Has it been 90% white because there have been so many whites detained here?

DW: Yes, we meet every Wednesday at Wits university and black people are working and so on and it just so happens it is convenient for us to meet at that time.

There are structures for people in their own areas like Soweto and Alexander township where they meet and we all come together at a central Descomm structure and pool ideas and work out strategies. In a kind of de facto way, we operate like the UDF does.

You organise where you are best capable of and that is in your own area. We are in fact affiliated to the UDF anyway.

JF: In all your talking you didn't mention JODAC, was that kind of the culmination of whites finally finding a place, the skills and with UDF a return to working in areas?

DW: Okay, let's talk about that. When I came back from overseas in '78, in '79 a group of us sat down, it was done by invitation , a rather kind of undemocratic thing in a way. The group consisted of Barbara Hogan myself, Barbara Klugman, Morris Smithers, I think Joanne, a smallish group of maybe ten people and tried to plot out what role was for progressive whites in S.A.

We never got terribly far, we had a series of meetings and were finally asked to present a position paper into a broader group, an attempt to try and work out a strategy.

Before we could do that the wave of detentions took place in '81. That took out half the people in the group in one swoop, it was Morris Smithers the two Barbaras, Barbara Cresey might have been part of the group but was not detained, Joanne, although some of those were released fairly quickly thereafter.

DW: In a way the spontaneous Descom that emerged at that time was the fulfillment of that group. What that group actually said by the way, I still have the documents that were drawn up is that there are a number of things you have to realise, that whites are doubly disadvantaged, mainly they are intellectuals, not working class so they are not actually going to play a major role in working class struggles.

Secondly progressive whites are a very small minority and we have no chance of forming a mass based party, so any role we have to play is in conjunction with other progressive forces in the country, whether they be democratic trade unions, community organisations or political organisations.

At that time it was useless to even try form some sort of political structure because the state of repression was so high that you would open those people up to detentions and bannings.

That was our recommendation, that a broad white left caucus should be formed, should meet fairly regularly but any attempt to form a party or something resembling a party for whites of a left persuasion only would be ridiculous.

It had no role to play really. That was the recommendation of that and then all the detentions happened. I think one of the first meetings, I was asked to deliver the findings of this group and we dissolved ourselves at that point actually.

But nevertheless, we did feel it was important that white left people nurture each other, support each other, engage in progressive action together as much as was possible.

Our finding was also that in order to offer our support to progressive black organisations, liberation organisations inside the country, we had to do so from a position of strength and you could only do that from being organised at a cerain level

Being responsible and disciplined, so almost a party but not a party kind of thing. It was really out of that that I think the idea of Jodac began to emerge as a possibility, and the UDF was launched in 1983. Tom Wasp was another key person in that original discussion.

He has of course emerged as a key person in JODAC as well. The UDF was launched in '83 and there were these progressive whites who had been working in other areas all around, almost all of them not by definition in trade unions. They had got their niches and they were holding their ground and not letting new people in.

They were also taking what I think was a politically conservative line at the time. The UDF suddenly opened up all types of possibilities but there was no vehicle for whites to actually belong.

The udf is a front and you've got to have an organisation which affiliates, and a debate then took place amongst a number of people about whether it was worth laucnching such a group.

I was party to some of those talks although I wasn't part of the actual planning committee. I was consulted by people at that time, Tom Wasp, and Mike Roussos was a very keen person.

So it was decided that Jodac ought to be launched and it split the white left quite considerably between those who were engaged, let's call them the workerists, who were very intellectual, both in their activities and in their intellectual impact on campus, some of our best intellects are Phil and Eddy, they are workerists, although Eddy is more flexible than Phil.

JF: Can you define the workerists?

DW: The economists, the people who are saying the working class are the vanguard of the struggle, you have to build working class organisations first and foremost, and once they have been structured, then no matter what political party takes power subsequently in S.A and even whichever is in power now, they are going to have to deal with the workers.

DW:And the workers come first. That is ideals that most people can agree with but how it is put into practise at the moment is, don't touch politics, community issues or anything of that kind.

Just get better wages, build union structures and make the workers strong in the work place. The reality of it is that FOSATU had been moved into a more political direction but by shop stewards, by its rank and file, not by those guys.

They were very hostile to the formation of Jodac and the other group was very hostile too, a group of intellectuals who are broadly sympathetic to a progressive movement I suppose, but who think that Jodac are the wrong vehicle at the wrong time.

And who many of them are workerist in orientation too.

JF: Are they aligned together, or are they just generally other people?

DW: They are not a group, but they are a group of dissident left people basically, I don't know what else to call them basically, who broadly sympathise with the workers but don't actually work in worker's organisations.

But intellectually they are the Filmsters and the Kaplans, the direct equivalent, in fact Filmster as Jodac was launched so a group calling itself a discussion group launched itself in opposition and debated the role of the UDF and the formation theory of liberation.

JF: Who was [redacted] in it?

DW: Steven Gelb, Glen Moss, Kelwyn Sole, who first joined Jodac and then withdrew and joined that group, Eddie and Phil to a lesser extent although they don't participate any more, Jackie Cock.

I never particiapted in that thing, I saw myself as being a Jodac person and although it was interesting to dicuss those things, I wanted more action than a discussinn group.

And by that time I had shifted my view to thinking actually perhaps the time was right to hsve an organisation towhich [redacted] white left people could join which could be affiliated to the UDF.

I was already participating in UDF structures in other ways before that so it seemed sensible to me to have some properly constituted vehicle.

JF: Was Gerrie Marais in that anti-group?

DW: Tes, he was. Most of them were... they weren't a coherent group at all, there was a whole wide range of people there which you can't categorise, but if you are going to to lean towards workerism on the spectrum of things and are very opposed to what they regard as popular democratic struggles.

We don't have a strong enough working class content and might be hijacked by petit bourgeois elements they would say.

So Jodac was launched and I was an enthusiastic supporter and a member of it ,and on various occasions I have been urged to stand for the executive of it, but I've never had the time or the energy really to devote to Jodac,

My own priorities are DPSC as an academic, I've got to survive in that field and my outside academic work is broadly in those areas but it is descomm DPSC work, and I regard Jodac as important but not top of my priorities and it's why I never stood for the executive in any of those things, because I knew I would not put the effort in that is needed.

I knew that if I did stand I would be drawn into endless meetings which I would find tedious, and would be champing at the bit to do other things. I know that happens to people. What has been slightly unfortunate since then too, is that Jodac had emerged almost as a youth group. It's great weakness is that it is made up of young people. Tom Wasp may well be the oldest member and he is thirty-fivish.

DW: That is it's tragedy in a way, it hasn't been able to attract a more senior generation of people, my generation let's call it and that has been its problem.

Incidentally, one of the reasons that I have been drawn into the things I have, speaking on NUSAS platforms, drawn into UDF structures, helping AZASO, and Sawo is a tragic thing because my generation of progressive people left the country. A good number of my best colleauges in the '60's just split and there is an enormous talent gap that exists between Helen Joseph'S generation and this other generation below me, and that is why someone like myself who is not particularly skillful or charismatic or even a good public speaker, gets used as much as they do.

Why I see it as a responsibilty to do what I do. I hate public speaking, but it has to be done, there is no one else around at my generation or level. There to an extent, Phil or Eddie would be obvious candidates but they belong to a different camp, so it is a real problem.

JF: I heard you speak in October '83 for the referendum at the UDF rally, was that the biggest you spoke at?

DW: That was the biggest I've spoken at, but I'm reasonably close to the Natal Union Congress people, for reasons I don't understand they use me as a speaker quite often.

So I frequently speak in platforms in Durban and I've spoken at C.Town once or twice. I get on quite well with Gerry COvardier and those kinds of people down there. And I get used quite a lot by AZASO, their student group as well.

JF: I have this whole list of questions to ask Tom, which is not possible, I was going to ask him to tell the story and maybe I'm just pushingfor anecdotal material, of the new Years' eve party..

DW: I wasn't there, I was in East London. Look, there has been a conscious attempt to educate the white left and so for example they did convene that Christmas party to try and call in the Barsels and the Hymans to reminisce about the Congress of democrats.

There was an educational process when Jodac was in the process of being launched of going over the history of white left in politics in S.A and so the communist party was examined and members were asked to come and talk about what it was like in those days.

Congress of Democrats, various other leftist groups or individuals were asked to come and speak. You see, Helen Joseph who is such an influential person is actually hysterically quite a contraversial one because strong supporter of the ANC , strong supporter of COD, but very evidently anti-communist

. Mindlessly so, and there is a problem there, so you can only use her in those situations in a limited context, and she is wonderful about reminiscing about those days and being anecdotal, but as soon as you start getting to the nitty gritty of politics, she is quite a menace in some ways.

JF: The Barsels, have they been a useful influence?

DW: They are not terribly charismatic or useful they have been asked to speak on a number of occassions and indeed quite recently were asked in the Indian community to speak about the Russian role in the Second world war.

South African communist party is making a bit of a re-emergence, it's quite interesting, both in the african townships and in the white left. I frankly find them too rigid and wouldn't like to get too closely involved in their style of politics. But it's there alright and is obviously a progressive force in the broad spectrum of things.

DW: I've noticed in the townships an amazing emergence of the SACP from a position of xxxxx quite a lot of ignorance people regard it as being to the left of the ANC, and they want something, the young unemployed people who belong to Sako or the Release Mandela committee, for example who are quite nationalist rather than xxx anything else in their outlook, look to the SACP as being that step of further radicalism than the ANC was.

It's quite intriguing.

JF: So you weren't surprised to see the flag at the funeral?

DW: I was surprised to see the Russian flag, the hammer and sickle number but I wasn't surprised, red flags often come up at these things and people .. I've been asked by various people in Soweto to give lessons in Marxist Lenninism, which I politely decline because it is just suicide actually.

I have a sense of survival too, and I know these guys are going to get picked off sooner or later, and they will be questioned about where they got their literature from and their ideology from, and it will come back and the agitator hypothesis theory is very high in the security police's mind.

But there is hunger for knowledge about the SACP and what is marxism in black communities.

JF: When you say they want something to the left and are nationalist, can you talk more about that?

DW: You know how UDF structures work, on a national basis they've got in the schools COSAS, in the universities AZASO, and that is where the national structures end.

Then in the townships, take Soweto as I know it best, you've got a kind of pyramid structure, people who have left school, but are quite young, say the 18 - 25 bracket although I think SWAKO's very generous definition of the youth is 38, but for those who have left school there are the youth congresses which are really to about 25,and the vast majority of those are unemployed youth,the desparate ones, those are the guys who are the foot soldiers of the struggle withCOSAS, the burnings, the fights in the streets,the taking on of the policemen's houses.

JF: Are they the local training potential guys?

DW: Oh absolutely, no question about it. And they are the ones looking for the ideology and then above that when you are a bit more adult, you have the civics, a civic association to belong to.

In the township, or a suburb basis like Soweto, so UDF HAS quite skillfully built a series of structures which can encompass all areas, and if you are a worker there are progressive unions you can belong to Sawu, Gawu, etc.

So workers have an organisation which they can belong to which is UDF linked. Now the one thing missing from all of those things is a political party. The civic take up community issues, workers's unions take up trade union issues obviously, and youth take up local civic issues but at the level of the youth.

So the Release Mandela committee was deliberately launched I understand to provide that kind of political structure which the Transvaal Indian Congress plays for indians. It is a political party, not a community organisation andyou can belong to any of the other things I've mentioned, the Civic the Youth Congress, the COSAS, AZASO, and the Release Mandela Committee, and as it happens the RMC has never really got off the ground in Soweto in a systematic and grassroots way. That would make them a formidable force.

→ Tape 3

DW: But they are the ones who are looking for the ideology and yet ironically the RMC is unquestionably a nationalist campaign, not a socialist campaign if you are looking for labels. It is arguing for a national democratic struggle.

It is not a neccessarily unprogressive thing to do, it is broadly progressive, but ..it is a tactical thing to do, it doesn't have any socialist content built into it.

But those guys are trying to find that socialist content for themselves. There are quite a lot of splits in the UDF, and the RMC people, I know them quite well, I'm quite friendly with them, they frighten the hell out of me in some ways, because they are too militant without the discipline.

JF: What do you mean by discipline?

DW: WEll, they kind of like, an ability to control their members, that is what I mean by discipline. Like they called a very unsuccessful stayaway in about September last year in solidarity with people in the Vaal, here in Soweto.

It failed, was a total mess, and was uncaucused, half the RMC leadership was in detention, these were young members of the RMC who just thought well, fuckit we'll call a boycott, and it failed and they lost an immense amount of face by so doing.

But their leadership is indeed trying to find out more about socialism. Their leadership is by the way really working class unemployed youth, in Soweto and not terribly well educated youth either.

When they get into UDF area meetings, regional meetings of the Transvaal, and they come up against Indian intellectuals who are Wits students or lawyers, they just feel outclassed intellectually and angry and bitter about it.

They get outmaneurvered in debates and policies, they are much more militant , they want to push things in a much more strong direction and they lose the debate, they are looking for tools of debate, an analysis which can outdebate those guys, and outradicalisie those guys.

Marxism and Lenninism is the obvious one for them. It also has a legitimacy which they can call on.

ends

→ Tape 3.