

RW: Ja, I think we are moving towards an understanding of what it means to what it means to give whites a role in the struggle, what it means to play that role to the maximum effect, along the kind of lines that I've been articulating.

I do think however that we need a whole lot more discussion on this thing. You know we got ... Jodac has developed in Joburg, the (?006) in the Western Cape, us down here, Peak in P.E. And although those have been very much a sense of process, and part of the sense of dynamic unleashed I suppose almost immediately with the development of UDF.

At the same time at the concrete level, the particular initiatives have been fairly independent of one another. For example we haven't yet had one national meeting of all the organisations together. Nor representatives of those organisations. I think it is something which is on the agenda.

And I think that one of the things that would have to be looked at there is actually furthering and deepening our understanding of what it means to organise within the white areas and so on.

JF: What do you see moving the whites in this area? Because it's an area that is certainly not sheltered from resettlement and township unrest as other parts of the country? Do you see it as events will move them, that they won't be able to be as isolated from events, from realities?

RW: I think that's a very important point. Again as I mentioned earlier, the point I made earlier, we shouldn't have any illusions about the extent to which we can actually develop as an organisation, the extent to which we can actually move whites.

But I think that within that context what you pointed out is very significant. I think it is something that assisted us a helluva lot recently; it is the fact that the township is right on the doorstep of the white community in Grahamstown. People can't avoid it.

They can't avoid seeing the army in the streets every day, in white Grahamstown on their way through white Grahamstown to the township, with their caspers and hippos, to actually go and put down unrest there and so on.

And to a certain extent if anything has actually operated to our advantage, with the launch of GCD, it's been that. It's been ... the present climate is one of uncertainty. People are just helluva unsure about what the Government is doing. The present unrest, as it is called, in general the present climate it does seem increasingly that Botha and so on are far less sure of what they are doing from a little while ago.

The so-called reformers are coming with chastened responses, without any real control master plan to them.

So, there's uncertainty about that on the one hand and on the other there's a feeling of ... people are a little bit scared, I think as to what's going on. People don't understand it and I

RW: I think it's our job here to come out with a very clear alternative to what they might have come into contact with in the past. A VERY clear understanding of that particular situation, of why it has arisen and what the kind of answer is.

And I think that's very much the context with which we're seeing tonight's launch meeting...is providing precisely those kinds of things.

JF: You still haven't given me, I'm still so keen to hear some of the comments of the people in the area. What they understand.

You're saying it's all so clear, but does this come through people saying things, is there anything said about the townships and the army going through town every day?

RW: There is. I can quote examples of that.

There were two people in fact who unfortunately aren't going to get to tonight's meeting, because they're in Cape Town, who had joined up as GCD members, not as steering committee members, but recently told us before they went to Cape Town that they would join.

The thing that actually swung them, this is according to a report which we got, from someone on the steering committee who knows them quite well, is that they were fairly unsure about GCD before two weeks ago when there was a funeral in the township here. There was a funeral two weeks ago and one yesterday and Sunday as well; at that funeral two people, no three people were shot one of whom died, sorry two of whom died after the funeral.

And from all the accounts that were other than police accounts, it was a murderous situation: they were not actually throwing stones or anything like that at the time.

RWCont: And that event itself, actually swung those people to join the organisation. They heard about this thing, they heard various of the accounts of it, and they just thought FUCK!....I mean what is going on now, can we take anymore of this kind of thing basically.

And that was the final thing that actually pushed them to join GCD. So that's one kind of example.

I don't think that even with the majority of whites in Grahamstown it makes that much difference. It's quite easy to contain within your sort of conventional racist or apartheid-type understanding that these are the kind of things going on.

I mean there's the army going to protect your white interests, it's going to put down a bunch of kaffirs who riot in the townships and so on and so forth.

I don't think that the presence of the army is a challenge to a Nationalist Party-thinking kind of person.

I think it does create a helluva lot of uncertainty amongst people who are kind of to the left of that. People who....either people who are of a more intellectual type to begin with, people who've gone through university, kind of experienced it and think more about that kind of thing than other people do because of that kind of experience.

They have simply been exposed to a lot of questions which your conventional type of white model actually aren't exposed to in the course of their experiences.

RWcont: ON the one hand. On the other hand I think a lot of the people are...¹ mean the rise of the UDF itself I think has posed a lot of questions with PFP type supporters.

What is their role anymore? Before when you didn't actually have the growth of a body which clearly represents or can claim to represent or to voice the aspirations of the oppressed.

The PFP could be said to be doing that. They could always argue that they'd be doing that. Now it's becoming an increasingly kind of patronising thing to do. The PFP is claiming to want to change to get rid of apartheid and so on in a way which is going to be in the interests of those who suffer under apartheid.

There's a lot of people in the UDF who suffer under apartheid and they say they are not really interested in what the PFP is doing. And that creates a crisis for your average PFP supporter.

JF: And do you advise people who find that they are moved to the point of joining this, that they must still have contact with the black community? Do you think that's going to be more and more difficult, do you envision with the polarisation and the army and militarisation of the townships, that people may be forced only to having this outlet of conscientising other whites? Or do you think it's important to have that link?

RW: Look, I think our starting point is that contact with the black community is helluva important. That GCD is actually a channel for that. And within GCD we provide an organisational forum within which people can move and become devoted to political organisations, to the interests of

RWcont: to the interests of blacks in the country say, not on their behalf, but in their interests.

And the focus of that involves organising amongst whites but at the same time a crucial aspect of that is increasing contact with particularly black organisations. And that is to a certain extent what the UDF area committee is all about here.

So, I don't think it's a question, if I can make this very clear, of us being involved in GCD to the exclusion or as a tendency away from contact with blacks or black organisations, but precisely to become involved with GCD inter alia, to become more in contact with blacks and black organisations.

And I think we do. There's a whole lot of concrete ways in which that happens. The fact that when there's a funeral say for the township and so on, the GCD is invited to the funeral informally and formally there's a whole lot of ways in which that happens.

JF: Has that happened that you've been invited to the funerals?

RW: O ja. We were invited to the last --- look, we have a lot of very close contact with the black organisations in Grahamstown.

Individually I do in my work, I work with them every day, and other organisations in the Eastern Cape as well.

But GCD, as an organisation I think, there's a certain amount of respect, not in the sort of paternal sense of the word, but in the sense of people recognising the importance of what we're doing.

RWcont: They actually support very much the initiatives of the GCD represents. And they see it as very important to support us in all our activities.

Furthermore, with reference to the funeral, our area committees, our representatives meet and discuss and so on. We get involved in joint activities which we've done from time to time. With the funeral as an example, our representatives were invited to sit there with other representatives of the other organisations and so on and so forth.

I think if anything, GCD provides a way to maximise contact rather than minimise it.

JF: Can you just say something about what that experience was like? Or any other funerals you've been to recently?

RW: Maybe you ought to speak to some of the other members at the meeting tonight. Ja, for me it was a good experience. I was with the (?114)

JF: You were? Let me just ask you a question which might get a response out of you. I spoke to a photographer who I was speaking to to try and find out what he thought of what I was doing, and he said "Ag, I don't know why you want to look at whites. They're just really not interesting and what is really interesting is what is going on now like the funerals;" and he said anyway, the Uitenhage funeral really pissed him off because there were a few whites and they just marched themselves right up to the front of the funeral and sat down like that was theirs. Just like typical whites pushing themselves ahead.

Do you think that's accurate?

RW: There's two questions there.

The first question is the question to what extent is it important to organise amongst whites?

Now, in response to that, I would just say that is a fairly immature understanding of the position that you've just put, of ...well, a fairly un-tactical understanding of how one goes about furthering the interests of ...well furthering the process of struggle in the country. I think that it has been identified for some time now that organising amongst whites in the way GCD and Jodak and so on are doing, for the reasons which I've actually given, and outlined.

It is actually a very important era for legal activity. There's no opposition ~~or~~ should I say contradiction between organising there and the fact that you have funerals in the township. That actually we should try and weld those together for democracy and so on in South Africa.

And I think that is really the crucial thing. And again the extent to which viewed from one vantage point at least, not the only one, there is one vantage point which I think, you've missed the vantage point where the extent of our success or the extent to which we are able to contribute to the extent of the struggle in this country, is the extent to which we are able to actually mobilise whites on the kind of basis to which we have actually been doing..

And I think that that is a fairly accepted, a fairly well thought through and mature way of approaching what we want to do.

RWcont: As individuals, we might in a kind of anarchic way want to rush off into the townships and do things there which is not exactly helping the struggle at all in South Africa. In fact it doesn't really get things any further.

It is impossible for the average white person involved in the steering committee of GCD to play any meaningful role, organisational role, ongoing organisational role in the townships. What are they going to do? Are they going to go out there and organise amongst the civics? To actually go and tell people they're going to help them with their rent problems? Or concretely what kind of things are going to be done?

I think that's a fairly immature way to look at things to actually pose that kind of contradiction between the townships and organisation in the white areas.

The other thing, referring to the Uitenhage thing, I mean I don't know, I don't know exactly what he's referring to. It might have been the fact that there were white people on the platform in the thing - Molly Blackburn and so on. I mean they were there by invitation, not because they pushed themselves to the front.

There were not many other whites in the audience. I myself was amongst the audience generally. And there were quite a lot of people who came from Grahamstown with us and a couple of Peak people: there weren't very many of us, and we certainly didn't, well none of us ended up sitting down. I stood the whole way through the thing. So, I don't know quite what he's referring to.

JF: Do you think this is a valid thesis, a valid area of investigation, or an interesting area at all, one that can have any relevance or input into the general understanding of South Africa? I mean if you've heard someone is looking at the situation of whites like this, would you say, Ag why is someone doing this in such a marginal area? Or do you think it could have any particular relevance in terms of ...because it will be both an historical study and a current one looking at the realities?

RW: Well, it depends on what sense. Academically, it might be easier. I'm not quite sure, what the particular objective is here.

Is the objective an academic analysis to produce a piece of propaganda which is going to be of interest in the struggle?

JF: Well, how would you feel if you heard something was being done on whites? Do you think it would be useful? Do you think it would be important?

RW: Well, I think it would depend on how it's presented and so on and so forth. I think one area in which it could be useful, I don't know, but I've heard from people who've had experience overseas and so on, that really there's almost - i don't know if this is correct - but I've heard from people who've gone particularly in areas like Western Europe and so on, always the BC understanding of South Africa, is that whites are irrelevant, they've got no role to play and so on and so forth.

Now, I've heard this kind of thing. If something could be done to counter that, I think it would be quite important. I don't think, - that understanding is clearly against people who're struggling in South Africa.

RWcont: I can understand why people in Western Europe might see that, but I don't think it's accurate and I think if something could be done to counteract that kind of thing it might be a good idea.

The only other problem, say internally for ourselves, I think it would be quite important to point to the validity, or directed at the white community in general of the relevance of whites organising and so on and so forth.

Whether it would come out of something like this or whether it would come out of propaganda pieces the particular organisations themselves might put out, the latter might be better. But I don't know, I haven't thought about it. But it might be better in having a greater understanding of a particular constituency and so on and so forth.

I think on any other level we ourselves need more discussion about this. I'm not saying necessarily that work should be done that something should be published before there's been further discussion. But I think - our speeches to night by the way, represent a culmination of a lot of our own political thinking about what we're actually doing.

A lot of the things I've been saying I think will actually be done in tonight's speeches. The speeches of the GCD members, particularly the one which this chap André Roux will be giving, which deals particularly with extra-Parliamentary opposition and the organisation of whites.

I think that is something which the whole organisation has discussed, something we've actually worked through and I think it's the keynote address on our behalf. It represents our best understanding for the moment.

So I think you'll be able to get a bit more clarity than I'll be able to give you at that level.

But I think that nevertheless, at a national level, we still need to, I think between the different white organisations, we still need to actually work through these issues a bit more concretely.

JF: Where does this term democrats come from?
White democrats?

RW: I don't actually know what its historical origins are. It's a very convenient term. That's the best thing.

On the one hand it's a very broad term. You don't have to call yourself anything else, which might be kind of questioned. So it's very convenient as a label.

On the other hand, it represents in South Africa Today ...well look your key issue in South Africa today or two of the most key issues today are non-racialism as opposed to racism and democracy as opposed to oppression in the way it presently exists.

So, to call yourself a democrat, it puts a clear contradistinction into the present political arrangement and so on. So it's useful in both those senses. I find it convenient.

JF: This is a university town. Do you see the kind of thing you're trying to do and build, that you would ultimately like to see the role of the university change? Do you think the university plays in any way a constructive role in creating more democrats, as opposed to liberals or reactionaries?

RW: Look, I think there are certain bodies within the university which do that. Nusas is the key one there. For whites ok? For blacks there is another one, but you know in the end people who come out of BSB(?) aren't going to get involved in something like GCD necessarily, i mean in some other organisation.

So I think that there are bodies within the university represented broadly by Nusas which do that.

The university, as with the university administration and so on and so forth it is playing I think a very negative role. There's a lot of unhappiness within GCD about the kind of role the university is playing at the moment.

JF: Why? Where?

RW: Well, I mean, just you know, on issues like student leaders being detained and stuff like that, they're being very very wishy-washy; on these kinds of things they're not being strong at all.

On issues like at the Nusas level, the things they've been concerned with, there's been a whole move to restructure the ways in which universities are being subsidised in South Africa. That has been implemented already. Although white universities in particular have been subsidised.

That has to it a whole political agenda which is too long to go into it now. The university at no stage tried to resist that. In fact, various key figures in the administration were actually involved in it, developing our system from the beginning.

RW cont: So, there's been unhappiness about that. It's basically seen to be continually towing a Government line and doing very little to oppose the state in any way.

It's too much to expect the university administration to become a militantly anti-government force, but a one does expect them where it does affect them directly, to come out with something slightly more oppositional, even in terms off their basic liberal principles, than they have been recently.

JF: Are there other whites in the UDF regional executive who....

RW: Ja. There was one Andy Borraine who was the Western Cape Reef Executive at the same time that I was with the Eastern Cape. I think that's all. There might have been one in Joburg as well, but I'm not one hundred percent sure of that.

This year there is no-one in the Eastern Cape. Jeremy Cronin, who was released fairly recently from Jail for ANC and SSCP activities. He's on the Western Cape Executive, and Raymond Suttner who was released recently for the same kinds of things. HR was on the one for the Transvaal. I don't think there's anyone from Natal.

JF: Was there anyone from the National Executive?

RW: No, I don't think so.

JF: It's pretty much in disarray every now and then.

RW: Ja. Sure. Clearly they have their problems.

JF: Somebody said ⁱ should ask you about influences in terms of- have you been involved in the End Conscription at all?

RW: A bit.

JF: When people think of the kind of important figures in South African resistance, or heroes, or whatever you would say, would you say that any of those figures are whites?

RW: It all depends which people. Look there are some figures. I think Helen Joseph is probably the most prominent one that springs to mind, is the most commonly known person within political circles who would actually. .. clearly she doesn't have the status of someone like Nelson Mandela or anyone like that. There's no question about it.

But I suppose she is known to be a white democrat fairly broadly within the democratic movement. Certainly at leadership level there's no question about that. But I'm not so sure about how far down it goes.

Other people, I think Brahm Fischer is quite well known. Who else? I mean the more intellectual people know more about these people and historical figures like that, members of the CP before it was banned. Clearly Joe Slovo is a well-known person as well. Ruth First.

JF: My other question is, Zimbabwe has promoted reconciliation by letting whites retain their privileges. How do you envision reconciliation in a South Africa of the future? Do you think accommodation to white privilege will be necessary to maintain the level of production?

RW: Look, I actually don't know at all. I can see the question you're asking and I can see that you might think it's possible for me to answer that, but I think it's very difficult. The one reason is I think things are going to be very different here from Zimbabwe. I think that there's going to be so much ~~work~~ in this country, I think it's going to be on a scale Zimbabwe never experienced.

RW: The kind of level of Urban Guerilla warfare it's going to be quite unlike anything Zimbabwe experienced I feel.

The State here is so much stronger than the state in Zimbabwe ever was, that in a military kind of way, I really don't know what's going to happen. It's where you're going to have a whole lot of extra right wing parliamentary groups who are organising, that's a possibility as well. They might get involved in some kind of violent conflict as well.

I really actually can't predict. I think at the moment people would push a really hard line, GCE would push a really hard line and say, listen we're not interested in the protection of minority interests here at all. That would distinguish us from the PFP as well. We don't actually want to recognise minorities in that way.

Certainly as organisational categories yes. But for the moment we aren't talking about the protection of white interests as such. But what I think of a South Africa where a civil war actually expands as such, I don't actually know.

JF: You've mentioned almost a disdain or contempt for liberals at certain junctions. But it seems also that there was much more than that. I mean I just walked in on that UDF/PFP meeting with Slabbert yesterday in PE.

I mean how do you see, especially as [redacted] that's the responsible role of whites, the traditional moving through liberals and then rejecting it quite violently. How do you feel about white liberals?

RW: I'm sorry, I didn't mean to seem contemptuous of white liberals if I did. The point that I'm trying to make is that at the end of the day I suppose in the fairly near future I expect, people are going to have to make choices.

For example, the political interference Act has been scrapped now. That leaves the way open now, for the PFP to actually move in now and put up coloured candidates for the (?335). If it does that, there's a very clear difference between the PFP and the UDF far clearer than there has been up until now, - Do you see the point I'm trying to make?

Obviously we're not going to get involved with white...it's a little bit different to the coloured area. So, there is a difference, but it's been made a little bit more stark, shall we put it that way.

Now, people are going to have to make choices, it's not been that easy up until now. However, I don't mean to be cynical as to the importance of penetrating liberal forums, of really grappling it, of getting into concrete working alliances with the liberals and so forth; Again it's a question of terms of those around what kinds of issues --- an issue like conscription you can form a kind of alliance which you can't necessarily do around the forming of a Tric²¹²olour parliament(?). So, there are important differences.

JF: Let me just ask one more question that I think will be really useful. I just spent some time with Molly Blackburn and I was a bit taken aback at how revered she is and then I began to see how she plays a very important role just in her usefulness.

JFcont: You know, exposing things, because, this seems to be a place where there are strategies emerging just beyond belief, kidnappings, and disappearings and the apparent killings and a level that just seems to be unknown by the liberal press in Johannesburg, maybe Cape Town too.

Do you see, I'm also just trying to push you to give some Grahamstown and Eastern Cape specifics, do you see also a specific or responsible role in this region to, for whites, to kind of keep abreast of the new revolving strategy of the State and to expose them. It's a traditionally liberal kind of objective, but do you think that you would turn to that in a new way?

RW: A couple of points. Firstly on the Molly Blackburn thing: I think Molly Blackburn has played a very useful role, I think that other people would agree with that. I don't think an appreciation of that fact means a commitment to her particular ideology. That's the initial point.

Secondly, however, although I think it's very important to work with Molly Blackburn in a genuine way, on the general theme of responsibility, Ja, I would agree with you entirely. I think that it's helluva important that - one of our interest groups that's going to be officially formed tonight, is specifically on the issue of repression, which is directly around these kinds of things.

The Black Sash here has just formed a repression monitoring committee which has been in the act for some time now collecting, something Molly Blackburn has been doing, collecting statements, affidavits and that kind of thing, very important work.

RWcont: And the key people on that Black Sash thing are GDC members, our steering committee members and I think there's going to be a lot of cooperation on that point between us, two. So, ja, I think it's a very important area.

JF: Just in terms of getting the word out?

RW: To get the word out, to try and campaign around it where possible, to cause as much shit with the authorities as possible, so you can tell where the effectiveness of strategies or the hit where strategies can actually be deployed, because they are, as you say, quite unbelievable some of them, and we constantly have to try and make political capital out of them on the one hand, with respects to the ^{aims of the} broad democratic movement; on the other hand to curtail the effectivity of their strategies in a very concrete and direct way.

JF: How do I refer to you? What kind of title do I give you?

RW: Well, at the moment I don't have a very glorious title at all. You can just call me a member of the GCD. There aren't really any official positions. We have two co-ordinators on the committee. We don't really have an executive structure at all. Otherwise you can say I'm the Research Officer for the Labour and Community Resources Centre.

JF: And profession?

RW: You can say ex-UDF member if you want. Professionally I don't - that's it. I'm registered to do a Masters degree at the same time.

JF: Is there anything you're going to do professionally that relates to those goals or are they separate?

RW: I don't have a career lined up if that's what you mean. I'm a graduate student of politics and sociology but I'm not going to be a lawyer or anything like that right now.