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Interviewer: Okay it's the 23rd of August 2010. Just for the record, can you say your full name?

Molefe: My name is Thabo Setumetsi Molefe.

Interviewer: Thabo, just a few personal questions about yourself - where and when were you born?

Molefe: I was born in 1982, the 2nd of June.

Interviewer: Okay. Can you also give an indication of where you have lived - have you always lived in Johannesburg or have you moved around?

Molefe: I've lived in Johannesburg most of the time but I've also lived in North West, the rural areas of North West and I stayed there maybe for five years.

Interviewer: Is that when you were a child?

Molefe: Yes, when I was a child, yes growing up before I went to school, maybe around when I was four years and then I started my first year there at North West, then the second year I didn't go to school then I had to come back to Jo'burg just to go to school ...

Interviewer: And what kind of schooling have you had - your education?

Molefe: I do have a qualification which is...it's not a full qualification per se. I'm doing Media studies with UNISA, it's currently pending even now. I'm still a student even now there. But I do have a matric and all those.

Interviewer: You do have matric?

Molefe: Yes.

Interviewer: And where in...I'm assuming most of the time you've lived in Joburg you've lived in Soweto?

Molefe: Yes

Interviewer; Where in Soweto?

Molefe: I've lived in Diepkloof, just the first township when you enter Soweto.

Interviewer: And you've pretty much lived there all the time?

Molefe: Yes, but now I've moved down to Orlando, which is the next township.

Interviewer: Okay, and just tell me just a little about your family, do you have brothers and sisters, your mother and father, what do they do?

Molefe: Okay, I'm from a family of four; I'm the third child in the family. We were like two brothers and two sisters. The first born was my sister but she passed away. My mother also passed on so there are only three of us that are left now. I had, I should say a normal childhood of someone who was in Soweto, growing up with your grandmother

and your mother being here. And my dad being this person that I see once in a while but not living with him permanently.

Interviewer: And work situation? Have you ever like had jobs, have you ever worked?

Molefe: I've done work, but all of them they were not like those permanent jobs. I worked at Timber City Hardware in Randburg but it was only for weekends just to get more money and I also tried to work with tourists most of the time. I'm a translator, I do translation most of the time and I do tours in Soweto but that's a private thing that I'm doing for myself. But that's a part time job that I've also been doing. And I've also worked with Khanya in fact for a period of about six months, being an assistant like I do here but at the time they were still in Newtown. So those were the kind of jobs but basically nothing that's so stable in fact that I've worked in.

Interviewer: Okay ...describe to me how you became an activist, how did you become politicised?

Molefe: Okay, I'm from a family of politicians. My grandfather is in fact Moses Kotane, the founder member of the SACP. So from my family it's funny that no one is so like interested in politics, it's only few of us that are interested in politics so the question to me is always been, "Why aren't you supporting the ANC because your grandfather, if he, was here, he was supporting the ANC, he was going to be an ANC member?" - and all of those things. So I'm this kind of person who always wants to engage in debates and I always think that there is always an alternative to each and every situation, you know, I'm that kind of person. So the first time that I ... as I said I was sleeping with my grandmother. You know living with your grandmother, like it's us, in fact there were eight of us, the grandchildren of my grandmother, we were staying with my grandmother there. And because like she was getting grant money and it was always a problem when she was supposed to give us pocket money to go to school and she will complain that, "I don't have money I have to pay rent, I have to pay electricity" and all those things. And it was sad that most of the times she wanted to do those things for us but because of the money that she was getting all these things that she was supposed to do she couldn't do that. And when I was doing my Standard 7 at school, I was elected as an SRC in the class and from there that's when I got to politics in a way because during that time when you are an SRC member, you'll be maybe invited to the ANCYL meetings, you know them trying to sort of mobilise you and all those things. So that's how I got into politics. But until when I met with comrade Virginia and comrade Aubrey Setshedi, they were married at the time, Virginia and Aubrey, that's when the SECC started in fact. We were

having problems of electricity and my grandmother was complaining that she doesn't have money to pay and there were cut offs and she was very scared that if it is cut off then what was going to happen to us? So there were meetings in Pimville in fact...

Interviewer: Give us a sense of the time frame, when was this?

Molefe: Let's see...it was in 2000, yes that's when I started with the SECC but then we did not have the name the SECC because they were problems in Diepkloof of electricity cut offs, they were problems in Orlando of electricity cut offs and they were also problems in G-street in Pimville. So we did not have a formulated structure that was called the SECC but it's the problems that brought people sort of like together into the SECC. Because at the time, comrade Trevor Ngwane was in the council of the ANC and he knew of other issues beforehand, before the communities and then he sort of told the communities about what was coming in terms of those issues of electricity and housing. And then from there they were two groups in Pimville, the party from the ANC, they were those who were co- ANC members and there were those who wanted Trevor to start something new out of the ANC. So they started having meetings in Nelspruit and Pimville but they started seeing that the problem of electricity is not only in Pimville and then they started talking to the comrades in Orlando. The very first comrade that we started talking to in Orlando was Mamo Khele. We used to have meetings at his house and from there Mamo Khele from Orlando then we met with Aubrey and Virginia then that's where comrade Dale and others started knowing each other and said that, the problem that we're having is not a local problem but it's an international problem. So, yes, that's how I got into politics. It was mainly the issue of electricity that made me so, like open to the world and say, there is so much that's happening besides the issue of politics so that's how I got into politics.

Interviewer: And you were, at that time still a student or...?

Molefe: Yes, I was still a student; I was going to school and from school attending like meetings, because even the time when we went to the Mayor's house Amos Masondo, it was only a year after I had matriculated. But I was active even at the SRC in school and even at the SCCC because I was an SRC since from Grade 7 until I matriculated I was elected the entire time by the students until then.

Interviewer: And during that time did you belong to a political organisation or were you just part of the SRC?

Molefe: No, I didn't belong to any political party but we were...you know people wanted to get us into politics, like the PAC wanted us to join them, The ANC also wanted us to

join them and the UDM wanted us to join them but I think with me it's always been an issue of you've forever been there and you're forever to people you'll give them this but whenever you have a chance to do that you fail people and the sad part is that those who put you in power also have to fight you to deliver whatever it is that you promised. So that has always been my thinking and my look in politics that you know, it's sad enough to promise people what you can't give so we sort of like wanted ...people wanted us to get into politics. But from the Left side there was a group, which was called the SI (I think), they also wanted to recruit us into the SI, but I have to say, with them it was an issue of us getting, we were having a study group with them in fact, them giving us issues to read and having to meet and discuss whatever paper that was given to us. So that's how I got to know issues of politics internationally, you know issues about Dr Guevara and all those political icons that were there before us.

Interviewer: And SI stands for Socialist International?

Molefe: Socialist Initiative.

Interviewer: Okay. Now you mentioned that that kind of political education and those kinds of things raised different issues for you, obviously one of the key issues was privatisation... so just give me a sense of how it is at that time that you understood privatisation and what it is and why you were opposing that?

Molefe: Okay. You know, sometimes when you get to hear of these big words you are scared, "What's this?" But it was easily explained and I also came up with my own way of explaining it that we can't say we own a shop being five of us and us owning a shop and there are families outside of this shop and one person will come and say that the leadership of these five people is not good leadership. So these five people, we must say they have to get a certain percentage but this whole percentage of this shop must be owned by this particular person, you know. So for me it's always been that that it's not fair, you can't work in a bakery shop and bake bread everyday but at the end of the day you can't afford to buy your children bread everyday. So for me that's how it was explained and that's how I understood it that you know, that privatisation on its own is a problem to those who don't have because it comes with certain demands on its own and people's lives are undermined and profit comes before everything. So for me it's that sad part that it's bad that money should come before people's personal issues. For me that's how I understood it, it's how easy sometimes when I get to tell the next person that privatisation is this, taking something that's been owned by the community and taking it to this one person to own it which is not fair.

Interviewer: Try to just place that for me within the context of when you just started becoming active within the SECC ...how did you make the connection with what was going on in the electricity front and the larger issues that government was...you know was interacting with people and the policies it was implementing.

Molefe: I think from the SECC context, it's easy because it was local politics, we discussed local politics of, we don't have electricity, we must go to the Councillor. When you go to the Councillor, the Councillor says, 'I'm not Eskom', when you go to Eskom, Eskom says, 'We made a presentation to the government and they gave us a go ahead and the Councillor will just say, 'I'm just here but looking at that was agreed upon by the government and Eskom,' we only see that the projects are unveiling. So that's when you get to know that decisions are not made by this one particular person, decisions are made by those who have money more than us. Decisions are made on behalf of us because those who have money they want to protect whatever they have; they want to protect their profits. So it was easy for me to look at it from the SECC side because it was a thing that if you don't pay, you don't get electricity and it was easy for me, which means if I don't have money, I'm privileged to have these things. So that means in a nutshell that if these things were given by government, giving them to the people that have voted for him, it was going to be easy because it was going to be easy in a way that they will provide this to everyone but now because the parastatals are being privatised into certain individuals each and every person that starts a business want to make profit. So if you privatise something, surely you must know that whoever is going to buy shares or whatever their main objective and aim is to make profit. And from the SECC perspective, that's how we understood it that, no, that's why we are getting cut offs is because we don't pay electricity they want to make profit so if we don't help them to make profit then we're privileged to have it.

Interviewer: What were the main demands? What was the SECC saying should happen? What were you fighting for at that time?

Molefe: I think one thing that we demanded as SECC was to stop the cut offs. Just stop the cut offs. And taking it back to the ANC and saying, "Hey, you promised us! You never promised the members of the ANC but you promised the whole nation that we're going to give free houses, free electricity and free everything! So we're saying to you as much as you promised us, give back what you have promised and stop cut offs!" And if you could see the membership of the SECC, its mostly pensioners which being the case it raises the question why it's mostly pensioners and it's easy in a way when you look

into it, its because pensioners were the most who were affected, you know. Pensioners were those who were having large bills in their houses of R16000-R17000 and the very sad part is that also when you try to engage with them they will say, 'Sorry we've made a mistake with this bill, its not supposed to reflect this amount.' So you can see that there is also a problem with the administration of Eskom, the way they do things and the way they were saying that they don't send people to come and check the meters but they will just come to your house and estimate that okay, this house can use this. So those were our demands that stop the cut offs other demand is that they should stop giving people false invoices and statements. I think those were the main...and also that ANC should live to its promises; those were the strong demands that SECC wanted in fact.

Interviewer: And when you say keep its promises were you demanding for free electricity or is it a particular amount of electricity ...?

Molefe: We were saying as they promised. They said, free electricity, it was the main focus of the demand, you know, but SECC said if you want to know people who lie everyday then its politicians.

Interviewer: And just give a sense as to how the SECC was said to grow from one area to the other and then became a Soweto based organisation. How did it structure itself, how was it operating?

Molefe: You know in Soweto we used to have, we used to call them like CBOs, you know community based organisations that are looking at the issues that are happening within that particular community. Maybe like Diepkloof as Diepkloof as a whole but not happening in other areas and we also have street committees like we can have people like from one street looking at about 30-40 houses and we elect two people to just safeguard the street and to see to it what's happening. So that's how the SECC got into being an organisation based in Soweto because as I said when we started to meet we were meeting in Orlando and Mamo Khele's house, you know. It's funny because sometimes when you do good people want to know more about you. And I remember when we met we didn't have T-shirts or membership cards, we never had any of those, we started as comrades coming together and saying, "these are the problems, how do you deal with the problems?" But we met as people who also had families, you come here and you say, 'I'm from Orlando, I have a problem in my house and this and this and that but you'll also say that but my family also in Zola, they have a problem with the similar situation". So one thing that changed with the SECC is that we never, from Orlando, we never waited for communities to call us and say there is a problem, we used

to sense, not sense but people used to come to our meetings and say, 'there is a problem'. Which was surprising because people used to come as individuals from Dube and say, "We have problems of cut offs in Dube so how can you help us? How can you make sure that you come to Dube?' And we will say, 'No we can't address you as individuals, it's better if you do have a venue that is accessible to anyone then we call a public meeting and we come there'. And most of our meetings, when we started the SECC, all the meetings in fact were in public spaces, open spaces like your soccer fields, your park but only in open spaces where people could just come and listen. And that is how it started going from this area to the other because when you are in a public space you can talk about this thing but after the meeting one person can come to you and say, "No, I was just passing by and I'm from this place and I heard you talking about this, so how can you come to my place?" We used to...that's how we organised SECC through all these committees in fact.

Interviewer: And once you had done that, how did ...once you got quite a number of membership, the SECC as far as I understand it is one of the few organisations I know of that has a membership based organisation. So if you can just describe how the organisation became structured ... with leadership and so forth and so on.

Molefe: Yes, I think it's always good for an organisation to have a leadership to see that it is involved. So with the SECC, it was coming from a mentality that we have so many structures and we're growing in a number as members of the organisation, so there was question of people in ... when we started that SECC people always volunteered in positions, you know, I will take the minutes someone will chair the meetings and all that but the person that used to be like the face of the SECC was Trevor at the time because looking at him and the history that he left the ANC and you know you're the Messiah of the struggle, you left the ANC and then you came to the poorest of the poor, you were not getting paid there and all those things and that's why you came there. So Trevor was like the face of the organisation and because of that we used to get media attention during those times. And moving forward we said that it was important for the SECC to have an AGM just to have a leadership that was elected by the people on the ground, a leadership that was going to be mandated by the people on the ground. And yes we did have a ...it's just that I don't remember the date but we did have an AGM and the leadership was elected. And through that leadership ...because SECC before we never had money to run our affairs and do things, we used to maintain ourselves as a structure, you know when we were having trips, people were asked to donate R5 or R2

and people used to donate those things. But moving forward, people started to look at other means of fundraising and we started with the membership card as a way of fundraising in fact and as also saying you can also be proud and say, 'I'm supporting this organisation because of these certain things', you know. So that's how we grew into this thing of formalising it as having a leadership by having the membership card by saying, "Be part of us, have a membership card. By having the card it doesn't mean that you have to take the membership card and put it on top of the wardrobe and wait for Eskom to come and switch off your electricity and then call us but attend regular meetings so that you can know what's happening around you and what's going to happen", and all those things.

Interviewer: Okay, now fairly soon after the SECC was formed as you sort of mentioned, it got a lot of attention both in South Africa and also internationally. So there are two things that I want you to speak of.

1. How it came to be that the SECC allied itself and became part of the APF;
2. To what extent did that broadening out of the struggle of Soweto impact on the campaign from the organisation itself?

Molefe: As I said, you can't want to say when you have a problem you go to the doctor, when you're sick you want to go to the doctor. If you need medication you have to go to school, if you want to grow positively you surround yourself with people who are growing positively. But, you know, SECC was one of those strongest organisations that anyone could relate to at the time because many people were seeing that the money that we're getting it's peanuts, we as the grandchildren, as the grandson of them we were seeing that our grannies are getting peanuts but they also have to pay for this and it's sad that they were the ones who are sick with arthritis and all that, they need to be warm and all those things. But seeing that problems were there and were not only in Soweto, we used to have KCR back when I was working at Khanya, we used to communicate with SECC, they were having problems with evictions and all that and we also communicated with others from Free State, they used to have problems of evictions. But that's when we started to say, "Problems, it's not the issue of us and Eskom, but problems it's about the policies that are implemented by the government'. And by us now the problem now is no longer about local issues, the Councillor, why you switch off and...but we're still fighting a standing battle but we have to fight the battle on its own, don't start the battle and don't want to fight. We said, "You know what, let's fight, let's involve ourselves with people who know more, let's involve ourselves with people who want to go forward". And we

started sitting on a table and discussing that, 'What's the problem with the issue of electricity? What's the problem? Is it Eskom? Is it government?' And then we got to see that a large part of Eskom was privatised and was being owned by certain individuals. And we said which means we are not fighting Eskom per say, but we are fighting the policy of privatisation because that's one thing that makes us to have cut offs and everything. So I think there were also organisations, that's why I'm saying your KCR and all those that were there, but we said all of us there is only one thing that is making us fight all this and we all identified the same problem which is privatisation. And that's when we started having like people who were educated at the time, new issues of privatisation and also worked with other movements that were fighting privatisation. And I think that's when the APF also started emerging in a way so that at least all communities from different areas of SA, of Gauteng can come and meet, you know. And like with the APF, it started, if I can say but it started in Jo'burg and that's when it started to go out when we were doing things, when we were doing marches all those, people started seeing that, 'Oh, these people are now fighting let's join them'. So that's when we said, "the struggle is not only in Soweto and the struggle is not about us fighting the Councillors, but the struggle is all about the policies that are implemented by our current government'. That's one thing that we said as SECC that, "Our goal is not to fight the Councillor but our goal is to challenge the policies that are set by the government and to fight for the rightful things for the poor people of Soweto! So that was...

Interviewer: Okay. And just at the beginning, you mentioned the community organisations like the KCR and the others that joined in ... but when the APF began at least in its first few years, it also combined individual activists, students, some unions and other kinds of things. And the SECC in particular at this time, I think was very vocal about making connections with a range of different constituencies particularly workers and other kinds of things. How did that ... the question I want to know as an activist in the SECC, how did that broadening out impact on the struggle that you were waging in Soweto as well in the communities?

Molefe: Like as I said, you know, I think what's good is that when you want to see things growing, you have to surround yourself with people who have that knowledge and you know the issues were that if we in Soweto are fighting electricity, someone in KCR is fighting eviction, someone where ever is also fighting eviction, someone where ever is also fighting electricity, so we saw that it's no longer an issue that it's strong based locally on those different areas. And the good thing is that having individuals that were

also part of the APF, having academics that were also part of the APF because they knew more, they knew of these policies, they knew what these policies could do to people, they knew why these policies were wrong to the people, you know. And SECC was one of those organisations that said, yes, there is information out there, we never said we don't want this information, we want this information but we want to align ourselves with people who know more. And I remember Patrick Bond used to be one of the guys that came for a meeting at the SECC and gave a presentation because at least those kind of comrades they know so much, they also do research and they also read, things that we were not reading at the time being comrades and we were not reading things. But they also gave us presentations, you know. And I think sometimes us as black people, sometimes when you see a white person facing the same problem as you or wanting to fight the same problem, you see now that is the problem because sometimes our thinking is that white people are not poor, they have money, they don't experience privatisation, they don't feel it, they don't have ...but when you see white people now starting to engage with you, of the other colour you say to yourself, this is the struggle now. And one thing that we never did as SECC is that we never like discussed people in terms of the colour of their skin but we discussed people in terms of the experience and the knowledge that they have of particular issues and that's how we got, I think to align with the APF and also to be vocal because we were not only vocal on issues of electricity, you know when there were marches of COSATU and all those, we used to have Ministers saying such statements like supporting the workers, supporting the people because we saw that people lacked so much information that if you are fighting Eskom then that's not fighting, so yes.

Interviewer: And just give a sense of what were the kind of tactics that the SECC employed in order to wage this struggle ...? In this case you were talking about cut offs and some other things so once the state responded clearly, not in the way that communities wanted them to respond, what did the SECC do? What kind of tactics did it employ to engage that struggle?

Molefe: I think it started locally because we used to say to the Councillors, "Stop the cut offs,!" We used to have meetings with them, sit in their offices and discuss, stop the cut offs and all those things. But when we see that cut offs were still going on, we said, we want them to feel the same pain that we're feeling as the community, the Councillors. And we started engaging on a struggle of saying, 'Let's also switch their lights and electricity off' And that made a huge impact because it's funny sometimes when you go

to a certain area and when you do something like that which I can say it's illegal and you will get overwhelming support from that community and that's how again the SECC got a chance of going bigger and bigger because people were saying, 'These guys are strong, they can challenge the Councillor and do what they said they will do'. You know, we also had the marches, we've had marches before and we couldn't do those kinds of actions but seeing that we would give memorandums, no answers you know, we tried to engage in meetings, no answers and then we said, "No, we're just fed up, we can't fight here a losing battle, let's do something just to show that we mean business." It's the same thing I think when we went to the Amos Masondo house because as youth we had a number of marches and the ones that we were getting is that, you know when you have a memorandum, you present the memorandum and then you wait after whatever day and you march again, the same thing. And then we said, "You know what, as much as Amos Masondo's parents are staying in Soweto, we don't think he's man enough because he's doing this to the people of Soweto and he ran away from Soweto going to KZN. Then we said the best thing is for us to go to KZN ... because the main aim was for us to go and cut off electricity and water at that time. The main aim is that we've been marching to his office and don't find him, we've been sending memorandums and saying we'll be here but when we go he's not there. And we said, "Now we want to go where he stays" and we went to his house and when we went to his house they said he was not there, he went to whatever conference overseas. We were so fed up that this guy when we want him he's not there but he has time to go to overseas. You know, the anger, when you're angry, your anger is very high, you know, you can do anything when you're angry and when you're hungry at the same time you can do anything. And then we started saying, 'Look at this man, he's living in this huge house, nice and they are security guards outside when people are suffering in Soweto!' And people said, "No, let's cut off the meter" And we started with...we cut off the meter of the ...the water meter and when we cut off the water meter then we started also cutting the electricity and that's when the security guards retaliated to whatever we were doing. But that was us trying to say, "We marched, we gave you a memorandum, you don't give us any response so it's better for us to give you a taste of your own medicine because in those memorandums we were raising issues of saying, please stop the cut offs because of a number of reasons but you failed to listen to us so if you fail to listen to us we also have ways of making you listen!" You know I was surprised because that was one victory that as SECC there was a time where the cut offs were stopped in Soweto but its funny that now they are coming

back. But I remember I think it was the year, 2006 or 2007 the cut offs were stopped in Soweto. There were no cut offs in Soweto and that was one victory, we as SECC said, "Now we have a victory but the victories also that we got from local structures was that, some of the structures that we had as the SECC, Eskom vans were not even going to those areas like Zola, Eskom vans were not even allowed in areas like Zola. If there were problems, they would find someone who is an electrician there and fix the problem so those were some of the things that we had as an organisation, people's assistance. Because that's one thing that me being in the SECC has taught me that you know, the resistance shouldn't come from the leadership only and resistance shouldn't come from certain individuals who don't even come from that area but resistance should be from the people who are affected, from the people who see the daily problems with whatever that they are complaining from and that's one thing that made me say, 'I'm doing this!' in fact, yes.

Interviewer: The SECC became fairly widely known for its tactic of reconnections. Can you talk a little bit about how that happened and how that was received by, and what happened as a result of employing that tactic? And the second thing - if I'm not mistaken, also another goal achieved was that Eskom wrote off a substantial amount of arrears, just talk about those two things.

Molefe: Okay, Yes I think as we said the question was why is Eskom switching off the electricity for the people - because they were not paying. And why people were not paying - because people are unemployed, people are getting peanuts you know, so they don't have money to pay Eskom. So we as SECC we said, is there an alternative to whatever that Eskom is doing? And an alternative came to the members that were at the meeting, you know someone said, "No I can reconnect, I was working with Eskom as a contractor to cut off and they are giving us..." They were giving them I think R60 a day at the time and after he was deployed to go and reconnect the electricity in Zola and other areas, the guy was from Pimville. When he went back to Pimville his house was also cut off and he resolved and said that, "You know from now on I'm going to reconnect the electricity". So when he made that proposal to the meeting that "I can do this" it came as something that as SECC we said, "If they cut off, let's switch on the light". And we went to Eskom with this issue saying to them, "if you don't want to listen to us, if you cut off, we'll reconnect for ourselves, you know." And they said, "Okay you can do it but if we find someone handling our boxes, they'll then be arrested." And when we started reconnecting there were questions in terms of issues of money, should we charge

people to reconnect? And it was also discussed because people were cut off because they can't pay, they don't even have money to pay someone to reconnect. And SECC one thing that we can do, let's reconnect for those who can't pay. And we started...I think we also used that, that was one of the mechanisms that SECC grew to what it was because people were so fascinated by whatever we were doing, you know, 'Eskom can cut for me I don't care, I can go to SECC they'll reconnect for me for free. I don't have to pay anyone they'll reconnect for me for free!' It strengthened the struggle of the SECC and also the campaigns of the SECC that we got at the time because more and more houses were reconnected. And I'll have to say with Eskom help, cutting off made SECC become stronger at reconnecting electricity and you know, I'm proud to say that since we did the reconnections as SECC there was never one house that blew up or was burnt, there was never that with the SECC. All the connections that we've done even now some houses they are using that and there was never something wrong that happened. And you know because I was also reconnecting electricity at the time and it was fun in fact. I remember this one time we just went to Orlando West and there was this old lady, I think she was staying by herself and she didn't have electricity I think for three months. And her house was smelling of paraffin; and when we got to this house with Sifiso - Sifiso who was working at Khanya because he was the first chief operator of the SECC - and when we switched on the electricity I saw tears on that woman's face and I said to myself which means we're doing the right thing. It is the wrong thing for Eskom to say maybe we're stealing electricity off the government but we're doing the right thing and I've seen people cry through me being one of the persons who used to do the reconnections. I saw people cry, I saw people not knowing what they can give you if they should give you money, they should cook for you, whatever and it became a strong campaign on its own because what we were doing to people and how we were changing people's lives because people didn't care at the time that what I'm doing it's illegal. To them it was, "I now have electricity, I now can cook, I now can do whatever that I want to do without me paying anyone." And the funny thing is that even Eskom when they came back and they started targeting people, they never targeted people that SECC went to and switched their lights on. They went to certain individuals but most of the people even now they say Eskom even came to them and for us and for the SECC that made the SECC I think what it is today. You know them cutting off and them going and reconnecting for free, I think SECC even today people are still identifying it as "Operation Khanyisa" You know we "Khanyisa" (Bring back the light) It's because of those things.

Interviewer: Give an indication of how after the initial few years SECC was very successful in mobilising and over the last several years where possibly things have slowed down a bit or struggles have waned somewhat ... is it a result of success? Or first of all the movement when you have success the basis for the struggle sometimes is less or are there other elements which have to do with things broader than the SECC and outside than the APF and the social movements in particular?

Molefe: I think we as people we sometimes have a way of engaging and identifying with issues or matters in fact because I think with the SECC it's that people came there when they needed help the most. People came there when they were desperate for their houses to get light and when they got light then they sit down. When Eskom comes and reconnects again they come again. So it easily says to you that SECC had a victory and we can measure our victory by what's happening today in our movement, more people are sitting at home enjoying electricity for free, not coming to the movement. The more we see people in the house, the more we know that there are problems. So we can see...for me it's looking at this thing in two ways, Yes, we do want people to come because that's one of our worries that if people don't come to our meetings as an organisation where are these people? But looking at it at the other end it's that we've worked so hard that people are now sitting at home enjoying whatever we have given them and saying, thanks to the SECC and the funny part it's that the SECC, you can come to the meeting and you can see the people and track the membership cards, we have a large number of membership cards and less people attending the meetings because the people even if they don't come to the meetings but they still identify themselves as SECC. So that's why I'm saying that in terms of maybe the decline in numbers and in terms of maybe the issues of the SECC, it's because of the victories that we have, because people said now they've given us so much and now we would like to sit down. But let it be, or let's say as comrades starts something and say, I reconnect, then I'm telling you you'll see a number of people coming to the SECC. So really it's a question of how do people identify the SECC now? And I think for them they identify the SECC as an organisation where I can go and have a problem. And when we engage with people sometimes individually, people are tired of fighting in terms of, politically, you know. They feel that they fought so much against apartheid regime, now it's not the time to fight, it's the time to negotiate and come to a table, come to a decision, you know. But even now with the members that we do have at SECC, those are people who say, 'I do have electricity at home because of the SECC but I also want to know more of the

issues". So most people are not coming to the SECC, those are the people who came only for this particular thing, the electricity then after its on then I sit down. But it's good that we still do have members that are also coming to the meeting but that's why I'm also saying very surprising, it's few people that are coming to the meetings but a large number of memberships so that's why I'm saying for me I can look into it as part of the success that we've done so much that people say, "Now I can sit at home and enjoy electricity".

Interviewer: Over a time period of that potential success at least at that particular level, how would you describe the response of the state over the time frame? You've already talked about it in the early years but as the campaign to Operation Khanyisa and everything, how did the state respond?

Molefe: I think they were responding in different ways. At times we would reconnect and the policemen would come and they will just look at you and go past the place, and say, "Eish it's SECC" Because as SECC we used to be identified by the T-shirt, even now the people that are doing work we wear T-shirts. And those who were arrested it was even difficult at the court to be handled like a criminal case because most of the time they will say, "Okay I've arrested this guy who was doing an illegal connection - is anything stolen - no, nothing stolen". So Eskom can say maybe the damages. So the response of the state was also saying they no longer want to arrest people who are doing illegal connections and specifically like in Orlando because they were saying that, "You arrest this person, the next day you see a thousand people marching through the gates for this one particular person". And I can tell you now, even now in Soweto you can go and do an illegal connection and the policemen will just go past and just leave you alone. You can be by yourself with the box or you can be with people and they will just leave you alone. But now the retraction is not coming from the state, it's from the community itself because the people were stealing cables. So now when you go and you reconnect for someone, that's when you're scared, you'll be scared of the community and not the police because the police can just come there and just look at you and just leave you alone. And not saying so much about police, only that you know, they are corrupt, they can catch you doing something wrong and they will say to you, "Give us something for cold drink" And if you do have something they will just leave you. But since we've been doing this, we've never had serious cases, like people being arrested for these cases. The only person that's doing that now is one guy from White City and he had cases not because of illegal connections but because he was fighting the guards and they take the

case as assault...but now I don't want to lie to you, you can do an illegal connection and the police when they come they will just look at you and go past. They won't even do anything, you know.

Interviewer: And how would you describe on the political ... ideological side of things as opposed to the practical response of the state and as an SECC activist throughout these years, have you seen or noticed a shift in the political train and ideological terrain as a result of the struggles of organisations such as SCCC and larger ones like the APF?

Molefe: Yes. You know movements like SECC, they are having an impact and the very sad part is that even the state they won't say, 'we're making this change because a certain organisation marched to us'. They won't say those things, you know.

Government now it's changing its policies all the time. There was DR, there was Igoli, you know all those facelifts but let's come to reality, they have changed the names, yes we know as we see that it's the same wine just a different bottle. But we should look at what made them go to that trouble of changing the names, changing whatever maybe. It's because of local struggles that are intensifying in communities and organisations like the APF making that impact because we as organisations like the APF and SECC, sometimes our fight is not an immediate fight and it's a fight that we do have a vision, it's a visionary fight and the good thing is that through being in politics, certain things have changed. And I can only see that change that's there because of the movements that are there. And I'm telling you if there were no movements like that, that change will never have happened. Check now with the issue of...like the SECC remains an organisation fighting before for the issues of the cut offs but they have done it now, they have introduced these new policies of government now, Operation Masiza, they want to eradicate poverty now but if you don't have money, if you don't have this, if you don't have this you'll be exempted from paying these things. So for me I think those things are there because organisations like the SECC raised them, we fought for those things but the sad part is that government, our government is very clever because they've given this hand and they take the foot on the other hand. They are very clever, but I think everything that's there because of organisations like the APF and the SECC and making sure that people get what they want, what they voted for. And you know government is very intelligent that's why there's this give and take but I believe we've raised awareness and certain issues are decisions are pushed by us in the government who are making these things.

Interviewer: And how important do you think it was to have the kinds of local community struggles around these issues become much more than local issues? In other words, become not just national but in many cases international. One can think of water struggles, one can think of a range of different things. And the networks and the connections that were able to be forged as a result with people outside and other countries. How important? Did it have an impact?

Molefe: Yes, I think it's important and it also strengthens and also tells certain individuals as comrades that whatever you fight as individuals its not only happening here but its also happening elsewhere as well. But the most important part is that one of seeing if it's not happening here and only here so it's happening in other places. Now you have to identify, who's making this thing to happen and start a discussion from there that, you know, we in South Africa, the problem is this company and the policy of privatisation, the company of such an individual has bought this, it is the problem since the government introduced this... So for us it's important because you start to engage with those kind of countries and share information of how they dealt with their issues, how they are dealing with them and also with us it's also the same thing of us giving them our experiences and how we deal with issues, you know. And for me it's important in a way that the struggle that was local, it's no longer local now it's international because whenever they are doing something that side they will include you. And with us when we do something that side we will include them and we know that when people create they get to know that, "Okay which means this issues is not only happening in Soweto, they are happening elsewhere". So I think for me it's quite important that we engage with international communities and for me I also think that, it's just that there is an issue of finance through the organisation but I also think that whatever space that we get we should also utilise because if we want to strengthen our struggle, if we want to be powerful... So you won't be powerful if you're just fighting locally so whatever space that we get that, come and participate, make a submission as an organisation, you must utilise those spaces because it's quite important in terms of support and us moving forward as an organisations.

Interviewer: Okay. Now the SECC went through in the previous years a split itself and there has been a range of different challenges, problems, not simply the SECC only but the APF and other affiliates. How would you as someone who's been involved for all this time both as SECC and APF, what would you identify as the key reasons for these kinds of problems and challenges that still exist very much in the present as well?

Molefe: I think it's easy because I know, I'm this kind of person when I do something right I just take time to think of it and you ask yourself why do we have so many churches? We pray for one God, but there is so many churches. It's because we all want to be priests. It's the same in politics; we all want to be leaders. You know, people don't accept and give a chance to a particular leadership you know. We sometimes want to differ and think that the only way to solve a problem is for us to go out. As much as I may be against the ANC but I salute Zuma and the way he campaigned to be a president, he never left the movement. He believed that we built this movement with the same vision as all comrades here, so I won't go and open something that's so different only with a name but doing the same thing. For me to have leadership is for me maybe to say that we campaign, let me stay in the movement and show people that such and such a thing are not happening the way they should be and moving forward let's identify problems and solve them and moving forward, you know, I think for me that's an issue because it is the same even here in politics, you get your SI, you get your SMI, you get all those different names but come to the table you're all fighting the same thing, you know but the question is those who are in leadership it's either they want to be changed, it's either they always think they are... whatever they think it's greater than everyone. I think for me with the SECC that was the problem, you know. And leaders that say, "I've started this, I know better than everyone" I think for me that's not the struggle, what's important is to share information and you know build each other because we came together, fighting for the same thing. So I think that's one thing that pushed the SECC to a split, you know. People couldn't take it that you know there are leaders that have been there forever and the leaders didn't want to be questioned, which isn't the right thing you know. You can't say because you're the leader not to be questioned by the constituency. This isn't the old days where we would have kings who will tell us what to do and we just... But as I say, its better sometimes when you want to fix a movement, just be within, it's your movement, you started it because you intended to be there with you going outside and starting something, it's going to split again. For me it's like that, once you started splitting, you going to split again and again because you avoid resolving very important issues of what is really the problem here, those are, for me that's a really important issue. A split is not a solution in politics because you're making our struggle weak. Where it should be powerful you're making our struggle.... It's good if we can have in fights sometimes but a case when we go out there you go together as a front, win together but when you think that for us to solve the problem is to split, for me it's a

problem because you're making our struggle weaken, where it should be stronger it will be weak and when you have enemies they will be happy seeing things happening. And it's always easy for an enemy to infiltrate where there are splits because you identify problems of splits and that's how he's going to demoralise the organisation. Whenever it goes, we see that okay; there was a split because of this and that. Whenever you're going that's going to happen ...

Interviewer: Just the last couple of questions. What would you identify - outside of what you just mentioned in terms of issues relating to leadership and egos in some cases those kinds of things in keeping some degree of unity - what would you identify as the main weaknesses or problems that presently exist, not simply just within the SECC although you can talk about those, but also just more generally within an organisation like the APF which tends to have those because there's been clearly a weak link and from your experience and perspective, what are the main things there?

Molefe: I think ...speaking I think to comrade Dale who was saying to me, 'It's a question of leadership and your leadership skills'. But the question is, how much leadership skills do you want? And we grew up in a way that you learn from those who know more in informal education. And being a comrade that's one thing that should tell yourself that in informal education that's the most important one because you go to a meeting, you hear this guy speak of this, you go home and do research. So for me people are identifying enemies within a movement, their own movement they identify enemies which is a problem for me because you can't have an enemy in your side, you can't. If you have an issue, let's debate the issue and let's come to a consensus. The word comrade means my friend in struggle so if we forget the meaning of those important words, we've seriously lost whatever that we're fighting for because our struggle is privatisation. You're my friend, our struggle is privatisation. I can have a comrade at the SECC our struggle will be the issue of electricity. But that means that let's not bring personal issues in organisations. Yes, we're people, we have personal lives we have personal issues, let's not use the most important spaces like our meetings and waste time discussing personal politics, for me that's the number one problem because once we start discussing personal problems, you start this meeting with a personal problem, from the next meeting that's going to come, someone has got to read the minutes, when you read the minutes that very issue that rose is going to reflect on them and it's going to start a debate, you know. So for me it's always been a problem. That's why in organisations we say, have a constitution, have a policy, that's how we

should debate as comrades, "Comrade but the policy says this...comrade but the constitution says this..." because we drew these things together saying these are going to be our guidelines. But if we fail to follow the guidelines that were set by ourselves we definitely failing and we not going to go anywhere and if we are still going to identify each other as enemies we're not going to go anywhere. And sometimes the problem is that we tend to elect people who don't have knowledge in particular things, which is not wrong. But if you don't have experience, ask. It's not difficult to ask for help, ask for help with this. It's the same thing if you could take a taxi here to Soweto and you want to come to my house, and you're thinking that you can come to my house by yourself, but if you ask you will find the house, "Do you know Thabo?" "Yes, I know him." But if you say, "I know, I'll just go" you won't find the house. So I think for me that's the most important part and you know, I don't want to lie to you comrade I don't want to have an enemy in an organisation like our organisation because if I do have an enemy that means that I don't want to go forward, I don't want to see this movement growing big but the problem also is that these personal egos within the leaders. You can't say we give you a position where you were elected by us and you want to control us not according to the policy that was set by us. You set your own policy personally then that's wrong. And that's wrong leadership, it's good if you're a leader and you say to me, "comrade, according to the constitution of the organisation, this and that cannot happen this way it must happen this way". Yes, it's good, we do have a constitution, our constitution says that if I want so much money and our policy says I should give you this much. Take me back to the policy comrade, but our policy says this and that. Then if we're failing to use the policy and constitution as our guidelines as a movement then wherever we're going, we're not seeing where we're going and if people are going to be elected into positions and identify the enemies once they are in those positions, also for me that's a problem because when you're a leader you say, "This is my leadership, when I go out of here I want people to talk of my leadership. Not because I tried to prove that whoever was wrong I can be better". It's not about someone being better here and all that, it's all about running the organisation the way it should run. There's no Messiah in the struggle, I think that's one thing that is also important to me. For example like comrade Trevor, you can't say I started the SECC so I can control what happens and whatever. That's not politics and if you doing that for instance as a comrade then the very thing that we say the ANC is doing, you're doing the same thing, taking decisions on behalf of people but you said we're fighting the ANC because they make decisions on behalf of people but you're

doing the same thing so it doesn't help. So for me I think that's been a problem in our movement that people get into election, whenever they get into leadership they already do have enemies and its sad because even if you do ask a person, why do you hate me?

Interviewer; Just the last question ... we're about to come to the end. What would you identify as the main challenges ahead? You might have already mentioned several of them but if you look at the present situation as you described it, some of the challenges, problems, the successes you've achieved and the general politics at the time. First of all is there a continuing role for organisations like the SECC and APF? And if so what might that role be?

Molefe: The role can still be there but I think will start now to have the mentality of NGOs e.g. like Khanya College where we would have a staff that's being paid. The problems now will be our projects, they will no longer be things that we want to fight for and make sure that communities have but they will be projects where you get funded and you just look into it and you just forget about it. And the issue why I say that it's ...it's sad that you go to a meeting and you spend 3-4 hours in a meeting and you never hear anyone talking about something that's happening in the community. It's all about who took our money? Who did this, who did that? And the very sad part is that now people are starting to open their eyes and say that our present government is not delivering, we want homes that we can go to, political homes we can go to and when they come to such a movement we are discussing personal issues. There was this guy, he was one of the researchers, he came here to do a research for college and all that, he was sad that he spent almost 6 months in South Africa but he never experienced any politics. He was saying that, "You know what I read on the Internet about APF and the coalition was so fun, I said to myself I want to be part of these guys. But it's sad that when I'm here I didn't see anything, each and every meeting that I attended was personal attacks, personal issues". And that's why I say moving forward I see us...people are going to start NGOs and organisations and affiliates will move away from the APF side, they are going to say we're now going to look for funding as organisations alone, going to look for funding as what what alone. Because currently of what's happening, of the issues that are happening. And that's why I'm saying sometimes it's the issue of what kind of leadership do you have, which is a problem. I was reading a clip of the report that partly was written by somebody and it's sad that in the report, time and time again its Vaal, which is sad. Is it because he came from Vaal and the report -

this is an organisational report? If I'm a funder and you want to tell me about this one particular affiliate, I can cut your money and say that, "I thought you were working with all these guys but if you working with these two then I'm giving you too much money." And it clearly shows that the leadership, the campaigns should be the campaign of the organisation as it is, it's not the campaigns of certain affiliates and all that. So that's why I'm saying, if we go on like this, APF as an organisation because come here for solutions and we don't give them solutions, we easily go down and dissolve and after dissolving people now will start looking for funding separately from their own affiliates saying that, "I do want something, I do want something" And with APF, looking at it very closely, if we don't change the current leadership that we have and if we don't change the current issues that we have, and if we don't say to them, "This is our policy guys, work with this policy" If we don't do those things for me that's where I see it going and it's sad that even if it can go to that extent that it dissolves, it's sad that it's only few affiliates that are there that can manage to ask for funding. The rest are not going to be able to do that. So it's slowly going there. And to me looking at the SECC, SECC you know, if there is one thing that is allowing SECC to be there all the time, it's those simple meetings that they do have. Here at APF people when we say, "Give us your report from an affiliate, it's personal, whoever did this. We should have a way of saying to people now let it be about politics, I don't know if we should start a committee which should deal with personal issues or what but as long as we waste time discussing personal issues here in the APF, people now will start stealing things from the office thinking that this movement is dying - let me take a computer so that when it dissolves I do have something at home. People will start stealing something so that people will say...people will start paying themselves so that whenever the movement dies at least I have something at home. Now I've always said to people, "Now if you know that you work as a comrade, and your work will speak for you, you don't have to be scared of a leader that's been put there by you". Because now there is this thing of saying, maybe the new leadership...it was sad on Saturday I think, when I was here and I was speaking to one of the comrades and she cried. It's sad that if people are crying like this, it's no longer a vision for them to be here. I've spoken to a number of comrades and all of them are saying, "You know what, I've had enough, I can't take this anymore!" But it's only then after I've talked with them that, "You know this is your movement, if you don't claim back your movement then you want it to die, you want to see it die. We don't want to see it die, we want to see it alive". So that to me is a problem, you just have to identify the problems and deal with the

issues. That's what I said to most of the comrades that, "You see the problem deal with the issues and you see that we move forward. We can't let people come here and kill our organisation. And as I've said that as long as, I think that's one thing that should be important, as long as we don't push the leadership to work, to follow the code of conduct and the constitution, our movement is going to go down because now people are doing things and not following the code of conduct and the constitution. They are just doing things because, I'm the leader now and it's sad.

Interviewer: Okay.

