J.F. So where were you born and when?

A.B. I was born lived in Pietermaritzburg and Durban when I was very young, but we moved to England and the United States, where my sister and then my brother was born, because my father was doing his MA at Oxford and then his PhD at Drew University in New Jersey.

J.F. So where were you born actually?

A.B. In Natal - in Pietermaritzburg.

J.F. In what year?

A.B. 1959 - so - and then we came back and we actually lived in then Rhodesia for a year on my grandmother's farm - I was - I started school then - then moved back to Durban aged about six or seven and I lived there till I was about 14, 15, so in a sense I grew up, apart from the few years overseas, in Natal.

J.F. Do you think there was any affect on you, the United States, or were you just too young?

A.B. Well, I think it was more an effect on my father because he took part in the civil rights movement there and met people like Martin Luther King and Andy Young and Jesse Jackson and Robert Kennedy and, you know, all sorts of people who were quite prominent then, and marched with them and faced the dogs and the teargas at various demonstrations, and I think that, from an early age, put him more on the kind of civil rights side of things in South Africa - in other words in - in terms of action, defiance, breaking the law, as opposed to the more traditional liberal side of things, and I think that began to rub off on me as well, so when it came to kind of make a break with traditional liberalism I didn't find it very difficult.

J.F. So then tell me what - were there any important influences on you in the years when you came back to Natal?

A.B. Well, I think a very important influence was the fact that my father was involved in what was called the National Youth Leadership Training Programme, which was influenced by a lot of American ideas of the '60s of the civil rights movement - it was religious based but non-demoninational, and it was one of the few programmes of the '60s that had black participants, not just as tokens but eventually in the majority - and I remember when I was a little boy going out to the campsite, which is up at Botha's Hill in Natal, and just meeting young black men and women who were coming on this programme for three months, and actually just learning to accept black people in a very natural way, without having to learn that later - I -

I never really had to go through that political lesson later on in my life, which I think - which was good for me - and then slightly later meeting people like Steve Biko, who was then the young medical student at Durban University who was in touch with my father, who was doing quite a lot of work in - in the period 19 - I think it was 1968, it would have been, and so for example, he came and discussed the question of the formation of SASO with my father, because they were together then in what was called the University Christian Movement, and there was a lot of dissatisfaction amongst the young black theologians who were putting forward ideas of black theology and rejecting the traditional white structures.

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A.B. And again I think because my father had gone through the question of black theology in the United States which had come a few years earlier, and also he was very critical at that stage of the white power structures in the church and always fought against them - again that was my background - that - you know, the questions of BC, black theology, the white power structures in the church at that stage, and then later on in politics as a whole started influencing me quite a lot.

J.F. Now you don't remember any sense of like maybe speaking or hearing Steve Biko speak and thinking this guy's black, the government says these people are bad news or inferior or whatever - you don't think you had any kind of process you went through - despite your father's attitude were you - where you compared the what you were getting from school and from C and E and all that?

A.B. No, I don't think it was ever as conscious as that - I'm sure I was still pretty naive, and I think my parents didn't try and politicise me as such - they just tried to let me grow up in a fairly normal environment as much as possible, and I mean Durban in those days was pretty racist, and I'm sure those attitudes reflected in me and without me even being aware of it, but I just - what I do know that there was never a stage in my life where I suddenly was struck, you know, like Paul on the road to Tarsus, you know, where the blinding flash of light that my life has been wrong and now I must suddenly change - I didn't ever have to go through a conversion that people like say, Beyers Naude talk about or - or others.

It was a fairly natural process that - I mean I remember when we got back, and I don't think I even knew this consciously, but the fact is that our house was watched by security policemen and that there was tension in it - I think that kind of just rubs off, and it was only talking to my father years later that I started putting a lot of these things into place, and a lot of it is with hindsight trying to explain how I grew up in a relatively non-racial atmosphere despite being in a white society, you know, or racist city and going to a white only school.

J.F. Did you sense that your family was different than others, that you were different than other schoolkids - was there ever any kind of experience with friends where you realised how different you were?

A.B. I started just before I went to high school, you know, about Standard Five, more from a religious point of view as opposed to a political, people would talk about Kaffirs or natives, and I would try never to do that, and I wasn't too sure why but I just knew it was wrong - and I remember once when we had a woman working for us, an African woman, and I referred to her as a Kaffir - I remember it was about - I must have been about Standard Three - and I remember my mother chasing me (Laugh) round with a wooden spoon to give me a hiding because of that, and from that moment onwards never referring to black people in derogatory terms, but not really knowing why or - or what it was all about really.

J.F. And would you say that there was a totally natural relationship - did you have friends who were black or was it more the people who your father related to who....

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A.B. It was the older - the older people - I never had - really had younger friends who were black, with the exception of when I was growing up in Rhodesia - in fact that was another thing that - that there was a young chap on the farm called Peter, and we would go off into the veldt together for - for hours and hours, and we planted a little garden together, and I just remember getting on very well with him, and I guess that kind of also rubs off.

J.F. So did you go to government schools?

A.B. Ja, ja - well, up till Standard Five, and then I went to a private church school, Methodist Church school, because by that stage my father was the president of the Methodist Church, and so it was kind of natural that I would go to a - a Methodist Church school.

J.F. And what year was that that you....

A.B. I would have started that in about, what, 1971.

J,F. Were you aware at all as you got into high school of the development of BC and the fact that these were blacks who were saying they didn't want to work with whites - did that ever?

A.B. Not really, no - no, it was never as political as that - and I mean thinking back to some of the events of the '60s, if I think of perhaps the assassination of Verwoed or - I mean I'm not conscious of that at all - I don't remember it, and I would have only been about seven at the time, but it's something that perhaps one could perhaps remember - I don't remember any of those things or any of the - or I suppose a lot of the times it was the silent '60s so I didn't know about a lot of those things.

My - I mean my first politicisation came very clearly in 1974 when my father stood for parliament and got in by 33 votes as a member of the then Progressive Party...

J.F. For Natal?

A.B. No, for Pinelands in Cape.

J.F. So you had moved there by then?

A.B. No, you see, it was a by-election, and he was - we were - had moved to Johannesburg because he'd taken - he'd been asked to and taken up a post as some sort of labour consultant with Anglo American, who at that stage were experiencing a lot of conflict on the mines, and they were trying to work out how - how the hell they'd deal with this - and on the basis of that I think my father, who had been asked to stand for the Progressive Party during the '60s and had constantly turned it down because he was in the church - at that stage he had moved out of the church because he had been fed up with the white church structures, and the fact that white ministers were still paid less than white ministers in those days, meant that in a sense he cut his ties with the church pretty effectively - moved to labour consultancy and within 18 months found himself in parliament.

It was a by-election - the Progressive Party weren't expected to win - he was just meant to be a kind of candidate to fly the flag and he got in by 33 votes - it was a bit of a fluke - and found ourselves having to move to Cape Town, so I spent my last two years of schooling in Cape Town at another Anglican private school called Bishops, which was - I mean going firstly to a church - to church - to church schools was both good and bad.

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A.B. There was good in the sense that I have slightly more liberal attitudes than say, a government school would have in terms of racial questions, slightly more, not - not always but perhaps slightly more tolerant - but on another hand they incredibly elitist - they incredibly (?) up tight - they - they awful institutions of control - and even - I mean looking back now I can see how they retarded my progress just generally as a human being - I mean going to an all boys boarding school is about the worst thing I think that anyone can be inflicted with, even though at the time I liked the sport and I - you know, it was good to have a whole lot of friends around.

But I do remember at Kersney when my father was in the Progressive Party I became involved in the debating union, which was modelled on the form of a parliament where you have the government and the opposition and the cross-bench, and getting involved with debates about racial questions between the Nationalists and the Progs, and at that school the Progs were the government and the Nationalists were in the opposition so (Laugh) it was a slight reversal of roles, and started picking up on political questions wider than the things that I'd known in the past.

J.F. Kersney is what (?)

A.B. It's that - that's the - that's the Methodist school in Natal that I first went to for three years....

J.F. How do you spell it?

A.B. It's K e a r s n e y - Kearsney College.

J.F. Why was '74 a political awakening when your father ran?

A.B. Because he got into parliament and suddenly I was the son of a parliamentarian, and he would come back, or I would go home and I would be meeting Zach de Beer and Gordon Wadell and Helen Suzman and Colin Eglin and Ray Swart, and they all were household guests.

J.F. Did you have any sense of what did the PFP represent to you then?

A.B. Well, I thought I mean just generally the kind of liberal principles, the kind of general anti apartheid principles, were for me quite significant - just doing away with racial discrimination, that's how I saw it - it was unfair that black people were treated like that - it was - it was not nice, and it had to go - it was - it wasn't much more complex than that. I remember working for the - in fact maybe I sh - perhaps even bef - you know, in fact it wasn't only with my father's election which came in June, because the election of '74 took place before that when I in fact - and I was in Johannesburg, and I worked for the Progressive Party then in the elections campaign putting up posters, as a lot of the youngsters do, and I became involved in politics per se, not knowing much about it but enjoying the kind of hurly-burly of politics, you know, and the kind of glitter and tinsel of it all.

But I - I - thinking back now there was actually one other very, very significant event which probably was even more important - as I became I think - I can't remember whether I was - I was chairperson or vice whatever of the young Progs in Johannesburg - we organised a - an outing or trip to Soweto - we wanted to find out what was going on there - and I remember we just hired a bus and decided to go there, quite naively, with a whole - about 20 of us.

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A.B. And firstly we weren't allowed to go on our own - we had to go with a West Rand Administration Board guide - and then I remember thinking, you know, bugger this, why should she come and tell us, and I remember being aware of government propaganda then very consciously - she insisted that we would go around to the - the nice parts of Soweto, if I remember - places like Dube the - and she kept pointing out these posh houses, and the fact that Baragwanath Hospital had treated so many black people and they'd built all these things, and we kept insisting that we go to other parts of Soweto and she wouldn't let us, and there was a fight over that, and finally we persuaded the driver, who I think was a black bus driver, to go, and he was telling us the other story of Soweto, but we went to the urban Bantu Council.

I remember meeting councillors there, and they were trying to tell us what was happening, and we - but I remember clearly not being - none of us were taken in by the propaganda - very distinctly it wasn't - we were able to resist that simply because it was so crude and they forced it on us, and we weren't having anything like that - and in a sense as a follow up to that we got in touch and invited some young black people our age to come through to Johannesburg and meet with us, and I remember them initially saying : No, we're not going to come - but then actually arriving at this meeting - and we sat for about five or six hours, and I remember taking notes and I - I really wish I had those notes today, because the kind - they listed all their grievances to us and they said you - and I remember clearly the main one was education - that question of Afrikaans in the schools

I mean so when '76 broke out two years later it was - it was all there two years before - I don't even remember the names of these - these young people or - or what organisation they were from - I can't even remember those details, but I do remember thinking whether they died during Soweto where - whether they left the country and what they doing now, you know, after the time - and I remember that was - for the first time that I'd met young black relatively radical militant people who were very articulate - I think - I suspect they were from the South African Student Movement, SASM - and in a sense meeting them as equals as opposed to a paternalistic meeting with a black servant and treating them well (?) of my youth, or meeting with older black people who I'd relate to as a youngster and it wasn't really much to do with me - that was my first proper, let me say South African political experience, and that I think changed my political outlook enormously.

J.F. Maybe I should let you isolate what was the next step - was there a break with liberalism or break with the church - was it going to university, or was there anything before that?

A.B. Well, perhaps before that I was in matric during 1976, and I mean thinking back now how unaware - even though I was relatively politicised compared to a lot of other people in my - in my class - and I remember feeling when our school formed a kind of white vigilante to protect the school buildings from the so-called black invaders I mean as most people saw it, and the parents got hysterical and armed themselves with cricket bats, I remember feeling vaguely disquieted by that but not really knowing why, and also why do they burn down their own schools, you know (................) in that stage - I remember going up on the hill in Cape Town and watching the fires on the Cape Flats burn, and not really knowing what was going on - not really being able to explain it but knowing that something drastic was happening.

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A.B. At that stage my parents were overseas for six months - my father was lecturing at Harvard, and he actually flew back to assess the situation and he informed me (?) some of the things that were going on - also prior to '76 it - perhaps it didn't come as a shock to me because he I think was one of the few MPs in the parliament that repeatedly warned in May and June that there was going to be an explosion, and I remember him coming back and saying : They are not listening to me and - because he was going off to Soweto and places like that and getting messages from people like Motlana and Qoboza who, you know, he had come into contact with, saying : Alec, there's going to be all hell here, and it's about Afrikaans in the schools and the education - and he would raise this in parliament, and I remember - I just distinctly remember him coming home.

Then they left for overseas before June because he'd got the six months appointment there, and as soon as it broke out in Cape Town in August he flew back for a few weeks and then went back to America - maybe because he wasn't around to explain to me that I didn't really know what it was going on, but I remember trying to think about it and think what the hell's happening here and - but not really knowing.

The next year I actually went into the navy to do my national service, and I managed to get into the navy as opposed to the army and thought well, I'm going to go now because it's - it's much easier to be in the navy - you don't go to the border - but at that stage the question of whether or not to go to the defence force didn't - had never been presented to me - it - it - I certainly never remember going through agonies of - of deciding - it was just get it out the way and get - just get it over and done with.

And I remember being in the same bungalow was the - the then kind of heir apparent to the Nationalist Party, Connie Mulder's son, Coerne Mulder - and I remember being a little bit nervous that I was the son of a PFP MP and how were the kind of other people there going to react to me, but they reacted more - or worse to him, I remember feeling, to my satisfaction, because he was actually quite a lazy - he didn't really pull his weight - his father would arrive in a big black governmental car and take him out for special privileges, which I made sure my father didn't come near me, you know (Laugh) over that time, so that was just a little point there.

But what then did during '77, I think, where I started really feeling angry about the situation was when Steve Biko was killed, and that - suddenly I remembered that this was the guy that I used to hear stories from or I used to see around the house or, you know, I used to chat to when I was a young boy - and I remember having a blazing row with my commanding officer in the navy who tried to justify, you know, the fact that this guy was a communist and that he had killed himself because that's what all communists do, and I just remember refusing to accept that and starting to - to - to feel very bitter and angry about the whole system, and so I couldn't wait to get out of the navy.

And I went straight to UCT that year and within five months or six months I was elected to the SRC - it was a - quite a natural process, and in fact it was Richard who had asked me to stand for the SRC - I stood with him and a group of - of nine people - I was still a liberal at that stage - I was still in the Progressive Party youth - I was heading it up in the Western Cape in fact when I - when I - at university - I was still involved with organisations like RAG, but I had started coming in contact with the campus left, which had started me questioning my kind of liberal perspectives on things, or start wondering what a radical critique was and trying to understand that.

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A.B. And secondly definitely renouncing my religious beliefs at that stage, and since then I've been a confirmed atheist - I'm not too sure why it was such a harsh reaction, but I think because of the type of religion that I'd experienced at church schools, in a sense it's very easy to reject that very quickly, because it is so phoney and so see-through.

Anyway we stood as a kind of liberal left coalition on the SRC, and we all got on - it was a huge election - the right wing was very powerful at that stage because there was a lot of Rhodesians getting up-tight about the war in - here in Rhodesia - and fighting like mad, and there was actually cases where the right wing on campus were armed - Brian Hack was one of the leaders, and he later was implicated in the shooting at Colin Eglin's house, and they raided two other fellows who were in the CSA - that was Conservative Student Alliance - had found an arsenal of weapons - there were plans, for example, to kidnap people like Richard and other chaps on the SRC who were kind of of the left at that particular stage - thunder (?) flashes were thrown at our meetings - meetings were banned on campus - there was general - generally there were a lot of clashes on campus.

Anyway we came in a sense into - into power on the SRC - we defeated the - the right wing - and I remember that being an intensely political stage of my life, still very much confined to white student politics. What I do - O.K., what - that year - that was '78, and I remember the then NUSAS president, who was Auret van Heerden, coming down, and when was it - September 12th. - giving a speech on - on Biko day which we were commemorating, which was a very solemn occasion in those days - Biko was really the only black leader that we really knew about, and now he was dead - we -

We didn't really know about Mandela and the political prisoners at all, or the exile movement - we hadn't really heard of those - it was still vague and - and I remember Auret giving a talk where he paid tribute to Biko, but said that BC was - was - he - he explained the difference between a BC philosophy and a non-racial philosophy, and he started raising ideas that BC was not the way forward, you see, and we were all horrified and shocked that a white could criticise blacks - you know, we - you know, and why I'm mentioning this particularly because it raises the question of how one relates to black people as a white and how one is affected it by BC - at that stage we were all convinced that our only role was on the white campus - blacks didn't want us and they didn't need us, and we accepted that - we felt that was fine - we did - who are we to force our way into the black ranks.

And some people were having contact with black people through the wages committee and the trade unions, and we felt O.K., that was fair enough, but only the lucky few got into that sort of work - other people through the community commissions got in contact with the squatter camps and did a lot of work there, but by '77, '78 those people had all been banned - people like Graeme Bloch, Allen Aderem, Willie Hofmeyr, Debbie Budlender - a lot of those people were removed from us and so we were a whole new generation.

J.F. Who was the second one after Graeme Bloch?

A.B. Allen Aderem.

J.F. How do you spell the surname?

A.B. A d e r e m - he was very involved in the unions and in the community struggles of '76, '77, and he was placed under house arrest because of that for five years.

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A.B. He's now in New York - he's a top doctor there. But I remember the speech of Auret's actually for the first time started me thinking about well, is it right to - to challenge what blacks are saying, or why (?) must we as white students accept everything that they say - and I didn't resolve that question but it started posing itself for me.

The second contact that we then had with - with black people was from Crossroads, where some young black students - black youth made contact with the SRC, and they said they needed money and they needed help, resources - and we rather uncritically decided that this was our mission in life, to give these people help and resources. Now years later I found out that in fact one of those chaps was actually a scoundrel, and he's still around there, a leader of one of the vigilante groups....

J.F. Johnson (?)

A.B. No, this was a chap called Howard Ntloqo - anyway we weren't aware of anything like that - he was black and he was there to be supported, you know, and so - and we had secret meetings with him and it was all kind of hush hush and that was - you know, at that stage we would still spend more effort having contact with Afrikaans students than with black students, because our attitude then was well, Afrikaaners are going to be in power in the future and if we can influence them that'll help change apartheid - in other words, we had a very skewed understanding of how political change occurs.

But those were crucial years for me personally as well as for the student movement as a whole, because within the space of those two years we had transformed that whole notion - I remember having - we had a furious debate on our SRC - I think this was probably my second year on the SRC, and by that stage we'd had new elections and I was vice president - where we said we - we will have nothing more to do with Afrikaans campuses and Afrikaans students, and instead we will seek contact with black students, which was starting to emerge in the then formed COSAS in '79, and AZASO, which at that stage had broken away from AZAPO and were starting to organise on - on the other black campuses.

And then at the end of that year, end of '79 I was elected NUSAS president, to become, from what I can make out, the youngest NUSAS president ever, at the age of 20 (Laugh) - and looking back I was very naive and very - very young - and within a month the whole Williamson scandal had - had broke - so that's something I had to cope with. He'd come back, and as a former NUSAS office bearer I had to answer questions about, you know, question of infiltration on NUSAS and things like that, so I was in the hot - hot seat right away.

J.F. You mean questions from the press?

A.B. Well, the press would phone up and say : Would you like to comment that a former NUSAS treasurer is a lieutenant in the police force, you know - and just ag, stupid questions like that, but you've got to be - in your first month as NUSAS president have to cope with those things (................) the Citizen and everything like that - plus, you see, that year another thing we had to face was Zimbabwean independence, with the right wing on the campuses going mad - really I mean beating up our people, threatening to beat us up, threatening to kidnap - really quite ugly scenes at places like Rhodes and 'Maritzburg, and I was - I remember being terrified speaking in some of the residences because these guys with their kind of Kill the Gook tee shirts on running up onto the stage and smashing the microphone and, you know, really being very unpleasant, so kind of learning the hurly-burly of - of politics in facing the right wing there quite early on.

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A.B. I remember speaking at Stellenbosch and again our meeting was broken up by thugs there - that was '79. I think I was very fortunate when I - where - in - the time when I was in student politics was a time when NUSAS as a white student organisation actually made the contact with black students, initially privately, behind the scenes, you know, working out how we going to respond to each other, and then after a while more publicly - and the number of campaigns that were very important for that process of starting to cement alliances between white students - at that stage white students were the only real visible organisation in the white community other than the formal parliamentary politics, and there was no area committees, there was no ECC, JODAC or anything like that - it was only white students that kind of flew the democratic flag in the white area, as it were, as opposed to the Progressive Party.

And in fact most people on campus at that stage still supported the PFP, still voted in the elections, still saw parliament as the only place where change could come about, and we had to be very careful about that - we found it very hard to explain that in fact change was going to come from somewhere else, because at that stage most white students said : Well, if it's not parliament it's violence, and we don't support violence - and it was only through our contact with black students that we were able to start inviting them onto campus to explain their perceptions of the future.

Now the campaign that were important there were firstly the Freedom Charter campaign of 1980, which we ran in conjunction with COSAS, and I remember in NUSAS actually assisting with the printing of thousands and thousands of Freedom Charter pamphlets on behalf of COSAS - you know, in a sense we had the resources and we had access to money, and they would approach us and say : We need 10,000 pamphlets for tomorrow- and we would print that and see that as our role, as a support role for student struggles - at that stage the community organisations hadn't actually taken off.

But another area of struggle, particularly in Cape Town, which broke at the same time was the support for labour struggles, particularly the Fattis & Monis strike which was taking place at the time - then later on the meat strike with the General Workers Union - and then later on still the - the - the SAWU strike - the - the Wilson Rowntree sweet boycott, which we organised on campus, we printed posters, pamphlets - we had demonstrations because of that.

But I think our biggest achievement during 1980 was bringing UCT out for a whole week of boycotts - most of the university in solidarity with the black schools boycotts, which were happening round - round the middle of the year - and we had some quite - what we would do is that a lot of black students would come onto campus both at UC (?) and at Wits and in a sense inject a spirit of - of militancy into the white students, and we would do this deliberately to try and start non-racial audiences going and actually try and break down this notion amongst white students that in fact their only role was in the white community, but what we -

I remember we spent a lot of time discussing these things - we were very conscious that we couldn't just allow white students to go into black communities to make their own independent contacts to in a sense do what they wanted in black communities - we were still very aware that black people had to run their struggle, that we could assist, and that some individuals even through - in the unions or wherever could play an important role, but our duty in fact was to discipline white students, to stop them running off and doing whatever they wanted in the black community, helping squatters there and getting under the people's feet there, you know, and so that was the whole debate.

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A.B. And I think some people said : We want to do what we like, who are you to stop us - and you know, those were the sort of debates on campus where we were being undemocratic and things like that - and maybe I can just say that the campaigns I think that NUSAS had run a few years before that were important - in 1979 it was education for an African future, and what we meant by that is not only changing the - the course content of our - of our education and democratising university and preparing it for an African future, which is still very much undefined, but also people must learn appropriate skills for a new South Africa and they must stay in the country at all costs - our role was here - it wasn't, you know, that whites, we - I remember we had huge campaigns on this, stay in the country, even if that meant going to the defence force at that stage and, you know, later on that became a bit of a debate, whether one could still go into the defence force or not, but at that stage that wasn't the issue - conscription wasn't the issue then - it was staying in the country - it was sort of '79, 1980, around about that time.

1981 I was re-elected NUSAS - what I should really mention is that in 1980 on June 16th. I was detained and spent the next two and a half months in solitary, being interrogated by Craig Williamson and others, and I think I learned again a lot about politics there from a different perspective - I think I - I hopefully was toughened up - I learned how to live on my own or cope on my own - and in those days it was under the Section Six of the Terrorism Act, which meant you had no access to anyone - I didn't get a shower for two months, or a bath or anything like that - there was no exercise facilities, so conditions were - were fairly primitive compared I think to what they are now - although as a white person, as a son of a MP I - I was clearly protected at that - I suppose at that stage from things like torture or mishandling, which never happened - it was just intense interrogation for 12 hours a day, some - not every day - sometimes they'd leave me for a week, I wouldn't - I wouldn't see them.

And it was in connection with a trip that I had made to Lesotho, where I had come in contact with some A.N.C. people, and they were alleging during my detention that I in fact had joined the A.N.C. at that stage and was working for them as a NUSAS president, and I of course denied that and said that it was completely fortuitously that I'd come into contact with A.N.C. people there but - and that didn't mean to say that I was working for them or I'd signed up as a member - but I remember going to Roman (?) University and meeting young black students there and being very impressed with them and as it - I mean some of them were A.N.C. people, although I didn't know at the time - some were from Namibia, others were from Lesotho and other countries in Africa, and I just remember meeting and being very impressed by them.

I went to a - I didn't even know what the meeting was about at that stage, but I remember finding it was a June 26th. meeting, freedom day meeting and that - Williamson was particularly keen to know why had I gone to that meeting - that was the first time that June, 1979 that I saw the Freedom Charter - it was for the first time - I remember reading it and then kind of tearing it up (Laugh) being very nervous about it that - that you acquire (?) - I thought it was a banned document at that stage - well, in a sense it was.

I remember reading Mandela's book for the first time, No Easy Walk (?) to Freedom in - in June 1979, and starting to realise who Mandela was at that time and what the A.N.C. was, and meeting quite a lot of different people who just explained all sorts of parts of South African history, and I think that that also had quite an effect on me.

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A.B. I started being able to see white student politics in a broader perspective and also realising that white students were, certainly from - from the way people put it, were encouraged to continue with their work - people felt that they were doing good work and, you know, that was encouraging for me to find out that black people knew that NUSAS existed and that they - they were - they wanted us to continue our work - that they didn't reject us, and that was very important obviously for white students at the time.

Anyway for - for that trip I spent two and a half months in detention.

J.F. They didn't take you till the following year?

A.B. Ja.

J.F. Why do you think they waited that long?

A.B. I think they didn't know much about the trip - I think they - it's a whole long story, but what basically the - the short of it is that the person that was with me at the time, when they were seized at the end of that year, and despite warnings, had stayed with Craig Williamson, who was still in Geneva, and had actually told him this whole story - on coming back we pressed this particular individual, who I'm sure you know - because by that stage Craig Williamson had come back - it was just a few weeks before he was exposed - and we said : You stayed with Williamson, what did you tell him - and this person said : Nothing, I didn't talk about our trip to Lesotho - so I accepted that, but it became clear that he had basically given Williamson the whole story not knowing that he was a - not knowing that he was a South African police spy, and that's how they got onto us, but that's why it took so long, and then presumably after that when Williamson came back he initiated an investigation and they were - followed up contacts in Lesotho and this and that, and then finally detained us.

J.F. Was it - were other people detained besides you?

A.B. Ja, ja - well, just as one of the fellow (?) and he spent the two and a half months in detention, also interro - we were kept separately - we were both then released and he left - I think at the end of that year left the country, went into exile and I - he's staying here at the moment.

J.F. And was there any sense that you got from the Williamson interrogation of the importance, perhaps the inordinate importance that the police attach to white organisations - you were beginning to have a realisation that there were blacks who accepted whites, that there wasn't just a BC point of view, that there was the A.N.C., yet Williamson was just - clearly his beat was whites and they considered it really important - is there anything you could say about that?

A.B. Well, you see, I think at that stage, and probably - and I think it's good that it's changed - but I think whites at that stage were playing a disproportionately important role in terms of national politics - in terms of the revival of a lot of - I mean like the Freedom Charter campaign - the fact that NUSAS ran that nationwide means that Freedom Charter's got not only onto the campuses but into all the schools and all the communities, often for the first time since the 1950s, so in a sense NUSAS suddenly found itself, and me as NUSAS president suddenly find myself playing an inordinately important role - a lot of the black leadership was still banned at that stage - I could travel around

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A.B. NUSAS had a bit of a budget, so I would go to Durban and meet people there - I'd go to 'Maritzburg and meet more people there - I'd - I would go to Johannesburg and then fill people in on trends, on - I'd present a report not just to white students but to black leadership in each place - at Rhodes - even in P.E. - and in a sense I as an individual president and then NUSAS as a whole was playing a role out of proportion, and suddenly whites became very important for those black leaders to just simply be briefed, to get information, to keep in touch with other - as people started emerging again from decade - a decade of violence or years of being banned or people coming off the Island and not, you know - they - they often, not always, and I wouldn't - I don't want to - and I'm not saying this to over-exaggerate our importance, and I think that - because that's a very dangerous thing for whites to play that role - but I think it - I think NUSAS at that stage, together with COSAS, played quite an important part in reviving the kind of Charter tradition around the country, and with that reviving on the non-racial tradition from '79 onwards, and I just happened to be NUSAS president at that stage.

But I think if you look at our Free Mandela campaign of 1980, reviving the specific things - Mandela was non-racial - he worked with other whites - he supported the Freedom Charter - the Freedom Charter campaign that went with that - and then the following year in - in - in May 1980 the anti Republic Day campaign, which was the first of the series of broad front coalitions against the government, where we had black trade unions, the emerging trade unions - we had NUSAS, COSAS and AZASO - we had the NIC - we had the Black Sash - we had the - Sam Buti from Alexandra, who at that stage was still a prominent community leader - Matlana, Qoboza, Tutu, you know - NUSAS played quite a key role in that campaign.

We printed over a million anti Republic Day pamphlets - the flags were burned at our meetings - I was then detained again at that - just before the Republic Day - having done a nationwide tour with Wantu Zenzile, the COSAS president, and speaking on the same platforms - and again I mean both personally that had an enormous effect on me just speaking to Wantu and - and hearing his history and the history in - in the - particularly from the Eastern Cape, where he was from.

I think I was the first NUSAS president to speak on a black campus, you know, since the 1960s, when I spoke at Durban Westville at the beginning of 1981, and again it was the - the - the black comrades that I was working with there were very apprehensive that this would be rejected - they were still - they thought maybe they were in the minority, that BC was still going to say : Ag, we don't want this NUSAS president on our campus - but the meeting was packed out - it went very well - it was the first time that I gave an Amandla salute - I mean in those days you just didn't do those sort of things.

It was the first time I talked about the Freedom Charter and why I supported that - so ja, I think those two years for me were - were enormously important. Anyway I - I was detained - Wantu Zenzile was also detained at that stage....

J.F. When was this?

A.B. That was May, 1981....

J.F. Before Republic Day?

A.B. Ja, just a few days before to get us out of circulation - and I was kept in Cape Town for two weeks and then in - I was driven up to Pretoria Central, I think more out of spite than anything else, because they didn't interrogate me there or anything.

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A.B. And I was kept there I think it was for about five weeks - four or five weeks - anyway when I was released I was served with a five year banning order - flown down to Cape Town and served with it, and that kind of immediately cut me off from student politics, from NUSAS - I wasn't allowed to study, you know, and had to undergo all the normal things that are associated with a banning order, so again that - that was a different phase of my life....

J.F. When was that - how long were you detained that time?

A.B. I would say six weeks, ja.

J.F. So we're supposed to go till '86.

A.B. Ja, we would (?) have finished June, '86.

J.F. Just to get back a bit - did - can you remember - you kind of went over it so fast, anyone specifically articulating a black person or articulating their belief in non-racialism to you and what your reaction was?

A.B. Ja, Wantu was very - I mean he - he - I remember seeing him argue with other black students and saying : You know, I'm going to resign before I let, you know, non-racialism be challenged - I remember people in NIC defending NUSAS publicly their alliance or their - their working relationship with NUSAS - you know, people like George Supersat - people like Paul David, you know, who were - who were in the NIC at that stage, or who still are - people like Archie Gumede, you know, the - the Natal people were very principled about that - and then also the student leadership of AZASO as well - people like Joe Phaahle, who was the president of - of - of AZASO at that stage - Alf Karim - they were very, very strong on that, and I mean when we would kind of wilt we'd say : No, we - we actually don't think we should be, you know, involved - they would say : You know, but that's nonsense, you know, you - you - you must play a role and, you know, we - we will stick by that, we - we are encouraging that - those were the sort of influences that I remember at the time of people actually specifically stating non-racialism - this is our tradition - this is the - the tradition of the congress movement.

J.F. Did they come as a surprise or a source of support to you - did you....

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J.F. .... and express their support for you?

A.B. Ja, of course it was important - I mean I think that I never would have had the confidence to speak on a black campus as an activist if they hadn't given me that support - I would have been terrified - and I probably wouldn't have been able to get up on a white campus and give, I think, the first Amandla salute that any NUSAS president had given - I remember - I mean that was - caused enormous shock - that was in 1981.

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A.B. The day before I was detained I'd told - I had just come from this tour and I was very kind of excited about it and I told some people - Richard Good was one of them - I said : Listen, I'm going to do this and you must give the kind of response to it - and they were all kind of seated strategically in the front of this enormous audience and I greeted people like this, Amandla, and everyone was shocked because this was - people didn't know whether (.........) black power salute or what it meant, and - and I remember the security police in - interrogating me for two days after this - why had I given a black power salute if I was a white person - and so we were learning a lot of those things, and I would never have done that if I hadn't been with Wantu, if I hadn't come from Natal, you know, with the students there - they all had an enormous influence on me, there's no doubt about it.

Then also we had begun to ask Helen Joseph to speak on campus again, and again she would then tell us of how the - the Congress Alliance worked, and how she as a white person was number one accused in the treason trial, and we slowly started realising what had actually happened in the 1950s - so the whole of this time was our attempt to just rediscover the 1950s which we didn't know anything about, so NUSAS brought out a people's history of South Africa, which focused on the '50s - we brought out that book Dissention in the Ranks, which focused on the Congress of Democrats, the I think Black Sash, the Liberal Party and NUSAS, looking at - specifically that was an intervention showing that sometimes how whites in the Liberal Party had reacted badly to the black movement and in fact had formed alliances with P.A.C. against the A.N.C. because of the perceived communists in the A.N.C., and we felt that that wasn't the role of whites at all - and we were specifically reviving that era of the Congress of Democrats - the idea of blacks participating as - of whites participating as equals in the struggle - that was what we were doing throughout 1980, 1981.

J.F. Did everyone go along with it or did you have some whites saying : Look, this is not on - or responding in a liberal - from the liberal tradition, or was it pretty successful?

A.B. I think there were still remnants of - of white liberals who argued that we shouldn't cut our contacts with say, Afrikaans students, but in a sense at that stage we had to in order to allow us to make the contacts with black students - I mean I think now the student movement is right to go back and make contact with Afrikaans students, but that's because we are part of UDF and I mean the position of - of whites in general is - is - is unchallenged - but at that stage in a sense we had to prove that our first priority was with the black struggle, the extra-parliamentary struggle, with the community struggle those sorts of - of groupings, and not with white politics, so we would make more and more statements against the Progressive Party.

We would, as I said, clearly cut our ties with Afrikaans students.

J.F. Tell me a bit - the other thing that you didn't go over in enough detail for me was the break with liberalism - your own father maintains his position - just tell me a bit - what your reaction was - why you actually made the break.

A.B. O.K. - firstly I saw - I think I always thought of my father as a bit of an unorthodox liberal or - or more as - as a person with democratic ideas as opposed to - I mean he - he's never been a kind of classic free enterprise liberal, you know, wedded to a kind of 19th. century conservative liberal ideal - it's been more - I mean he's always stood for majority rule, even though in the Progressive Party he was bound by a party.

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A.B. I mean just privately at home I know - I mean he just said : Look, it's going to come, and there must be one person one vote in this country - that's the bottom line - and so I think I never had to kind of fight with those sort of ideas because that was always part of us, but clearly I remember grappling with ideas - if you're a radical does that mean to say you don't believe in freedom of speech or freedom of expression or a lot of those kind of liberal ideals, which at that stage I still felt were - well, I think they are important.

I remember there was a chap called Steven Bowey who - who Richard would know and who was with us on the SRC, and he was one of the people that had actually studied a bit of - or done (?) left wing courses - and there were quite a few left wing courses at - at UCT at that stage through the courts reform and people like Ian Phimister arrived, you know, at UCT, and Dave Kaplan was there and Mike Morris and quite a few left academics, and so in second and third year we would start doing Marxist courses, mainly focusing on questions of underdevelopment, imperialism, relationship between third world and first world - you know, that whole Arreghli, Emmanuel Wallerstein (..............) Andre Gunderfrank school.

But we also studied the Cuban revolution - we looked at - we did courses on China and the Soviet Union, so for the first time I would read stuff on socialist history and socialist revolutions - but then also I mean - I remember battling with this in my first year, not accepting the left, feeling that they were often undemocratic, often too rigid, often too dogmatic, and I suppose often they still are (Laugh)

I remember very clearly going in right at the beginning of my first year - going with Kate Philip, who became a NUSAS president subsequently as well, to a seminar organised by the left on campus SSD and totally rejecting that was said there and vowing that, with Kate Philip, that we would never get involved in the left - that we totally rejected this, because they wanted to tear down everything, and I think at that stage the left was very crude in - and not particularly sophisticated, and I remember a - one person saying that the only reason why the white liberals want to do away with the pass laws is so that they can have cheaper labour in the cities, which was a bit of a kind of crude analysis, and I remember getting up as a very naive youngster at this thing and saying : Well, I think that some of these liberals are - are very sincere, not just because they belong to Anglo American, you know - and of course this was howled down with derision, and I remember feeling very upset about that.

I remember we were shown a film on Summerhill, which was that Canadian Alternative (?) School, sort of liberal alternative, and I remember thinking this was actually quite a good idea, and then the left people would get up and critique at this liberal alternative to - to conservatism, and I remember being shocked by this. I think also I was very influenced at that stage by the women's movement much more than the left in terms of challenging my ideas - there was a very strong women's movement on campus at the time, and I was involved with one - with a woman who was a member, and she would challenge me personally and then just politically, perhaps even more so than now, questions of women's liberation were - were assuming as much importance if not more than questions of the left - that the left was posing - and again it was very much western feminism, but I think - was it that year or the year after we invited I think Juliet Mitchell to come and give our academic freedom address.

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A.B. And we were all reading Shulamith Firestone and Anne Oakley - I remember having long discussions and seminars in the women's movement - you know, we formed a kind of men's group which allied itself to the women's movement and, you know, that - that type of politics - questions of democratic structures, questions of hierarchies, questions of male dominance and leadership were all being posed very strongly at that stage, and I think I - I was even more influenced by that initially than by left wing ideas - and I think because the - the feminists were also challenging, you know, liberal power structures as much as they were challenging the left power structures started making me aware of the limitations of liberalism, and - and from then it was also because of my intellectual studies, because of the challenge of the women's movement, and also because I was on the SRC again for the second time as a member of the left as opposed to a liberal - it was during that first year that it kind of after initial buckling and sort of fighting for the first six months I became a member of the left really, or saw myself as a kind of left wing, or specifically not as a liberal thinker.

I mean I remember having to break with quite a few of my friends who were liberals and who were very upset that now I had kind of gone over to the left, but I remember at that stage I resigned in my first year resigned from the Progressive Party, so that was - that was the clear break - but it took a couple of months, and it was both personal influences from friends - people talking to me - I remember for the first time very clearly a few weeks after our first SRC elections this chap that I mentioned, Steve Bowey, explaining to me what historical materialism was, and I remember being amazed - that -

I remember that day thinking that religion is - is clearly, you know, basically superstition, as far as I saw it, and that made - that was quite a profound influence on me.

J.F. And how did your father take the break of liberalism - you resigned from the PFP (.......)

A.B. Well, I think he was never - I mean entirely happy with the PFP, and so when I would come back and say : Ag, the PFP has done this - he'd say : Well, maybe it's not quite like that, but I agree with the essence, you know - he was certainly never friends with the Harry Schwartzes of the world right from day one, and the Gordon Wadells and the kind of Anglo controls - I think growing up as a Methodist Minister where we were always I mean relatively poor - I mean there's no doubt about that that compared to a lot of my other friends we never had the big houses and the swimming pools and the cars that they had.

Even though I went to a private school I went there because my father could get me in for free or very cheap because he was a Methodist Minister as opposed to paying large fees, and so - so I was never very impressed with, and he wasn't either, with the kind of wealth of the PFP and those kind of - that kind of - those - that sort of part of it, and the sort of big money spenders and things like that - also because he had always retained his contacts with black people in the communities, the friends of Steve Biko's, and growing up in a church background he had known Rick Turner - he had known Beyers Naude, Brian Brown, Donald Woods - I mean that whole kind of radical liberal lot who'd all been banned.

He'd been in the Spro-Cas commission in '73 - Jimmy Polley, Basil Moore - he - he'd been a NUSAS vice president for many years - he had spoken at the Free all Political Prisoners campaign in 1971 with Mewa Ramgobin.

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A.B. In '74 he had defended the - the - the trialists then - you know I mean publicly identified with them - and therefore even though I came back and - and was criticising the - the PFP he wasn't upset about that because he himself was - always saw himself on the left of that and clearly was never - never happy - so it wasn't a major conflict of interest.

There were certainly issues that were probably - I mean I think also then when one discovers the left you become a very kind of dogmatic and crude leftist, and I'm sure he would argue with me on those points, and I think that was also quite good because it forced me to actually really work out exactly what I believed in instead of just taking very rigid or flippant blinds from people - and so I think what he did teach me is - is not challenge my right to believe in what I wanted to, but make sure that it was thorough, make sure that it was not rigid, and that I listened to other people, and I hope I do that, you know, up till this day.

So I think his influences and where he challenged me was not so much on my content but on the way I went about things and did I listen to other - or was there a tolerance - was there - was there a flexibility in my thinking - did I actually believe in what I was saying at all stages or was I just, because I'd heard it from, you know, was I just parroting what other people - what I'd read in the books - and so I think it was quite good he challenged me and, you know, that sharpened my thinking at all stages, so I don't -

We never had fall outs - it was always very good discussions at home - right up till this day we have major debates and discussions - and I think just as he's influenced me I think I've influenced him - I've kept him in touch through UDF and what is happening, and I think the fact that he's now resigned from parliament I think shows that the fact that we've - we never rejected each other, and to this day I'll defend him, you know, personally as my father and he would - I mean when I was detained he defended me down to the ground, there's no doubt about that - absolutely - he said : I don't care what my son has done, I'm supporting him.

And in fact the week that I was released he and my mother were going to chain themselves to the railings outside parliament, so you know, it was that very close family background. Also at that stage my sister was on the SRC - later my brother was editor of the student magazine - he's sub - he's refused to go to the army now, and was fined this (just) last year for that - even my little brother when I was in detention got a spastic colon from worry about me, so the whole family's involved in this, you know, and it's - it's never been a question of rejecting them at all, or them rejecting me, and it's been very helpful, and I think it ha - I think -

I think he has taught me to really never accept anything at face value - always probe a little bit deeper - never just take a line from anyone - never, you know, bind myself to one thing at the exclusion of everything else - so I'd hope my kind of left understanding, what I would hope to be a kind of scientific understanding of the world is not a dogmatic and rigid one - that it is always questioning things.

J.F. And your rejection of the church, how did he take that?

A.B. Well, you see, he'd already rejected it - he doesn't go to church.

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A.B. From being the head of the Methodist Church and being a minister for 20 years he's no longer in the church. He doesn't - I think he would be still a religious person but not - not a very religious person at all, and he certainly doesn't go to church from - you know, from being- from doing his doctorate in theology. Just - just on that in - he - he did his doctorate on - on - on - part of it was on John Wesley, but he was always influenced very much by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who had opposed Hitler as a church person - you know, broken the law and actually had planned to take part in the plot to assassinate Hitler, and had been executed by the Nazis in a German police cell - and I remember my father telling me the story and it was - he was very influenced by that and - and I think that also the question of breaking the law or not accepting the traditional constitutional framework for change meant that it never was really a problem for me to accept those new ideas - never was a massive break - it was never a huge wrestling with it.

I think we all - our whole family saw ourselves as slightly different from the traditional liberal mould, and it was very easy for me to - to - to take up a specifically, you know, left wing or materialist (?) position.

J.F. What did you do when you were detained - that was what, from July, '81, June, '81 - your (.......) banning?

A.B. Oh, well, I applied for and got permission the next year to finish my degree, so I firstly got that out of the way - that's 1982....

J.F. So when did you actually get banned from - was it from June?

A.B. June, '81, ja - and I almost immediately got a job, or I bought a share of the bookshop, and that's what kept me going, and that's when I read and I read for - for the - for two years solidly....

J.F. Open books?

A.B. Open books, ja, ja, and that was the one way I could keep in contact with people and - but I mean it's very - you can get very cut off.

J.F. Even though people were - or just one person at a time was allowed to speak to you at the bookshop?

A.B. Ja, ja, ja, and there was constant pr - you know, and you - you definitely get cut off from people socially and you get very up tight - looking back now I mean if it had gone on longer than the two years that it did go on I'm sure I would have been a very different person - it definitely affects how one approaches life because you just stuck in your house and you see one person at a time - you can't get away - and you start policing yourself, and because they keeping constant watch on you you've always got this paranoic feeling behind you.

But I think I managed to retain contact with sort of former students, both black and white, and they would come and see me and fill me in on things. I remember applying for and getting permission to run the comrades' marathon, not particularly because I wanted to run the comrades' marathon, but that meant I could get to Durban and spend a brief few hours with people there and just swop ideas and information, because a lot of people at that stage were banned - there was a whole spate of bannings related to all different things, so a lot of people couldn't travel at that stage.

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A.B. I mean there was - I think at that stage over 100 people were banned in the country - and then in - in - in July, '83 they switched over to the new Internal Security Act, which didn't automatically reban everyone who was banned, and so I think at that stage they lifted the banning orders of over 80 people, and it was actually an enormous scene where - it was at a NUSAS conference - it coincided with a NUSAS conference in July in Cape Town, and a lot of people had come down for it once they were unbanned - they all made a bee-line for it - and I remember seeing - who was it - he was - Guy Berger was unbanned - Keith Coleman was unbanned, and Clive van Heerden - people I hadn't seen for two years, or certainly not heard from officially - you know, obviously we could get notes to each other - and a lot of the other black leaders that were banned at the time were - were unbanned, and that's really the time, that July, where the momentum - a lot of momentum was going to form UDF, which was launched two months after that - or six weeks after that, literally, because I mean two weeks after I was unbanned UDF in the Western Cape was launched - it was actually called the Cape Democratic Front at that stage, and I was elected treasurer then onto the executive -

And then UDF was launched and we in the Western Cape played quite a big role because it was held down there in - in Mitchell's Plain in getting it on the road and as - as an executive member I was very involved in that actually the launch and then meeting a lot of people for the first time from all over the country, and then at (?) the first meeting after that I was elected as one of the Cape representatives to the - to the national executive, but that at that stage was much bigger than it is now - at that stage it had about 35 people - I think there were five from each region and then three from the smaller regions that were still forming, and one or two people co-opted on, you know, and it was quite an unwieldy structure, and I served on that from that time until April,'85, so it was for at least a year and a half I was on the national executive of UDF and on the local executive of - of Cape Town as treasurer.

Anyway perhaps to just take it through, I stood down from the executive when we had our first elections at the end - when was it - in March, '85, that's right, firstly because I was actually physically in quite a bad way - I was getting a lot of these stomach pains and I was just completely overworked, and my relationship had just broken up after five years, and I had a chance, I knew, to go overseas for two months, so I kind of stood down from the executive and took this opportunity to go overseas and really just - I'd been kind of going flat out since NUSAS days and it kind of all caught up with me at that particular stage, so I really just had a great time.

I went to the States, met some, you know, interesting people there, and went to Europe and really just - just kind of did all the things that one does overseas, and came back to find - and came back in time for the Cradock funeral and the state of emergency - the first one - whereupon I was co-opted back onto the executive - the shadow executive because the old executive was all in detention - that shadow executive was all detained - two of us managed to go underground before - we heard within minutes of them coming round that people were - were being detained from the new shadow executive, which was meant to be secret, so we just vanished and spent a long time that - the end of last year picking up the pieces.

By the end of the year we'd kind of got things back together again and people were starting to be let out again, and I remained on the - the - it was - you know, I remained a full member of the executive - again I was quite (........Laugh) off because I wanted to do a lot of more low profile training work because I had become quite interested in the question of education and training, which I still am interested.

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A.B. But I - I think just generally with the - the sort of depleted state of our structures I was asked to stay on, which I have done up till this date, and then now with the second state of emergency (Laugh) you know, we were planning for an AGM where we'd elect a new executive, but it means that we haven't been able to so I've by default really been on the executive for the last year.

My main task there fortunately hasn't been treasurer, because I think that's one of the most soul destroying tasks of the lot - it really is difficult to - to collect money - I mean I was having to raise 10,000 rand a month, which is impossible - it just really is, and to keep track of that when I was formerly on the executive - but what I've been doing is, as an exec member, being - doing quite a lot of education and training work with people like Jeremy Cronin.

Now again that raises the question which you'd be interested in, is how can white activists be responsible for education and training of black activists - in a sense doesn't that create some sort of imbalance - and I think it is something that - that - that we constantly have to watch out for - I think it is a problem if whites are seen to be lecturing to blacks, but I think it's - it's a thing that we have been aware of, and I think someone like Jeremy who's (?) also a particularly sensitive person as well he - he - particularly aware of the problems like that, and because we've been able to discuss that what - what we would do is firstly encourage as many other people to take part in this training, both black and white people - we'd make sure that it's always non-racial, that there're one or two white activists on the training course, one or two or - or reflecting Cape Town one or two African and then the majority Coloured, and we'd run a six week training course on different aspects of the struggle, the history - you know, I'd do one section, Jeremy'd do another - we'd get a - perhaps a black person to do a third (?) you know, and in a sense we would try and make it that even though as two white intellectuals we were having to do a lot of the initiating of this course it took place through UDF structures, so it was democratic, and that we were answerable to the mass organisations - it wasn't just us going ahead and doing it off our own bat and coming to tell blacks what to do - it was always through the structures, and because of that I never felt that it was a problem, even though we'd had because of our intellectual background and our access to knowledge, vast arrays of information and knowledge that a lot of black activists didn't have, because we were part of the same structure we were able to pass that on in a way that wasn't paternalistic or elitist or anything like that - I -

I really think that it didn't become a problem and that we were always aware of that (?) and raised it with the leadership - I mean and another example I can give is that I mean in Cape Town I had a lot of contact with the press, but I made sure that I never issued a statement in my name I mean if - or - and we made sure that - that press were always briefed by the black members of our executive, and still are to this day - that even though it's far easier for the white comrades on the executive now, which is Jeremy, myself and Graeme Bloch, to go into town and issue statements, we only have to do that in a absolute emergency, otherwise the UDF must have a black face, in other words, and maybe that's a little bit artificial but I think we believe that it's very important and that's the collective decision arrived at, that UDF must have African leadership - it must have working class leadership - and that white intellectuals or people trained in that tradition can and do have a place at executive levels or at a - or at other levels - but they can't be seen to be representing the UDF.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

A.B. That's not to say that I and other whites didn't say, during the anti election campaign I - I - I went all over the rural areas addressing meetings with Cheryl Carolus, with Trevor Manuel, and I mean I would have an equal proportion of actually addressing those meetings, and in fact sometimes we would do it for effect that here I was as a white person identifying with the struggle, and we were very conscious of our role as - you know, and we often talk about that as the role of whites on the executive - sometimes we have slightly different roles, but it's talked about openly - it's not assumed that we all identical.

We know that we can't go round building street committees in the townships - we have severe limitations with keeping contact with the - the black communities during a state of emergency - on the other hand, we know the white community far better than they do, and our role is to at least not necessarily to organise the white community, because that's what the area committees do - as exec members we would have different functions, but to brief black comrades on the executive the nuances of the white church structures and the Black Sash and what was happening in the debates in the white areas and the - the students and how to handle a university crowd if they go and speak there, so I think it - it clearly is complementing our work I mean and as I was commenting to you - to you at a previous stage, my research work, because I've gone back to university this year, is informed by my constant contact with black comrades not only in the Western Cape but right round the country, and it's precisely because of that that I think my research work does not get removed to the campus, to SALDRU, to, you know, the library, and I don't get immersed (?) in those kind of debates that sometimes are very sterile, sometimes necessary and I'm not- I wouldn't like to reject intellectual discussion at all - at all costs - I think that's a - that's a mistake to say we must only have action and only organisation and we must kind of cut ourselves off completely from the more refined debates.

I think questions of western (?) Marxism can teach us a lot, even though to get bogged down in those sort of things, for example, amongst other things can deflect from organisation, I think the constant contact with - with activists at all - at all levels plus my continued involvement at an intellectual level has hopefully shaped me as someone and - and hopefully shapes other people like Jer - you know, other people like Jeremy Cronin and Graeme Bloch, who - I mean all of us in a sense are attached to university bases or come from intellectual backgrounds or take part in intellectual debates - Jeremy writes - Graeme teaches, you know - I'm studying and writing research and things like that - but in a sense through our work in the executive and our contact with activists, hopefully we are getting a perspective of where that intellectual work fits in - that it fits in the context of building a mass organisation, you know, and that we are ultimately accountable and responsible to that in our research, in our teaching, and that it is our duty - our skills lie not with building the mass organisation but at an intellectual level, and we must use those.

We mustn't be scared of using those things - we mustn't draw back and say : We are anti intellectual and we are now workers - because that - that's false - we are not workers - we don't live in a black community. We do have mobility and access to things which a lot of black comrades don't, and we must use that for the benefit of the democratic movement under its control.

J.F. (.....) You were going to go on.

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A.B. I was just going to say that - that obviously there's always the temptation that that can lead to elitist forms of - of participation, and that has - that's something that has to be worried about, and discussed and talked about, and I'm sure often those sort of problems occur, but I think if we - if we are able to function as a proper executive or as a proper collective we will overcome those sort of things, and there's no guarantee that the whites won't get carried away with their inflated role, and white egos often have to be pricked, my own included, you know, and (Laugh) and the bubble has to be burst, but I think we've learned that the hard way - that our - our particular contribution to the struggle means absolutely nothing if it's not associated with and in conjunction with the mass struggle - the mass struggle can actually do without us, you know, and it's - it's - it's a salutary lesson I think that we all learn.

But on the other hand we don't go overboard and say that there is no role - I think we are - we are confident of our role - that whites can play a leading role - not just a supportative in the background kind of role - I think we can actually play an important role.

J.F. What about any opposition to that conception - I understand that (... ....) JODAC equivalent in Cape Town because there was opposition from the white - from some whites in Cape Town - do you - how did you feel about that kind of resistance?

A.B. Ja, I think there was two forms of resistance - I think the one which said working in the white areas is - is a waste of time, you see, and that whites must assist the black struggle in the black areas, you see, so non-racialism meant supporting the trade unions or the community organisations or working on service organisations that only did that, you see, and I think that - that - that was bending the stick too far towards supporting the struggle - on another hand I think some people - I think perhaps in JODAC and in some of the white areas in Cape Town went too far by saying the only role that whites can do is in the white areas, you see, which I think is also mistaken - I don't - you know, I think that - that whites - you know, it's not only confined to the white areas - I think there has to be that link between the white areas and the black areas, and that sometimes whites are called on to make that link.

And I - I mean my personal position would be is that the form of organisation depends on what you want to achieve - whether it's a white area committee or whether it's a JODAC stype structures is not that much difference as long as you achieving in the white areas what you - what you want to achieve - you set your goals and then you define your organisation accordingly - you don't set out with your structure and then define your goals - and I think sometimes the debate got a bit confused on those two things.

But my - my - my firm position would be is that the first priority at all levels of the struggle for all activists, be they black or white, the first priority is the mass based struggles in the communities, in the schools and in the factories - that above all that - that is the base of the democratic movement - a secondary task would be, amongst other things, working in the white area and winning whites over.

Now some people are better suited for that - a lot of whites are better suited for that, and that's why it becomes their first task - but I think that to say that it is therefore the only task, or it is therefore loses sight of what I consider the primary task - in other words, building mass struggle - mass militant struggle in - in the black areas I think sometimes has led to an imbalance in the work of - of JODAC or- or the white areas.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

A.B. In other - I mean an example would be is that if one were to undertake an alliance in a white area it was perhaps quite a contraversial alliance in a sense that a lot of people in the black areas didn't understand - I think that is a case of putting work in the white areas before work in the black areas - that in other words, all white - all work in the white areas has to be understood and supported by people in the black areas, and if it is in a sense detrimental to struggle - if people in the black areas are not understanding it or - or - or rejecting it, then it cannot go ahead in the white areas - you cannot separate work in the white areas from work in the black areas - they have to be linked at all stages through organisations like UDF, and that is why at one stage I was a bit worried that JODAC was moving a little bit too far away from UDF - I felt that it wasn't close enough to what - the work - the actual main political work that UDF was doing- that it was getting too far into all sorts of things in the white areas and I - I think it's always a dual role at all stages.

It's not only work amongst whites for the sake of it - it's work amongst white to support the - the - the - the non-racial democratic struggle in the black communities.

J.F. Did you ever have any - you're portraying it as if it's always been very comfortable and easy to develop - did you ever feel that there was a - Horst Kleinschmidt talked about back at the Christian Institute when blacks kept borrowing cars and smashing them up and then - and when challenged they'd say : Well, that's part of the struggle - (..................) did you ever feel at all used (?) that there was a sense that NUSAS had money and a budget and cars and access - I'm not saying that it was the overriding, but was there ever that element that had to be dealt with so you weren't just approaching it from a liberal point of view and accepting....

A.B. Look, I'm sure initially I was as - as naive on that question as everyone else - In a sense I was - I was prepared to - to kill myself, often unnecessarily to - to kind of support the needs and desires of black people, but I think I rapidly learned, probably the hard way, you know, when a NUSAS car probably was smashed - I can't remember that specific incident, but you know, money wasn't accountable for pamphlets that we spent the whole night printing or went to collect the next morning and because people didn't get it together to do so (?) you know, and things like that, so those incidents did happen.

And I'm very firm on the question now that if I see a question of misuse of property of an organisation, whether the person's black or white, I have a duty to stop that - I don't - it doesn't matter whether I'm black or white, and if it is a black person I must be able to raise that with them or report that to the executive - there's no doubt about that, so I - I wouldn't feel any hesitation of doing that now - be it funds, be it cars, be it - be it the attitude of, you know, black mens (?) or white women or vice versa, you know, of white men to black women or any - any of those, you know, social conducts and sexual conduct and political conduct - I think that has to be made very clear from the start, that whites and blacks are equally affected by that - there's no special deal for blacks because they are blacks - definitely I think I'm very clear on that, and I think a lot of other black comrades would be clear on that - if they see a black comrade of theirs taking advantage of whites they come down very, very hard on that person, and I would expect them to do that.

J.F. What about the opposition - you talk about the kind of critique from the white quarter of the way UDF has evolved, their non-racial participation - what about from the black point of view - was there any lingering BC that people had to respond to in the townships?

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

A.B. Well, a major - major issue was the affiliation of NUSAS to - to UDF - a major issue, certainly in Cape Town where you have a lot of these ultra left groupings - I wouldn't say it's more - I mean in Transvaal it was more from AZAPO point of view, you know, specifically represented by people like Saths Cooper, but in Cape Town it was more from a so-called left point of view - I say so-called because I - I think often it verged on a racist point of view, or - or maybe that's a bit strong, but on a BC point of view.

I - I remember on three occasions having debates with people like Neville Alexander on this particular question, where he would say basically UDF is being controlled by the sons and daughters of the ruling class as represented by its - its affiliation with NUSAS - or well, NUSAS affiliation to UDF - now firstly the absurd situation where one rather insignificant organisation like NUSAS can be said to be controlling UDF is - is - you know, I mean one could even stop there, but I think when one looks at the principle of it, we rejected that argument because we felt that it wasn't just by fluke or by luck that whites joined the struggle - they had to be organised - they had - we actually had to go into the white community and get them out, and that meant (?) types of organisations.

So we never claim that NUSAS as a body was a revolutionary or progressive per se organisation - what we did claim that NUSAS produced activists that were progressive and that were conscious of these things - the average NUSAS student on campus is liberal, at best conservative - there's no doubt about that - and we don't expect all whites to come over to the struggle - you know, I think we very clear on that.

You know, just like there's a lot of members say, in JODAC who are not revolutionaries - you know, they are sincere whites - a lot of them remain liberals - we don't expect them necessarily to be lifelong activists, but we expect to try and win them towards the struggle, you know, and there's various stages - some people will never come right into the struggle and they'll never be full time activists - they'll never be elected to executives - but that's fine - as long as we can stop them going into the enemy camp we feel that we've done an enormous service to the struggle, or if we can get them to stay in the country and at least use their skills here - keep their money in the country and things like that.

And I think people like Neville Alexander just are so caught up with intellectual debates about what constitutes non-racialism that they don't actually see that non-racialism is first and foremost a struggle and a process to win whites over to a porgressive point of view, or at least a democratic point of view, is a very difficult process.

Whites do come with all sorts of ridiculous ideas - all of us - prejudices, resources, intellectual arrogance, money, and that has to be sorted out, you know (Laugh) - has a lot of disciplinering (?) and political politicisation process that whites have to go through, myself included, you know, and that doesn't happen overnight - whites just don't fall from the sky into the struggle - they have to be one (? to the struggle, and so I will - I - I firmly maintain the principle of organisation in the white areas affiliating to black bodies, you know, and maybe even entertaining the idea in the future that it would have to be integrated non-racial bodies - I mean because in a sense what UDF means is not just whites going to other whites, which in a sense used to be the - the - or still is - the BC position, that O.K., we grudgingly concede that perhaps whites do have a role but only in their own community, and as soon as they come anywhere near black organisations they dilute that struggle.

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A.B. And I mean I - I think that's - that's clearly an incorrect analysis and clearly needs to be rejected - and I think our strongest weapon is when we do invite black UDF radicals to come into the white areas, and we all do a lot of the organisation - in a sense provide them a platform to speak directly to whites - and that does more winning over whites than any white person like myself going to address whites - that's why I'm saying that it's not - you cannot isolate work in the white areas from work in the black areas - that blacks have a key role in white areas, just as often whites can play quite a - a directly assistive role in - in black areas - it's - it's not a question of whites in the white areas and blacks in the black areas - it is genuinely a non-racial - although on the whole we understand the reality of the situation about Group Areas and about the need for most whites to work in the white areas and most blacks obviously work in the black areas and there's that crucial meet up point, which at this stage is the kind of UDF forums and the executives, and that is why UDF is such a crucial body - that is why UDF in practice is a non-racial body - even though it does have a TIC and a white student movement and a JODAC and things like that - I - I'm firmly convinced of that.

J.F. What - tell me about your decision to move into the area you're now researching......

END OF SIDE TWO.

J.F. .... of years ago before the non-racial position was - is clarified as it is now - did that factor at all - did you just figure it's an important area to look at and I'll look at it?

A.B. Well, I've always been - I think - I think my position in UDF has always stressed the need to build up strong organisation, I think - you know, and we've had debates about where to put different emphases or - or - or the stress - and in the past either people that I've debated with in UDF have - have stressed the kind of need for high profile political mobilisation challenging the government directly, which would include things like mass meetings, the consulate sit-in, you know, a variety of things like that, hard-hitting - now I don't deny that those things are - are important, but I say they have to be founded on a bedrock of solid organisation - that has always been my kind of position, you know, and I don't think it's a - it's a major debate - it's just a question of at what stage in the struggle do you emphasise certain things.

Anyway because of that I've always tried to understand what community struggles are about in the townships, at a street level, at a local level - I've always been interested in the response of ordinary people, and I think that just I spent quite a lot of time when I was - the first time I was on the UDF executive in Cape Town on the forced removals committee working with people in the - in the - in the townships, African townships, and in the squatter camps and trying to put resistan - help resistance there - trying to control the interference of outside groups, church and liberal groups, and understanding the - the complex interplay of various factors, racial, tribal, class, factors (?)

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

A.B. Also that - that - that's be the one kind of area of background of involvement where - which has stimulated my intellectual thought - the second area I've always been interested in the question of revolutionary struggles, and when I was banned I - I did an enormous amount of reading on everything from national liberation movements or nationalist movements like Nasser's Egypt and Gandhi's India to national liberation movements like the Vietnamese, the Cubans, the Sandanistas - looking back at the October Revolution, the failed revolutions of Germany and Hungary in the 1920s, really trying to understand those and - and look at the different complex facts which makes up a revolutionary process - the role of a - of - of a - of a vanguard party - the question of a mass movement - the position of intellectuals within that - class alliances - the leading roles of the working class - all those sort of questions for me are very vital ones, and in a sense my - my decision to look at people's power comes from those two backgrounds.

My interest in African politics on the ground, street by street literally, and in a sense that is what they doing now with the organisations of people's power - plus relating that to a political context - that the questions of insurrection, questions of people's war come out of - of those very questions - the forms of organisations that we organise now have a direct bearing not only on the - on the - the final push hopefully for governmental power but - and the actual questions of transformation, questions of socialism.

So I feel - I mean looking back at some of the - some - some of the more influential writers like be it Lenin, be it Cabral, they spent masses of time studying the - the situation in detail on the ground - I mean Lenin did his mammoth study on the development of capitalism in Russia, where he spent, I think, four years just recording what he saw - Cabral did his report on the - on the rural areas before he even started his - his - his more - the revolutionary theories - and I just think that any person that is attempting to understand at an intellectual level the revolutionary process occurring in a country has to have firsthand information of what is actually happening on the ground, from activists and from ordinary people.

You have to have a good idea of the complex interplay of - of - of forces - the - the effect of religion in South Africa, the effect of - of - of racism and divided communities and attitudes towards that - the effect of witchcraft in the Northern Transvaal amongst all sorts - the legacy of - of - of tribal factors - those all affect the way we organise and how we organise, and I'm just trying to understand that really through my research - you know, it's not much - it's not more complex than that really.

J.F. But I'm just saying the fact that you are going to chronicle what's happening in the townships - did you - do you think that needs to be defended in that you're white - was there any resistance from blacks - is it just defendable because they wouldn't possibly be able to do it or?

A.B. The question of whites doing research on blacks or - or....

J.F. Well, the central key dynamic of the process right now, which has to do with townships which doesn't have to do with whites - there is the cracks in the ruling class, but you're not choosing to chronicle that - you're choosing to chronicle the black aspect - was there any resistance from them - did you consider it an issue?

A.B. Well, I mean firstly I consider the - the question of what is happening in the black townships as the most important aspect of the struggle, and maybe that's why I was drawn to it.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

A.B. That - that sure, there is a desperate need to understand - say, to understand the response of the state or the ruling class, but I firstly think there's probably a lot of people already doing that, and I don't think there's enough people chronicling what is actually happening in a mass level - the hidden struggles, in other words, both in the urban and rural areas - secondly it's probably because it's more in line with what I do as an activist in the townships as a UDF exec member - you know, I - most of my time is not at university - it's - I'm not a kind of professional academic - I'm a - I'm a full time activist who happens to be chronicling at the same time some ideas about what I am seeing.

You know, I don't start off as an - as an academic - I chose to register this year at university because I was an activist, and it gives me access to resources, and I can travel, and the facility - the back up facilities which any chronicler needs, I think - that's more that point of view.

I think the second part of your question is - is a vital one because I think has a major problem - I mean just looking at - at - at, for example, South African Review Volumes one, two and three, the fact that every single one of those articles is written by a white - virtually every single article on the (...............) is written by whites - is I think a major failing on - on the part of the South African struggle to produce black intellectuals or - or black - black - or people inside the country - I mean obviously journals outside the country are written on the whole by - by black activists in the A.N.C., but - but even then I'm sure that there's a preponderance of white activists, and I just think the question of organic intellectuals - intellectuals from a working class background - is a question that we haven't been able to solve.

J.F. But is it a failure to produce black intellectuals - is Terror Lakota not an intellectual - he happens to be in a position where he came to research right now, and even if he could his - if you speak to him you're speaking to a black intellectual, but he chooses - there just isn't the time to do endless articles for WIP - ultimately what they achieve might be the response - isn't that it more?

A.B. I think that's - I think - I think it's - that is very correct, and I think it would be a mistake for us to try and, you know, fight every single political battle in the pages of WIP and the labour bulletin, you know - I think what we've done is we've, just as an - a sign (?) in a sense that we in UDF have neglected to put our case there more forcibly, and I think that's something that we're trying to rectify, and then it often people say : O.K., well, we building street committees, you whites you can, you know, that's - you know that - you know that crowd - because I mean no-one really reads those things in the black, you know, and (?) people building mass struggles.

Ja, and I think often black intellectuals or black leadership do write papers which are more used in activist training - they just don't happen to get them published in a journal, a referee journal at that, but I still think there's - there's a shortage of black activists who actually are in a position, through a thorough political training, to actually - I shouldn't say analyse because I mean obviously they are constantly analysing the situation, but in a sense draw on perhaps a framework that other struggles in other parts of the world, for example, would - I would be aware of, you know, and the difficulties experienced by the Cubans and the Sandanistas and the Angolans and the Vietnamese and, you know, I can draw on a wealth of other writings - I can look at Cabral, I can look at - at - at Machel, whereas a lot of black activists simply haven't had the time.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

A.B. They've either been in jail, or they haven't been to university - they haven't had the privileges that I've had, and I think that's a - that's a pity - not to say that they are not intellectuals and not analysing the situation, but I think that it often falls on white intellectuals then to and bring a whole lot of different experiences into the struggle, which - which - which I think would - would be good if black intellectuals also had access to those sorts of things to get a fuller internationalist understanding, because it tends often to come through whites, you know, understanding of British politics or American politics - we the ones that read those sort of things, and we travel.

We have access to people who travel, we read international magazines.

J.F. So do you - are you getting a PhD now?

A.B. Well, no, this is finishing off my honours, and I'm hoping to start work on my PhD next year on - you know, just broadening this area of research.

J.F. And what do you want to do to it - with it - do you want to publish it all at (..........) - do you want to publish it as a thesis - do you want to.....

A.B. No, I - I - I'm not particularly keen to publish - I mean I wrote one article on my research specifically to be used in an activist newspaper, SASPU National, and I have been asked to kind of refine it a little bit and publish it in - in Transformation - now if I have the time I'll do that, but I suspect I probably won't, and that's not a priority of mine - my priority is to make sure that people in the street committees have access to the types of things I've found out in other parts of the country, particularly now when things are so cut off and things become so compartmentalised and regionalised, and if - I mean I'd like to - I mean if in a sense - what I would in a -

What I would hope to get out of it is to become a good teacher - a teacher in the broadest aspect of - of the - of the - of the sense - a collective teacher responsible to the democratic movement that can learn to record an event, interpret it, and then reconvey it in an accessible way, so through the - the pages of Isizwe, the UDF journal, through study notes that - that we may prepare - get them translated into Afrikaans or Xhosa - through being able to learn how to deliver a talk to people who have Standard Four, Standard Six education whose first language is not English who're relying on a translator.

I mean I must - that - I would hope my skills would develop in those - those areas - that I can, through my intellectual training, which I believe is - is - is the one area where I have been able to develop my life, absorb and record and interpret events in such a way that I can pass on that understanding to people engaged in mass struggle, in mass action - youth worker, students, various groups like that - that's how I would see it, and that falls not as an individual but as a member of a - of a mass based organisation.

So I would hope people would be able to call on me to assist them in providing - not direction but added interpretation - particularly interpretation of what the state is trying to do - getting - going and digging out access to town council records, which is what I'm doing in Manelodi, you know, even going to - they said : Go and interview the so-called mayor, see what he's got up his sleeve and then come and tell us - and as a white in a sense I'm in that position - I can pose as a neutral researcher from a university, so in a sense using my academic research not just to get a PhD but to actually use it for the struggle.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

A.B. To publish it in journals that are read at least by masses of activists, you know - plus fight some of the intellectual battles that I - I believe we in UDF have to fight, and that does sometimes mean sitting down and writing an article for WIP or labour bulletin - I don't think we have to withdraw from those - those arenas.

J.F. But those battles are being fought against other whites, isn't it?

A.B. On the whole, but they have - they have influence, you know, over - over other areas of struggle such as in - in the unions - also they've been fought not - well, also against a lot of Coloured intellectuals, for example, and they have a lot of influence in Cape Town, and I think we need to win those battles at an intellectual level - I think we need to win the universities over to our position and on the congress position - I don't - I mean I think if we eventually come to power but find we have a whole class, mainly of white but some black and Coloured and Indian intellectuals who are ranged against us because they are ultra leftists or workerists, I think that's wrong - I think we've got to win them over as well, and that means defeating their arguments at an intellectual level, but definitely not being preoccupied by that - not becoming obsessed by those - those sort of debates.

J.F. Would you also find it useful in terms of bringing to whites some insight into the black experience - whites, even those who fancy themselves as moving to a radical position or white liberals, have a fear, often a total irrational one, of the necklace or what the dynamic of township resistance really is - do you think it's at all important to try to make them understand what the reality is - have you yourself as much as you have been moving - as you said, in 1981 you raised your first fist in an Amandla salute - by 1984, '85 there was the necklace, that because of the level of resistance and state repression, which I would assume you began to be exposed to as well?

A.B. Ja - I mean it has never really been an issue for me personally, probably because I've never been in that situation, fortunately for me, that I've never had to be confronted with a - a - a crowd of people after a funeral threatening or actually necklacing someone, and I've never had to respond personally to that - when I go into townships - there's no doubt about it, you can't just waltz into townships even if you are a UDF exec member if you white - you must go with other black comrades - you must wear your UDF T shirt, but you must also wear a shirt over it so if the police - you know, the police can't see the UDF thing and arrest you for that, but you take your shirt off, you know, you - I mean in times of - of conflict sometimes definitely I would have to put a UDF sticker on my car so I can be recognised - you've got to be aware of those things - it's just practic - you can't expect an angry grouping of black youths who - whose one of their numbers perhaps has just been shot or died in detention or - or killed with booby trap grenades or something like that to work out who - who are the friendly whites - I mean they are going to attack and they are going to attack targets, and usually those targets are - are white policemen and white soldiers, and they'll go for them.

So I think that - that whites do have to be careful of how they - they behave and respond in those situations - and sometimes it's best for whites not to be around, I think - also I think it is important to explain to younger white activists constantly counter the government propaganda, and that is - I - I - I mean I've just finished the smaller article for Up Front, which is the UDF's kind of white areas magazine, on what people's courts are in (?) Mamelodi and that they not kind of savage instruments of justice but they actually new forms of law - people's law.

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J.F. Have you been to the people's court?

A.B. Ja, ja, ja.

J.F. So tell me what you'd say to a white audience - what prejudices do you think they have about blacks in that situation, and what your experience really was.

A.B. O.K., well, if it was a grouping of white activists I would simply be going there to inform them of the situation - I mean I did that when I came back from Mamelodi for NUSAS students - I did that for people in the white area committees, you know, and I kind of did a - a round of talks - but there I wouldn't be trying to - I mean they wouldn't have the same fears as a more broader grouping of whites say, in the Black Sash or a liberal audience - they would - they would simply be wanting to have an update on the situation and how the resistance is going and what the state strategies are, so I do more an analysis, a conjunctual analysis for them, but using concrete raw material that I've put together, and they would then perhaps ask questions about are the vigilantes strong, or how are people coping with the crime or things like that.

For the white aiduence I'd - on the whole I would try and identify clearly the - the whole question of what is black on black violence - what is violence in a - in a township situation - who and what is causing that violence, and how is it being resolved, and how will it be resolved in the future - that would be the first thing - secondly I would - I would try and convey to them what blacks are doing in the townships in terms of people's power - that it is organised, that it is disciplined, that it's not random and anarchic and destructive in a sense - that sure, it is destroying apartheid, but that is not destroying society as a whole or destroying all whites or all white people there's - there's that distinction.

I would probably try and point in fact to the - often the - the moderate or conciliatory positions that many blacks still have in a sense - not wanting to capitulate or negotiate - in a sense try and convey that they have a sense of confidence about the future, but also that they're not anti white, that - that is a non-racial component, of which I would be an example of that, and that what I would be telling them is no different from what blacks would be telling them - that we'd have a similar perspective and it makes no difference whether I'm as a white person or as a - whether it was a black UDF person (.........) who would be in fact probably black - UDF people would probably sometimes even push a even more conciliatory line than I would coming to a (Laugh) a white audience.

They would bend over backwards to say : We would like you to join us - we want you to be with us in the future - I would perhaps sometimes also say : Look, even though blacks are saying we holding out a hand, I would also say : Look, it is (?) a question of power and privilege which is going to have to go - standard of livings are going to have to drop - your schools are going to be overcrowded for the first ten years - that, you know, your clinics are not going to be white only, you going to have to wait in queues, you going to be jostled, you know, where previously you just had whites only entrances - you must expect that that - what a new South Africa will mean, but despite that, you know, then convince them that they can stay - so I would perhaps push (Laugh) a slightly tougher line, I would imagine, than say, a black UDF member, who would probably emphasise the kind of whites must stay type position even more than I would.

J.F. Can I ask you to - basically that's answering the question, but I just want to, because it's such an emotional issue, if you can give a less considerate intellectual response to it - what is - let's say -

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J.F. Let's just talk about a liberal audience who are first years at the university - what is it that they fear about black resistance and black power really, because there is a beginning of building of power that just really freaks them out, and what is it that you have experienced that you could say to them gives hope for the future?

A.B. Ja - maybe I can answer that - that - that second question first - just I - I tend to find that if I explain things in a very calm, logical, rational, intellectual way I find that that gets through to a lot of whites - I don't really use emotional issues - I'm not a particularly emotional speaker - I tend to be - I work out in - in great - I try and in a sense prove to them logically or - or - or in a very analytical way, using lots of concrete examples - I tend to be - try and be very descriptive, based on research, facts and figures, so many, you know, and I - I - I personally find that that is how I can get through to whites.

I appeal to their kind of intellectual or - or training, I suppose, as opposed to their emotions - I can't - I'm not a Terror Lekota or a Cheryl Carolus, who can describe what is happening to mothers and babies in the townships, you know - I mean I could try but I don't think I'm the best person for that - they are much better, you know, or whatever - more emotive - you know, describing why a town councillor's so hated - I could do that in an abstract way, but I don't really even try and do it in an emotional way.

And therefore for me to identify the prejudices of whites and how to overcome them probably - probably I do it in a slightly different way than - than - than someone coming from the townships, who would be much better placed to say : We are not about to drive you into the sea - we are not about to come and kill your women and children at night, you know - we are not savages or cannibals - you know I mean depending on how - how (Laugh) how kind of bad your white - white audience is.

But I think - ja, the things I would - would stress is that not only are they not going to be chased into the sea, you know, literally, but that they don't have to sit around and wait for everything to ha - the inevitable to happen - basically I start - firstly I try and say that what they regard as the inevit - what they regard as the ending of apartheid is inevitable - it's going to happen - black people are confident - whites in the long run are going to lose their position of power - whether it's in the short term or the long term depends on whites as much as it depends on - on black organisation and - and - and militancy and things like that.

Whether millions of people die or whether we have a relatively peaceful situation depends also on what work whites do in the white area, and then I try and talk about that, that - that they can join other organisations, that they - that UDF does welcome them - that there's not - that it is a genuinely non-racial struggle, but it is a - it is a more intellectual going through those things - it's not really an emotional appeal.

Often what we do is we have two speakers, one white, one black, you see, and perhaps I as the white speaker would chronicle some of the events over the past few months, what the state has been doing in the townships, how many troops there, and bring out a lot of facts and figures, and then you'll get a black person to actually describe a day in the life of a black person in a township, you see.

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A.B. Now obviously they are much more effective - I'm just really giving back-up added points of reference for white people, that they can go home and not only say : My God, did you hear what happened in Soweto - but also : I didn't know that 95,000 white troops are being used in the townships - or however many the figure is, and that sort of thing - that's - that's the sort of back-up, I think, that I would be able to provide as a speaker in white areas.

J.F. Can you just tell me just a little bit about what you have learned, because I think the way you described it yesterday, I just want to get a sense of what it actually is about - what your research has been about and what you found important.

A.B. Firstly there's a - a great - there - there's a difference between formal and informal organisation - that often you can look at a place and you think : Well, there's no organisation there, there's no visible leaders, nothing stands out, and that place is thoroughly organised - that's the first lesson I've learned - and even within that un - informal level of organisation, again there're different levels, and often there would be levels that I wouldn't even know about, and they relate to age-old networks within townships that have been going on, you know, for many decades now, which probably were brutally suppressed in the '60s and early '70s, but yet tenaciously hung in there and kind of - people just have a way of passing on information, which is so different from in the white areas.

J.F. (Interruption) You had just (.........) under the tendencious - the fact that (................)

A.B. Ja - I mean....

J.F. Tenacious.

A.B. Tenacious, ja - you know, so - so often you can have a - a civic organisation formally affiliated to UDF and it'll have formal leadership, but often a great deal more political work goes on behind the scene, you know, and just hidden from view and it's not quite as formalised as say, an organisation in the white areas which tends to get very bureaucratic and have long procedural meetings and things like that, and so there - there - there's a kind of - it - it - it's not always easy to exactly understand how organisation in the townships works for an outsider like me - I think that's - that's the second lesson that - that I learned, and you really got to be there a long time before you can begin to understand how decisions are really made and who's in charge and the - the kind of key figures, because often the - the - the people on the executives are not the key figures, and it's a mistake to think of them as the only kind of people making decisions.

Anyway just to - you - do you want a description of the area committees or....

J.F. Ja, just a bit of a sense of what (..........)

A.B. Right, well, I think - O.K., another thing that, if I was talking to whites, that I would stress is the - the way that organisation has progressed, and that it's not a kind of random anarchic situation in the townships - that people in our own organisations are desperately trying to extend those into every single street of the township, that one - that we can't really do that unless the township has been through a period of - of what has become known as ungovernability.

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A.B. That you can't just suddenly start building street committees - I mean you can build a civic, but to really assume alternative power you've got to first destroy apartheid power - I mean you cannot build people's power in a - outside of that - so that's why people's power's not just a - it cannot just be equated with a - a slightly more advanced form of civic organisation - it's not just having street based representation instead of a committee hanging in the air - it's not just built for formal democratic purposes - it actually is alternative power in the townships, and that's what I think people have to realise, and they often don't - they simply see it, well, it's nice and democratic and nice and accountable and it's : Look, you know, how nicely the decisions run up and down the various committees - and that is important, there's no doubt about that, that form, but I mean the content of having a single political authority over a township - I mean a collective authority, not one line, but I mean a - a - a single tradition, and that in the context of the town councillors being repulsed, the rent not being paid, consumer boycotts, the - the police and the S.A.D.F. being - being held back or held at bay or - or defeated in some instances - that is the context within which people's power actually takes and - and it cannot be divorced from that ungovernability.

J.F. And how have blacks reacted to you giving seminars and talking about the - what you've learned?

A.B. Well, they - I mean at - it does seem to - the response seemed - seemed very, very positive, very, very good, and I've had a lot of sessions now with different types of group, both activists as well as ord - I mean the last group I discussed with - with women who weren't even politicised on the street level - they'd been drawn in through the first aid clinic that was being developed there, and I gave a very simple outline for 45 minutes of how people in Mamelodi went about building people's power, and I discussed the growth of formal organisations, then the period of ungovernability, and I would raise things like there were - at that stage there was tension between the parents and the youth, and they all mmm,mmm, they - they understood that, you know, because obviously they were faced with the same things.

There was the ill discipline of the criminal elements, the thug elements - mmm, mmm, they - they - they recognised that from their own township - and I would try and pick out things that I knew that they were facing, and describe how people in Mamelodi had dealt with them - the - the - the difference between, or the tensions between the hostel dwellers and the township dwellers, where there had been quite bloody clashes in Mamelodi about a year ago - the effect of the police - all of those made sense in their own lives, and I think I was therefore able to communicate why people's power was so important to them, and it wasn't just - didn't - just another fancy kind of structure with some intellectuals drawing on the board - it actually means if you bringing youth and parents together, if you bringing hostel dwellers and - and - and township dwellers, if you - if you defending yourself from the police, if you getting rid of the hated town councillors, that actually means something, and I think they responded very well to that....

J.F. Who were they?

A.B. The women from a township in Cape Town.

J.F. So actually what you - have you ever spoken to blacks in the Rand in the Mamelodi area?

A.B. Ja.

J.F. You have as well?

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A.B. Not - not - not people so much on the street committees, because it's just been so hard to get in and - and I still need to do a lot more of that sort of work, discussion, for my own work as well as for them, but I have discussed it with quite a lot of activists not only in Mamelodi but from Atteridgeville and from Alex and from Soweto and from the Northern Transvaal, these sorts of things, you know, and they - they would - they say : Oh, well, Andrew's done some work on Mamelodi - next time he comes through we'll ask him to give us a run down on what's going on there and what he thinks of the situation.

J.F. So that what you're bringing to bear that - you could say a black could do it just as well if not better than you, but you're moving from one place to the other - you're helping to share experiences across?

A.B. Ja, I also have - have access to other academics' research, you know, from other, so I can account what is happening in 30 townships, you know, and perhaps put that all together and then sit down with a group of both black and white activists and think : Now what is the significance, what are the implications - and then draw up a slightly more theoretical paper, so we actually at a more advanced level get direction, so it's not only the question of bringing at a very local basic level - I mean I agree black activists can do that as well if not better than - it's not really my role to go round to the street committees and do that - I'm not going to set them up really.

I can assist, you know, in the process, and sometimes it would be useful to bring me in - I think what I can do is collect a lot of data from a lot of different townships, perhaps synthesise it with the help of other comrades, and then work out overall trends, which helps us as a whole, UDF as a whole, as a collective, to respond to the state of emergency, to reform and repression, to the international things - that's - that's I think where, if my research has a direct political consequence, that's where it comes out - it's political direction for the movement as a whole.

J.F. Just a few loose ends - if you were asked at a public meeting : Is this a black against white struggle - what would you say?

A.B. It's - the very last thing that it is is a black against white struggle the very last thing - it's not a race war at all - it's - it is a question of power - it's a question of both of political and economic power - clearly race in South Africa does play a role in - in - in how power's allocated, resources are allocated, how power is shared and distributed - most blacks do not have access to central political power - most whites, because they have had access to that political power, have therefore built up economic wealth, and South Africa remains to this day one of the most skewed income distribution areas of the world in terms of the top five percent and the bottom 40 percent, or however one measures these sorts of things, but clearly that doesn't mean to say it's a racial war.

I - I - I would be prepared to state very categorically that overwhelming numbers of black people that I have worked with and - and dealt with in UDF and other organisations that are affiliated to UDF distinguish between white people and the white - and - and the system of white domination, and increasingly they don't see it as a system of white domination - they see it as a system of domination and control of which black collaborators are playing an increasing role in the - in the bantustans, in the tricameral parliament, in the vigilantes, and in the police and defence force - there are blacks in all those structures, and people experience in many cases more brutal repression from black policemen and thugs and vigilantes than even from whites.

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A.B. Sometimes it's hard to say that, but it actually is true, that because those collaborators are so threatened they respond far more brutally and viciously than other whites - I mean one shouldn't generalise about those sort of things, but I'm convinced that this is not just amongst a few elite activists, but at a mass level I have never ever in my experience of the last say, five years, at funerals, at mass rallies, ever come across anyone who said : What are you doing here - why are you on that platform - or why are you in the crowd - and in fact the only - the only time that I saw it happening was there was a large funeral in - in Cape Town which I attended, of about 15,000 people, and there were a group of about 200 young black people who were clearly P.A.C. people - they were giving the P.A.C. salute, and they were kind of muttering and moaning about all these whites there, but that's the only time I've actually seen it in a black community, and certainly not from the ranks of - of UDF type organisations ever.

Soemtimes obviously black people would say : Look, things are getting tense, we don't think you should hang around - we will get you out of the township or - but I mean when we've been teargassed at funerals people open doors and say : Come in here quickly - shelter - give you water - you know, feed you and things like that, smuggle you out in their cars, defend you even - and that just happens - it's happened too many times for me to say that my case is just an isolated incidence, and the exp - I've never heard, even amongst my white friends and comrades, I've never heard them having a bad experience, you know, of outright racism in the townships.

J.F. Do you - a friend of mine said that she was involved in a political organisation and after having worked in the black schools they were moving back to being working just with white teachers, and she felt such a loss and was really going to miss that kind of stimulation and felt that was so much more sterile and - just wondering if that was at all what drew you to moving into doing this kind of study - do you feel that at a certain point you feel comfortable and you feel more stimulated by being involved with the struggle in the black areas?

A.B. Ja, I think - I mean I think that tends to be true - I think sometimes I get fed up with whites, you know, either because of their racist or paternalistic attitudes they just don't learn, you know, in the liberal or semi liberal community, and even amongst, you know, my own comrades in the white area, sometimes they get far too bogged down with bureaucratic details and things like that, and sometimes you just - when you sitting in a long six hour meeting with everyone chain-smoking and getting kind of neorotic about something or other you just wish that you were in - in a kind of meeting in the black areas where things are, because it's much more a matter of life and death, people are more efficient - I wouldn't say work harder, but I suppose also have a - have a way of going about things that is more relaxed - in the midst of battles they can have a cheerful - I mean one doesn't want hear (?) stereotypes about happy - happy blacks, but I mean clearly there's less tension and there's less neoroces and less - and there's less paranoia sometimes in the black areas than in the white areas amongst kind of porgressive activists, and - and - and people will think nothing about taking a day off and saying : Yes, we must relax, let's go and have a drink - whereas in the white areas if you do that you kind of not working hard enough and, you know, that - that's - sometimes that is a refreshing attitude that - that - that is in the black areas that you sometimes wish was in the white areas, where people take themselves too seriously, and there're probably too many egos around and too many intellectuals around - yes, that definitely does happen.

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J.F. And what was your position in UDF - were you in the national executive from the outset?

A.B. Ja, from - from right from the beginning.

J.F. And what was your position?

A.B. Well, it was a - a representative from the Western Cape - there was no - I didn't have a title or anything like that.

J.F. And then you became....

A.B. And at the same time I was treasurer, but for the Western Cape region, not for - not for the national executive - I was just an ordinary member of the national executive.

J.F. And who's all there - (.................)

A.B. Well, the presidents were Albertina and Archie and Oscar Mpetha and Edgar Ngoyi, and from Cape Town I mean we would go with Trevor Manuel, Cheryl Carolus, Christmas Tinto, Wilf Rhodes and myself and Mildred Lesier - that was our sort of delegation - and Terror Lekota and Popo Molefe were the two office bearers - there are people like Cas Saloojee, who was the treasurer - Mewa Ramgobin, Yunis Mahommed, Steve Twete, Rev. Staphile, George du Plessis, Professor Mahommed from Eldorado Park - those are the sort of people.

J.F. Can I conclude by asking if you can say, address the issue of non-racialism itself - do you think it's important to be doing anything on this topic - how do you see it in terms of the framework of the new South Africa - is it a detail - is it central - is it worth worrying about?

A.B. O.K., well, firstly I - I think many misconceptions have to be cleared up, but - I mean, and - and I would think of two constituencies that any work on non-racialism can and should address - firstly it's an overseas audience that does tend to see things very much in crude black, white terms, particularly in America, where I think a lot of the black politics there has tended to reinforce that because it is very, very - been very much associated with the kind of BC tradition as opposed to the non-racial tradition, and I - I - I mean when I was there - what's that group, Transformation or....

J.F. TransAfrica.

A.B. TransAfrica - I just got fed up with their attitude because they weren't prepared to really talk to me at all, mainly because I was a white South African - I felt that they - they - there were things that I could probably inform them about that they could learn from, like they could learn from any South African coming out and that they would perhaps, like I found a lot of other groups would kind of grab hold of you and said : Give us half an hour of your time and tell us what's happening - they weren't interested in that, and I think if they the leading kind of organisation in the United States, certainly amongst blacks, that - that - that question of non-racialism has to be fought out there or challenged there - I think Britain is slightly better, but still there there's often a lot of misconceptions about race war, and particularly I think the churches reinforce that - there's going to be a bloody catastrophy, you know, between whites and blacks - Tutu reinforces that, you know, and I think that the second area where it needs to be kind of challenged is back at home clearly amongst the white community, and any work on non-racialism showing how it works in practice, that it has strong traditions (?) I think will clear up the misconceptions and help win people over to that position.

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A.B. Plus challenge, I think, the position of - of black exclusive nationalism rather than inclusive nationalism, like AZAPO which tends to say that whites have no role and then reinforces prejudices - so I think just on that level I think it could challenge those - those two sort of areas - but not just in terms of its political effectivity.....

END OF SIDE ONE.

A.B. .... but also as a principle - you know, just, you know, in itself it is important, because just as now we are trying to build the - the street committees, which hopefully will be the seeds of a future popular government, or factories committees that'll be the seeds of popular control of the wealth of the country, or cultural - non-racial cultural organisations that'll bring together a true South African culture reflecting the diverse backgrounds that we - that we have all experienced - I mean just as we're trying to do that now, and not waiting for the time when a particular flag flies over the union buildings in Pretoria, you know, symbolising a new - new majority government - similarly we are really very concerned to build non-racism in now to avoid any race conflicts after - after liberation - to tell whites that their skills are needed if they are prepared to accept the conditions laid down by a future majority government - that there's no reason why they can't leave - why they can't stay - there's no reason why they have to be fearful of the future - that their skills are necessary, that - that they are - that they are important - that we don't want to have a scorched earth policy - we want to isolate the far right wing and their terroristic activities - and that is why non-racialism is - is - is vital as a principle to build in now, just as we would try as far as possible to build in democracy and other principles like that.

I don't think we just call our struggle a non-racial democratic struggle because that's what we aiming at - that's what we want to do now.

J.F. Where would you hope that your father and those who've taken the extra-parliamentary option would move toward?

A.B. Well, I think they already have moved towards this - I mean I think they will now say that majority - apartheid is - is going - it will go - a non-racial democratic majoritarian government is necessary and desirable, but that they - they would feel that whites could and should stay on - that they shouldn't feel that they have to leave, and they will do their utmost to actually put that point of view across as well.

J.F. What structurally would you like to see them get into?

A.B. Well, I think it would be a mistake for them to say, for example, even join UDF, because then people would either say : Well, perhaps they should be on the committee - and I don't think they know necessarily enough about UDF to suddenly be on the committee, but I can't see them fitting in in a - in a JODAC type structure - I mean I think they would be wasted there in - in - in their own sense and also in terms of JODAC - I think people would feel uncomfortable having too - a kind of nationally known ex-parliamentarians sitting in at kind of local committee meeting - it just wouldn't - it wouldn't work.

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A.B. But, on - on another hand you can't, as an individual, go round saying what you like - you have to have some sort of base, so I think their base is still in the white community and it's amongst people that would - would - there's a lot of people that would have followed them in the PFP amongst liberals, because I don't think they are necessarily have renounced a lot of their liberal beliefs - they've renounced parliament and constitution - well, they - they've - they've announced their despair with constitutional white dominated forms of change, and I think that they have decided that change is going to come mainly from the black non-racial majority - they are prepared to try and communicate that to whites and win whites over to that - not necessarily even to that position, but to a position which doesn't undermine and challenge that and confront that black majority.

J.F. Just some quick little things I was going to ask - Steve Bowey is spelt how?

A.B. It's B o w e y..........

END OF INTERVIEW.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE