

- J.F. Well, the way I'm doing it, I'm asking - I'm starting with everyone just to get a bit of biologic - biographical information, and kind of sense of where you fit in, so can you tell me where and when you were born?
- F.C. Born in Goodwood down in the Cape and - but my father, who was a railway worker, he was transferred to Pietermaritzburg when I was four years old - he worked in the railway workshops up in Pietermaritzburg.
- J.F. So what year were you born?
- F.C. So, Pieter -
- J.F. What year were you born?
- F.C. 1920 - and I grew up and went to school in Pietermaritzburg, and in fact it was from Pietermaritzburg where I first made contact with the South African Communist Party. That was way back in 1936/'37, when I was still very young - so that's as far as - my family background, as I say, was a working class family - my mother had nine children - Catholic family, too - eight of them survived - and my father was a coach painter on the railways - my older brother was also a painter, and the rest were plumbers, bricklayers, labourers (Laugh) - you name it, they were it.
- J.F. And what kind of politics did your dad have?

- F.C. My father was a trade unionist - he believed in trade union - I think he was for a while shop steward in the railway work. Neither of my parents were educated - they had very little schooling. My mother had got up to Standard One - she was semi-literate, and my father, I think, left school when he was in Standard Two to work.

They'd come from the Cape, and in those days of course there was no free education for whites or blacks in the time when they were growing up, so - he was a supporter of the old South African Labour Party.

One of my earliest political memories, or childhood memories for that matter, was my father taking me and a number of my young brothers to a big meeting in the Pietermaritzburg Town Hall to listen to the election results in which a Labour Party man was elected for that particular constituency.

I think his name was Strachen - he might even have belonged to - might even be related to Jock Strachen, you know, who is in jail. On the colour issue well, he was like most South Africans, possibly a little bit more liberal because he came from the Cape originally, and their attitude towards colour wasn't as bad as it was amongst the whites say in the Transvaal and the Freestate and Natal.

In fact, in our street, where I spent - where I - I mean we lived most of the time Pietermaritzburg - both our neighbours were Coloured families, with whom we were on very good neighbourly terms, so that was the sort of atmosphere, I suppose, that I grew up in.

It was a Catholic family, as I say, and I took my religion seriously, and we lived on the outskirts of the borderland between the white area and the Coloured and Indian area, and the Catholic church that we attended mostly was a little church down

F.C. .... what we call the East End, predominantly African and Indian congregation with an Indian priest, and that's the church that I used to attend - go to Mass and Communion and Confession - this church - but the whites didn't mix with the rest of the congregation - we used to go into a side door, and our section was set aside, or segregated from the rest of the congregation, and this used to bother me when I was a youngster.

I couldn't work it out - I used to go and listen to the missionaries talking about the universality of the Catholic church and how it embraced everybody, and all Catholics were equal and this, that, in the eyes of God, and I could never work out -

You see, there was a conflict that arose there in my thinking when I was thinking of that - a test (?) but then why is it that we sitting aside - it worried me. And then, too, we saw plenty of signs of poverty both amongst the white workers at that time when - 1933/'34 when I was growing up - and of course amongst the Africans and amongst the Indians it was even worse - I didn't like what I saw.

And then I used to go and change books for my father at the local library. He never had time to change them - he was working all day. He used to leave home early in the morning, come home late, and he used to read cowboy (?) books and detective stories - he used to like stuff like that.

But I started to go into the childrens section of the library and from the childrens section when I was looking around for books for my father, I started to get into reading socialist literature, and the American writer who was very prolific at that time - oh, I've forgotten now - but there was Jack London - I've forgotten his name for a moment - Howard Fast (?) - I got hold of his novels -

I picked up a few other odd things from the shelves - free thinking - books on free thinking, atheism, rational society books, and that's how I devoted my firm political thinking, is through reading, and I - by the time I was sixteen, as far as I was concerned, I was already a communist, and I had never heard of the South African Communist Party, and I was convinced that there wasn't a South African Communist Party, then I was going to see what I could do about (Laugh) getting one going.

I used to argue with the workers at work on the colour issue and communism and socialism fascism and all the rest of it, and they used to enjoy arguing with me - I suppose some of the older men used to bait me a bit to get me going. Then one day - I'd also made contact with some Indian workers, because as part of my job when I - I started to work when I was 14.

I left school and went to work as a postal telegraph messenger, because I wasn't old enough to go to the - at that stage - to go to the post and telegraph training school - so I had to work a year, 18 months, as a telegraph messenger, and in the course of my work I used to visit the Natal Witnesses (?) round the corner, delivering telegrams, the press (Express) Collect telegrams, and I made contact with some of the Indian youngsters of my own age who were in the sort of reception area there - became friendly with them - then, as I say, this one day I was ....

F.C.

.... arguing in the Pietermaritzburg Post Office down in the sorting department - I was working in the sorting side of it at that particular stage - and holding forth, and a chap from the Durban Post Office came along, and he listened to me holding forth there, and then he said - eventually he says Och, there's a chap in the Durban office who talks the same sort of shit as you do (Laugh) - so I said : What's his name (Laugh) - and I was off, and I -

But two months later I got leave, and I went down to Durban and I looked this chappie up, and he put me in touch with the party people down in Durban - with Mike Diamond Fosee (?) secretary of the Communist Party at that stage - he was a barber - he ran a little barber shop - and I bought a little Lenins (?) from him and stacks of out of date Moscow News - I'd never seen anything like it in my life - and I spent most of my holiday reading -

Go down for a good swim in the morning and in the afternoon used to read all - go through all the little Lenins (Laugh) - the whole afternoon. I think I must have read every Little Lenin in that two/three week holiday.

And then of course I made contact with the party people there and kept contact with them, and began to get together a group in Pietermaritzburg of youngsters of my same age - most of them started around what was called the liberal - we called it a liberal study group, to study conditions in South Africa and Marxism or anything else to do with politics - it wasn't a specifically party - Communist Party group - it was wider than that.

And out of that - those contacts that I made then - we got a group of the Communist Party going. This was about '37/'38 - and then at a later stage, too, when the Leh Book Club (?) movement sprang up all round the world we established - I made further - we made further contacts there in Pietermaritzburg.

I went around to all the book shops - I wrote into Gollants (?) asking them if they had any subscribers in Pietermaritzburg - I went to all the book shops and newsagents to find out if they were - had anybody - and we formed quite a successful Left Book Club there -

And from there, too, we recruited a number of party members. At that stage it was mostly - mostly Indians and whites who were involved, but at a later stage we made contact with people like Harry Gwala, you know, and not Moses Mabida - Moses Mabida I didn't know at that stage - I think I was already - had already possibly been transferred from Pietermaritzburg, because the authorities there tumbled to what I was doing, and I was told that if I continued activity - political activity - I'd be risking my job in a post office.

So I told them I wasn't prepared to stop - so next thing I know they transferred me to Port Shepstone, you know, down in the South Coast, and there too I made contact with Indian workers and helped to get them organised and then pass them over to the Sugar Workers Union.

So that's my sort of general background - how I came to be involved politically in South Africa - and from there I never looked back. The war broke out - I joined the army .....

J.F. Let me stop - let me ask a few questions and then get into the army because that's a different kind of period - because there are so many things you've said that I'd like to follow up on - just way back as you were growing up in the home what was your parents' attitude to blacks - you said they were a bit liberal, but did you have blacks who worked in the home as servants?

F.C. Yes, there used to be - one used to come in - an African woman used to come in and do the washing once or twice a week, and possibly helped out in the household, I'm not sure, but I can't help - we never had a live in servant, possibly because we couldn't - first of all we had no room (Laugh) - we were sleeping two to a bed in any case (Laugh) so we were pretty crowded, as you can imagine, and so we never had a live in servant, and I can't remember any servant making our - doing our bedrooms - but I know definitely my mom used to get somebody in to do the washing - the laundry - but we had no -

We had no hot water in the house, for instance. Part of our duties when we were youngsters was to boil water in the back yard - we had a big sort of cut-away 44 gallon drum propped up on bricks, and to get hot water for baths and so on we used to burn wood under the - under this great big drum, and then carry it in with buckets (Laugh) - we didn't have a live in servant at all.

J.F. The reason I'm asking especially is I'm so interested in the attitude of those whites in the Labour Party on race - your father was - would he have thought of himself as a socialist or just a good trade unionist?

F.C. No, I don't think he would have regarded himself as a socialist. He was rather proud of me as I developed in my political activity. I don't think he was a conscious - he was a wor(ker) - he was a class conscious person, but I don't think it went as far as saying that I'm a socialist, although having followed - I don't know - I never really discussed it with him.

I know that during the War, when our Indian comrades used to make contact with my family to find out how I was getting on and so forth and so on, you know, because I used to correspond with my family there, my father used to invite them in and sit down and have a drink with them and have a beer and so forth and so on, you know, so I think, that in that respect he was quite liberal in his race attitudes, although he was appalled, I think, at the -

At one stage when there was one of my brothers who was having an affair with a Coloured girl, and he was very upset by this - this business - so his attitude towards - I would say he was a - basically a humanist in his attitude towards colour and the colour question, but whether it extended to Africans or not I don't know.

J.F. What about the - you were working with a white working class - you were part of that which so many - very few whites in South Africa have that experience - what kind of insights did you get into their politics as it related to race - the whole idea of my focus is trying to relate the politics to the class and colour issue - or issues.

F.C. It's - you it was - it varied - it varied amongst white workers. Some of them were absolutely so bloody blind bitter racialists -

F.C. You know, they would say well, there's only one bloody thing to do with these kaffirs - you give me (?) a bloody machine gun and I'll shoot the lot down. That sort of crude attitude one found, but on the other hand you found them who, if you put the questions to them on a basis of fairness and justice, would at least listen to you.

I remember one - you know, that they'd give you a hearing, and they weren't particularly antagonistic towards me because I was a communist, and openly so - I didn't try to - this was in the days of course before the party was - was legal - but I didn't find any particular personal enmity towards me on the basis of my, what for them, were way out views on the colour issue.

I remember once - this was way - during the treason trial, in fact - up in Transvaal I went to visit my sister and my brother in law - he was a bricklayer - he was doing house building on his own, you know, small construction worker. He said to me one Sunday : Fred, let's go and have a drink - so I said : Where are we going to get a drink on a Sunday? He says : I know a pub - he says - a hotel where we can get a drink - you sign on as a guest and, you know, get a guest to sign you on.

That sort of thing used to go on in South Africa. And I went there and there was a whole - packed with miners - up in the Transvaal this was - round about Primrose East, Germistone way - and he introduced me to this group, and he says : Meet my brother in law, Fred - he says - he's a communist. Oh, Jesus Christ (Laugh) - going to be bloody trouble here, but on the contrary, there wasn't.

They started asking me questions, they were interested and, you know, these were very reactionary backward white workers, some of them, no doubt, supporting this bloody fascist crowd now, but they were interested in what I had to say. They never met a communist in their life before, and I was able to tackle it from the working class point of view and say : Now how would you like to be working - you know how hard they work - sometimes work bloody sight harder than you, and they get so little wages - who's getting profit out of them - it's not you who's making the bloody money out of them - it's the mine owners and so on and so on, you see.

And with that approach you could see some of their - some of them starting to think a little. They certainly weren't anywhere near as antagonistic or at all antagonistic, and I thought that I'd be lucky to get out of this bloody place without having my bloody jaw smashed (Laugh) or something, you know, but it didn't happen that way, so well, what can I say -

And I felt the same thing in the army amongst the white soldiers, that one could talk to them on the colour issue and they'd listen, and in fact they - a lot of them would turn to us if they wanted advice about some problem that had arisen back home - they used to come and discuss it with us.

A number of them used to come along to me and ask me to draft letters for them because they were semi literate - whites - even at my contemporaries - there were quite a few of them who had difficulty in drafting letters in their own Afrikaans or English, so - I would say that - what can I say now - it's difficult ....

F.C. .... - first of all it's difficult to project myself so far back, you know, because after the War - or immediately after the War I went into politics full time, and then of course I lost that sort of direct contact with the white workers which I'd had when I was working amongst them and when I was in the army - that sort of direct daily contact.

I had contact with them, but it was through political meetings and, you know, that sort of contact. I'm optimistic that, given a - given a peoples government in South Africa, and a correct approach to the white workers, that they can be swung around - they can be swung - be a hard job - hell of a hard job - but it can and it must be done, because the task of building a decent South Africa would be made infinitely harder if we didn't manage to win at least the majority of them over to our side - sometime or other we've got to do so - to do so - and from my own personal knowledge of them I know that it - it will be possible to do so.

J.F. What do you mean by correct approach - what's the key - how...

F.C. Well, it's difficult to say - when I say the correct approach it's difficult to - for me to say : Look, this has got to be our approach to the white workers - because the concrete - our concrete approach and political line to them will depend upon the circumstances when we're in control, and if things continue to develop as they developing in South Africa today towards an all out conflict in which every section of the people is going to be involved and going to suffer, you can be sure that amongst the whites it's going to be the working class that suffer more than anyone else, and that I'm quite positive that amongst them will start arising movements of resistance to becoming involved in this thing - we can already see signs of them amongst certain sections - and so our approach will depend upon how we - how we can present the new South Africa of being of benefit to them, and in fact - in actual fact show them that there is a benefit to them.

It might be difficult to do so now because they still - large sections of them benefiting directly from apartheid - but I'm looking at a situation in South Africa where apartheid is no longer putting jam on the white worker's bread, and taking it away, you know, so one will be able to make a straight patriotic approach, yes, economic approach, a working class approach to them, and not antagon(ise) - not - it's difficult - to overcome their fears, in a way - to show them that the fears that they had about a free South Africa are absolutely groundless - that in fact that's the only way forward to guarantee their future, to guarantee their language, and their particular well, culture, because they haven't got a particular culture in South Africa -

Many - the culture that we have in South Africa is a shared culture in many ways, but if we - that's the sort of approach that we'll have to get over to them. At the moment we approach them on the basis that look, they carry on with apartheid here, apart from the moral issues that we - we can - we can argue out with them - is that if you continue this way with apartheid, if you not prepared to live in a South Africa on a basis of equality with your fellow South Africans, there's going to be no peace in this country whatsoever, and everything is going to suffer - you know, that's our approach at the moment to them, and say you must take a stand together with the African workers against apartheid - that's - that must be approached ....

F.C. .... (our approach) now on the basis of the actual fight that is going on, but I think we - I don't think we going to, at this present moment, shake sufficient of them into falling in behind us - I don't think so - but it'll come, for sure.

END OF SIDE ONE.

J.F. How do you respond to this - there's so much media attention about the white right wing right now - how does that fit in - there's the kind of..... you know, the media kind of portrayal is that this is really going to be trouble for the future, or this is why P.W. can't move, and all that.

F.C. Well, first of all the extreme right wing movements are not new in South African politics. They take on an - they were, in the run up to the last World War, they were very strong - I mean all sorts of organisations were strong there - the Grey Shirts, directly connected with the nazi movement.

I can remember when I, in Pietermaritzburg, in '34, '35, '36, because there was quite a strong German speaking community there who'd retained, around Pietermaritzburg - Greytown area - those areas around there, where a lot of German settlers had settled, and the nazi did - climbed in there - and we used to see them walking round with their swastikas and their grey shirts and all the rest of them, you know, in Pietermaritzburg.

Quite openly they used to parade in the streets, so - and the Ossewbrandwag - I mean all the anti war movements - Mpido's (?) crowd were - so that sort of thing isn't new in our history. It takes on added significance now, because there's always the possibility of a fascist solution, not just the sort of heavy handed military police brutality methods that we've got now but these madmen taking over - there is that possibility, although I think that there (are) a hell of a lot of whites who'll be looking at this, including Afrikaaners, and not liking it one little bit, because in a sense it runs across a lot of their own internal democratic traditions, if you like, but I never wipe out that sort of trend amongst the whites.

It's there, and from time to time it reveals itself. As far as we are concerned - when I say we I mean the A.N.C. and the whole national liberatory movement - and I'm sure as far as the Africans back home are concerned - it doesn't matter a damn to them - whether it's the - these people ruling or the Nats ruling or anyone else - anyone who's going to carry on with apartheid is a bloody enemy - you can throw what you like at him -

For the Africans in the township I mean how much worse can it get. They really - it's there in front - they've already got fascism there in their townships - the army and the police - being arrested - every bloody thing's happening - they got rule - real fascist rule, as far as they concerned, so it's a matter prime - of concern to the whites, I would say. As far as the ....

F.C. .... Africans are concerned, they couldn't give a stuff (....) I'm sorry, I shouldn't be saying (Laugh) No, they really - they - it's - they could fight - you want to fight amongst yourself, all the better for us - and if that crowd happens to win, we'll fight them, too, just like we fighting you - so that would be our say, immediate reaction to it - it's peripheral - it's white politics, and white politics in a sense in South Africa - only in a sense, because it's important what happens amongst them - is not relevant as far as the Africans are concerned - it's not their politics.

So that's my reaction, and I'm sure that this would be the reaction of most of the Africans, too, ja.

J.F. How about the more hopeful side of it, when you were saying you think it's possible that those - that the white working class can be brought into a national democratic solution - what about the element of racism - you saw it yourself, just the idea of not only dealing with blacks in a more fair way but actually being ruled by blacks - are they going to cope with that - is....

F.C. It won't be ruled by blacks, you see - that's not our - as far as - that's one of the things, for instance, that we'd have to tackle, this fact that they think that, you know, they'll be ruled by blacks, and to get them to see that look, what you really doing is a democratic South Africa with all South Africans participating, whether you be black or white - vote for whoever you bloody well like here - blacks will vote for this side and blacks will vote on that side and so on - which will happen, of course.

So, you know, that is - we - that is one of the things that we'll have to overcome in their minds - the fact that they see suddenly a South Africa being ruled by blacks - you've got to say to them, what's going to happen here, in fact, in South Africa, for the first time all the people of South Africa are going to have a say in the democratic process, and you as well as everybody else.

On the question of race - now there was a difference, for instance, and for a long time, in the attitude of the whites in Cape Town, and the attitude of the whites there in the Transvaal or the Freestate, towards travelling in the same buses, in the same trains and so forth - Cape Townians used to accept this - never bothered them at all.

The people that used to be bothered were the bloody hairy blokes from the Transvaal who were steeped in this racialism, who didn't want to sit next to the black man. As far as Cape Townians were concerned - white Cape Townians - it was just accepted - it was the Nationalists that forced it in on the people there - and I've no doubt whatsoever that already, I'm told - this all happened after I left South Africa - that -

You know, nowadays, for instance, the colour bar is, in that sense, breaking down. There are restaurants in Cape Town where black and white sit together; cinemas are open to black and white, and it's been accepted increasingly without any problem whatsoever.

On that level I don't think it's going to take us long to break prejudice down. I mean my brother married a - an Afrikaaner lass from Pretoria whose parents are really vower (?) Afrikaaner nationalist - I mean steeped in that tradition - scarcely ....



F.C. .... spoke English, not because they were anti English but because that's the sort of - the home that they came from. And I remember when my brother still lived in the - still worked in the Transvaal, I took him and his wife - invited them along to a May Day meeting in, I think it was the Gandhi Hall in Johannesburg, where there were Indian speakers - now she'd never ever in her life sat down in the same hall with black people, whether Indian, Coloureds or anybody - she'd had no contact with them whatsoever.

She said yes, she'd go along with us. She had, I suppose, a natural curiosity, and I was her brother in law and she liked me - and she sat down there, a little bit apprehensive at first, but as the songs and the speakers spoke (you) could see her warming to this sort of thing, you know. It was a tremendous education to her, and once that initial contact is made - I find that that's all you need - from then onwards, once you get over that blind - well, I'm not talking now about the real bloody nazi paranoiac mentally sick idiots - it's the only way to describe them - but for the ordinary white South African, once that is over - you overcome that initial fear, and they realise look, this is a man (?) like me - my God he's - (Laugh)

I tel(1) - the - you are - three quarters of your job is done already, as far as I'm concerned, and if we got a government that deliberately fosters this sort of thing then ach, I'm not worried. What we will have to deal with are the ultra rights - sections of the Afrikaners in particular, who are not going to accept it under any circumstances and will go into rebellion, as they've gone into the past against governments that they don't like, and we'll have to deal with them very firmly - very firmly indeed, because they'll be a constant menace to us.

But me I'm optimistic about the possibility of - of turning the whites who are a millstone around the necks of the black people at the moment, of turning them into, if you like, good South Africans, and even perhaps enthusiastic workers for a democratic South Africa in the future.

At the moment, not so - they got to go through a lot of - a lot of trouble yet. They've got to learn from bitter experience that apartheid's no good any longer for them, and they'll learn - they'll bloody learn quick - they're learning no - so, ja, I'm very optimistic as far as that's concerned.

And we'll be giving them - we'll be giving them something - that - they'll feel good about it (Laugh) Well, you've met white South Africans - you've become involved in their struggle - and it's a great liberating thing for them - when they don't have to fear - suddenly realise you don't have to fear your fellow man, because the amount of fear of the black people that's broad amongst the whites in South Africa is fantastic - they really fear them, and out of that fear is born hatred, which is what the reactionaries play on all the time - sheer hatred of the blacks.

J.F. So let me just ask you just before we get into the war period - you left school when you were 14?

F.C. Ja.

J.F. And why was that - was that just.....

F.C. No money (Laugh)

F.C. It just was a matter of <sup>force</sup> force....

F.C. No money - there was no free schooling then. In fact there was no - when I grew up there were no free schooling for whites beyond Standard Six, and I won a bursary in Standard Six. I was the first member of my family who went beyond Standard Six, in fact, and - but after two years, when the bursary ended, although I did very well in the exams - Standard Eight exams - not well enough to win a further bursary, and my father just couldn't afford it - this was 1934.

I think my father was only working three days a week. One of my brothers was working on the roads and doing what they called relief work because he didn't have a job - the others were out of work - so times were hard for the family, so I went to work, that's all (Laugh) - looked around for a job.

Brothers just above me had already worked - or trying to work - doing odd jobs and things like that - so that's how I came to work. I mean I suppose these days I would have gone on to matric because then that was free for - I don't know what year it was, but I know it eventually became free schooling right up to matric for whites, but it wasn't so in my days.

J.F. And just up to the point of the war, did you have any position in any political organisation, or were you still working for your living full time - did you....

F.C. When the war broke out?

J.F. Ja, up until the war broke out were you....

F.C. I was working in the post office.

J.F. In the post office - and were you a member of an organisation - were you.....

F.C. I was a member of the party then, ja.

J.F. A member of the CPSR?

F.C. Yes.

J.F. But did you have any position - any....

F.C. In - I think when I was in Pietermaritzburg I was secretary of the party group there - during the war it developed into a very strong branch, actually - it had its own offices and it did very well indeed. That's Jimmy Coragill's father - he was chairman of the party at that stage.

J.F. In 'Maritzburg?

F.C. In Pietermaritzburg - so I didn't really have no - certainly no full time position but I was secretary of the party group, as it was then, before I was transferred, in Pietermaritzburg, but it was just a group, you know - it's got no - no really position there.

J.F. And of the follow communists at that time, were they all progressive on the race issue, or were there those in the party who weren't?

F.C. Oh, no, all the party without exception, yes - I mean the - the Communist Party - by the time you joined the Communist Party (Laugh) there was no doubt about your attitude on the race issue, you know.

J.F. I'm just thinking of the kind of Wilton Bunting (?).....

F.C. Ag, no, that was - that was long before my time - oh, yes, before my time.

J.F. Had you heard anything about that debate about the native (.....)

F.C. At that - when I joined the party that wasn't an issue at all - it wasn't an issue - it'll really, I think, become party history - it wasn't - it wasn't a living issue in the party, and it's only afterwards, and I heard people talk about the old days that (it) came in, but it wasn't an issue at all when I was there.

Mind you, I didn't have such a hell of a lot of contact with the party in Johannesburg or Cape Town, I think where these controversies may have still been lingering on. My contact with the party down in Durban and in my own little group that we were building up in Pietermaritzburg before the war, but certainly my generation of communists that wasn't a - it wasn't a - they weren't issues that bothered us at all - they really weren't.

It's a sort of ancient history still as far as we concerned (Laugh) we had other things to get on with - we never bothered about it.

J.F. Were there mainly whites, or was the majority whites - was it Indians - was it.....

F.C. No - down in Natal certainly the majority were Indians. Durban might have been - the majority might have been Africans - but I'm talking about Pietermaritzburg, and when I started to develop there, my contact with Indians, and we starting to make contact with Africans as well - but down in Durban, of course, they had many African party members - possibly the majority were - Indians were strongly represented but the - I'm su(re) - I don't know, but it could well be that the majority were Africans there, but the party as a whole at that stage the majority were Africans, members nationally have already by far the greater majority of the members were Africans.

J.F. O.K. - can you tell me about the war - the lead up to the outbreak of war, and bearing in mind that although I want to trace the history politically, I'm looking at the kind of elements of class and colour, non racialism, building up political consciousness - but just tell me about your involvement.

F.C. Well - at the time the war broke out I was already a member of a union defence force - you know, you get call-ups - you get called up there. Every year they used to call up batches - you were - everybody was liable to serve in the union defence force - and I was a acting platoon sergeant in the Natal (.....) in the infantry regiment. Then I was transferred to Port - to Port Shepstone, and I'd already served the bulk of my camp (?) period when the war broke out.

I was against the war, but I also knew that where there were soldiers you had communists - I mean this is - this is what I was thinking. I'd still contact with the party but not in such close contact as I was when I was in Pietermaritzburg, and I was isolated there in Port Shepstone....

J.F. What do you mean, when you have soldiers you do have communists, or you should have communists?

F.C. Should have communists.

J.F. You should?

F.C. Ja.

J.F. Why did you think that?

F.C. Reading Lenin (Laugh) - don't forget I was a youngster then, eh, they - if I'd had closer contact with the party perhaps I would have said no, to hell with them - I'm staying out of this - but I also thought there would be conscription in any event, and I was in the army - I'd be called up - but I was also quite convinced that you had to have people in the army as well to do work - political work amongst soldiers, and so I volunteered in 1939.

I thought I'm not going to wait to be called up - I'll volunteer - so I joined the signals - signalling unit - and I ended up with a infantry battalion, Duke of Edinburgh's - Dukes, they called them - from Cape Town - and I was there as a soldier (?) - what else is there to say.

So I left South Africa in 1939. I was amongst the first of the South African soldiers to leave the country - be sent out of the country - in an advanced group of signals that were sent up to Kenya, and I saw very little of South Africa, in fact, for the next five and a half years.

I think I was in South Africa for about three months - the rest of the time I was outside in Somaliland, Abyssinia, the desert - Libyan Desert - and then after that in Italy - and we only came home for a very short home leave - about three months, and that was it.

So I wasn't caught up then in the political work that was going on in South Africa, but I was active in the sort of political work that was developing among the soldiers in the army, Springbok Legion. When we were in the desert, myself and a chap by the name of John Morley, we formed a union of soldiers.

The only ex-servicemen's organisations that existed in South Africa other than the sort of Afrikaaner Boer War Oud Stryders Associations was the B.E.S.O., British Ex-servicemen's League, and there was a strong feeling amongst South African soldiers that we were certainly not British, whatever else we were - we were South Africans first and foremost.

I think that the lesson a lot of English speaking South Africans learned during the last war, that they were South Africans rather than English - we wanted to have nothing to do with - anything to do with the British - British Ex-servicemen's League - we wanted our own ex-servicemen's organisation to cope with the problems we knew would face us when we got back home, so John and I started what we called a Union of Soldiers, and then we heard about the Springbok Legion, and we signed up a lot of members there in our unit and other units in the Middle East there.

Then we heard about the Springbok Legion that had started almost simultaneously down in South Africa from ex-servicemen who for one reason or another found themselves back in the - in the - in the Union - Union of South Africa (?) Jack Hodgson, for in-

F.C. .... instance, who was active there, so we linked up with them, and from then onwards we were busy recruiting for the Springbok Legion, and it became a vehicle in the South African Army for a lot of progressive thinking, on the race issue as well, amongst white South African soldiers, and there too, because of given the climate - you see, this is the important thing -

When you look at the problem of bringing the whites across, in the cold, as an abstract theoretical thing, you can see all sorts of bloody problems - but given the right climate, as existed for instance, amongst soldiers during the war, we were able to do an enormous amount of work in a progressive direction amongst them, and we took up all sorts of issues there - not only the question of increased family allowances and things like that - things that were hitting their pockets and their families, as it were - but on political issues calling for sterner measures against the Bryderband (?) and against the Ossewabrandwag, you know - we were able to do that sort of work -

And we organised a big meeting in Pietermaritzburg, strangely enough, when the first division was down in Pietermaritzburg waiting to be sent back - they brought us back for home leave because we'd never been out of the bloody front line for years - we were one of the few units that had not had a break like that.

We knew that the English soldiers, for instance, were going home and coming back and that sort of thing, but we were stuck there - so part of the agitation that we went carrying on in the army was to give us a bit of home leave, because we could see this was affecting the soldiers and their morale and everything else - so when we were concentrated in Pietermaritzburg prior to being shipped back North we started a big agitation amongst the soldiers there, because then the fellows, you know, they'd had a chance to see how their families had been battling back home, and they were fed up with this growth - the continued activity of the anti war elements - they wanted to see - put an end to these buggers, and these were including Afrikaaners, don't forget -

The bulk of the South African Army - white army - were Afrikaaners, not English speaking, and they also bloody fed up with this lot - some of them were being beaten up when they went to their home towns and their dorps and so forth, by these anti war elements - and we called a big mass meeting there, and the army got a bit worried about this and they called a number of us - the intelligence people got in touch with myself, three or four others who'd been organising this big mass meeting, and they tried to frighten us out of it, and they said this was a mutiny and we couldn't have this sort of thing and so forth and so on, and that if we went ahead with the meeting they would arrest us - so we said well, that won't do you any bloody good at all - we said : You know yourself the response we've been getting - the soldiers are going to be there at that meeting, you can forget about it - the boys are going to be - and if we not there we know what we're going to say and what we want to say, and what we have to say is designed so that it'll stimulate the war effort and not stop it, but if you take us away we don't know what's going to happen at that bloody meeting.

Now they I think they had in mind possibly the riots that had happened up in the middle east and places like Alwan (?) where the soldiers went on a rampage, so they didn't arrest us.

F.C. We had a hell of a big meeting there at - pushing forward the demands at that time.

END OF SIDE TWO.

F.C. There were a number of these old Afrikaans organisations from the Boer War, because they didn't belong to the B.E.S.L. - (.....) optimism about bringing the whites across, and there too, in the army we all had, and we were there living daily with - with - well, we were whites (Laugh) so - and one could see how, given the right circumstances, you can - you can win their political support behind particular progressive demands -

J.F. ....

F.C. Because, you know - for instance, the soldiers back home in South Africa, where the government was scared to arm the Africans and the Coloureds and the Indians in the face of the opposition from the right wing and the anti war elements, amongst the soldiers you could get across the line, that look, why shouldn't they be armed - we see them here - they driving trucks and so forth and so on - and so the demand for arming the - the - the blacks was a demand which we could put across amongst the white soldiers and have it accepted.

J.F. Now tell me, who started the Springbok Legion in South Africa?

F.C. The names that come to mind immediately was Jack Hodgson was one of the founders and first secretary, a chap by the name of Jock Isaacovitch (?), Cecil Williams - although whether he was amongst the founders or came in afterwards, I don't know - well, these are the chaps that we knew - we'd heard about - who'd started it back home in South Africa, and it was - for a long time it was - during the war, and for a good many years after the war, it was very influential.

It organised that huge anti Nationalist demonstration in Johannesburg which smashed up a Nationalist Party Conference - the first National - Malaan and Company had organised a conference in the Johannesburg Town Hall, and the Springbok Legion organised such a huge demonstration there that they had to call it off - they had to call the whole thing off.

It was a terrific demonstration - trouble and baton charges and all sorts of things there.

J.F. When was that?

F.C. This was in about 194 - 1946 - '46, ja - I think it was 1946 - a huge demonstration in Johannesburg, again with whites turning out in force, and a hell of a lot of Afrikaaners and ex-servicemen. I remember one huge Afrikaaner coming along there and (.....) carrying a rope (Laugh) I said : What you carrying that rope for? He says : If I put my hands on Malaan - he says - I'm going to hang the bastard - so (Laugh) I mean that was the strength of feeling that was - that arose there.

- J.F. Strength of feeling about what?
- F.C. Anti Nationalist - servicemen and those who'd fought in the war were pro war, and those they regarded as traitors, who tried to stab them in the back when they were fighting.
- J.F. Anti also Ossewabrandwag?
- F.C. Anti Ossewabrandwag, anti Nationalist - tremendously strong feeling there - a carry-over from the war days when the split amongst the whites on the war issue was very deep indeed. Again, to my way of thinking, if you look back on South African history, the times when the whites have been homogenous in their political thinking have been very, very few occasions. Now and again you get it amongst the Afrikaaners, but for the rest, the white population, on particular historical occasions, can be just as split - they can be split every whichway, with very high passions aroused, so that's - that was an interesting episode in history - in the South African history, that.
- J.F. Did you have contact with the army education service?
- F.C. No, Brian was - I was just an ordinary signalman - well, I was a corporal - but Brian was in the army education service, ja - I think he was for a while, anyway, but I - I'm almost sure he was.
- J.F. Because what - was that a kind of precursor - did that - it seems incongruous to think of a South African Army Unit having any progressive influence but someone like Helen Joseph said that it....
- F.C. Oh, terrible - an enormous influence, yes.
- J.F. Why was that - what was it....
- F.C. Well, I think A, because a lot of progressive South Africans - put it this way - the only people who could really put across a line (Laugh), a convincing line, were those who could analyse the situation, and who were politically aware, and the army education service was to keep up the morale of the forces, explain what was happening, and who best to do then than the - the progressives - how it happened I don't know, but there it was -
- And the army education service was progressive, possibly because it took some of the - a lead from the British Army - the British Army Education Service was also progressive. I think the nature, too - the nature of the war and the struggle that was being fought at that stage favoured the development of progressive ideas.
- J.F. And what - I'm interested in kind of your approach, because I interviewed Wolffby Colish (?) and he was so interesting because he was really a - someone who hadn't had politics - he was kind of a working class white, although he had the opportunity to take on the money and trappings and privileges of South African society, and he went into the army and it changed his life...
- F.C. That's right.
- J.F. I've got his point of view on the receiving end - on the putting out of the line end view, what were you.....
- F.C. Well, you see - no, you take - take my unit, ja, and we were active on the - we even had sort of almost formal contact with the - the - the officers used to - members of the Springbok Legion - we used to see things going a bit wrong or we didn't like, we used

F.C. .... to take these issues up, you see. Almost outside the - within - within one - well, it's always - one had to work within military regulations, but given a decent commanding officer, for instance, you could work a lot of things there.

I know in the - my unit - I used to run two newspapers, war newspapers - the one was a Springbok Legion newspaper.

J.F. What was it called? (Interruption - 'phone) (Tape off)

F.C. Right, can I talk now. So I used to run two newspapers. One was the Springbok Legion Newspaper - I can't forget what a - and the war newspaper - and it was well, everything to do with ex-ser(vicemen) - with soldiers problems, ex-servicemens problems that were arising already - people who were discharged - the general conduct of the war, what was happening and so forth and so on, and then side by side with that they used to run a more progressive sort of party war newspaper - I got away with this sort of thing (Laugh)

And, well, this all made an impact on the - the - the soldiers - and we used to go along when the Army Education Service used to call meetings on particular problems - we used to go along and participate in the discussion, put across a progressive line, raise all sorts of issues concerning African ex-servicemen, or black ex-servicemen, or whatever - I can't remember the details, but we always managed to find fresh material to put it in or perhaps write out a bit ourselves and so on, and the soldiers used to read this, but -

And then on one occasion - I've forgotten where I got it - I might have had it sent to me through contacts in Cairo, where the Army Education Service was situated - a document marked Strictly High Confidential and whatnot on the bloody Broederbond. I read this, because it gave details of which Broederbonders were in what government departments and - it was an army document that had been produced, you see.

I read this and I thought to hell with this (Laugh) - it's a secret whatever, boy (Laugh) - this is too good, boy - people must know about this, so by then - this was in Italy - by then I'd made contact with the Italian Party wherever I went - they were beginning to revise - and I always made contact with him - and they put me in touch with a printer who used to work - do underground work for them in the fascist days, and during the war under the nazis, you see - situated in a little village - so I made contact with him and I said: Will you be prepared to print something for us, no questions asked, you see.

He said yes, he would. He had a problem - he didn't have petrol for his machines - he had to run his machines with petrol somehow or other because of whatever it was - that was his power. So I managed to liberate some petrol, as soldiers say, enough for him to run his machines, and he printed this booklet.

I think Brian was there at the time, with me, participating in producing it. It was called Meet Your Enemies. We - we - we designed this cover - it's a blue - little blue booklet like this. I think we produced about two, three thousand of them, under the noses of the field intelligence, and we sent them all over the army - all the different contacts that we had throughout different units - South African units that were around, (in)cluding some back home, where it was picked up by the press and - and ....



F.C. .... splashed - it led to one of the - an increased pressure on the - on the Broederbond, you know, and the anti war elements at that time. And there I collected money - it costs us a bit of money, all this business, and I collected it from amongst the blokes in my unit - not all of them, but a lot of them - (I) used to go along and say : Look, this is what I want to do - you just read this, mate, eh - now you tell me it's not a good thing for this thing to be read by everybody, and that's it (?) -

Oh, Christ, yes, Fred - so O.K., give me a quid or whatever it was, or so many Lira, you see - and I must have had about 50 or 60 people in my unit who'd knew that I was involved, who'd given me money for it, and I had them stacked under my bloody bed in the billets there, ready to be sent out - those that hadn't been sent out when they started - (of) course the moment they got out then the army was worried about it - where the hell does this bloody thing come from, you see - and it's this leak (Laugh)

They were searching all over the bloody place to try and find out where it came from, and they never did. They made extensive enquiries in my unit, possibly because they got word that, you know, we were particularly active then - not a single person gave me away there.

There's another example of where you can, you know, you get whites to respond to something positive, and that was - well, from our angle - and I'm sure out people, the progressive South Africans who were in the - when I say our people I'm talking in very general terms - I don't know how many of them were communists or not communist - but certainly the progressive liberal South Africans who were involved, heavily involved in the Army Education Service, in speaking to the soldiers, must have opened many eyes, ja, to what was progressive in a progressive direction, and that carried on.

And there was a whole group of us in the army who said when we - the war's finished, we not going to go back to ordinary jobs - we're going to go and do full time political work one way or another, and we did. There was Brian, Ivan Sherrenbrooker (?) myself - a whole - when I say a group of us - four, five, six of us, and that's going to be - when the war finishes, full time political work.

And we did - we just got straight into political work and activity, and some of us full time. John Morley, myself, Brian Bunting, Ivan Sherrenbrooker - who else was there now - and a number of people who went into the Springbok Legion full time.

*Clapham?*  
J.F. Vic Clacken?

F.C. Vic Clacken - oh, Vic Clacken - I think he was for a while full time in the Springbok Legion, and then he dropped out - he was a cartoonist, Vic - he didn't - he played for a brief while he played a role in the Springbok Legion, and then we lost sight of him.

J.F. Just that I've read the history which said the Springbok Legion grew out of the Union of Soldiers, initiated by Morley, Turner and (in) Libya (?) and the parallel movement in the South African Army.

F.C. Ja, well I....

- J.F. Vic Clacken and.....
- F.C. John - John Morley and I - ja, John Morley and I were together in the Union of Soldiers, ja - John and I started it together because we were in the same unit.
- J.F. And when they say the parallel movement in the South African Army camp?
- F.C. The Springbok Legion?
- J.F. I guess (?)
- F.C. Yes, but that's because the Union of Soldiers that we formed was restricted to our division - almost our brigade at the beginning - so we didn't run in tandem for very long. As soon as we heard about the Springbok Legion - the Union of soldiers - we said oh, well, this is it - it's much broader and wider than ours, you know, and we didn't see ourselves, in any shape or form, in competition with them, and once we saw the principles upon which they were founded they were similar to ours, so there you are - so we didn't pursue our Union of Soldiers, we said : O.K., let's get everybody to go across to the Springbok Legion.
- J.F. And tell me what was your rank in the army - which unit or brigade?
- F.C. I was - I was with the Tenth Brigade Signal Company, and the Tenth Brigade Signal Company serviced the whole of the first South African Infantry Brigade.
- J.F. Where?
- F.C. In wherever we were fighting - in Abyssinia, Middle East, and I was - what happened, the battalions - an infantry battalion like the Dukes or the Brigade - the First South African Brigade - we would service them, so we would have - we were really part of them - although we were separate - the Signallers who belonged to the Tenth Brigade Signalling Company would be attached to various units in the First Brigade.
- I was attached to the Duke of Edinburgh's Rifles in the Infantry Battalion, and John Morley was a sergeant - he was a platoon sergeant in the Dukes, and that's how I got to know and made contact with him, and we developed the Union of Soldiers - my rank, I was just a corporal, that's all.
- J.F. In what years were you active?
- F.C. They actually attached to?
- J.F. What years were you active with the Springbok Legion - what time are we talking about?
- F.C. I'm talking about '40 - '40 right through to '45, ja.
- J.F. And just tell me a little bit, from your point of view - as I say, Wolfie kind of told me from his point of view - he talked about walking into bombed villages in Italy and he realised that it was the poor people who got hurt kind of - very basic (.....) - what did you see in terms of what was moving people politically that you would feed back into my issue of politics, non racialism, race and class in South Africa. What were you teaching these guys - what were you opening their eyes to - what were you trying

- J.F. .... to do - or did you even get into South Africa - talking about South African politics?
- F.C. Did I get into South Africa how do you mean?
- J.F. Did you get into the talking - if you were sitting with guys in the Middle East or wherever, did you actually talk to them about race and class in South Africa, or was it just look what the Nationalist government's doing or what - there.....
- F.C. Well, it wasn't the National government, no...
- J.F. But look at....
- F.C. Well, that - no - you talk about - you talk about colour issues. One of the issues that you would be raising, for instance, is the question of arming the blacks, making a maximum contribution to the war - let's get this bloody thing over - why - why, you know - so you'd be bringing in the colour issue on around concrete things.

Also, you know, soldiers being soldiers, going through Africa, Abyssinia and so forth and so on, a hell of a lot of white soldiers made contact with black women for the first time in their lives, ja.....

It's funny, you seldom heard any anti black sentiment amongst the white soldiers. In Abyssinia they'd mix freely with the Abyssinians (Laugh) - they wouldn't give a damn whether they (?) were black or white - it was a funny thing.

There was no overt - overt racialism in the South African army - who (?) manifested in the South African Army - when I say overt I'm sure it was there, obviously - it - I don't know how one did it - it was (?) just a sort of general progressive feeling there, because you fought together with, you know the South African soldiers were fighting together with Indians and African troops, particularly in Africa, Nigerians and people from - from what was then called the Gold Coast, ja - I mean Kenya, they saw for themselves that these were first class fighting men, and if you're in an army and a man's on your side you respect him, you see (Laugh)

There was that sort of general attitude, I think, was there amongst the white South African soldiers. They saw people of different races fighting together on the same side against the common enemy. This couldn't but have an effect on their general thinking, and if any - if there was anything at all it was a attitude towards say, Indian troops or African troops that they met with was one of admiration and respect, you know.

I think they saw for themselves that the people needed to be armed - they were participating in the same struggle - it was that sort of general atmosphere there, you know, and certainly they were welcomed, like when we got to Ethiopia - Abyssinia, as they called it then - you know, the people welcomed them, and the troops would respond to - to that welcome, ja, and the South African white troops would do - well, certainly were doing in Africa what they would never dreamed of having done in South Africa, which would have been a criminal offence, anyway (Laugh)

The Immorality Act didn't apply as far as the soldiers were concerned, I can assure you (Laugh) - that's the last thing they thought about (Laugh) - and all these things had an affect on their thinking - how long it lasted after the war amongst the ....

F.C. .... generality of South African white soldiers I don't know, but I'm sure a hell of a lot it stuck - hell of a lot of it stuck - and although they getting old now and old in the teeth, there's a lot of them who would be unhappy about what they seeing developing now.

It wouldn't have been possible - I doubt it if it would have been possible for any South African government at that stage to use the South African Army against the black people back home, as they doing now - I don't think that the soldiers would have - then - would have responded to that except with bloody antagonism - but then of course it didn't arise.

It's a different sort of army to the one you've got now - this one's all indoctrinated along the wrong lines, and there you had another type of indoctrination going across.

J.F. From the Springbok Legion....

F.C. From the Springbok Legion and also from the Army Education Service itself, you see, because the army was being constantly subjected to propaganda from the anti war elements, the German Army - you know, the nazis were putting across their propaganda, playing on the division in the ranks of the Afrikaaner - so in an effort to combat this and to get a common consensus the army was putting across fairly progressive lines through the Army Education Service.

I've spent a hell of a lot of time on the war now, where one's main political contribution if you were a soldier was being a soldier, I suppose, you see (?)

J.F. So you decided to come back and get involved in politics - what did that mean - what did you do?

F.C. Well, I started off by working in the Springbok Legion....

J.F. When was....

F.C. Full time - I don't know if I just - I must have been to start towards the latter half of 1945, just before the war ended in Europe, whatever date that was, and they asked me if I would work as what was then called the Non European National Non European Ex-servicemens organiser - used to organise specifically Africans, Coloureds and Indian ex-servicemen, you know - take charge of that aspect of the work.

And so I left the post office - formally resigned from the post office - I never went back there - and when I was discharged, worked full time for the Springbok Legion for about six months, I think - I'm not sure. And then I was approached by the Cape Town Communist Party district - Cape district - to ask if I would be prepared to stand as secretary, and I said I would because that, you know - that's where I wan(ted) - that's the sort of work I wanted to do primarily.

Ex-servicemens organisations and ex-servicemens organisations got a limited span of life, as it were. And then I was elected and worked as secretary down in the Cape until the party was banned, you know, and continued with the rest of - or most of the rest of the communists working underground, when we got the South African Communist Party going again.

From about '45 - '46 I worked in the Cape - so.

- J.F. So first you went back to 'Maritzburg....
- F.C. No, Johannesburg.
- J.F. To Johannesburg, and that was with the non European.
- F.C. That was with the ex - Springbok Legion, ja - and I worked in that - I headed the department, organising the black ex-servicemen.
- J.F. And how long a period was that?
- F.C. That must have been for about six months or so - and their problems were manifest, eh - they had far more problems - obviously they - all soldiers had problems arising out of demobilisation pay and allowances and getting jobs - a whole host of problems that face ex-servicemen after a war - housing - och, (you) can't imagine the sort of problems that you face.
- And of course for the Africans it was - particularly - it was a thousand times worse - they come back from fighting a war for freedom and democracy, and back they home in a bloody colour bar situation - when as ex-servicemen, certainly abroad, that wasn't the case at all, eh, but they were discriminated against in the army as far as pay and everything else was concerned - but here they were pitch-forked (?) back into society where a colour bar existed, where they had to worry about pass laws, lack of homes, housing - all sorts of things like that - having tremendous difficulty getting their demobilisation pay and things like that.
- J.F. Let me just...
- F.C. So, it was a pretty hopeless - we could do a few things, but it soon became obvious that within the context of South African society there was very little that one could do about African ex-servicemen in particular.

END OF SIDE ONE.

- J.F. So it seems....
- F.C. To then - so, you know, when I was down in the Cape and I was elected to the central committee I was in the national executive of the party - I was amongst those arrested in the sedition trial...
- J.F. In '46?
- F.C. That's in '46....
- J.F. Before you get....
- F.C. Then again.....
- J.F. Just ask about the Torch Commando - what - were you...

F.C. No, I wasn't involved in the Torch Commando. The Torch Commando was - in the run up to the general election, where the Nationalists - which the Nationalists won - and (in) the run up to that the Torch Commando was formed - it was a broader organisation than the Springbok Legion - it was formed from amongst people who'd formerly been active, if I remember correctly, or connected with the Springbok Legion at one level or another, but it was a much broader thing.

It was sort of an organisation basically ex-servicemen, formed to take the fight into the platteland, as it were - it was a United Party but not quite a United Party organisation - a sort of broader thing - today you would have - like the Progressive Federal Party types of these days, ja, and they were - and so the left wing of the - well, if you can use that term, left wing - the democratic wing (?) of the United Party - but it had a very brief - a brief existence - it faded away pretty rapidly after the election.

J.F. Why do you think that was?

F.C. Yes, well (why) - I don't think it - it was - possibly because it was never meant to go beyond the election, eh, I think, but again I'm - my memories of the Torch Commando, I must say, are pretty vague. Even at that time, you know, I thought, well, here's a mushroom organisation - it's not going to get established - it didn't have the - once it - no organisation which didn't - that said it was democratic it didn't make contact in meaningful terms with the - with the black masses of the people, and bring them into the struggle, which the Torch Commando wasn't doing, had any future, ja, as a democratic organisation of any significance whatsoever.

And the Torch Commando didn't reach beyond the confines of the white community except down in the Cape, where it attracted support from the Coloured people, particularly Coloured ex-servicemen. It was a mushroom organisation, and very soon after the general election we heard no more about it, you know - it was...

J.F. So what did you hope to achieve going to the CPSA in full time work - what did you, at that time of your life.....

F.C. Well - a socialist democratic South Africa, ja - equal rights for all - equal rights for all - the Communist Party programme that set out then. That's what I hoped to achieve and what I still hope to achieve (Laugh) I mean it's not much different to what we doing now, eh.

If you had meetings amongst the Africans you would - you talked about votes for all, ja, and free and democratic South Africa, and South Africa would eventually be socialist - Communist Party line (?) - I mean that's what I thought I was fighting for and I haven't thought any different since (Laugh) ja.

J.F. So you went down to be on - to be secretary?

F.C. Yes.

J.F. And moved to Cape Town?

F.C. And I moved to Cape Town then.

J.F. And what were your duties - what did you do practically - say up to '46?

F.C. Well - you mean as far as the party was concerned?

J.F. No, what was your political work....

F.C. Well, the usual - organisational work, right - keeping your branches and your groups together, giving them political guidance - not me personally but acting on behalf of the district committee - campaigning amongst the people on general political issues but also on basic political issues as well - problems that were cropping for the people - this was just after the end of the war, so rationing, for instance, was still in existence, I think, for certain items.

One of the first jobs that I undertook, for instance, was to help to organise the women who - in the food lorries - food vans used to go around - it was a hangover from the war. There was a shortage of rice and still a shortage of a lot of basic necessities there, and during the war the government, to stop or counter as much as it could, black markets developing, would develop a system of food vans (who) used to go along to the working class areas and used to sell say, in certain basics like sugar and rice, oil and things of that nature at set prices - much cheaper than you could get on the open market, and certainly much cheaper than on a black market -

And long queues used to form at these various spots where the vans came along, so there was a problem of organisation - organising the crew, then making sure that things went smoothly there - the women had all sorts of complaints about the van(s), so one would take these up, and then the vans were going to be withdrawn - we had contact with - through John Morely, particularly, had a lot of contact amongst the women - used to sell The Guardian there and so on -

And we had these womens committees formed, and we campaigned, and it was taken up later in Johannesburg and Durban - we started a campaign in Cape Town against the black marketeers withholding rice - jacking up the price of rice - because rice was a big staple food amongst the Coloured people, as it was amongst the Indians - and the bloody merchants were hoarding the rice, so we started a hell of a big anti black marketeer campaign, which ended up with the women actually organising the raids on the shops where we knew they had the bloody rice, and forcing these people to disgorge it, and then we would take over and sell it to the people at the regulation price.

But there (it) was a big campaign that - they - if you read the papers of those days you'll read it was a hell of a big campaign. Well, that was one of the sort of activities that we went in for - organising the elections - the Communist Party at one stage in Cape Town had four Communists on their Cape Town City Council. Other issues were growing - arising there - the question of the Coloured vote, vote for Coloured women, and then at a later stage, of course, when the Nationalists came in, there was the issue of train apartheid, bus apartheid - well, all sorts of political issues like that -

Campaigning in the Coloured townships - the municipal townships, where they didn't have the municipal vote. The - down in the Cape Province your municipal vote was based on quality - proper ...

- F.C. .... propert(y) qualifications - it wasn't based up in the Transvaal - the rest of the Provinces - if you weren't a white voter on the white voters roll you couldn't vote in municipal elections, and it wasn't so in the Cape. In the Cape you had a common roll in which there were even African voters, eh.
- J.F. On property qualifications?
- F.C. Yes - and it wasn't very high, either - you know, you didn't have to own property - you could - providing you were renting property of a certain value then you could be put on the municipal voters roll, so we had many Africans - of course, tens and tens of thousands of - maybe hundreds of thousands of Africa - of Coloured voters qualified very easily - but in an attempt to keep as many Coloured people as possible off the voters roll they didn't count municipal property wasn't counted for the purpose of quality - property qualifications, so in the working class areas particularly, where the council had developed big houses, like Athlone, Silvertown, places like that, the tenants there were - had been robbed -
- The moment you moved into one of those houses you lost your municipal franchise, so that's one of the issues that we were camp - you know, campaigned around - and at a later stage, of course, there was the election of Sam to Khan (?) to parliament, myself to the provincial council.
- I stood in the 1948 election as a communist candidate (in) the Cape Flats constituency. It was a flag carrying nomination - we campaigned because we knew we didn't stand a hope - it was too heavily out gunfire (?) here by the whites - they made sure that the Coloureds never - were never anywhere in a position where they could dominate a particular constituency - very interesting campaign though, who - well, the usual - you know, whatever a Communist Party did and worked was concerned with I was concerned with it.
- J.F. And then the '46 sedition trial - can you tell me what the lead up to that was?
- F.C. Well - it was the miners strike that led up to that, eh. Now down in the Cape we hadn't been directly involved in organising the miners strike - you know, that was - if anybody had been involved at all it was the Johannesburg District Committee, and we didn't know what the response was going to be like to the strike call itself, so the - the strike was not a surprise because obviously we knew that - you know, that organisation had taken place, but the scale of the strike, I think, came as a bit of a surprise to everybody at that stage, you know -
- African Mineworkers Union had been dormant for a long time - not easy to get a strike of mineworkers done (going) (Coughing) - and then they arrested us, arising out of that strike, after dealing with the Johannesburg District Committee - I think it was afterwards or maybe towards the end of their trial - they picked us up, and we went through preparatory examinations and were chucked out and they re-arrested us, and went to trial and that was chucked out and they re-arrested us again - the bloody thing went on for about two and a half years, if I remember correctly -
- And it was (the) beginning of the sort of legal harassment of the Communist Parties and the Communists, and the democratic movement that took off at that stage - I don't know what else one can



F.C. .... say about that sedition trial - it just was a - it was a - well, from our point of view it was - it certainly focused attention on the communists - it - we fought a good battle, I think, in the - in the courts. It had a political impact upon, I think, general thinking in South Africa.

But there've been so many trials since then that it's - what was it, 40 years ago - bloody hell!

J.F. What was the attitude of people to communism and to the CPSA, blacks and whites?

F.C. Certainly I think one of respect, even al - even those - amongst, I suppose, the..... (Interruption - 'phone) - well, you know - attitude towards the Communist Party and towards communists varied - it varied from one of intense hatred to one of respect and to one of support - I mean they even managed, in Johannesburg of all places, where the - as I say, the municipal voters are all whites - Hilda Bernstein was able to be elected to the Johannesburg City Council.

Certainly down in the Cape the Communist Party was, I would say, where it wasn't supported, respected for the work it was doing...

J.F. Do you see a difference between how blacks saw it and how whites saw it - how blacks and whites....

F.C. Oh, well, yes, the - the - as far as the blacks were concerned, (and) as far as the Coloured people were concerned, right, when we put ourselves - were able to put ourselves to the - or our standing to the test, you know, in municipal elections, we could see from the support we were getting that we support - you know, we - we got support from the Coloured people - and during the election of the so-called Native Representative and Sam Khan stood, we swept the boards - I think Sam's opponent lost his deposit, so widespread was his support -

(It) was an interesting election there - you could see the Africans breaking away from the old liberal influence that they'd followed up to then, like Martinoz and all those - that was a real key election in which you could see that the African people down in the Cape at any rate, and I'm sure that they -- they married the attitude of Africans elsewhere - swung decisively away from the old liberal influences and embarked upon the course that they still following now on a much higher level, and they said, Right, let's - we want to see complete and absolute change.

One of the slogans that they evolved themselves around our election campaign was Vote New Look - New Look - and at that time there was that womens fashion - a new look fashion they called it - I don't know if you remember it - a sort of - there was a - a womens fashion that was - everybody spoke about it - a new look it was called -

And in this election campaign the people were saying Vote New Look, New Look, and that really was - was a new look as far as they were concerned. They wanted a complete break with the old ways, and we provided the answer there. We didn't go along and pussyfoot about it - we said : You've got to do the job yourself - we can - you can put us to parliament and we can kick up a bloody noise in parliament there and use it as a platform, but that's as far as it goes - the rest of it is up to you, eh - and they'd not ...

F.C. .... - they'd been used to the sort of paternalistic approach before on part of you've liberal politicians who were prepared to confine the struggle to the parliamentary level, such as it was for the Africans - oh, well, widespread support - and when we had meetings they were attended by thousands of people, sometimes tens of thousands of people, and we had no lack of - of recruits to the party -

Not all of them stayed - when one of the features of operating in South Africa, we'd have a big meeting say, on the Grand Parade or one of the African townships, call for recruits, and we'd get lots of people signing on. Then of course you're faced with the problem (of) integrating them into the organisation, and many of them who joined the party on the basis of party programme - what they heard from us, because they wanted to fight, but a lot of them of course didn't stick because oh, for a whole variety of reasons -

They didn't come along to meetings - the spirit was there but (Laugh) they were more supporters than the sort of members we were looking for, because our discipline, even in the days when we were legal, was fairly strict from the point of view that we - it was never enough for us that someone should just pay his subscription - he or she had to belong to a party union - unit - attended meetings, take part in party activity, and if he didn't measure up to those standards, then from time to time we would have - we'd look through our membership lists and see what people were doing or weren't doing and then lapse them, so there was a big turnover in party membership -

But a hell of a lot of people who didn't make the grade as far as continued party membership was concerned remained our staunch and solid supporters for the rest of their lives, no doubt about that, and one sees, for instance, in the present upsurge, old communists coming to life again, and prominently in some cases, eh - or you hear of so-and-so's son or daughter being active - the wide -

The party's influence is very widespread, I would say. I've no doubt whatsoever that when we get back to open activity in South Africa, and all the restrictions on meetings and political activity are lifted, that the party will make very, very rapid progress indeed, eh - very, very rapid progress.

J.F. Let me ask you - about that '46 trial - what was the government out to do - what was their agenda - why were they....

F.C. I think they were becoming worried about the growing influence of the party, and of course the Smuts government particularly were always very sensitive about what was happening in the miners - you know, in the mines - the gold mines particularly - they've always reacted fiercely and immediately to any action there by the mineworkers.

I don't know what the hell it was after. Maybe they were trying to propitiate the right wing, as this government's now (Laugh) trying to provoke - propitiate its right wing, because there was no - they couldn't possibly have had - the intelligence would have told them that the Communist Party as such hadn't organised the mineworkers and the executive committee of the Communist Party was not in any way directly involved - they must have known that - they (were) just beating the anti communist drum, I think, and hoping to hinder the advance of the Communist Party which ....

F.C. .... was making steady advances there.

J.F. I read that the prosecution set out to prove - what the prosecution set out to prove were the Communist Party secret police was in fact the Springbok Legion which had no organisational ties with....

F.C. (Laugh) Absolute rubbish - I mean the sort of things that they - they brought up both in the sedition trial and then subsequently in the treason trial, eh - I was also involved in that - ag, were just figments of the imagination's the only way to describe it. They saw communists everywhere - they really - it's quite extraordinary - and in the treason trial, for instance, they were putting forward witnesses there - their own witnesses - blacks, for instance - one African there - making the most incredible statements from the witness box -

Like the Communist Party had - and the A.N.C. had - had planned to sprinkle poisonous white powder in the white suburbs - I mean incredible bloody stuff - and this is from witnesses that if the police had - had even done their homework properly, checking up on these - the lunatics they were getting there, ja, to give evidence against us.

They would've been able to establish in tee twos (two ticks) that that man could not possibly (have) been at the bloody meeting that he says he was at because he was at bloody in prison as an ordinary criminal at the time he was supposed to be there.

They were raising all sorts of things like that. Whether they believed it or not I don't know - I don't know. I think among some anti communists they go a bit mad in the end - they believe any damn thing as long as they think it's got to do with communism - impossible.

As for the Springbok Legion being our secret police, anybody who knew the Springbok Legion with the party's relationship with it would know that that was just a lot of rubbish - absolute rubbish. The two organisations were completely and absolutely separate, and the Communist Party impact on the Springbok Legion, apart from the fact that there were communists working in it, was minimal - it was a autonomous organisation absolutely.

Certainly the communists would have been the last to think of the Springbok Legion (Laugh) as the secret police, I can assure you - it's laughable.

J.F. You talked about the threats that whites perceived from the Communist Party - what about the kind of - I know you're saying that there was support from blacks, but of the criticisms that came black quarters say Unity Movement or the youth league - the A.N.C. Youth League - can you talk a bit about what kind of blacks were critical of the CP - there was the kind of line that began to emerge up until the break between the P.A.C. and the A.N.C. of blacks - some blacks - the minority, but some blacks saying that the CP is white dominated.

F.C. You used to get that - that was the line - that was the line taken by the Unity Movement and by the people who - the Africans who were with the Unity Movement in the All African Convention - that is the line that they were taking. From the African Youth League up in - operating mainly up in the Transvaal the - I think that was probably their line as well, that this was a white dominated organisation - Communist Party.

F.C. Down in the Cape opposition came mainly from the Unity Movement, and they would boycott elections, and it was on specific issues. Every time the A.N.C. called for a general strike, for instance, you'd find the Unity Movement saying it wasn't the time; they'd oppose it - there were concrete points of conflict between ourselves, the Communist Party and its policies and the policies being pursued by the Unity Movement, particularly on organisational grounds, eh.

The Unity Movement's idea of political organisation was one that we always opposed - they didn't believe in a single political organisation. Their movement was called a movement, not a party or congress. It was - it consisted of a whole host of all sorts of organisations which belonged to it in a nice broad lovely movement, which come to be dominated by the same characters all the time because they never had anything like elections - it was composed of civic associations, teachers organisations, pigeon clubs, sports clubs - anybody could belong to the Unity Movement.

And it was that sort of broad amorphous - they opposed us politically, mainly I think because they - their main accusation was this was a white dominated organisation, which of course it wasn't, but.....

END OF SIDE TWO.

J.F. At the same time they opposed.....

F.C. They opposed us - they respected us - I think the communists were respected amongst the blacks, even among those who opposed us most vehemently.

J.F. But just to talk about the opposition, was there also opposition from A.N.C. Youth League kind of pan Africanist league (?) members - did you ever get Africans telling - kind of pushing the line that there was white domination by these communists?

F.C. Yes, you got that down in the Cape and you got that up in the Transvaal amongst the African National Congress Youth League people, but some of those of course - in the A.N.C. Youth League some of the most prominent of them of course changed their policy substantially.

J.F. The A.N.C. Youth League?

F.C. Oh, yes - I mean we were the people who dominated the A.N.C. Youth League - they (there) were people like Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki - not Govan Mbeki - I think Govan Mbeki was always opposed to any anti communist line - Nelson Mandela, and very possibly also.....

J.F. But I'm looking at non racialism and racialism even of blacks against whites in a political way, and I'm just wondering did they try to use that - did you ever have the experience of blacks saying your white.....

F.C. Oh, yes - oh, yes - that - if we had a meeting in Athlone say, for instance, you can be sure, specially at - during my (?) election campaign, or any other campaign that we were - the....

F.C. .... Unity Movement people would come along there, and they'd use anti white theme (?) - say here, you're a white - it's all right for you, you're just a white - what do you know about it and so forth and so on, ja. If I was speaking on behalf of the party, because we always had - our Coloured comrades would also be addressing meetings like that - and one had to always fight against that politically and say : Look, it is - it is possible and whites should be participating in the struggle together with others, eh - listen to what I say, not the colour of my bloody skin, ja, so we - we had that sort of thing happening - even down in the Cape I mean with the P.A.C. people at a later stage, where it was based on anti white - whitism - not just directed against us because we were white communists but whites generally, you know, had no place in our struggle - none whatsoever - we go it alone.

I mean the - the P.A.C. slogan down in the Cape, arising out of Sharpeville and immediately afterwards where they - they swept the townships at one time down there - was to We Fight on Our Own - (in) fact amongst the Africans it wasn't the question of being anti white - they were anti Coloured as well, in that sense, so they - this is our bloody struggle - you keep your nose out of it - that was -

For a time down in the Cape they - they - immediately after Sharpeville they swept the boards, but then the A.N.C. it wasn't long before they regained its influence because movements like the P.A.C. movement at (.....) and down in the Cape they can very rapidly become dominated by criminal elements, ja -

They were demanding that everybody should belong to the P.A.C., and produce a P.A.C. card - going into peoples houses, forcing them to make contributions or pay membership fees, even when they didn't want to, when they were A.N.C. supporters - they wouldn't let A.N.C. peoples selling The Guardian, for instance - they used to beat them up - our paper - well, I don't know if it was The Guardian (.....) at that stage -

I worked for the paper with Brian for a while, when the party was banned - so you know, then fights developing in the townships between the A.N.C. people on the one hand and the P.A.C. on the other. I imagine the P.A.C. elements (have) still got support down in Cape Town, but I doubt if it'll ever reach the level which they reached immediately after Sharpeville and the big demonstrations there, and because they antagonise the people because of their activity amongst them.

J.F. And did you fight it on your own or did black comrades come and support you in.....

F.C. Oh, yes, we never - there's never any - any - if we were to spoke at - if I happened to be a speaker at a meeting - at Langa, for instance - we used to have very big meetings in Langa - African comrades spoke on the same platform together with us - they were probably the main speakers there, you know - oh, got support - and how we got support, ja - and we would never have been able to make any headway at all amongst the African people if it weren't for the work of African communists, eh.

They the ones that organised the African people behind the Communist Party, not us, eh - if you like, we - we were there, and in some cases prominent, but our presence there underlined the nature of the Communist Party, and was a class organisation - it wasn't

F.C. .... on race - that was one of the big points which the communists were - were always making and still make today - they say : Look, this isn't just a black/white fight - this is a fight - a class fight, or a fight for democratic rights that's for everyone, eh, and we mustn't fall into the trap of our enemies - they want us to hate each other, eh - and the African people, and you can see it today through the leading organisation, have accepted that proposition - much as they hate white oppression and are prepared to kill as many whites as possible - or not as possible - as necessary in order to win their freedom - you can see the welcome which they gave in Alexandra Township to the two, three hundred whites who were bold enough and courageous enough to go there, ja, and gave them a very warm welcome indeed.

There's a very strong feeling amongst the African people, and it's based on political understanding that this is not an anti white struggle, and they - certainly now in the ranks of the A.N.C. they actively campaign against - they see that feeling - the development of that sort of feeling as a political danger, as one that plays into the hands of the - the enemy, eh, the racist enemy - and well, there's the A.N.C. now for the first time in its history is - you know, opened its doors deliberately to all-comers - also the Africans, black or white - the A.N.C. has never had a colour bar written into its constitutions, as far as I know, ever, although they never encouraged whites or Indians or Coloureds to join them - it was predominantly an African organisation, which it is today, ja.

So it's a big political issue, that one, eh - and you'd find other African comrades who understood it more than anyone else would be fighting amongst the Africans - when I say fighting I don't mean physically fighting but politically, to win them over to the idea : Look, this isn't a black/white fight, all right - we fighting against white oppression, and if we get a good white man, whether he be Fred Carneson and so on, we must welcome him in the bloody struggle, you know - you know, this sort of talk, I'm sure, and discussions went on amongst them all the time.

We wouldn't have, on our own - why do I say on our own - but it wasn't a question of me going there as a white man - I was going as a communist, and (Laugh) there's my African comrades with me - and then women - and they were men and women who were active amongst their own people on behalf of their people on rents, on everything, housing, trade union work - they were there amongst their people - and that's how the Communist Party got, or won support amongst the Africans - not through the work of white communists but basically through the work of African communists amongst their own people, eh, so the idea that this was sort of some white dominated party going along and working amongst Africans is completely false.

It may have been true in the very early formative stages of the Communist Party, but that was only for a very brief time, ja - very brief time, when communism and organisation was being introduced into South Africa by progressives and revolutionaries who'd settled there from Europe, but that was for a very brief history - part of our history - four, five years at the most, then took off.

Similarly amongst the Coloured people, and our strength amongst the Coloured people - there the Coloured people accepted - accepted whites and white political activists far more easily ....

- F.C. .... than the Africans did, eh. Yes, there was always that - there was always that anti white element, and still there, I'm sure of it - you don't live in a society such as ours, and deliberately based on racialism and race hatred and fear, without the - the mud and the muck sticking everywhere, and everybody's consciousnessless (?) ja.
- J.F. And tell me in - leading up to the time of the banning of the CPSA, had you married?
- F.C. Had I married?
- J.F. Ja, by that stage?
- F.C. Oh, yes - I've been married now - Sarah and I have been married - oh, bloody hell - about forty five years we've been married - oh, yes, I was married.
- J.F. You got married in what year?
- F.C. God, you ask me, I tell you (Laugh)....
- J.F. That's O.K., I....
- F.C. No - oh, yes, I was very much married then - I've got it down here because I keep my married state here for various - sometimes you need it for documents and so on, eh - where we - Ja, in '43 - it's - it's '86 now - 43 years we've been married....
- J.F. So you...
- F.C. I married during the war.
- J.F. You got married in 1943 - and when were your - do you have kids?
- F.C. Three.
- J.F. When were they born?
- F.C. There was - Lynn was born in 1944 - my son, John, who's teaching in the A.N.C. school at Mazimbu now, he was born in '51, and my daughter, Ruth, was born in '53 - there's a big gap between our first and our second child, mainly because I was - we were both very active politically then, you see - so I was married, but why do you ask that question?
- J.F. No, I'm just - with so many of the people I've interviewed they've told about the toll it took on their family or how their family responded, but your wife was - was she also active?
- F.C. Oh, yes, my wife's parents were among the founder members - early members - the very early members of the South African Communist - the Communist Party of South Africa - and very active, so my wife grew up in that politically active atmosphere.
- J.F. What was her maiden name?
- F.C. Sarah.
- J.F. Her maiden name?
- F.C. Oh, Ruben - R u b i n - Rubin - Sarah Rubin - and both her parents were active in the Communist Party of South Africa.

J.F. And did she hold any office in the organisations - did she work for any organisation - when you say she was active?

F.C. She was active - she may have been secretary of a group or something like that - I don't think she held any office at a district level, ja - but I'm not sure - down in Durban - she was active down in Durban - that's when I first met her, see. When I was forming the group, that's when I first - but I didn't think of her in those days as a wife - had lots of girlfriends there - and she was in Durban, and a girlfriend in Durban's too far away, isn't it, so (Laugh) - so I never really thought about her in those terms then.

She was a little older than I was and - she just turned 70 yesterday, hence all the flowers, my Sarah - so she had no problem whatsoever there, you see.

Sometimes she says to me it's sometimes a drawback to have been brought up in a family like that and not having to (have) gone through the struggle to become a - not a struggle but you know, through all the formative periods, and get to know the white workers, as I did, you know.

I know their thought processes because I had to go through the - the same thing. I can talk and argue with white workers - do propoganda and work amongst them because I'm familiar with the way they think, and a lot of - not a lot but some white communists, like Sarah, who arrived fully fledged, ja, they sometimes find it a little bit difficult to - to approach white workers because they're not quite sure of their reaction, and I know - and I think a lot of white workers who've reached where I have reached, you know, have gone through the same - same struggle - we had to overcome the same thinking in our own minds - we had to combat this idea and combat that idea - I can see how much has....

J.F. Does she spell Sarah with an h or without - how does she spell Sarah?

F.C. S a r a h.

J,F. So in 195....

F.C. And she's still active - I mean there she is - she's - I think now she's - I think for a while she - down in the Cape she was secretary of the Soviet - the South African Soviet - Cape branch of the South African Soviet Friendship Society - she worked for a trade union there to,, I think, as (for) a while.

And she's now sort of assistant minute secretary of the A.N.C. womens section here, ja, and all my children are very interested. My son is very active A.N.C. member - he's teaching at the A.N.C. school at Mazimbu - have you been there?

J.F. I've been to....

F.C. And you didn't meet him there?

J.F. I didn't get to.....

F.C. Oh, you didn't get there - and he's worked in Mozambique as a teacher - he's just married a Zulu - I'll show you pictures there - And my daughter, Ruth, is active in the anti apartheid movement down in Durban. My daughter, Lynn, is a member of the A.N.C.,....



F.C. .... so all my children have followed in our footsteps, which we very happy about that, as you can imagine - very happy indeed.

J.F. So back to that time of the banning - the Suppression of Communism Act - did you expect that or was that kind of a surprise?

F.C. No - oh, no, there was plenty of warning about the Suppression of Communism Act. First of all, the Nationalists had for years been virulently anti communist - in their speeches and their propaganda they were holding up the - the communists and the Communist Party as the worst enemies of South Africa and people who had to be dealt with and so forth and so on in the run up to the election.

They - they'd promised, I think, in their propaganda speeches and their programmes that they were - propaganda they were getting out amongst the white electorate - that they would take action against the communists - and then as now, as they saw as the main - main danger to white supremacy and oh, all the rest of it - so in fact I think a lot of people in South Africa the Nationalist victory in 1948 came as a shock - they knew it would be close, ja, but I don't think anybody thought that Smuts was going to be defeated as heavily as he was - that he would lose ground, yes, but that he would actually be defeated so soon after the war was almost unbelievable as far as the people of South Africa, whites and Coloured people certainly - I don't think the Africans were particularly interested in one way or another even then, eh.

They couldn't vote in it - white politics was not for them - so it was a bit of a shock - and knowing the war history of the Nationalists, and how heavily influenced they were by pro nazis, people expected them to take action much quicker than they did, in fact, you know.

There was an atmosphere of fear abroad - I'm not thinking so much as the communists - we - you get used to that sort of (Laugh) thing, and it takes a lot more than that to frighten us - so we not frighten(ed) (?) - but amongst a lot of other - specially amongst the Jewish population there was fear, eh, that these people had come into power - and people thought in terms of nazi terror and things of that nature - but of course it wasn't like that - the Nationalists didn't have the power at that stage to go ahead immediately -

It took them a couple of years to get round to dealing with us, but there was plenty of warning that they were going to deal with it - I mean the Suppression of Communism Act, it was preceded by a big build up propaganda campaign against the party and the communists, and we were responsible for this, that and the other, and we knew it was coming, and then when they put a Bill before parliament, we already had a parlia - we had a member in parliament, Sam Khan, then.

We knew we could follow the different stages of the Bill, so from that point of view it wasn't - it didn't come as a - as a surprise at all, ja. Well, once the Nationalists were in power we knew that they would carry out what they said they were going to carry out, and that's deal with us one way or another.

We had two years - two years more than we expected, actually - you know, once they'd won - but they were still playing - playing within the rules of the parliamentary game, which is why whatever vestivages of parliamentary democracy may still exist in ....

F.C. .... the country was very useful - people who were fighting. Not that - you know, their - their certain democratic freedoms which (are) (were) always important - and the Nationalists weren't able to move fast enough - took them many years before they were able to implement their programme.

We were - thought perhaps maybe they would do it much quicker but they didn't - they had to work within the framework that they inherited when they came to power, and I've no doubt about it too, inside the Nationalist Party as well there were elements who would not have at that stage tolerated any - any sort of coup - coup d'etat attitude, eh.

So when the Suppression of Communism Act was passed we were - we were already prepared for it psychologically - we knew it was coming.

J.F. Were you a paid member of the party?

F.C. Yes, full time worker.

J.F. And was Sarah doing other work or was she a paid political worker?

F.C. No, Sarah wasn't a paid political worker - I don't know what work - Sarah was a housewife for a long time - I'm not sure, to tell you the truth - if I tell you that she'd bloody well clock me on the ears. No, she worked, as I say, for the British Soviet Friendship Society - then she worked, I think, for the jewellers and goldsmiths union in Cape Town - what else did she do - various odd jobs like that, you know, but they not necessarily - she wasn't a full time political worker.

J.F. So what happened to you as of the Suppression of Communism Act in the (?) 1950's?

F.C. Well, the first thing that happened, of course, was that I no longer had a job (Laugh) - me personally, eh - and then, of course, all of us we didn't stop our political activity just because the party was banned, either our general political activity or I was, for instance, then, I think, already a member of the provincial council - I'd been elected to the provincial council, ja.

J.F. When were you elected?

F.C. At (about) '49 - just before the Suppression of Communism Act, or just after - I can't remember these dates. I was kicked out of the provincial council the same time that Sam Khan was kicked out of the parliament, after the Suppression of Communism Act was introduced and they start(ed) implementing its provisions, one of which was that they could get rid of any named communist who was elected to parliament or the provincial council.

So there was plenty of political activity to do and we did it - and then, of course, there was the question of rebuilding the party underground, eh - that also took up time and attention of many communists. Jobwise, well, my job came to an end, that was for sure, and I found it very difficult to get work.

The atmosphere was - wasn't conducive to anybody employing a known communist. I eventually got work - during this period we - we - without my in laws, and selling the house we had, we bought a bigger house and we ran it as a bed and breakfast place - ....

F.C. .... guesthouse as a - and both is something that saved us during difficult times but gave us a hell of a lot of trouble, as you can imagine (Laugh) - keeping our head above water there.

And eventually I got a job working in a furniture factory, doing costing, wages, factory costing, shipment costing, book-keeping work - that sort of thing. And then when Sam was thrown out of parliament, and I was thrown out of provincial council, and the question arose as to who we were going to put up as a candidate - we couldn't put them up then as communists, but everyone knew who the communists were in Cape Town, and anybody we backed was going to be elected - and Brian was then editor of the paper, Guardian, and he said well, he couldn't undertake that job, stand for parliament and do his work as a parliamentarian unless he had some help on the paper, so I was asked if I would take on the job there, and I did.

I knew nothing about newspapers. The most I'd edited were party magazine - well, not magazine - a publication called Freedom, for a while, but that's as far as my - just as far as my - my journalistic experience went - so I was pitchforked into this job, and I worked on the paper right until the time we were all knocked out - first as editor when Brian was in parliament, and then as general manager.

J.F. And when was that - from?

F.C. Heavens alive now (?) - '50 - from maybe '51 right through until the paper was finally knocked out of action.

J.F. And when was that?

F.C. God, I don't know - Brian would tell you about that.

J.F. And doing underground SAPC work did - I'm just looking at the non racialism aspect of it - were you able to work with blacks, or did you have to, because of surveillance and stuff, have to concentrate more on whites?

F.C. Absolutely not - I mean the whole essence of underground work is to be able to - it's got to show itself politically somewhere or another in the open, and - no, there was no difficulty as far as that was concerned. Our main work then, as it was before, was working amongst the black workers, Coloured people, no-one else (?) not amongst the whites, eh.

We didn't neglect the whites, but not our main - main function is to work to organise the revolutionary section of the working class, and those are found amongst.....

END OF SIDE ONE.

F.C. .... one never lost sight of the fact, you know, that one needed to work amongst the whites, but the main thrust of our activity - activity of the party - was amongst the African and - and down in the Cape the Coloured people...

J.F. But I'm just saying how does that work practically - wasn't that - were you under a lot of surveillance?

- F.C. Oh, yes, good God - at one time I think I had a squad - they had a squad of about fifteen people watching me - came out in one of my trials - they were bringing them from all over the bloody country to watch me and my family.
- J.F. What do you mean - what....
- F.C. So, no, you arranged to meet - it wasn't easy - it was always difficult but not - by no means impossible, ja. You made sure that you - you - that you ducked the surveillance, otherwise you didn't go ahead with the meeting if you thought there was any difficulty, and one (.....) - work would have been unthinkable without those conditions, but there again I mean it was our Africans and our Coloured comrades who took the lead in working in the - the areas - but there was -
- You know, the - although the Communist Party was banned and underground, communists were active, and people saw that they were active. I mean when Brian stood as a parliamentary candidate, and backed by Sam Khan and myself and this African leader and that African leader, the people knew what it was all about.
- Vote him in - they knew Brian was a communist, although he wasn't able to stand as a communist, and when he was knocked out and we put Ray Alexander up they voted for her too, eh, so there was all that work connected with - with concrete political activity that was going on, and the struggle didn't stop because the Communist Party was banned, by any manner of means - (Laugh) it was intensified, you know, and those of us who weren't personally banned from attending meetings and things like that - some of us were - many of us were.
- I, for a long time, was active in the trade union movement there before I was banned, prevented from doing so - prevented from attending gatherings or belonging to (a) trade union - all that activity that was on the go - and then gradually you - they got the party together again and functioning as an organisation - always difficult, dangerous, but we did it.
- J.F. I'm just interested in if there's any anecdotes you could tell me about how it actually worked in terms of having to organise with blacks at a time when you were so under surveillance - I remember Ray Simon's daughter talking about blacks coming up dressed as domestic servants when they were actually coming to political meetings, and just in terms of how it worked practically, or was it not that difficult?
- F.C. Yes - well, you see, it's not as if all contact were cut between whites and Africans or whites and Coloureds meeting - it wasn't like that at all, ja - the old comrades and contacts we had amongst the Africans, if they wanted to pop up to my house on a friendly visit they'd do so, ja, and some of them would be communists, some of them wouldn't be communists, eh, and if you had anything to discuss that you didn't want to be heard, you made sure you didn't discuss say, in front of a telephone or something like that, ja, and then for -
- As for when it came to more formal meetings you could use these contacts to set up the - the say, organisational structures that happened - or if somebody was arrested you'd find - and they were being arrested, and people would gather around and - or we'd have parties - I mean so they knocked out the Communist Party, but we still had the paper, and the paper was a real source of strength

F.C. .... both to the party and to the A.N.C. at that time when the organisations - the African - A.N.C. hadn't yet been banned, but it was moving into a position where it was beginning to work under semi legal conditions, and there the newspaper was - played a very, very powerful role in during that whole period of - you'd organise yourselves party around the paper, selling the paper, keeping contact with your sellers all over the place - some of them were communists, some of them weren't communists -

So there was a lot of organisational work that could be done - it wasn't as if we suddenly, you know, had to duck underground, like they say in the days of the nazi terror in Germany - it wasn't like that at all in the '50's and the '60's, though there was plenty of danger knocking around, eh, it was never as bad as - as it was, I imagine, under the nazi occupation in - in Europe, for instance.

Now it would be, eh, in the townships and so on where they now going after you and wanting to kill you - that's another matter - but that wasn't the atmosphere in those days, eh. A lot of activity went on. There was a question of municipal elections, for instance.

There were municipal elections taking place, so one paid attention to which candidate you going to support, what sort of demands did you want to see being put forward during the election campaign - treason trial come along - question of organising support for the treason trialists - financial and moral support - had big battles going on, eh, and they had to be fought, so I think, you know, if you writing about that period I think it's best to look at the concrete struggles that were being waged then, and in all those struggles you'll see that the party and communists made a terrific input.

Their presence was there all the time. They didn't for one moment think that you could organise a party, or re-organise a party, an illegal party, except in the course of struggle, eh, because that's where you measure up - people measure up, ja - and thinking of all the struggles that took place there - there was the struggle against train apartheid - mind you, those - the party was still - still legal in those days.

But all the - you know, the political issues were there, and no lack of them, to take up and to fight out, eh, and you did whatever you could within the bounds of the - your own personal restrictions - banning restrictions - because my wife and I - we were banned from the one particular magisterial district in Cape Town - we weren't able to attend meetings - they had to - in (and) our banning order said specifically that we could speak to each other and contact each other, but even within those constraints you found ways and means of - of carrying on -

Even when I was under most surveillance I was - and people were being arrested and sent and banished to their areas - I used to get around and keep contact with people, collecting food and money for people who - the wives - families of those who'd been detained or sent out - there was that work - that type of work to be done in addition.

J.F. When were you banned?

F.C. Oh, heavens alive - about '50 - when did they - I was amongst the first to get banning orders - can't remember - about '52 - I know I was banned for over - for over 20 years - I was never without a banning order of one kind or another, and each one ....

- F.C. .... become more and more repressive and restrictive.
- J.F. But the first one would have been in '52?
- F.C. I think so - when they dished out the first banning orders banning communists from trade unions and attending meetings, I got my banning order then.
- J.F. After the Suppression of Communism Act?
- F.C. After the Suppression of Communism Act, yes, but how soon afterwards I don't know - might have been a year or two after the passing of the Act - because they had to go through all the legal rigmarole of compiling lists and this, that and the other, so it may have been a good two years, but I'm not sure - I'm not sure.
- J.F. Can you remember in the late '50's the debate that led Sebukwe to ban the A.N.C. - the whole anti non racialism debate - were people in Cape Town talking, or people in your circles talking about this attack on non racialism and then ultimately the P.A.C. leaving the A.N.C.?
- F.C. That - that was just before Sharpeville, but we - we didn't - it wasn't presented in that light at all - we were all too familiar with the struggle inside the A.N.C. between the different sections within the A.N.C., being partly boots on anti - anti whitism, on racialism and on anti communism - those were all familiar arguments with us.
- We didn't concentrate our attention on fighting it out on that base (basis) - it didn't work that way. The split with the P.A.C., for instance - the A.N.C. was going to embark upon a really huge anti pass campaign and had put in a lot of work throughout the country on that, and it was the P.A.C. jumping the gun, eh, deliberately putting a spoke in the wheel as far as we were concerned - that was the issue - it didn't - so the racial issues was there all the time, you see.
- Where - where the conflict arose is over particular forms of political activity, policies that had to pursue we pursued in relation to the struggle - the P.A.C. wasn't only against collaboration with whites in any way whatsoever, it was against collaboration with the Coloureds and Indians, and the A.N.C. was pursuing a policy of being about the widest possible measure of unity, first amongst the non white people and then amongst democrats at large, eh, so it presented itself not in an abstract form eh.
- When you fought against the racialist go it alone ideas of the P.A.C. it was around concrete political issues - we should have unity with the Coloureds and Indians, and you actually went ahead and you tried to structure that - that unity between the Indian Congress, the Coloured Peoples Congress and the - and the A.N.C., so these manifestations of racialism inside the black movements were never, as I say, on an abstract level - they always come down to concrete political forms of activity, eh, so - ja - that's a - I think that's an important point to make, you see, to see where that was - and the P.A.C. - I mean the A.N.C. people were absolutely furious at the way in which the P.A.C. had deliberately jumped the gun, ja.
- J.F. Were you involved in the re-surfacing of the SACP when it was announced that it was - that it in fact - when it announced the road to freedom programme - what was that, '61 - the SAPC was banned, and then.....

- F.C. Then the SACP arose, ja, from the ashes, as it were - yes -
- J.F. Were you involved in the arising of the SACP in terms of that public ....
- F.C. Yes, I was - I was - I was - when I was sentenced to jail I was sentenced to jail for belonging to the Communist Party, so it's no secret that I was engaged at that stage in what was going on inside the party.
- J.F. When were you detained then?
- J.C. '6- - going '66 I think - '66 - end of '65 - I think it was December, '65 - gosh, one of the big adventures of my life and I can't even remember when (Laugh) - it's a funny thing that after a while you - you regard that as just one incident, you know - you - I was in - till '72 I was in.
- J.F. So you were picked up - where were you detained from, your house?
- F.C. In Cape Town - from my house, yes.
- J.F. And had you expected it to any degree?
- F.C. You always expect it when you work underground, ja - you knew that there was - people had been picked up for a start, eh - I was certainly expecting it. I knew that people had been picked up in Johannesburg, that the police were getting information, more and more information as a result of methods of interrogation - torture, the rest of it - and then I was getting more direct information saying so-and-so, police know about this, that and the other, so it came as no surprise to me when I was arrested.

(In) fact there had been suggestions that I should leave the country - the pressure was - then the - the net was closing in very rapidly - but I decided no, what the hell, stick it out - but there was also so much - there's so much work to do all the time, you can't just give it up - maybe it was a mistake I made, personal mistake - I don't know -

I never thought of it in that sense - but it didn't come as a surprise at all. Had I known that they were there waiting for me - as it happened I was out doing some very illegal work at (Laugh) the time, and my son tried to warn me by jumping out of the window, but the police were too quick with him - quick for him - because the police moved in when I wasn't there and they kept everybody there - they wouldn't let them move out of the room -

My son had some friends there, my daughter had some friends - they wouldn't let them - they were young schoolchildren - wouldn't let them move either, so made sure that I was there - as I pulled in the garage my son jumped out of the window - I was so angry with him, because I told him and his mates that they shouldn't jump out the window - you know, they used to - it was easier to jump out the window than going through the front door when they were playing, and I used to say to them : Don't jump out the window, out of the bloody door, you see -

And this time he jumped out of the window and before he could warn me they were there and they grabbed me, and that was it - if I'd - if I'd managed to escape, eh, normally I would have 'phoned through from where I was and checked up with Sarah just to make sure everything was all right before I come home eh...

- F.C. .... and this bloody time I didn't do so, and it was a mistake, but they would have caught me sooner or later - but had I known that they were there I would have gone underground - I wouldn't have left the country but I would have gone underground, because I'd gone underground during the state of emergency and had been able to do work throughout the state of emergency - make contact with our African comrades, get out leaflets, give guidance to the Party organisation, eh.
- I'd done so on the instruction of the Party at that stage during the emergency - Sarah was arrested - my wife was arrested and she was detained then.
- J.F. For how long?
- F.C. For about three, four months, I think - and I was only underground (?) for about five months before it was safe to come out - they were looking for me - there were about five of us that they were looking for particularly in South Africa - they managed to go underground, eh.
- J.F. Who were they?
- F.C. <sup>Kolane</sup> Moses Catanya was one of them, <sup>Hannal</sup> Michael Hong was another, and a couple of others that they were looking for - so I stayed in Cape Town - well, I moved around - once I went up to Johannesburg during the state of emergency, but for the rest I worked in Cape Town, and we'd made arrangements - I had a duplicator and, you know, we'd made prior arrangements about it, so they never caught me there - but where was I now - I've forgotten - I've been talking too bloody much -
- J.F. So then you - when Sarah was arrested then and you went underground what happened to the kids?
- F.C. (Laugh) My one daughter - my eldest daughter, Lynn, she was taken in by some friends of ours, close friends of ours and supporters - my two younger children they were taken in by people who hardly knew us - we'd - Sarah'd met them sort of around school activities and so on, you know, sort of parent teacher activities - and they took the children over and they were marvellous to them -
- The house was all shut up - the birds had a marvellous time - they all moved into the garden, nested and - and when we came home we had nests all over the place (Laugh) - so that was it - the family - that was - that's the worst part of that sort of thing, you see.
- One occasion I managed to meet my little ones - all my children as a matter of fact - when I was working underground - took a long time to arrange and organise, eh, and I met them up on the slopes of Table Mountain, and I'd brought a little present for them, and my son, John, he was only about what, eight or nine maybe at that stage - of course they were very apprehensive -
- They were so pleased to see me, because you can imagine the impact of this sort of thing on children, eh - and at the end when I gave him the present and he sort of watched - looked at me and - we'd impressed upon them the need for - mustn't tell anybody that they'd met me or anything like that, you see, the need for secrecy - and children are very good in that respect, it's been my experience - and when I gave him this little



F.C. .... present he said - he thought for a while and he says : Daddy, yes, but what am I going to tell Krystal when she asks me where I got this from (Laugh) - and the house that gave me shelter - the people who gave me shelter, they had a little son - he was about four, five, eh, and he never ever once gave me away -

He used to come to me and say : Uncle Fred, there's a knock at the door, someone's coming to the door, you'd better go into your room, eh - and he never ever - because they carried on - the people I stayed with carried on their normal life - so I told them : Look, don't do anything odd, have your friends come in and the rest of it, eh, and just carry on as you do normally - and they had lots of friends -

They even had parties at their house when I was there, and this little one never ever gave any hind whatsoever to anybody that I was in that house then - quite extraordinary, eh - absolutely extraordinary - he was so very good (Laugh)

J.F. And did your kids understand what you were on....

F.C. Oh, yes, they knew - first of all we'd - the communists and progressives were a very sociable community - we used to have parties - fund raising parties - children met African children, Coloured children at these parties - we'd sometimes take them along with us if we went to visit African comrades in the townships - they would come with us, eh - they grew up in that atmosphere -

They were very well aware of the issues at stake and very keenly interested in them - they saw the injustice of things as we saw the injustice - never any problem with them - and at school and things like that they'd stand up for their principles and argue with the other children, so they were very much part and parcel of this thing themselves, eh -

And my young son, Johnny, used to ask me all sorts of questions and discussed things with me - the others did as well, eh - they were involved - and certainly Johnny was directly involved in the days when we were working underground, and he used to go and take messages here and there, you know - there weren't anything important obviously but, you know, if you wanted to make contact with someone you'd say to Johnny : Look, go and tell so-and-so and so-and-so -

He knew what it was about - he never went straight to the place - used to - when he was still at school he used to go out and play around here and he was scouted and then go and do it, you know - so they were brought in on this and they've never lost it - we never had any problem, Sarah and I, as far as that was - was concerned - children were well aware of what were happening and 100% behind us....

J.F. There was never any resentment or....

F.C. None at all...

J.F. About you having to - that your work made you have to leave them, both you and Sarah?

F.C. Well, I'm sure that there was no resentment for sure - that their resentment was reserved for people who put us inside (Laugh) and not for ourselves, eh - no, not at all - anxiety - well, no children like to see that sort of thing happening, and of course they were anxious for our sake, for their own sake - disturbed, eh - obviously that sort of emotional upheaval I'm sure that they experienced in full measure, as all our children did -

But never - no resentment or - or any suggestion on - at any time on their part that we should give up what we were doing - never ever - never ever - and we were very fortunate - I don't know what -

But as far as I can make out the reaction of children in other families was the same - you know, the family loyalty was very strong, eh - very strong indeed, ja.

J.F. So you were detained in '65, and can you tell me about it in terms of my looking at the non racialism part of it or the racism part of it - how did the police respond to you - was there a special way they treated you as a white - were they especially angry that a white would do such a thing or did they figure you were a communist and you were a lost cause, or how did they treat you?

F.C. No, I think - I think the police were already used to the idea that there were whites - not only white communists but other whites they were taking their stand with the African - and I can't say that - if I was treated any differently at all the only reason - you know, whites are treated differently in prison, put it that way - conditions are concerned - but as towards any particular animosity towards me because I was white, no.

In fact I - you know, some of them, I think, probably before they get to know think you know, there's a bloody white man, you bloody traitor and so forth and so on - but I think for instance (?) the warders that we came into contact with respected us, eh -

Some of them were bloody - hated us but then they hate all prisoners, and not just us - they were just bloody (Laugh) so to say, natural bastards (Laugh) and others respected you for - for what you were doing, eh.

J.F. Because John Matthews told a story of how they were so shocked that he wasn't Jewish.

F.C. Oh, that sort of thing - oh, that's ignorance - you see, that's ignor(ance) - they think every communist is Jewish - you tell them you're a Catholic like me then they can't believe it, you see, but that's because they've been taught that - that's part of the Nationalist propaganda - every communist is a Jew and every Jew is a communist and that sort of crude stuff sticks around -

But it's hard to think in those terms if you're a warder, for instance, with Braam Fisher or ~~Mario Schoon~~ in your - under your charge (Laugh) - you don't think about that - you soon lose that sort of nonsense - but that comes from their - the more ignorant of them, eh, who still believe in the great Jewish conspiracy and all that rubbish - bloody sheer nazi .....

*Mario Schoon*

F.C. I don't know - it's difficult for us to - to sit back and say well - or see the struggle instead of - in any other way except as a continuous continuum, you know - we just get stuck into the task that has to be done (Laugh) and what happened in 1956 and 1966 it's already water under the bridge as far as we concerned, eh - go - get stuck into the task that has to be done - very interesting to read about it and sit back - oh, yes, that's right, that's true, that's how it happened (Laugh) you know, but to try and bring it back yourself in your own memory, when your mind is concentrating on what has to be done now (Laugh) it's a bit awkward, so I don't know to what extent I'm going to be helpful here.

J.F. I'll just pick up - let me ask some quicker questions to finish up - how were you treated with the interrogation - were you tortured or how did they deal with you...

F.C. Yes - not physically tortured - well, put it this way, I wasn't beaten up, but they gave me what they called the statue (?) treatment, ja - statue torture treatment - that's standing, depriving you of sleep and making you stand for long, long periods -

They arrested me on the Wednesday night - Wednesday evening at about five - there were two of them who arrested me - one was - he was then, I think, captain or major Swanepoel - he's now brigadier retired - they had a bit about him in the Guardian - he came down to Cape Town to arrest me together with another fellow whose name I've forgotten - Ferriera or something like that - but both of them had been involved in interrogating Looksmart Ngudle (?) who died under interrogation -

(In) fact the first thing they did when they were taking me up to the interrogation room in Cape Town was to say : Oh, yes, we know all about you - you say that we murdered Looksmart Ngudle, eh - so I thought I'm going to have a tough ride - a rough ride with these blokes - and they kept me awake all that night - the interrogation wasn't particularly intense - they'd asked me a few odd questions and just sit quietly -

Sometimes one would go off, have a bit of a rest maybe or whatever and come back, but they kept me awake the whole of the night, and they flew me up to Pretoria and they made sure that I didn't sleep on the aeroplane - every time I tried to doze off they'd wake me up, nudge me and so on, ja - it was a military 'plane they took me up (in) -

Then when I got up to Pretoria they took me to Compol Buildings where they got their interrogation room there - it's right at the back of the building, and then this big cavernous hall the walls were about that thick, and in the corner there had a built-in like a little cubicle there - there were eight of them headed by Swanepoel in this interrogation squad, and at first they let me sit down, and then they got fed up when I wasn't going to answering any question - wouldn't answer any questions whatsoever - and they said : Stand up - I said : I'm not going to stand up -

There'd been a court case a short while before - I said : No, the judge says it's illegal to force prisoners to stand up under interrogation - they said : Well - using rude words they said : F the judge - we're in charge here, boy, not the bloody judges - you do what we say - so I said : I'm not standing up -

So they - they quite literally physically - two of them got

F.C. .... hold of me and they dragged me off the chair, put me against the wall and they pushed this desk - I was on the one side of the desk, they were on the other and around me - and they pushed the desk against my stomach there like that and they kept me pinned to the wall, and there I sat for bloody hours and hours and hours and hours - I stood there, rather, eh -

First sometimes there were eight of them hammering questions at me, boasting about the information they got, being insulting and this, that and the other - I wouldn't answer - then they let me sit for a little while and they pulled the chair away from me, make me stand again - and this went on and on, and in the end you fighting against yourself, eh - fighting a terrible feeling -

Your eyes, your body aches - your eyes - you think you going to lose your mind - your eyes start - you think the - eyes like - like standing out on bloody sticks - and - sometimes there two of them there, sometimes all, sometimes four of them - some of them shout at you, others talk nicely to you - and that's all worked out -

In fact at one stage I got Swanepoel to admit that they'd been trained specially by psychologists of how to conduct this particular form of interrogation - and this went on - in the end you just collapse, eh -

I collapsed - they put me in a bloody corner, and it's the most terrible thing - you standing like this, you see, and you battling - you battling - your body aches from - you - I can't tell you, you see - you just one mass of bloody aches all over -

And you - you - you go like this and then you - you away, eh...

J.F. You fall? (?)

F.C. They last - they pick you up - they had to prop you up again, and you battle it out - you see, you fighting there - you're fighting against yourself too now, you see - and then you collapse again, they prop you up, and they just watch - and they hammer you - not physically - hammer you with questions - or they don't say anything - they just let you bloody stand and suffer there -

So that went right through until the Saturday morning, eh - so that's Wednesday, Thursday, whole of Friday until about three, four in the morning on Saturday - about - I tell you that's punishment, eh.

They haven't laid a finger on you except of course to force you to stand, so forth and so on, but it's a - it's a hard form of interrogation, eh. So then they got a statement off me, and they flew me down to Cape Town to look at this place that I'd had there - this underground place - and they flew me back again, and on the plane I lost complete control of my limbs - like a - like a - somebody in a fit, and they had to hold me down I was shuddering so violently -

And they got a fright and they had somebody - a doctor at the other end to examine me and he gave me some pills, which they didn't give me - they kept them - they wouldn't - wouldn't ....

F.C.

.... give me the pills - then much later when I was awaiting trial, and I told my wife what had happened, and she arranged for a physician to examine me, ja, and he said it - what I was suffering from then was battle fatigue, like the soldiers suffer from after a particularly hard battle - he says : It's symptomatic of - of battle fatigue - this is the sort of thing that that happens with you (?) - so that was when I knew what it was all about, because they only gave me this pill when they took me back later that evening - it must have been some sort of sedative -

When they took me back to Pretoria Prison and they locked me up in the cell there, and gave me these pills and I slept - so the statement I'd made wasn't worth much at all - they'd already got the bloody information, eh - I was just repeating what I knew they already had and they told me - and they weren't satisfied with it, of course -

And on the Monday morning they came for me again, and they, from the prison took me back to Compol Buildings, sat me down in the room - they were very nice and friendly now, you see (Laugh) - so they said : Right, Fred, just a few more questions - and they asked me the first question and I said : I'm not going to answer, finished -

Swanepoel - well, the man's got a naturally red face, you see - they don't call them Rooi Rus for nothing - he's got a sort of red-purplish face, or had it then - a huge big (.....) bugger he is - he looked at me and he couldn't believe his eyes, man - he sort of half rose (Laugh) from his chair - he says : Wat - he says : Nou zal juy kak! - grabbed me - off to the interrogation room again -

And Jesus, there I went through the whole damn thing all over again, and by then I was finished, eh - I stood it out - I stood out the whole of that day, the whole of that night - about half way through the next morning before I collapsed again, eh - and that was tough, eh - that was really tough because I was just collapsing all the time - they were propping me up and - just - just - just sheer fighting for every bloody minute you fighting, you see - and at the end they got me there too, not as much as they wanted again, you see - and they came back to me in Cape Town when they took me down to Cape Town, because they'd already made up their mind to charge me but I'd not yet been charged - I was still under the Special Branch - and had another go there in Cape Town for about 48 hours, so I had a long spell of that sort of treatment -

And there you fall down they throw water on you, eh, so you like a rag doll, eh - they throw water on you, prop you up again - so it goes on all the bloody time - very effective means of interrogation, that one - they know exactly what they doing because they've been trained to do it.

J.F.

So what were you ultimately charged with?

F.C.

Belonging to the Comm - well, I was charged with sabotage under the Sabotage Act - Security Act, I think it was, or some section of it, or Public Safety Act - having explosives - being in possession of explosives - being a member of the Communist Party, taking part in its activity, and for luck having a banned publication, African Communist - I got three bloody months for that (Laugh)

J.F. So were you actually working with Umkhonto we Swizwe or a member?  
 F.C. Well, I won't answer that question....

J.F. O.K., but that didn't - I just - whatever came out in the trial...

F.C. Well, I was charged with being a member of Umkhonto we Swizwe...

J.F. You were charged....

F.C. .... and taking part with their activity - I was charged with the same - apart from having explosives the same charged that Braam Fisher got life for - they brought the same witnesses in my case as they - or certain aspects of the case - on the sabotage and that aspect of it - Terrorism Act.....('phone)

J.F. O.K., so you were tried with anyone else?

F.C. No.

J.F. By yourself?

F.C. By myself, ja.

J.F. And did any people testify against you who'd worked with you?

F.C. No - the only - the only person that we asked to give evidence, because we wanted to establish a particular point for us - you know, for the defence - was Alan Brooks, ja - and it arose out of the charge on - on the explosives, and I had to prove - although there the - the explosives were there in the bloody (Laugh) court room, much to everybody's anxiety, because there was no danger there it's not nice to have all those explosives knocking around -

They had to prove that I had possession and - or I had to prove that I didn't have possession, although I - so I was able to prove, through Alan, that I wanted to take possession of these things and wasn't able to - he didn't know what it was all about at this - at that stage - but we wanted him to say : Yes, he had collected this to me - he'd gone along and they wouldn't give him what I'd asked him to collect because my signature wasn't right or something like that, you see -

But then I pleaded guilty to the Suppression of Communism charges because I didn't want - I knew they were going to bring witnesses, and I didn't want to put my comrades to the - having to get up there and say : No, I'm not going to answer questions - give them a bloody year - when I knew they had plenty of other evidence to convict me on, you see -

So I'd pleaded guilty to them - there were - I think there was just one comrade who was going to - who'd agreed to give evidence against me, and she was pregnant at the time, and I was particularly anxious that she wasn't put on the spot - but the others, there was Shipane....

J.F. With you.....

F.C. No, he wasn't tried with me - they brought him along - others I'd worked with - Piet Beyleveld - I hadn't worked with him in the underground party - Shipane I'd met under other circumstances - he was brought along to give evidence, the same sort of evi-

F.C. .... evidence that he gave against Braam Fisher - both he and Beyleveld - that I was at Rivonia and that I'd - at a meeting there that I'd advocated sabotage in various ways whatsoever - we managed to break Shipane down - one reason why they couldn't find me guilty on the sabotage and MK charges - belonging to MK - was that we were able to break Shipane down and got him to admit that he'd been tortured - that he'd gone over to the police in other - and all sorts of things he was making - and he revealed personal animus against me, eh, and once he did that then the court can't take his evidence if he's a whosit - a collaborator, whatever they call it - some special word for - for people who take part in a conspiracy and they give evidence -

*Hlapane*

Once they show a personal animus then they've had it, and he showed personal animus towards me - started screaming about the whites and this, that and the other, and quite wrongly accused me of having given evidence against Walter Sisulu, I think it was, and some article which Walter had written for the Morning Star and had never - and wasn't - just wasn't bloody true - it's something that he got stuck in his mind through police interrogation - he came out with it in the court and that's why he hated me personally, and that was the end of his evidence, otherwise I'd still be sitting in bloody jail - I would have got bloody life if we hadn't broken him - so no, I was on my own there, ja.

J.F. And what did you get convicted of?

F.C. Being a a member of the party, taking part in its activity and having banned literature, so that was five years nine months, but I was in jail for six and a quarter years altogether - that's wait - from the time of the arrest to my release - just over six and a quarter years.

J.F. And they didn't get the explosives - didn't get them...

F.C. They didn't get, no - that charge was also - fell away because they couldn't prove possession, ja.

J.F. So did they - what did they want - did they want to show the Communist Party as a violent organisation - is that what they were keen to do or - or were they hoping....

F.C. No, by that time - by that time, of course, they were taking action - legal action - not only against the Communist Party but against A.N.C. - the general police attack and legal attack had started on all the democratic organisations including the Communist Party - it was no longer just a question of the communists -

I mean they were having you for being a member of MK, being (a) member of the A.N.C., taking part in activit(ies) much broader - this was after Rivonia, you see....

J.F. Right - so they didn't connect you to MK then...

F.C. No.

F.C. .... in the trial?

F.C. No, no, they weren't able to make that connection - I wouldn't be sitting here if they had, ja - I would have got life, that's for sure, same as Braam....

J.F. So you felt a bit relieved that you got what you did get?

F.C. Oh, yes (Laugh) naturally - I was prepared for anything but you know, the fact that they weren't able to - they didn't find me guilty there - then they kept me for 13 months in solitary in Pollsmoor Prison before they sent me up to join the others -

And it came out afterwards - well, I didn't know at the time - right towards the end of it - that the reason why they were keeping me there, and in isolation in the (.....) was because they were trying to nail me on other charges - on further charges - communist activity -

The Special Branch were absolutely furious that they hadn't got a - the full conviction against me - so they were trying to add on a few more bloody years, you see - and then I was charged with additional charges involving two other party members, and party activity -

But they weren't able to find me guilty there, because I'd pleaded guilty in the Supreme Court on belonging to the - being a member of the party, taking part in their activities, and that's how my lawyer put forward a successful argument - you can't punish a man twice - he's already pleaded guilty to taking part in the act(ivities) - what are you coming along every six months now, or every year are you going to pile on a few more little things - he's already been sentenced for it -

So they didn't find me guilty there either (Laugh) so in a sense I was very lucky - very lucky.

J.F. And who were they trying to do you - who were the other two they were trying to try you with?

F.C. Zolly Malindi and Bernard Huna.

J.F. Bernard?

F.C. Huna - the two of them.

J.F. How do you spell Huna?

F.C. H u n a - both African comrades - so I think they got three months or something like that.

J.F. I see - and can you just, because of the time, is there anything you could say in conclusion about your prison years, in terms of what it meant to be involved in a non racial organisation and then be sent to prison with whites only?

F.C. Well, first of all they kept us separate from the white prisoners.....

J.F. The political.....

F.C. I - I was any rate - at one stage I think a white political prisoners were mixed up with the prisoners up, for a short period, in Pretoria Central, and no, you - you don't feel it strange at all because prison is a funny place, ja - there's a very strong - I'm talking now about prisoners generally including criminal prisoners - there's a very strong feeling ....



F.C. .... of solidarity amongst them, so that the white prisoners wouldn't feel any antagonism towards us except the lunatic fringe elements you always get, and the African prisoners would certainly go out of their way when they had an opportunity of - of showing solidarity - certain.....

J.F. How did they do that?

F.C. Well, when I was in isolation, for instance, I used to help them get tobacco, smuggle tobacco - you'd be surprised how (Laugh) resourceful prisoners are in overcoming regulations - they used to be walking around the thing, you see, and - in the isolation punishment section there - your windows are not only barred but they've got thick wire mesh over them - but the first thing the strong (?) prisoners get - when they get there is to try and open a little gap in - in that mesh on the side, push things - things could be pushed through - so you've got the prisoners -

As I say, you've got hundreds of eyes - the warders have only got two eyes - so when they walking around there they used to roll up your - roll up a little squid (?) of tobacco there, you know, push it through the window - then in the evenings when the night shift come on it's sort of become a tradition that say, between five and eight in the evening when the bell - final bell - rings for lights out and quiet, that you'd - the prisoners used to talk across - although they were in separate cells - used to talk across the cells to each other...

J.F. To the African prisoners?

F.C. Yes - and I was in a - in that punish(ment) - in a non white jail - there were just very few white prisoners, criminal prisoners, and they were far away - occasionally they used to be brought in to do punishment....

J.F. So for those 13 months you had contact with African prisoners by talking....

F.C. And Coloureds, yes - oh, yes, so you never - only when we got up to Pretoria, that's when they used to keep us very much apart - in there we could hear the African prisoners in the other sections there and we used to some - hear them sing or something like that, you see - so certainly in Pollsmoor there I was - sometimes I was the only white man amongst all the black and Coloured prisoners in that section - I never mixed with them - they wouldn't let me mix with anybody, for that matter -

Used to do my exercise on my own and that sort of thing, you know - they kept me segregated, but you can never - it's never - never - oh, it is possible but it's very difficult to keep prisoners under those circumstances from communicating with each other - oh, no - so one - one - when I was there I didn't feel this if I was - you know, the question of racialism didn't come into it at all -

Prisoners are - the criminals associate quite freely across the - the colour line, ja - they're all mates together as far as they concerned.

J.F. Anyway, because of the time, let me just ask how you left the country and when - you were released in '72?

F.C. I was released in '72 - Sarah was already over here.....

J.F. In England....

F.C. .... and you don't need to put this in your book, but my young daughter, Ruth, when I was arrested - shortly after I was arrested - Sarah was also arrested at a childrens party, because she had a banning order - six policemen raided this bloody party - Sarah was sitting alone in a room waiting to take Ruth home, because she didn't want her to come home on her own on new years eve - so they pick Sarah up - and Ruth was already upset that I'd been arrested and she had a breakdown -

She tried to commit suicide and she ended up in hospital, and she wouldn't go home to where I was arrested, and the doctor said well, (Laugh) we not going to pull her right - Sarah was under surveillance all the bloody time - and my son, John, had come across to study here, so Ruth was on her own - she was about 13, 14, a difficult age at the best of times -

So the doctor said : You better send her to England - where my eldest daughter was - and then what - Sarah couldn't stay there, so she came here - we had no intention of leaving South Africa - none whatsoever -

I tell you I was - I was so upset when I heard this, ja - I heard it through a Catholic priest who used to come and visit us - so there was no point in me staying in South Africa - they gave me 24 hours to get out of the country, otherwise they said they'd put me under 24 hours house arrest, and I wouldn't have been able to get out at all -

And in fact they followed me - two Special Branch men followed me from the time I was released (at) seven in the morning right through until the time I got on the 'plane - followed me to my sister in law's place, they waited outside there - right through - and that's how I come to be in England in (?) '72.....

END OF INTERVIEW.