

A.K. .... that's not too bad.

J.F. O.K.....

A.K. No, but in terms of - just that point of understanding how people actually break down those kind of barriers. If you ask - maybe one needs to start on the point that the reality within our own situation is that people have been divided into different race groups, and people have been, through the Group Areas Act and a range of other laws been actually separated to the extent to which one doesn't understand other communities, one doesn't understand their experiences etc.

One is not able to appreciate their cultures because one has no experience with those communities. While that is true, on the one hand - well, what that actually does is that it establishes people within a set group. Within the Indian community, you grow up in that group and things like that.

Now, with the sort of African community it might be very different, because if you look at the Indian community it's a very complex thing. For one, you have that kind of ethnic division between Indians, Africans, Coloureds and whites, with Indians having it in, not the worst, in terms of oppression, but the worst in terms of the minority syndrome.

They are the smallest percentage of people. They always fear that we can't challenge the white government because they'll be able to trample all over us. We can't actually challenge the Africans because they are far superior in numbers and they will wipe us out and send us to the Indian Ocean, as the saying normally goes, and then there is a lot of fear attaching that, together with sort of apartheid propaganda, which has consistently attempted to keep the Indian community as the sort of jam in between two slices of bread, and repeatedly, in our history, whenever the Nationalist Government has needed an excuse it has actually battered the heads of the Indian community as well.

So the result that the kind of fear, historical experiences of the Indian community, and their minority syndrome has led them into a very complicated position, and in different periods of our history also, while you will find that the Indian community have been extremely progressive under the leadership of Ghandi, taking on the white authorities at that time during the passive resistance and other campaigns, later, after the 1945 take-over of the Natal Indian Congress by the sort of progressive, or the left element within the Indian communities, you had sort of massive demonstrations of unity with the African community.

We've had, for example, the defiance campaign, where Indian and African people participated together - 8,000 people sort of go to jail. You had the congress of the people campaign, where the freedom charter was drawn up.

The Indian community was consulted, played a key role and in fact, today has adopted that document as their document on the basis of which change will occur, has ....

A.K.

.... also went under the anti repatriation sort of challenge to the authorities, so that period of their history, once again, you'd find that being - the left was being organi(sed) - was very organised.

The Indian community was playing a very progressive role, in terms of identifying itself with the African community and challenging the apartheid system.

Then, at different points in the history again you'll find that the Indian community will play a sitting on the fence role, because for a long period of time after the treason trial the Indian community never actually came up as a community - never expressed itself, and what you had instead was leadership expressing themselves and ...

Well, after 1965 or somewhere - almost 1975 : Correction :

Well, after 1965 to possibly somewhere - almost 1975 the only action you had from the Indian community was student action, not the Indian workers or nothing like that.

Oh, ja, and in the past Indian workers during the '20's, '30's, 40's and 50's, Indians workers played a tremendous role in the struggle, were very organised and were central to SACTU and those kind of federations.

The Indian community participated in the congress alliance together with the A.N.C., and what is interesting is in 1949 we had the riots, and what's happening today is like a Sunday school picnic in front of what happened during that time, where raped, shot, the works - people were murdered and things on both sides of the community, Indian and African, set up by the white community itself.

But in 1952, just three years later, the Dabl, Kuma, Naika pact was formed, of co-operation and collaboration between the Indian and African communities, and in 1952 again - oh, that was in '49.

In 1952 the Indian and African community went together into the defiance campaign at that point. But now what you find is, once again, since 1980, since the school boycott in which the Indian community participated, both students and, at a support level, the community as a whole participated in those boycotts and made a range of demands, you find a much more progressive view being held by the majority of the Indian people, with the result that well, Government established structures, puppet structures that it is frequently referred to, like the local affairs committee, which are mouthpieces of the system, the South African Indian Council, not to be confused with the South African Indian Congress, which participate in the alliance, all those were like puppet structures, an attempt to co-opt the Indian community into the white laager was rejected by the Indian community.

Elections had 5, 6% polls and the best expression of Indian unity with African people was at recent elections. Last year the August election for the tricameral system, where the system says that 20% voted, but in fact it was 20% of registered voters, and less than, oh well, 50, 60% had only registered as voters. Even those who hadn't did ....

A.K. .... it in defiance because they rejected those elections, and many of those that did, our own suspicions are over 10% or half of that 20%, actually did so under threat, where gangsters went to the home still (058) that women who were there while their husbands were at work and say : You go and vote.

And gangsters all over the street, similar to what is happening now - gangsters agitating the Indian community - took people and voted, but the rest of the community was steadfast.

We believe, on our assessment, and I'm a member of the NIC. We did house visits of over 100,000 Indian homes, specifically Indian homes, during the August election period.

Our own assessment was they had no more than about 6, 7% support at that time. Other people might actually put the figure lower once you take away the threat of the hooligans.

During that election the majority of the votes were postal votes, special votes, and not voted on the day, so people were just being, for the previous two weeks of the election, were being forced to vote at that point, so I think that that's important to understand in the Indian community - it has always played a progressive role.

It is possible that at different point, because of the lack of organisation of the left, that they have been subdued and not actually been very vocal, but at all points where - you look at the treason trials - then the treason trials.

Now you look at any political action and you will refer to names of NIC and the Indian community, and that has a sort of serious implication for Indian people on the one hand at the political level, but at another level you have, within the Indian community, religious divisions, and that was also something that Indian activists in the democratic struggle have to contend with.

Where you have Moslems and non Moslems, or Hindus and Tamils and things like that.

Now I was brought up in an authodox Islamic home, and like the war you almost had between Jews and non Jews, you can't marry a person who is not within that religion, you don't eat in their homes, sort of socially ostracized almost all the other people, it does make unity difficult.

So it was that people, or Indian activists at this point, have had the problem of uniting within their own communities and breaking down their own little cultures that they had, then the other problem of uniting with the African community as a whole, with the sort of nascent anti African feeling at different points in our history amongst the Indian community - ja, so I think those were two central issues, and to break those things, the political and the sort of ethnic kind of divisions that one had is a fairly difficult process, and ....

A.K. .... I think, in most of us, it didn't happen all of a sudden. It was a process of struggle inside oneself, and my own contribution - the first time I ever got involved in politics was in 1979 at the university of Durban Westville where I was studying. I was studying for a B.A. Law.

During that year we had formed what we called the SRC - the Student Representative Council, and there was a lot of negotiation between the authorities and ourselves. Basically the authorities wanted a puppet structure to co-opt the students, and it was a fairly big embarrassment to them that they didn't have an SRC on the campus, and we had actually initiated the move for a progressive SRC on that campus.

So it had a lot of struggles between student and authorities - demonstrations, negotiations, the works, in terms of which we eventually won for ourselves an independent, autonomous SRC and that is what we called it, simply meaning that it was totally student controlled, it was able to do what it wished.

It could make press statements what it wished, it could come out of publications in whatever it wished, and it had no links with the administration, except to get money from the administration itself.

That was our first involvement, but I think what really changed a lot of my sort of age group of people was the 1980 boycott, because following that year the very committee that was forming the SRC - that was called the constitutional committee - co-ordinated a boycott in 1980, which ran over a process of about three or four months on that campus, and was about the best demonstration of student unity up to this point on that campus.

Ja, we had clashes with the authority - we sort of - with the S.A.D.F. - lots of students being beaten up. At that time there were lots of students who were detained as well, and all students in the Indian community, whether at university tertiary or at any school had actually come out on boycott, which was a very, very powerful demonstration of kind of attitude of the younger generation of Indian people.

And then we were clearly saying at that point that what we wanted firstly was a democratic society. Secondly, we wanted a kind of educational system that was democratic and included all people under one educational system, and that that was only possible in a democratic society itself, and not possible within an abnormal society as we have it.

I think that was our real experiences, real political experience that sort of reshaped our consciousness, and began to have different attitudes at the same time almost, although, as I said, one might have been more difficult than the other, both the African and the Indian community - ja.

J.F. (Talking about Dorothy - tape off) ..... You were talking about the '79 experience in conscientising people - does that mean that you - you were studying law?

A.K. Ja.

J.F. At UDW?

A.K.

Ja.

- J.F. And were you there as an under-graduate?
- A.K. Ja.
- J.F. So did you miss out - when did you start university?
- A.K. '77 - '79 was my final year - the year in which we were sort of - what's the word - agitating for the SRC.
- J.F. Did you do something after high school, before university?
- A.K. No, I wasn't doing anything, basically - not working.
- J.F. But you did stop, though.
- A.K. Ja, I did stop - I had a break.
- J.F. So did you not have any effect of BC in the early '70's or mid '70's or..
- A.K. Not at all.
- J.F. Now how - this is so interesting to me that I'm finding out (127) specially from younger people, people who actually weren't affected - was that - because there certainly were Indian people who were affected - why do you think you didn't have any - you say it didn't influence you.
- A.K. BC? Not at all. I was totally out of politics at that point. My interests were totally otherwise - hitching around and that sort of thing instead of politics itself, and the first contact that I had with any political sort of thinking was possibly in '78, but the first political action we were involved in was during the '79/'80 period.
- J.F. So why did you - that's interesting because the state wants to say people are apolitical or they just don't bother about politics - why do you think that in Indian high school and then all those years you didn't have any interest, or why do you think that was? (You're not too clear)
- A.K. I'm not too sure. I think just the kind of social kind of group that I was moving around with had absolutely no interest in politics. Well, there was one of my friends who's today fairly centrally involved, who wasn't involved or anything like that, but politically conscious.
- And I remember once a very little incident when, in Tongaat they weren't really Afrikaans speaking people and they began to put up signboards, road signboards, saying : The beach is that way, and having signboards say : Straam (142) which is the word for beach in Afrikaans, and those things actually agitated us, saying : What the hell they putting these kind of things on - ja, but not too much beyond that.
- J.F. So what did finally get you into politics initially?

A.K. You see, in 1978, at the beginning of that year there was an African girl called Martha Sitebi, who was living - who was allowed first to live in the Indian hostel on the campus, then subsequently, for some reason, the authorities decided : No, it's only for Indian people, this hostel, and we want to take that African girl out.

And I don't know whether it was rebelliousness or what, or morally feeling fairly concerned about that, and one of my friends who, well, he was in the group in which we moved around on campus - we weren't studying the same courses but we met fairly frequently.

He had actually began to be fairly concerned about this, and students generally concerned that an African girl had been kicked out of the Indian hostel and that students must do something about it, and we did.

We did elect a committee of four people to co-ordinate student resentment to the... All four of them would (157) then say : We lost the issue - we lost the issue and when we evaluated we realised that there was an organisation on that campus, but also all four of them who were taken up - were taken up by the disciplinary committee.

The whole experience was a very heavy one, so traumatic with the Security Police involvement and all, that one of those four persons actually lost out totally on all his studying and became mentally affected by that particular incident.

The other students - all the other three becoming that much more determined in their resolve, and I think that rubbed off. That particular experience, to me, was a fairly important one, because although at that sort of age group you are fairly rebellious, but at the same time it was a very moral issue to us, that a human being should be allowed to live at the hostel and that's it, and that the fact that we lost, we felt that we had to do something, even if it was a short term or a long term process.

And during the beginning of that year we began to think of how do we actually respond to the administration? How do we actually take up those incidences? How do we actually make this campus a peoples campus where anybody who wants to study can come?

For the past ten years on that campus - for the previous ten years, there was a resolution on that campus which said that we should not form an SRC on the campus, because an SRC being formed on the campus would give credibility to a racist administration.

But it also said that the only form of SRC that could be formed was a sort of totally democratic one controlled by students, and then - well, we had actually taken that resolution forward to the student body.

We felt that what was needed on the campus was organisation if that was to be possible, and that we had a very sort of idealistic view at that point - we'll form this SRC, we'll unite the students, and again attack the administration on the Martha Sitebi issue.

Well, eventually that wasn't possible, as we later found out, but then that was the time we began to move and say to people ....

A.K. .... we can't continue to allow this happening. There were other factors that were agitating us as students on campus.

The campus authorities were beginning to lose control of the students during the '79 period, particularly because of this kind of incident which had, in fact, happened the previous year as well, when an African student was also deported from the Indian hostel there, so -

You know they had put a lot of security cops on campus - their own security with dogs, motor bikes and vans - having sjamboks. They had sort of boom gates where you had to register your car, and couldn't come in without a card and all those kind of things, together with the sort of lecturers racist attitude at that point and the treatment of students.

Together with the fact that, at that point we began, because we were fairly close to our majors and things like that, they were beginning to understand that the kind of education we were being offered was also fairly low key.

A lot of our students who had passed were finding it difficult to get jobs simply because they had come from a sort of bush campus as opposed to Wits or UCT, so I think it was a multitude of local factors on that campus that began to agitate us and say : Look, we've got to do something about it.

And that's when we moved, and we called together the student body and we had taken the initiative to form an SRC. We negotiated with the administration and I think they were fairly heavy negotiations.

The administration expected that we will come there and accept anything that they said, but I think it was the long struggle with the administration, lasting something like a year, because the SRC was only finally recognised by the administration - a constitution was drawn up by us and finally recognised in March - ja in March, 1980. We had resolved that.

Then we were about to move into elections in March, 1980 and the Cape students had formed themselves into a committee of 81, if you can remember that, and they had made out a national call for a boycott of all classes and ethnic institutions etc., because they were already on boycott at that time.

We actually responded to that call - a day late, but we had responded. We called together the student body, explained to them that this is the situation, and a boycott committee was formed. There were six of us that were co-ordinating that. Just for your own information, I was the chairperson of that committee, which co-ordinated the 1980 boycotts on campus.

It was a very powerful boycott. There'd been many incidences there where - with confrontation with, for example, the S.A.D.F. Where once we were going to hold an illegal open air rally on the campus and invited students. Something like 15 - 20,000 students responded to our call, but the cops didn't allow them in and there were a lot of skirmishes.

A.K. On another day they had sort of come in and told campus students that : You must leave now - leave the campus because we going to close it. We refused to and they busted people up. I remember one of my very close friends lost a baby in that incident, and there were over a hundred people seriously hurt - I mean fairly seriously hurt, apart from the sort of minor injuries - sjambok and lashes and things like that.

That boycott lasted for over three months with a very, very high level of unity. At that point, as well, the security police began to look very earnestly for the six people who were sort of co-ordinating that boycott, and at that time they couldn't find us, but we wouldn't be at home but come onto the campus and sort of lead the boycott, in a sense.

But the night before the boycott was supposed to be called off, at a challenge meeting with the rector when he was - he was supposed to face the students, and we were going to call off the boycott on the basis that we put forward to him our local demands, and we were going to give him a certain time period to meet those demands.

The night before that all six of us were arrested. Well, two had been sort of arrested a bit earlier, and they had managed to arrest all of us. It was a fairly simple thing. We had actually felt that we don't have to hide from the cops any more and that one should give in to the cops, so one of our persons - one of the four that were left sort of walked into the security branch offices and said : I know you looking for me - Here I am.

And he was then supposed to give the addresses of all the other three people and where they were staying at that time, and we went back to live in those homes knowing that he'll give the address, but forgetting that we had to be on the campus the next day, which was the kind of event that was organised after that person had went over to the security branch.

But then that - the sort of taking of (the) six people - the boycott leaders - well, it just agitated that boycott. That boycott continued. One or two things were burned on campus and that kind of thing.

But even during our detention we sort of met like student leadership from the rest of the country, and what did really come out to us at that point that, unlike our idealism when we had started the venture at UDW - our forming an SRC and taking on the administration and very quickly making it a non racial university, that the struggle was a very long and a protracted one.

I think we learned (a) fairly serious thing in the couple of months that we were in detention. We learned that the struggle is a protracted one. We learned that it requires, basically, a lot of discipline on our part, but centrally - and that's where, basically, my own consciousness was very, very much affected - we learned that unless the African people are liberated in South Africa there can be no liberation for any other community.

And that, although we went in idealistically, believed in non racialism and all that, we hadn't up to that point ....



A.K. .... understood it. That non racialism actually means the liberation of the African people in the first instance, and as students, well, we debated the whole lot of approaches to the struggle.

You have a kind of approach which says it's simply the working class that will take over. What we had learned from those experiences was, basically, one needs a national democratic approach, where all the people, any single person interested in challenging apartheid, whether here or any other part of the world, is welcome into that broad struggle to rid our system of apartheid, and basically to have a new form of government that is representative of all the people.

Not that any new government that's coming in will be able to rid our society totally of exploitation or division, but the\*ring of our society of exploitation and division was a long term process, and that that was definitely something that we needed to struggle towards, but if we just struggle towards that, without actually being in political power, without having a government representative of the people - of all the people, rather - that it was going to be difficult, and that a clearer approach to the thing might be that all anti apartheid forces, be they the church, the extremists, the radicals, the Marxists, the moralists, whoever they are, the progressives, all should unite. \*ridding.

Businessmen, workers, everybody should unite into one common front to take on apartheid. Not that coming into that kind of united front means that there is no contradictions within those people, but that that was central to actually take on apartheid, and what one finds today, at the same time, is that it is essentially the sort of African working class, to some extent the petty African bourgeoisie, the Indian class, the Indian petty bourgeoisie and the whites, from whatever affiliation, are actually coming together in that kind of struggle against apartheid, and what you really having is a non racial democratic front at this point.

That there are right now, within the Indian community, within the African communities, those that will collaborate with the system, but equally, well, there are a lot of people in all those communities who are prepared to unite and take on the system as it is.

But our overall belief was in a basically a non exploitative, a non oppressive kind of society, and we believed that that was a long term process. Our immediate goal was a sort of non racial democratic government.

So apart from learning about those sort of points, I think another thing that came across to us very centrally was that one needed some sort of programme in terms of which you actually moved towards those goals, and I think it was about that time that we adopted much more the freedom charter as our own programme, the freedom charter being a programme that establishes for us a level of the kind of society we want to see, but that our own struggle would actually go beyond that as well, but at this point in our ....

A.K. .... history that that was a relevant programme to unite all anti apartheid forces and take them forward into a new society without much division.

I think so those were the central things that came out during that experience itself.

J.F. O.K. - lots of questions - the detention - why were you saying you learned so much in detention - were you detained just for the ones from UDW or from other ones?

A.K. We were first detained for about a month of here during interrogation by - with only UDW people - well, it was solitary but there were only UDW - or rather, only Durban people.

We were then moved to Benoni, which is - I don't know - 600 kilometers away..

J.F. Moredeby?

A.K. Moredeby - we were moved over there in 1980, and all student leaders from all over the country actually converged in those prison cells. There were 63 of us. We had four big cells - on an average 15 in a cell, so it was a tremendous learning experience for us.

I think that the system probably did that - to be able to bug the place and listen, but there was nothing that those people could actually say that was going to be incriminating to them.

In fact, they had everything to learn from each other, and all those people who went in - into that particular experience had come out ten times stronger, and actually, to me, that was the golden opportunity. I think I learned much more there, for those two or three months that I was there \*then, in all the other kind of discussions that I've had. \*than - no comma!

J.F. So were they mainly so-called cogs (315) from the Cape?

A.K. No, there were a lot of African people - there were - no, the Cape Coloured people were not brought into Moredeby. That was only Natal and Transvaal people that were there, so it was essentially African and Indian people, if you want to put it that way.

There were no white people who were brought into that cell. There were white people arrested but kept in other prisons, and the Cape people were kept in Polsmore at that time. We really didn't have contact with them.

J.F. So these people from - what - Soweto or from...

A.K. Soweto, Pretoria, but sort of essentially the Transvaal and Natal - Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

J.F. Trying to think about whether there was that much - I always think that - '80 school boycotts as being Cape (327)

A.K. No, it was very wide up here. In fact, it was very militant in Durban as well. A lot of the African schools had actually come out as well, but I think at that time, well, repression within the African community was fairly high, and organisation within the African community was low.

That sort of condition didn't allow the kind of response that you did have in '76, or the 1980 Indian response to the situation, but I think that particular boycott had, in fact, in the more contemporary period changed Indian politics.

J.F. O.K. - you said you responded to the call from the committee of 81?

A.K. Who had already been co-ordinating the boycott in Cape.

J.F. Right, ja, but that was unusual for people who'd never - hardly had any relations with so-called Coloureds - was it just you were so clear that it wasn't a factor at all - they were boycotting and they made a call - I'm just interested in the racial aspect, \*whether it was Coloureds in the Cape. \*that

A.K. No, I don't think that was too much of an issue. People at that time knew that there were a lot of African schools out on boycott as well, but I think by that time, O.K., not in our practice but definitely in our theory, the 1979 kind of period particularly, had instilled a level of non racial theory in us.

Maybe we didn't practice that out, and maybe we didn't understand what that meant like, but we were saying it's like - our main thing was to create Indian, African, Coloured unity. We saw that as our political task at that point, although that is one of the central tasks, but by no means would achieve liberation in itself, but that was the kind of central task that we saw.

So when we saw this call coming from Cape Town, and knowing that African people were involved, from our own theoretical position we felt there's it (357) One needs to respond to that. This is the way to build unity sort of thing like.

And then, anyhow, our own student body, the whole Indian schools and things that were absolutely agitated already by the conditions that we were experiencing on our local campuses, and that call came at precisely the correct point in time, where it captured everyone who were like fairly conscious about the issues, well, local issues at least.

J.F. And I'm just interested in - with everyone about this idea that non racialism would be accepted so readily - do you think it mattered that you didn't have a BC experience that you could be so open to the non racial progressive line, or do you think that the people who had BC backgrounds will (370) also moved with you, or was it that everyone that you were with didn't have the BC background - most people would have had some BC.....(You're not clear and there's a lot of talking going on behind, so I might be guessing a bit)

A.K. Ja, I know - a lot of people had some sort of BC background, but in fact, that those people were, not racist in reverse, by no means, but they had complicated the race issue. They almost ignored the reality of what was going on.

The reality being that Indians were separated from Africans and Africans were separated from Coloureds and whites. That you don't have a single culture at this point. That you don't have single or the same experiences as those people, and they ignored that like, and they actually felt that people were people, whereas when we came onto the scene we couldn't ignore our upbringing.

We couldn't ignore the fact that we were separated and all, and we did say, even at this point in South African history, you will still say that they're Indian, Coloureds, Africans and whites.

There is no South African culture - one culture governing all those four sort of well, national groups, in a sense, and we felt that non racialism had to be built, experiences had to be - well, we had to bring people closer together, struggle together and experience together to build this kind of culture.

That this thing that we are talking - we are all South Africans is not on at this point. The reality doesn't reflect it, and we started on the basis of what is the reality and a response to that reality, rather than the ideal, and attempting to respond to our ideal in the sense, and BC people had a lot of problems.

Even now, if one talks about Indians, they'll say there's no such thing as Indians, whereas the reality is that there are Indians. The Inanda experience is telling us that there are Indians and Africans.

J.F. Shall I stop now?

END OF SIDE ONE.