

- J.F. so that I ask people to tell me what their experience with say, an African person from a rural area - they might say they never even saw a white person until they came to the city except for those exploiting them, and then the question becomes how can they adopt non-racialism - if you could first tell me where you were born and when?
- K.M. I was born in Durban on the 5th. July, 1926.
- J.F. What part of Durban?
- K.M. I was born in a suburb called Overport - it's adjacent to a white area - ja, that's - well, it's mainly I would say blacks who live in that area, and that's where I was born.
- J.F. And was that area - it wasn't just Indian at the time you were born?
- K.M. Well, it's mainly - it was the Indian group, and there were a few Africans in that area as well, but mainly Indians because of the segregation policies in our country.
- J.F. And when you grew up were you - did you develop a consciousness that you were Indian, did you develop a consciousness that you were black - what was your parents' outlook politically, how did they inculcate it, how did the environment inculcate it?
- K.M. Well, my parents they were ordinary people - my father was a worker - he was actually working in the catering industry - we were a family of about seven, and well, as I stated, our background is one of really a working class background.
- J.F. Was your father unionised at all?
- K.M. No, not in those days - he was not a member of the union, but the industry in the - well, I would say in the '40s or in the '50s the liquor and catering industry began, but I cannot recall my dad being organised into a - a union, but I myself joined the trade union way back in '42 just when I was about 16 years, because I left school at a very early age because well, as you know, most blacks because of the economic problems you have to leave school and start to work, and I started the - my trade union work and activities from about '42 when we were organised into the timber workers - that was the Natal Box Broom and Brush Workers Union, and I was in that union for several years, right up till - from '42 up to '46. - well, I actually left the factory to join the passive resistance.
- At that time it was - the passive resistance campaign was launched way back in '46, so I left job to join the passive resisters and well, like thousands in those days courted imprisonment, and that was the background of the - my trade union - that is the beginning - and I was also the chairman of that union, and later also we organised the Natal Dairy Workers Union with my long time colleague, Cde. Billy Nair - he was the secretary and I was the chairman of that union until (?) later when Cde. Moses Mabhida actually came onto the scene and he took over from us.
- J.F. How did you get into the unions at the age of 16 - what prompted you to join?
- K.M. Well, you know, being in the industry and when you - when workers are called upon to join trade unions, and we had an organiser who came round and discussed with us the benefits of being in a union, so because of the conditions you want to be in an - an organisation which will be able to fight for your conditions - that's higher wages, better working conditions.

- 1
K.M. Now one recalls in that particular industry, factory, the conditions of work were very poor - workers did not even get tea breaks - there was no proper safety conditions of work in those days - and when we formed this union we submitted demands and the employers had to concede and our wages were increased. - we didn't even have what we call a rest room, although in terms of the industrial laws in our country employers have to provide their employees with a rest room, but we did not have one (until the union came onto the scene) - and after submitting demands the employers had to concede.
- J.F. But what prompted you to join - did you just know union was a great idea - you do meet people who say no, no, no, they'll take my money or I've been told it'll get me into trouble - how come you were so keen to join - what made you - who recruited you - how did it happen?
- K.M. Well, the person - I still recall - it was Cde. R.R. Pillay - well, he was the - organising the unions and he put forward - I think I still recall - very effectively why we should be in a union, and it's only through organisation that we could benefit, all round benefit that workers would receive, and of course it was proved later years that it's only through the union that we achieved, by submitting demands to the employers, better working conditions and higher wages - well, for what it's worth - what it's worth the - but the fact is that we got improvement, and those improvements only came about as a result of the union - prior to that the conditions were simply deplorable.
- J.F. And this union, was it just for Indian workers?
- K.M. No, no - well, in those days the Africans, as you know, were not recognised as employees in terms of the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924, so Africans were excluded from joining the - rather submitting demands and so on, but the unions that were organised mainly of Indians, well, Africans were also included when demands were made - we submitted demands which included African workers as well - although some African workers joined the unions, but although - at that stage, as I stated, that African unions were not recognised in terms of the Industrial Conciliation Act.
- 1
But African workers were organised and they used to join the unions, and they also benefited. - but again in the '40s and '50s, whether an African or any worker, even an Indian or a Coloured, if he did not join a union he did not exclude him from getting any benefits when there was a wage award or a wage determination, if the union which represents a particular industry has got certain gains, all the workers in the industry benefit - that is as far as the blacks are concerned.
- 2
J.F. And what made you accept to work with other races? - you worked, I take it, with Coloureds and as you've explained, there was feeling for the African position, but there would have been other Indians who would have said: We're Indian - or maybe they would have said: We're Gujerati or we're Tamil - how do you think you got past that - were your parents not like that, or did it happen when you were on the work place, or did you always - it's just rare for someone in South Africa, given the segregation, to say: Oh, no, no, no, non-racialism is the way (?)
- K.M. Well, I would say in my case, and I think in many cases where people joined the progressive organisations, I mean those days, well, we had the South African Communist Party, we had progressive organisations like the Liberal Party - they influenced many of us - we joined at a very early age such organisation - there was the young communist league.

K.M. There were meetings, one recalls, you know, especially during the war years, meetings of the South African Communist Party, and that party which one could say one of the first parties which preached very strongly about racial co-operation, racial harmony, and I think thanks to the party and the democratic forces that we realised the importance of a non-racial society even at a tender age of 16, 17, and I think that made a very great decisive impact on our lives.

I recall many of my friends and colleagues who are in the same age group as I was who embraced the philosophy of the Communist Party of a non-racial democratic South Africa.

J.F. And in the CP were there people of all races in the place you joined?

K.M. Yes, well, that is - that is one organisation where there was complete equality - we had Africans, we had Indians, we had Coloureds, we had whites - well, if you take a situation like in Durban the majority, because of the population, the majority of the members I recall were Indian members, but we had a fairly - fair number of Africans and whites and Coloureds as well, and there was complete equality at meetings that is - and then the big mass meetings that were held, well, they were mainly attended by blacks, that meaning both Africans and Indian workers - and I think that made a very big impact on us about the whole question of building and working for a just non-racial democratic society.

And what is more the - I think the South African Communist Party brought out I think its literature, leaflets, its own paper, and I think that was very educative for us.

J.F. And what about the effect of anti-communist propaganda from the state, from right wing forces - that's pretty heavy - even before the Suppression of Communism Act, even before the '50s whole Boer mentality - you must have received some of that - did your parents oppose you being CP, did you tell them - did you hear that propaganda and get exposed to it?

K.M. Yes, well, I mean we know the Western propaganda against the Communist Party, against the Soviet Union - I think one even did see it in those days, but the anti-communist hysteria became very sharp after the banning of the party and especially after the Nationalist Party that came into power in 1948 - well, prior to that the party did exist - it was a legal organisation, like the ANC and the other organisations - it carried out its work amongst all sections of the community.

J.F. But how did the other workers feel - did you try to recruit other workers, did you find that they'd been exposed to that propaganda, or did they on the other hand think well, this is a non-racial group, they're not racist, that's good - clearly there was prejudice in terms of there were uphill battles to recruit more people - there was a lot of state effort against it - I'm just wondering how that worked in your experience.

K.M. Well, the political organisations they - there was - they went out to recruit people - we - we recruited members into the various organisations, as I mentioned - for instance, the Liberal Party, it was an - again the Liberal Party also was an organisation which brought in all sections of the people - it was a sort of a debating society where common problems are discussed and debated - at meetings - even congress meetings they will make an appeal for membership, but now one defers to your - what we are talking about is the - how did the Communist Party - when it worked it made an appeal, and workers joined, those who saw in the party that it is the party which works for a just - a non-racial society.

K.M. Now especially after the - during the war years we also found there was a tremendous upsurge amongst the workers because of the fight against nazi Germany - now one found that the allies were together with the Soviet Union, and at that too (?) made people to realise that the Soviet Union under the Communist Party brought about changes in that country, and people were receptive and they attended meetings - there was the friends of the Soviet Union in those days as well, so we found that there were in those years numbers of people coming together under the banner of the Communist Party in our country.

(But now the attack against the party came about as soon as the Nationalists came into power in 1948, and the first thing they did was to ban the Communist Party - they raised the same questions, that the Communist Party's a threat to democracy, for freedom, and it's got to be destroyed and - but of course we, the party, warned (?) the people of our country that the Nationalist, under the pretext of attacking communism, they were going to attack democratic organisations or (?) whatever democratic rights that there were at the time - we had - that was going to be whittled away, and that - that's - that's precisely what took place soon after the Nationalists came into power.)

What happened - they not only banned the party, but individuals were banned, they were house arrested, so much so ten years later the ANC and other organisations were banned, so our warning was a correct one - warned the people that attack against the Communist Party will be (?) an attack against other democratic organisations.

J.F. You were on the factory floor and then you left even your job to join the passive resistance in 1946?

K.M. Yes, I - well, (like thousands in those days, we left work and went to defy and to court imprisonment - now this was under the leadership of an - (of the Natal Indian and the Transvaal Indian Congresses - well, prior to 1944 the Indian Congresses in South Africa were led by what we would refer to as reactionary Indians) - the famous group was called the - the Cajee-Pather group - now these were two leaders who did not want to have any co-operation between Africans or Indians and Coloureds or - that they wanted to go it alone insofar as the Indian community was concerned, so the progressives within the Indian Congress, both in the Transvaal - well, it was mainly in these two provinces and later even the Cape - organised opposition within, recruited large numbers of members, and we worked for the change in the leadership of the - the Indian Congresses.)

One recalls way back in '43 already the campaign to recruit more members to join the Indian Congress began, and within the Congress was called an organisation - (the opposition group was called the anti-segregation council, and on that platform we organised the progressives to join the Indian Congress with a view to changing its leadership.)

Well, during that campaign we raised something - we recruited something like 34,000 members, and in October, 1945 there was a big conference - well, I must say I'm glad that I was one of the participants - we attended this conference where more than about 10,000 people assembled in Durban, Curries Fountain, when the Cajee-Pather group was kicked out lock, stock and barrel, and a new leadership was elected, and that leadership was referred to as the Dadoo-Naicker leadership - and so the congress itself the following year campaigned against the regime's segregatory policies, and we joined what we - the - (the passive resistance campaign.)

- 3
K.M. There was a law called the Indian - Indian Representation Act - Land Tenure and the Indian Representation Act, and which the Indian Congress called upon the people to defy - it was like the defiance campaign of 1952, so there - large numbers of us went to prison and defied the law.
- J.F. How long were you in prison?
- K.M. Well, that was - in those day - well, the maximum for defying that law was six months, but we got four months - that's way back in 1946 - because the - that is the maximum prescribed in terms of that law, but of course it's not like after the - the '60s when more - when the most vicious and draconian laws were passed, and today when people are sent to prison for life and for long terms - but this was a campaign and it was a - a campaign around which the congress mobilised all sections of the people, and it was the Indian Congress that called upon all the democratic forces again to work together, and that is to call for the closest co-operation to work with the African people, because we feel that the majority in our country are the Africans - if they're not liberated, then I don't think the others will be liberated, so we believe that the main content of our revolution is the liberation of the African people, and the Indian Congress worked for that, and that is the main reason why we kicked out that reactionary Cajee-Pather group.
- J.F. And was the motivation for you to get involved in passive resistance - did it have much to do with the Indian feeling about Gandhi's history of passive resistance - had you grown up and was there Indian politics in your family, or was it purely a logical revolutionary stance to do that because you'd organise the Indian community and then you'd be able to then work for ultimate liberation - I'm just saying (was it) your motivation kind of Indian oriented in any way, inspired by your Indianness and your allegiance, or was it purely political?
- K.M. Ja, well, I would say that in the majority of cases where Indians who joined different organisations, they did it not as Indians but as South Africans - I think it must be very clear that although the Indians workers - I mean the - the indentured labourers came to our country from India in 1860, but the overwhelming majority of the Indians are part and parcel of the South African society, and the majority of us do not look towards India - we look at India as any other country, but of course there is the special affinity because our forefathers hailed from India.
- But - and then of course, on the other hand India, as you know, was one of the first countries to take up the whole question of racial discrimination at the UN way back in 1946, and in fact it was during the passive resistance campaign that this question was raised at the UN to highlight not only the plight of Indians, but the whole question of oppression, and the plight of the African people and of the - the oppression against the blacks as a whole. → top 17
- 3
So we look at ourselves as South Africans - that is our first and foremost - the - as I stated earlier, that the - the overwhelming majority we regard ourselves not as Indians but as fully fledged South Africans, and I stated earlier, because of the joining the progressive organisation in our early days, well, naturally that shaped our thinking and our approach to the problems in our country.
- J.F. What happened after '46 - you got out of prison - did you go back to your same job or what happened?

K.M. No, I - I - you know, it was difficult to get back to the same industry - well, like many of us, we had to join the unemployed queue and had to receive our dole, but then (Interruption) - so we - yes, after passive resistance, well, as I stated that it was - one was unemployed - then after that, well, I worked in a dairy, and so again went back to the factory - well, this was of course not work in a factory, in an office - but before then I worked in a - in a textile - in a - rather in a clothing industry - I was - that was the Natal Garment Workers Industrial Union - you know, it was the - in the garment industry - I worked for a short while, and then went to the dairy industry, and whilst working there we again organised the dairy workers, and Cde. Billy Nair was the secretary and I was the chairman of the union....

J.F. But you worked in the factory or you....

K.M. It was - it was in an office - you know, it was administrative work that one did in this firm, and there again, you know, the conditions were bad for the black workers - we submitted demands and - for better working conditions, for higher wages - well, it was whilst working in this place that I, after several years, then (went to do full time work for the congress movement in Natal - I had to leave my job, so the movement wanted me to do full time work,) so it was in -

This was in '56, after working for eight years in the dairy industry - it was just before the treason arrests and the treason trial - well, I didn't even take up my post because why, on the 5th. December, 1956 156 of us were arrested for treason - Cde. O.R. Tambo, Chief Lutuli and Nelson Mandela, and as you know, there was all the - Walter - Cde. Walter Sisulu, Moses Kotane and Dr. Naicker and others - so - and as you know, the trial went on for almost four years, but then some of us were discharged in, you know - the state withdrew charges against some of us at (?) - in 1958 - well, I was not right throughout the trial, because at the end of the trial there were about 95 people who were committed, and well, after '58 then I was a full time worker in the movement ever since 1956.

J.F. What was your position in '58, which - were you in the Indian Congress or were you....

K.M. Ja, well, we had of course then - well, there was the ANC, the Indian Congress, the Congress of Democrats, the - then we had the South African Congress of Trade Unions, so - but I was organising secretary (?) for the Natal Indian Congress for - in the province of Natal - but we worked very closely - we had a joint committee of the ANC, SACTU, and the Indian Congress, and that was the beginning of what we now referred to as the congress alliance, when all the various congresses adopted the Freedom Charter, as you know, which was adopted in 1955, and that was the beginning of the various congresses getting together and working on common problems.

J.F. So were you organising secretary of the NIC from '58 till when?

K.M. Up to the time - up to 1963 when - when I was banned - well, in - as you know, that in 1962 the regime passed the Sabotage Act - well, that was just - just soon after the launching of the armed struggle by the ANC, when Umkhonto we sizwe was formed, and in 1962 the - they passed the Sabotage Act in order to curb the activities.

J.F. You're saying the Sabotage Act in '62?

K.M. That's right, the Sabotage Act was passed - well, that was to curb the activities of Umkhonto we sizwe, and well, the following year the 90 day law was passed, as you know, detention without trial.

K.M. Well, that is the '60s was the beginning of the repression that was being intensified by the regime - more and more vicious laws were passed - a few years earlier the banning of the ANC, and then started the - all the harsh laws that came onto the statute book - so, as you know, that in terms of the Suppression of Communism Act the regime could ban organisations, could ban individuals, could place individuals under house arrest, restrict their movements and so on.

So in the early '60s and (?) soon after this law was passed scores of leaders of the ANC, the - well, in fact the entire congress movement, they were banned, banished, house arrested, restricted in every possible way - so in '63 one received a similar banning notice, so the banning notice meant one has to give up that position and the post and being an official of the congress, and so....

J.F. You were banned in '63?

K.M. '63, yes.

J.F. And was it a five year banning or?

K.M. Ja, it was five years banning, and that - you know, the usual restrictions - cannot attend meetings, should not leave the magisterial district, and cannot be a member of this, that and the other organisation, so one had to give up the official position in the organisation, but of course that didn't stop us from continuing with our work - well, after one gave up the - in terms of this wretched law - so one had to find a job and to work - well, I worked for an attorneys firm, but during the period of banning, as I stated, like all of us we never regarded the ban to restrict our work - of course not to do public work, but we carried out what we refer to as underground work.

We used to organise branches, do trade union work, attend meetings, but of course one had to be careful as to how one attends such meetings and who attends these meetings, and we simply never ceased working - It's only thing that we didn't - couldn't appear on public platforms because in terms of that act, but we carried out our work like all those who were banned or even house arrested - there was - there was 24 house arrests, there was a 12 hour house arrest, but members of the movement continued their - with their activity.

Well, sometimes some members have been arrested for attending illegal gathering - for instance, in my case I know that soon after this banning I attended a meeting - it was unorganised, and I was arrested in terms of this act, so well, (.....) for the court, like many of us, and was sentenced in terms of the Suppression of Communism Act - that was way back in '63 - but the case, when it went on appeal, well, the appeal court found me not guilty, so that was in terms of this law.

Well, then, as I indicated, that after '63 started the repression - now there was Rivonia in '64 when - after Cde. Nelson and others were arrested in '63, there was Rivonia in '64 - now that was - and then some of us were arrested in '65 for, again in terms of the Unlawful Organisations Act, the Suppression of Communism Act, so there were a number of us arrested in '65, '64 we were - rather '64 we were detained in terms of the 90 day law, and then we were brought to court, and our trials started in '65, the beginning - rather in '64 - and then in '65 it went on up to about in - in June - now it was in June when the movement decided that some of us should leave the country - you know, there were quite a few who were leaving the country at that stage to join the external (.....) so by decision of the movement I left the country during this trial....

J.F. During Rivonia?

- K.M. No, no, not Rivonia, no - this is 1965 - there were different - you know, as I stated, that there was Rivonia in '6- - well, in '64 - there were very many trials, you know, after the - the 90 day law that was passed in 1963 - so it was in '65 that, during the course of the trial, there were quite a few of us that left the country and well, I went to well, jump the fence and we were - we sought asylum in Botswana - Botswana at this stage was still under the British - it was still a British colony - that was in '65 - that's where I was until about '68 when I joined - when I came to Lusaka, and after that went to Tanzania to join the headquarters, and that's where I was working, in Morogoro - you recall the ANC had its headquarters in - in Morogoro.
- J.F. Were you at the 1969 Morogoro conference?
- K.M. Yes, I was there - actually I left Lusaka and landed in Morogoro on the day of the opening of the Morogoro conference on the 25th. April, 1969.
- J.F. And so you were in ANC structures, not SACTU at this point that we're talking about?
- K.M. Yes, I was - ja - well, outside ANC structures, and inside the country once one became a full time functionary, well, we worked mainly in the congress movement, but at the same time those of us who were officials in the trade union movement we did not cease working - for instance, I did - served on the local committee of the South African Congress of - of Trade Unions in - in - in Durban - we have what we call the local committee or (?) the Natal committee of SACTU and - because the trade union work and congress work, there was no conflict - SACTU was not only fighting for higher wages and better working conditions, but its main task was also to be part and parcel its - of the national liberation movement.
- (SACTU is part and parcel of the African National Congress, and therefore members of SACTU are - are and were active members of - of - of the congress movement as a - as a whole - well, today there are many who hold dual positions, I mean official or otherwise - for instance, even at home SACTU officials held official positions in the congress movement, or ANC officials held positions in - in - in SACTU and vice versa.
- J.F. I'm just trying to find out what I can say your positions were - when you left the country were you in ANC structures or SACTU....
- K.M. No, I was both in SACTU in the - in SACTU structures and - but of course in the Indian Congress as the organising secretary, but then, as you know, in the '50s we created the congress alliance, so also one worked within the congress alliance structures - especially after the banning of the ANC - so the ANC was banned in 1960, so one worked in the various structures at home - for instance, in Durban - now the ANC, the Indian Congress, the South African Congress of Trade Unions, we all occupied one building, you know - it's called Lakhani Chambers, right in the centre of Durban - third floor - it's, you know, all the various organisations were - occupied the offices there. 2 to p. 14
- For instance, Cde. Moses Mabhida occupied the same office where I worked, and there's Cde. Stephen Dhlamini, Cde. Billy Nair, Cde. (... ..) Ndlovu, all of us work together.
- J.F. I guess I just wanted to give your position - when you left the country were you in Lusaka as SACTU or as ANC, or did you have a particular position I could refer to?

- K.M. No, well, outside - when one came outside, well, we all of us fell within the jurisdiction of the ANC the external mission, so we were members of the organisation.
- J.F. Did you have an executive position in SACTU?
- K.M. No, in SACTU, yes, and on SACTU I - I held the position of national treasurer in SACTU....
- J.F. Inside South Africa or....
- K.N. No, not in South Africa, no - in - in South Africa I was on the - what we refer to as a local committee of SACTU - each of the provinces have what we call the local committee, so that is for the province of Natal, but outside in SACTU I was the national treasurer for about three years, but I am on the executive of the - of SACTU presently - I was working in the office of the treasurer general in the ANC, but we wanted to reorganise, strengthen SACTU - then some of us were relieved from our work to take up - to carry out work in SACTU, because the trade union movement, as you know, after the repression that set in, the trade union movement had to be reorganised, and I think SACTU, over the past decade or more, has worked consistently to not only strengthen SACTU itself inside and outside - just to quote one example of SACTU's activities inside the country, although SACTU is not banned as such under any law because trade unionism is legal in our country, but because of the various laws, the regime takes action against individual members, as I stated in the - in '63 when the repression set in, most of the leaders of the ANC and all the organisation, including SACTU, cannot hold positions because of the various laws, but SACTU is not banned - is not a banned organisation - but not banned legally, but politically is a banned organisation because of the actions that are taken by the regime.

Now SACTU had commemoration meetings in 1985, and that was the 30th. anniversary, because SACTU, as you know, was formed way back in '55 - now there were many meetings held throughout South Africa - people were supporting SACTU wearing tee shirts and the slogan of SACTU, Injury to one is injury to all, and I think SACTU is playing an important part in mobilising people inside the country - what does SACTU do - SACTU issues leaflets, pamphlets, it uses a very powerful platform, the Radio Freedom, where we speak to our people, the trade unions inside the country, and we have dynamic contact with the trade union movement in our country.

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- K.M. For instance, we today have very close working relations with COSATU - last year COSATU, the ANC and SACTU met here in Lusaka, where we had discussions - a joint communique was issued, and that is a clear indication of the close working relationship, and our active participation in the trade union activity, and our active participation in the national liberation movement.
- J.F. Can I just ask more questions relating to this non-racialism thesis - I was just trying to get at what I can say your position was - you left the country - when you were in the country you were national organising secretary of the NIC - did you sit on a congress alliance - did they call it a joint council - (when the NIC, the CPC, the COD and the ANC came together?) →

- K.M. Ja, no, well, in - in Natal we had what we call - we had the joint secretariat - well, I sat on that, what we call the joint executive and the joint secretariat - that was in Natal, not nationally, because each centre had its own....
- J.F. Its own region?
- K.M. Ja, but of course there were times when nationally we used to have joint national meetings, when one participated also in these - at these meetings.
- J.F. And then when you left the country what position would you hold - I just want to say what you were from '6....
- K.M. Ja, well, when I left the country I was the organising secretary of the Natal Indian Congress....
- J.F. But outside you were what?
- K.M. And then also a member also on the Natal committee of SACTU....
- J.F. And then in....
- K.M. And outside SACTU, well, I mean I was former national treasurer, and presently I'm on the executive of.
- J.F. You had been national treasurer from when to when?
- K.M. From 1983 to 1987 - 6 - well, 1986 and partly '7.
- J.F. And now you're on the national executive?
- K.M. Ja, I'm on the NEC - well, I've been on the NEC ever since I've been outside - you know, since the SACTU was set-up - that was way back in '72 - you know, SACTU when - well, of course, you know, just like the - the external mission was created in the '60s, like when the ANC had to set up its external mission, so when one came out of the country one immediately was part of SACTU as well.
- J.F. But SACTU's external mission was only set up in '72?
- K.M. No, no, not '7 - no, no....
- J.F. (.....) '72.
- K.M. Well, as you know - yes, well, '72 and because the headquarters of SACTU was in Lusaka at the time - now I was in - in Tanzania, Dar es Salaam so....
- J.F. So in Dar you were in ANC....
- K.M. ANC, ja, in the ANC structure....
- J.F. Is there any particular thing I should say it was, or was it just ANC..
- K.M. Working - no, no, it's not (.....) - it was working at the headquarters of the ANC....
- J.F. In Morogoro?
- K.M. Morogoro - I worked under Cde. J.B. Marks - he was the acting treasurer general, and I worked in his office.
- J.F. And then you went to Lusaka in '72?

- K.M. Well, ja, I came to Lusaka round about in '72.
- J.F. And went into SACTU structures?
- K.M. Yes, SACTU, and of course ANC structures as well, ja....
- J.F. I'm not trying to differentiate....
- K.M. No, no, ja....
- J.F. title - (.....) to get a whole wonderful understanding - when someone says (.....) I just want to know his position....
- K.M. Ja, position.
- J.F. I never have it.
- K.M. Ja, no, that's right - well, as we stated, that outside I was national - a former - you can say national treasurer - I've held the position of national treasurer....
- J.F. Of SACTU?
- K.M. Of SACTU, and also - then presently I'm on the executive of SACTU.
- J.F. Let me get into more substance - when you were back on the regional joint - what did you call it again, the reg - when the congress....
- K.M. Ja, it's called the joint secretariat or (?) branch executive.
- J.F. What was it like to have all the different groups together - did you - what was that experience like - that really is the future non-racial state in embryo, that you have - when you're talking about national politics you would have representatives of all the race groups - in the NIC obviously was the Indian community - I'm just wondering if you can tell me anything about that experience, if there were any things you had to iron out and work through in terms of the different race groups working together - how it was in practice to work non-racially?
- K.M. Well, in practice we did not find any difficulty in working, although there were these organisations functioned separately, but when we came together on common issues, joint campaigns, we worked as one organisation, because the congress movement, especially after the adoption of the Freedom Charter, then all the various congresses accepted the Freedom Charter as their policy document, so there were no problems or difficulties in - in working together as a - a non-racial organisation and as a non-racial group as such.
- J.F. I'm not saying there were problems, but I'm just wondering what the experience was like in terms of - there are situations - if you talk to UDF leadership right now it's totally non-racial - you could have Mahommed Vali and Cheryl (.....) and Murphy Morobe - they're on the acting executive, they're all different groups - but at the same time Mahommed Vali might well say : Look, we do support African working class leadership, so perhaps ultimately it would make sense for - in Johannesburg for you to have a (.....) representation from the African community in Soweto - people would be realistic about the realities, about the experience of working non-racially - I'm just wondering is there's anything you can tell me about how you dealt with those issues, especially in Natal where you've got a - quite a heavy Indian population and a Zulu population - we didn't discuss a bit about historically the pact, the Zuma, Dadoo, Naicker pact and then the so-called riots of '49 - there were tensions, there were tensions (.....) by the regime's separate policies etc.

J.F. But I don't want to gloss over it - (.....) making statements that it worked perfectly and it was fine - I'd like to know just how it worked in practice, even anecdotally, what it was like working in the different groups....

K.M. Yes, let's say when you referred to Natal, particularly Durban, the majority of the Indian people they were working - working people - the working class - in terms of the regime's status (?) itself (70 to 80 percent of the Indian people live below the breadline, just like the African people, so the interest of the Indian worker lies with the interest of the African worker because the problems are the same.

Now yes, it's true, for instance, like the Pass Law, it affects only the African worker - it does not affect the - the Indian or the Coloured or any other section, but being an organisation which is based on a common programme and policy, every oppressed group has to oppose the laws that affect even individual national groups in our country, although the Pass Law does not affect the - the Indian, but when the defiance campaign started all sections of the people joined, and we called upon the people to join because we had a common enemy - in the trade union field - I think that was a good example, where the Indian leaders, trade union leaders played an important part in working towards bringing about racial harmony and a closer co-operation unity among the blacks - both between Africans and Indians.)

Now you referred to 1949 - yes, we know why 99 - 1949 took place - that was because of the oppressive, the racial policies of the regime, but I'd like to point out that in 1950 there was a big protest day strike that took place, and it was nationally organised....

J.F. May one?

K.M. Ja, the - yes, 1st. May - that was also to protest against the Suppression of Communism Act, which was already in parliament then, and that strike brought about Indians and Africans together - now overnight the whole atmosphere, the question of unity was seen during that strike, and I think we could say very confidently that it is the congress movement, in spite of the regime's dividing policy and its pernicious racism, that we - that is the congress movement as a whole was able to break through, and today so much so that we can talk about a broad unity amongst - in the first place amongst the oppressed black people, and we are also getting sections of whites also who could see that it's only through non-racialism, through unity and supporting the policies of the ANC and the Freedom Charter, (that we could have a South Africa - a just South Africa for all the people who live in it, both black and white.)

J.F. Were you at the founding conference of SACTU in '55?

K.M. No, I was not there - I mean I worked, you know, for the congress, but at that stage I did not attend the founding congress.

J.F. And you - when you were in the factory you mentioned that you were actually in an office - how did that work, to be an organiser - let me just ask first of all, did that mean that most of the people on the shop floor were Africans, when you worked - I think it was the dairy that you mentioned or....

K.M. Yes, the dairy - dairy industry - yes, well, in the dairy industry there were the - the majority of them were African workers....

J.F. How did that work - there is the stereotype - we all know that the merchant class of Indians was more in the Transvaal, and the vast majority were brought over as indentured labour, but if you ask the average African worker who's only seen an Indian in a shop they generalise, just like they generalise about whites and Coloureds - there are the stereotypes fostered by the regime's policies - another stereotype is that Indians or a middle level management, especially (.....) - there's an effort by the state to cultivate this blacks - just like you have petty bourgeois Africans cultivated in that position - then you have to work against that because on the factory floor did you ever have African workers who'd be suspicious of an Indian in - off the factory floor who'd be coming to organise them - how did you get past that - for example, when you were in the dairy and you were in office and the guys you were organising were working machines, how did you transcend that - did they trust you right away or did you have to come in with an African comrade - I think it was (.....) told me a story of how Billy Nair was organising African workers, and it took a long time for him to get to them - he went with an African comrade first, but that afterwards - one day Billy couldn't come and some new African came, and the African workers said : No, where's Billy - he'd obviously transcended that, but he admitted that initially it was a path he had to go through - what was that like for you, or for people you saw, dealing with that?

K.M. Well, in my case of course, at that stage I was not full time as the - in the dairy union - you know, the dairy workers, but I was working and the official position was part time, but Cde. Billy he was the secretary but we went - he went to the different dairy - dairies and organised the workers - well, sometimes one went with African comrades, but when we went to the workers and put forward the - the - the case for a trade union, now that was receptive, but of course in the dairy industry again the Indian workers were not very large in numbers but we organised them, but we found that as time went on that more and more Africans joined the union.

But I say personally I did not have any problems when one went to a factory - take for instance, during the period which I referred to was a full time organising secretary - we went to factories to address meetings on campaigns, but there were African workers, Indian workers who attended those meetings - and like this person the - the trade unionist who came to this factory to organise us way back in '42 - well, he addressed both Indians and African workers, but this person he had - well, he had one advantage he - he knew the African language, but the language was not a barrier - there were many trade unionists, Indian trade unions organised African workers, and we also had African trade unionists addressing meetings in factories where - where it could be predominantly Indians, so the work of the trade union movement continued.

J.F. I guess I'm just wondering if there're any particular experiences you can remember, like that story that Essop told of getting past that prejudice - did you find that that was a prejudice that you had to work against, that people - that there were African workers who would assume Indians - for example, there's a book that just came out in Natal called Indian Workers Divide and Rule - did you see that - by Shamim Marie - it's about the history of the Indian working class.

K.M. Ja, I saw it, but I haven't read the - I haven't read the book - I'm trying to get a copy of that - I haven't seen that.

J.F. What that talks about is the fact that Indians often wanted the benefit unions and then they were happy - very frankly it's history, people don't deny it - at the same time with great reverence for the Billy Nairs and the Poonens and all the people who are working - I'm saying I read that in history, but I've never had a chance of really getting a chance to talk to someone like you who experience benefit union mentality versus the non-racial mentality - what was that like for you on the ground - I don't know if there's any story you could tell me about dealing with somebody who started out with that mentality and how you get past it, how you change that?

K.M. Yes - for instance, it was not when one - when one speaks about the organisation of trade unions and working amongst different sections of the people, it has not been smooth sailing all the way through - one comes up with problems - even in factories there are people - Indians oppose joining a trade union - sometimes you may find some African worker in the factory also not prepared to join the trade union - well, these are problems that do come up.

But what one is saying is that I personally did not have problems working and organising the workers, but it was a difficult task - let me just give one example about in the textile industry - now there was a time when in the textile industry the majority of the Indian workers were members of the union - now we found that the African workers did not join in large numbers - you recall I stated earlier that a union, when it gained certain concessions from the employers, or when they got wage awards and determinations, whether a person was a member of the union or not he benefited, so some workers felt well, why should we be in the union because in any event we'll get our increment or improvement in our conditions - some Indian workers felt the same way, just like the African workers.

Now the textile industry, especially in Durban, we felt that there were a number of Africans who were not in the textile, there were just a small number - now the joint secretariat, as I referred to earlier on, the congress movement - now we decided that we should go out to the factories and to call upon - because the African workers were the majority - to join the trade unions.

If you turn the pages of the New Age in the '50s especially - '57, '58, you'll see that Dr. Naicker, our present president, Cde. Stephen Dhlamini, addressing factory meetings calling upon workers to join trade unions because we know that in our country the overwhelming majority of the blacks are working people, and we have an industrial proletariat of about something like eight million.

Now we took that as a - as a task, an important one, because a strong trade union means a strong national liberation movement, and a strong national liberation, the congress movement, means a strong trade union movement. - so we called upon all the members who are members of the ANC to join the trade unions. - for instance, in Durban the membership of the ANC at one stage was rather small in the '50s, but when we began organising the - the ANC, especially after middle - after the congress of the people the membership of the ANC in Natal and like throughout the country grew rapidly.

So we felt that every member of the ANC, who is in the most cases is a worker, then his place should be in the trade union, so we called upon all the members who are members of the ANC who worked in the textile industry that they should join that union, and do you know that after that appeal was made with circulars, leaflets, etc., the membership of the textile workers just simply grew by leaps and bounds.

K.M. So this is just to indicate to you that the - it is the appeal that - that was made, and it is our approach to the trade union organisation, and pointing out to the workers of the benefit of being in the trade union - and we found that the whole congress movement at that stage, when the joint secretariat was set up, tackled this question of the workers to join the trade union movement.

J.F. A few questions quickly - there's this phrase that's bantered around South Africa, the lessons of the '50s, and it's often used by a kind of workerist school to say : Look, SACTU in the '50s the lesson was don't involve work place issues with community and national liberation issues - how do you feel about that - what do you think the lessons of the '50s were - obviously people would want to look back and say : In the '80s we must win and there must be - we must learn from our experience - what would you say the experience of the '50s taught that would be applicable to the current situation?

K.M. Well, the '50s - I think that was a period when the - after the - after SACTU was being - was born in '55, one could say we entered a new era because SACTU was the first non-racial trade union movement that was formed in our country - now I think that is an important milestone in the history of our struggle, of not only the trade union movement - the whole liberation movement - today I think the trade unions have gone even further in that the trade unions participate in all aspects of the struggle.

Now SACTU itself, when - I stated earlier - when it was formed it was not only for high - fighting for higher wages and better working conditions for one trade union in one industry working for the - generally for the upliftment of the worker, no - now the difference between SACTU and other trade union bodies was this important factor, and that was to fight also for the overthrow of that system and to be part and parcel of the national liberation movement.

Now today in the '80s, or to the present stage, the trade unions are fully involved - much more than in the '40s and the '50s - today you'll find shop stewards who work among - in the community organisations, there's joint committees - shop stewards work with youth organisation, students organisation, which we did not have in the - in the - in the '40s or the '50s - so this is another era in which the trade union has entered, and COSATU I think has emerged as a very powerful trade union movement which is mobilising the workers.

So one could say that a qualitative change has taken place from the time that SACTU came onto the scene and the present day trade unions - just to give you another example is the number of trade unions who are affiliated to the UDF - the - I think there are something like 20 all (?) trade unions - now in the past we did not have - like SACTU was not affiliated to any political organisation or individual unions, but SACTU is part and parcel of the congress alliance - but today we have a situation where trade unions want to directly participate and - in the political - I mean in - in the political organisation, and of course not any political organisation, but a progressive, radical and democratic organisation, and today in our country I think the UDF is a unifying factor insofar as the legal organisation are concerned (?) but paramount, the most important and the leader of the entire liberation movement is the ANC - that is the, well, organisation that is giving that lead, but the UDF is playing its role in getting all the various organisations, whether they are church, community organisations, trade unions, educational institutions, work under - work within the UDF.

- J.F. When you came to Morogoro in '69 and there was the big conference, how did you feel about the fact that Indians, Coloureds and whites weren't allowed on the NEC, and that that only happened in 1985 - what was your feeling about that then and over the '60s and '70s and the early '80s?
- K.M. Ja, we - we accepted the membership of the ANC to be in one organisation because outside one cannot have the same - the same situation which existed in South Africa at the time - as I stated earlier, the - the congress alliance was the beginning of the creation of one organisation, but it is for historical reasons and for the conditions under which we live, today we still have different organisation existing, but they're all coming together - I think the UDF is a - a clear indication.

Today I think the ANC is the organisation for all those who say they are progressive and radicals to join - at the time, in 1969, the question did not arise, because the ANC was the only organisation and it embraced all South Africans - but in '85 of course the second consultative conference again had the delegates who attended from all parts and elected people onto the executive on the basis of merit, and there was no change from '69 - the doors were not barred to any group - the member - the - the ANC was open to all.

The only thing is that at that stage we did not have the election on the same basis as 198- - '85 - in any event the - the whole question was not probably at that stage - was not ripe, that to consider the question of the elections whether other groups to come onto the executive - it did not arise then - but the fact is that the ANC was the only organisation and its doors were open to all South Africans.

- J.F. And just final questions - do you - how do you think the future South Africa will be in terms of what the racial and class components will be in terms of leadership and direction? - do you think it'll be important to have almost a kind of affirmative action to assure that there's African working class leadership? - if you look at some of the unions now you have leadership positions - Cyril Ramposa doesn't fit a definition of a worker - some of the unions have white organising secretaries who wouldn't be described as working class - do you think it's going to be important to ensure African working class leadership, or do you think non-racialism means there's no racialism - however people go it's on merit only?

- K.M. Well, Julie, I think you'll agree that in our country the majority of the people are the African people, so there'll be something wrong if the majority of the people don't lead the country, so what we are saying that even in a future South Africa the majority of the people will be in leadership position - (now our main task at the present stage is the demolition, the destruction, the dismantling of the apartheid system, to work for a new South Africa and our - (in terms of our programme and policy, the Freedom Charter - and a new equitable, non-racial society will judge people on merit, and in our country the most - the most numerous are the African people and the - and the - and the working people and the working class, and naturally the working class in our country will play a very decisive role, and this working class is part and parcel of the national liberation movement - it is right in the forefront of the struggle at the present stage - the trade union movement and the various other organisations.

So the only guarantee for a future South Africa is the democratic majority, and I think that the Freedom Charter is that programme for a free democratic, non-racial and just society.

- J.F. Well, the pure numbers will take care of the Africans being in the majority, but do you count on the Communist Party to ensure African - to ensure working class influence and hegemony?

K.M. No, the - the - the alliance today comprises the ANC's the leader of the alliance, the - part of the alliance is the South African Communist Party and the Congress of South African Trade Unions - and this is the alliance, led by the ANC, is leading that struggle.

J.F. But I'm saying just to ensure working - there's like a lot of critique about the Freedom Charter saying it's not a socialist document, it's just a blueprint for the future South Africa that has to be filled in, and it speaks about some degree of nationalisation but it's not - I'm not complaining, but there is some kind of discussion about that, and I'm saying to ensure the working class involvement and actual hegemony, the fact that they would lead - would you see the Communist Party as ensuring that, or do you think that will be a natural organic evolution from SACTU, COSATU, all the influences together - do you think the Communist Party will have a specific role in being the watchdog of the working class?

K.M. The - as I stated, that the - at the present stage....

J.F. (.....)

K.M. Ja, the future - well, the future - we are talking about the - the goal, that is the destruction of that state - now the working class, as I've stated already, will play that important - it's playing an important role, and it will - now to my mind, a future South Africa will be where the society itself will have to be changed - there'll be radical change because the Freedom Charter is not a socialist programme, there's no doubt about this - it's undoubted - there's no doubt about that - but it is a programme which will bring about radical changes - it's not for the maintenance of the status quo - it'll be much more, and what - and what we refer to is a people's democracy, people's power, meaning the wealth of the country in terms of the Charter will be shared.

Now in this the working class will play a dynamic role, because they are the most numerous - and we don't think there's any contradiction within the alliance - within the alliance, and that alliance has been accepted, and the Communist Party even in a future South Africa will play its rightful role within a united democratic front.

from p. 5

J.F. Just quick things - will you in - at the - when the Xuma-Dadoo-Naicker pact was signed were you there - there was a kind of a conference where it was signed - were you at all party to that or? *(what was the importance of)*

K.M. Well, that - that was way back in '49, the - no, no, I mean as members I mean we are part of it, but I mean that was - took place at the - at the leadership level....

J.F. Xuma was secretary there, when it was actually signed....

K.M. Cde. Dan Xuma - ja, ja, he was, yes.

J.F. But just as a rank and file person, how did you and your comrades at that time regard the signing of that pact, to have that - was that a pinnacle of an achievement - did you - I'm just interested in what it was like on the ground, because there was the Champion problem, there was (.....) criticising it and....

K.M. Yes, that's right - as I stated, just like there were reactionaries in the Indian Congress, which we overthrew, well, there were certain - like A.W. Champion and others who did not want to have anything to do with the Indian Congress, but this pact was in keeping with the trends, that is to have unity amongst the - the African and the Indian people, and that's - that is the birth of that pact.

- K.M. It is a - a logical conclusion, naturally - the progressives in all the various organisations and within - mainly within the ANC and the Indian Congress at the time worked for this - it was just not a paper pact, but it was a pact that was necessary to show the - the unity and to bring about unity, and to work for unity and for the consolidation of the various organisations.
- J.F. So you were 23 at the time - what did your peers think of it - what - can you remember what - how it was received among the people you worked with?
- K.M. Yes, well, as I say, at that stage we - the pact was welcomed by all because it was necessary, and that was a logical conclusion of the previous struggle to overthrow reactionary leadership in the Indian Congress, and well, of course there were people in other circles that did not want this kind of pact, but the progressives triumphed when the pact was - was signed - and as I stated, it was just not merely a paper pact, but it was a pact forged out of work and out of struggle and to bring about genuine unity amongst the oppressed people, and in the main the African and Indian people.
- J.F. Last question - it seems like your motivations don't particularly come much from an Indianness - did you have a family background that spoke about Gandhi and the early passive resistance, or worried about (....) and the Africans, or did you just not have it yourself - or do you consider maybe I haven't sensed it - do you consider that there is a certain cultural identity which is fine - the ANC speaks about culture shall be (?) protected and upheld - I'm just wondering because I - if you talk to Indris - I spent a couple of hours with him - with his dad - obviously he was very into the TIC and in a way that goes back he's got a history - do you think you are one of those people who happens to be Indians who didn't have much - you were just unions, that was your politicisation, or do you also have an Indianness in your motivations....
- K.M. Well, to tell you about my own background, and as I stated earlier, because of our association with progressive organisations that I cannot - do not see myself, you know, being identified as an Indian than a South African - now I just want to give you one example just to show you how much South African people of Indian origin are - well, I could (?) just give you my own case - but my wife sent me some forms to be filled, you know, for passports - well, as you know, in South Africa well, a black woman is still an inferior - she cannot sign her own forms, so the husband has to do it - so my wife sent these forms, and I filled in these forms and stated the number of countries, you know, that - to include on the passport - well, I included many countries, but after I'd sent the forms for my wife, then it occurred to me why I've omitted India - just to give you an idea - I - simply because it didn't occur to me but I - I wanted to put India on the list, I - well, you know, it's a commonwealth country, but just to indicate to you that we do not think in terms, and our whole outlook is South African, in upbringing, in every way.
- But one is not saying that the Indian people they - they haven't got their own language or the cultural background and so on, but that is only a - a - a small group, but the younger people, and now for the last more than 130 years, the first Indians were settled in South Africa, that we consider ourselves to be South Africans first, and that's what comes through all the time, so - and I think it's also because some of us who joined the movement at the early age - I think that is also responsible for this - our more broader outlook and they talk in terms of a non-racial South Africa.
- J.F. Were you arrested during the first state of emergency in '69?
- K.M. The - the....

J.F. The '60 - 1960.

K.M. 1960 - yes, well, the - during, ja, that state of emergency we, or rather some of us escaped the police....

J.F. You went underground?

K.M. We went underground and we were working at the time - for the five months whilst our comrades and colleagues were in detention for the five months, well, we were working - left our homes, and we were working underground for that period, like many people, you know, throughout the country - well, at that stage there was Dr. Naicker, there was Cde. Stephen Dhlamini, and there were a whole lot of others - Cde. Billy Nair and others worked during that stage outside.

J.F. And lastly - is Kay just K a y?

K.M. Kay - the second name is M o o n s a m y.

J.F. What kind of name is that?

K.M. Well, Moonsamy is - it's a - it's an ordinary name.

J.F. Did you speak an Indian language at home in your youth?

K.M. Yes, well, I - the language that our - well, the mother tongue is Tamil - our forefathers hail from the southern part of India.

END OF INTERVIEW.