

J.F. So can I just ask you a little bit of your history where were you born and when?

R.D. I'll eh.. I was born in the year 1914 24 September. I was born in the banks of a place known as Queensbridge, just off North Coast in Durban and my father by occupation was a policeman, those days. They were known as the Natal Traffic Cops.

There a family of four sisters and a brother. Of course right now I'm all alone now virtually an aged orphan. And my early school and learning was, ... I entered into a Mission School which was a part of the Church of England.

And I was deeply involved in religious studies. And my ... the best part of my education I received was from a Mission School. But up till 1930.

J.F. Was that run by whites?

R.D. Eh.. It was ... It was a Christian Mission with white priests in the beginning and at a later stage the Church also had Indian priests who qualified in this country and became priests Its now one of the oldest churches, The St Aidens Church in this country.

J.F. So were you yourself quite religious?

R.D. I was very, very deeply rooted in religious but ...eh I never accepted conversion from Hinduism to Christianity. I always felt that if you love one kind of religion theres no need for conversion.

But I always got a number of prizes for scriptures from, from Std. I to Std.V, that is the only level of education I received. In '31 I left school, by then both parents were passed away. And then I entered into (cough) a baking trade.

R.D. And in those days I used to carry baskets selling bread to house to house. And eh, it was then in the 1930's I read a book by Sydney and Beatrice Webb on the history of British Trade Unions.

I was very....(it) moved by the incidence,... then I looked up the trade unionism from the local situation and during my period of employment we approached a number of young people at that time, to see if we couldn't form a Trade Union of Baking Workers.

And that was my first effort at that time 1933 to organise a Baking Workers Union. Unfortunately at that period, there was a white working union in the baking industry who did not accept us as members of the union.

It was purely a white union but by 1936 we managed to flourish as a group of militant workers and forced the hand of the white workers to accept us and they accepted us but they dwindled away and left the organisation to us. It was then known as the Natal Bakers and Confectioners Employees Union.

By the time we tried to sought registration ...it was a very interesting feature, that part of my life I joined a group called the Liberal Study Group. Those days.... and it was only later I discovered in that group there were members of the C.P. The Communist Party of South Africa... that stage and its strange at that period, that era, the members of that group were all very progressive and non-racial in their character.

And I can mention some of the outstanding men at that time... We had a gentleman by the name of E.J. Dhlomo who was the editor of the Natal Zulu paper called the Langalasi Natal at that period. And we had Peter Abrahams, a very brilliant author and a poet, who left the country at a later stage.

R.D. And we had men like George Singh, H.A.Naidoo, George Ponnen, A.K.M.Docrat and many others you know, who constituted the Liberal Study Group. And at a later stage from the Liberal Study Group emerged what we called then the Natal Indian Organisation whose primary objective was to resuscitate the old Natal Indian Congress, and to see that its made a organisation that will take up the cudgels of the Indian working class in this country.

As time went on from '36 onwards, the union began to flourish. The only... the union at that stage owed its allegiance to the Natal Indian Association at that time which was a stronghold of the Indian people, though Congerss was in existance but it never emerged as a force. It eh... it lay dormant for quite a long period, until 1938 and we a younger group of people from the Liberal Study Group formed what we called the Non-European United Front.

It was known as the Non-European United Front but not the Non-European Unity Movement. But at that time they... '38 it was ... in 1939 I joined the Communist Party of South Africa, the Natal branch. I remember very clearly I was interviewed by one Mr. Rowley Arenstein who is still with us but on the other side.

He is now with the ...an adviser to the Tricameral delegate. It's rather sad but Rowley was one of our most brilliant theoreticians in those days. And at that time the Party did indicate to us that it would be wrong to form a Non-European United Front, because the different racial components are not well organised to form such a Front.

So we had to disband that organisation in 1941 and we had to go back into the different fields.

R.D. And we were asked to work in our own areas, like the Indian people, Indian groups and the Coloureds in the Coloured areas and the Africans in the African areas. As a result most of us felt that our role should be in the Indian National Movement and then the African Peoples' Organisation of which the Coloureds belonged to.

And then we had the African National Congress which was alive at that time. The Party felt that it was very essential that these national groups must be first organised.... different units and then bring about a broad unity at a later stage.

Of course in 1939 War was declared and we in the same old Liberal Study Group decided that we will not support the war because it was imperialist war. It was Germany versus Great Britain and we shall have no say in the war so we carried out an anti-war campaign.

And I remember very clearly one of our chaps by the name of Dawood Seedat, who at that time was the leader of the Nationalist Block of the Natal Indian Association who was arrested for his anti-imperialist attack, attacking the king and queen who were of course their symbols of British imperialism at that stage.

A strange phenomenon occurred in 1941 when the Soviet Union entered the war so we had to change our role and felt that being the first working class state which was attacked we now felt that the character of the war had changed, that we should now participate in the war effort of the country. Even at that stage the Communist Party came out quite openly, supported the war effort.

R.D. But despite our support for the war effort, we carried out a very intensive campaign in asking the Government, at that stage to arm the Non-Europeans, who were unarmed. They were just merely being used as laymen, truck drivers and road repairers, etc. We felt that was not enough so carried out a campaign arm the Non-Whites.

During that era we had a number of strikes. We had the Paint and Dunlop Rubber Workers strike. And before the war ended we had the 1946 mineworkers strike which was the most powerful strike South Africa had seen, which was led by J.B.Marks then. He was a very powerful Party personality. And right up till 19.... Immediately after the war had ended, most of us had great hope that there would be something new.

A new kind of society we'll see. At that time we had an organisation called the South African Trade and Labour Council, to which a number of our trade unions were affiliated. And we also felt at that time being a large coordinated body we shouldn't form a splinter group, we should support the Trade and Labour Council.

And the Trades and Labour Council at that time submitted a Workers Charter to General Smuts who was then the Prime Minister, only to our disappointment to find out that that Charter had been placed in the archives of the Parliament. Nothing has been heard of it.

We were quite disappointed right up till that period. Of course in 1950 with the introduction of the Suppression of Communism Act, the party had to go underground and many of us were torn from our organisations.

R.D. And I must submit that during the existence of the Party, it was a very well disciplined Party. I myself could not deny the fact that I was disciplined many a time in the Party for not carrying out, you know, proper instruction, which I am not ashamed of. But the Party had great hopes for the future of South Africa, from that time up till now. Its a great pity that the Party is not existing, that is, I can go up to that point, if you want to question me any further then....

J.F. OK Eh... Because I want to focus on the non-racial aspect of it, do you think that that when you first read the book and thought about joining a trade union, do you thought of yourself, as a black person, as an Indian or as a worker? How did you think of yourself before you got to the idea of the unions?

R.D. You see, fortunately for me, my background was slightly different compared to other workers, because of my Christian background, because of the kind of education in the Mission School, the whole concept the colour question did not appear to me. And because when eh... my late mother died, I was brought up by an African woman who was working with my mother in the police cells, so my outlook was completely different to the average working class. And besides again in the 30's when I read a poem in school, "The Slave's Dream", I don't know if you've read of "The Slave's Dream", its a very beautiful poem. That poem had changed my entire character in life where the ... eh...

R.D. A portion of the paragraph goes like,

"Beside the ungathered rice he lay
With his sickle in his hand,
His breast was bare, his much adare
Was deeply buried in the sand."

It goes on to say,

"He did not feel the driver's whip
Nor the burning heat of day."

Just shows how the slavedriver was whipping the slave you know. That has transformed my whole thinking on this non-racial issue.

Then I was beginning to get a new concept that...how the blacks were being treated from those days.

J.F. Who's that poem by?

R.D. I think it was Longfellow. Its "THE SLAVE'S DREAM" Its a very beautiful ...I've got a photostat copy of it I wouldn't mind giving it to you. Its somewhere in my file.

J.F. Wow! Ehem.

R.D. So as far as the non-racial concept is concerned, that thing came something naturally, because of my upbringing, because I grew up with a family where my parents lived together with Africans, we grew up together.

J.F. That poem, why did it change you so much?

R.D. Because eh... I saw the tyranny, you know the.... I sometimes used to imagine what life these people must have went through, even in those days, leave alone now. Even in the modern technological age too, we still see that kind of oppression, but in a different level.

J.F. And what are you saying that before the reason that the poem was so powerful was your Christian lack of colour bar that sheltered you a bit from that tyranny aspect?

R.D. I er.... Well I was ..I was a great believer in/er... Christ's teaching at that time, I'm saying not like now, cause it's changed. At that time I believed that Christ himself,... brought about many changes, you know, I accepted those. Those like feeding the poor and getting the fish and blessing it and the bread pipe, loaves of bread and that kind of thing. Those things appealed to me as if Christ can tap on miracles we can also bring about change in that fashion. That helped me a lot in the early days. I used to be a regular ... I used to quote the Bible very freely even in my early days in the Trade Unions, doing my Memorandums, you know, I'm talking about '36 '37 its quite a long way.

J.F. And so your father and your mother worked for the police?

R.D. No my father worked for the police and my mother was a immigr... I mean a South African.... born. My father came from overseas, from India to South Africa as a young man.

J.F. But I'm confused, why were you ... why were you brought up in the police cells. You said something about the African woman, where your mother died?

R.D. You see they lived in a compound like, the African police, Coloured police, Indian police, so the families were living together.

J.F. And this was the which police? The...

R.D. It was KNown as ... In those days they used to call it the Natal police.

J.F. But it was railway or was it ...

R.D. It was the city police.

J.F. Municipal?

R.D. Municipal ja. They used to call it the borough police those days.

J.F. So were they the ones that did the Pass raids and....

R.D. No, no, they were purely traffic controls.

J.F. Traffic aha yeah! OK.

And you felt the way you grew up you didn't see race as a factor.

R.D. No.

J.F. So the question I had asked you, was, did you see yourself as an Indian or as a Black or as a worker? Did you not see yourself as an Indian?

R.D. I couldn't accept that concept because of my school eh... the church training, because I had a white missionary priest and my teachers were Christians. And my sister used to go to school... next door ... adjacent to the school that I used to go...I'm at Ton... but she used to go to a school, and her head mistress was a white. And we accepted them and the question of colour didn't appear to us, it wasn't a question I was voilent against.

J.F. So you didn't see whites as a process?

R.D. No, even up to now, I've always felt that they are a part of my life. And I've never carried out an anti-white slogan or campaign even up to this very stage, even though what we went through, I feel it'll be wrong.

J.F. And did you see yourself, before you read that book about trade unions, before you got involved in unions, did you see yourself as a worker?

R.D. I always believed that I'll be a worker and I'll die a worker. I never lived that one day I will be the owners of the means of production, as you say now, I'll try... I can't see up till now that I'll be here.... Other than the status of a worker, I can't see ... I can be....

J.F. Even now?

R.D. Even now I'm convinced that socialism is inevitable. Change must come. We'll have to push through that. I... I'm very convinced of that.

J.F. So after socialism you'd also be a worker?

R.D. Ja.

J.F. Mmm so what was the change then that happened to you when you thought about the unions? Did you see, ... I'm just thinking for a lot of people, they saw the black/white struggle and they found some kind of organisation and they thought I'm going to fight the whites. For you, you never thought of any way you're going to fight the whites?

R.D. No.

J.F. What did you think when you read the book? You were going to fight who?

R.D. The boss it was ... my concept was very clear. There was only one person that we got to fight, the boss class then we'll have to get all classes united right up till very stage, even sometimes ... different political groups will have discussions and if there are anti-white discussions I do not believe I should be party to that .

R.D. But right from 1938 up to now, I want to say even at mass meetings, at May-day Committee meetings, at various trade union meetings, I used to speak, I always used to say that: "freedom in our lifetime." "The workers shall take power." But up to now I'm very dissatisfied, even at the age of seventy now, I'm seventy to say, I've seen very little change taking place, except for new buildings streets, schools, offices, transport system, communications all these things advanced but other than that I'm in the same position as I was sixty-nine years ago .

J.F. Mmm OK. So can you tell me a bit about....

R.D. In the 50's after the dissolution of the Party, most of us went into our old trade union organisations and we continued our work in the national liberation organisations and we saw the birth of the Freedom Charter in 1955. A campaign that we all went out working day and night in every level factories, workshops, street corners, the buses and the trams, factories...

J.F. Would it be the Natal Indian Congress?

R.D. The Indian Congress! Of course the Indian Congress I must say at one stage I also had my areas of difference in using the word 'Indian' tag. But when I looked at Congresses work as a whole, we found that all its pronouncement and all its utterances and its policies did not... and its activities did not confine to the Indian itself. Its struggle was a very broad struggle for human rights, and that is where I fully subscribe to Congress ideals.

R.D. And even up to this stage, Congress as an organisation, as an umbrella body representing Indian viewpoint, at no stage in its life, in its history, it agitated one group against another group. And this is an unblemished record as far as the Indian Congress is concerned and it still maintains that character and dignity. Not only locally, nationally but internationally too.

It has got that one sound backing that it had not created racial conflict between any group, though they are a minority group. The Indian Congress I must say were largely responsible for even kindling the interests of the A.N.C. which was lying quite low, dormant and for the resuscitation of the African Peoples Organisation, the Coloured Organisation which has become alive to-day.

J.F. So then you were involved in that union in the 50's were you involved in the union er...

R.D. I was all along with the unions until 1953 I was listed... in terms of the Suppression of Communism Act. Despite that I continued with my trade union activities until the 70's behind the scenes and I was convicted in 1970 under the Suppression of Communism Act for being in trade unions as a listed person, and say none the least, again, a few years ago, the minister has relisted me and I'm relisted again last month in terms of the new Act.

So if you think of quoting me you needn't be afraid of quoting me outside the country; you can quote me. So so I'm not afraid of the minister relisting me, because he has listed me. I didn't ask to be listed you see!

J.F. And were you, when you were convicted, were you sentenced to what happened?

R.D. Ja I was, I received a suspended sentence from trade union activities. Of course I'm not performing any trade union activities at the moment, but though, I'm an adviser to a number of trade unions even at this stage.

J.F. Were you ever detained or arrested before?

R.D. Yes, during the Sharpville uprising.. We served a few months of detention in the Durban Central Prison and this beard I'm growing now was a result of Sharpville uprising, a remembrance '63 in the 60's.

J.F. So you grew the beard then?

R.D. Yes its all a remembrance whenever I stroke it I think of Sharpville.

J.F. So you didn't cut it since then?

R.D. No I didn't cut it since.

J.F. And what were you doing mmm, what happened that you were arrested before Sharpville?

R.D. Well we, we spent that three or four months away, we were in detention about 200 of us in Durban.

J.F. But I mean were you doing anything to do with Sharpville or was it just the emergency, they took all?

R.D. Emergency thats, they rounded a whole lot of us and took us.

J.F. So were you any... were you with S.A.C.T.U.?

R.D. Well we were... we all supported S.A.C.T.U. That was about the only organisation in the 50's which emerged gave some hope for the working class in this country.

R.D. We had first the Trades and Labour Council, then we had at a later stage , a Non-European Council of Trade Unions. Then we had FOFOTUSA not FOSATU, FOFOTUSA, A Federation Of Free Trade Unions South Africa, it was more a Pan Africanist Organisation, then SACTU came in and now then we had TUCSA here. Of course TUCSA was dwindling, a large number of workers now pulling out of TUCSA.

J.F. Did you....

R.D. Well I had my role in all these co-ordinating bodies from the beginning.

J.F. Did you have an office? Were you an office bearer in any organisation?

R.D. Yes a number of organisations I was an office bearer.

J.F. Can you tell me which ones?

R.D. Well even if you take for example, now the sporting organisation I am the national secretary for the South African Amateur Weight Lifting ...

J.F. It is a what?

R.D. South African Amateur Weight Lifting and Body Building Federation.

J.F. Aha!

R.D. I am the national secretary and we were responsible in getting South Africa expelled from the World Weight lifting Organisation I'm one of the founding members of Friends of the Sick Association which was doing anti-tuberculous amongst the people of this country.

J.F. Anti- what?

R.D. Tuberculosis YOU know this the...

J.F. Aha AHA

R.D. They call themselves the friends of the sick, and at the moment I'm the treasurer of the United Democratic Front.

J.F. The treasurer?

R.D. Yes and I'm also the treasurer of the paper called 'Ukuz'.

J.F. But are you treasurer of the Natal branch?

R.D. Ja.

J.F. And in the 50's were you an office bearer in SACTU?

R.D. No I wasn't office bearer in SACTU. Our Union, the Bakers Union was a supporter of the ...

J.F. And did you have an office in the Bakers Union?

R.D. Yes I was gen... I was general secretary of the union and I was also the general secretary of the Engineering Union. In those days we had the number 5 Branch of the Engineering Union which was known as the AEU those days. Since the AEU broke away from British Trade Unions, they formed their own Engineering Workers Union. I was general secretary of the Engineering Workers Union.

J.F. Mmmm And so what on a non-racial aspect er.. did you find that, OK you had a unique situation with your Christian Background, er.. did you find that the average worker was really non-racial, I'm just thinking of the apartheid policies and the exploitation at the hands of the whites, could you really tell me that workers...

R.D. Ja, ja I must say even up to this point in time, even if it's after the emergency, after the 1949 racial clash we found that the Indian worker still lived in fear of that, of that concept of Black domination, fear of Black domination, just as the whites fear it.

R.D. That fear is still in the Indians, but I can't say that everybody will go along with my kind of thinking hundred percent, they'll go up to, up to a point, say, that they believe in change, but the concept of that fear of Black domination is still a fact with the majority of the workers. Fear, fear that!

J.F. So how did you deal with that, I mean does that mean to say that you'll say No that they were not really non-racial. I mean it seems, do you think someone could say that you were ahead of those workers, they were not really non-racial in their views.

R.D. At all ... At all stages when we were organising, I must say it was difficult for us to organise those days because of the Pass Laws and the discriminatory laws that existed didn't give us an opportunity to work even openly with the African, but when we formed the African workers into our organisations, in our executive, we had African and Indians despite what the laws said. YOU know we did, we defied the law of that time. It was there that we were able to propagate that we can work together to achieve our objectives to bring about a better working condition for the working class. That concept the workers accepted but the political side to look at it, feel that one day we will also be dominated by a Black majority. That fear is there.

J.F. And where were you in 1949?

R.D. During the riots I was in Durban with Congress, I was also in the Riots Relief Committee.

J.F. Which town, which area did you live?

R.D. I lived in Mayville. That was the area that was affected most.

J.F. So can you tell me a bit about how you see the origins and what the, what the background to that was?

R.D. Ja, well it's not difficult to access that but my own assessment it was, ever since I knew from my own entry into the work situation, even from that time, in those days we used to call it the colour bar system was very very heavy against the Indian busimen and the Indian working class and we found that there was always campaigns that were carried on against the Indians.

At one stage I remember the ruling class even said that we should pack up the Indians and send them away to India because they had an Immigration Scheme which provided for the State to finance you even to go away to India and a larger number of Indians made use of this Immigration Scheme to go .

And I... I attribute the 1949 riots as a direct cause not so much of the white man himself as the white people, the policy of the Government, of the anti-Indian agitation that was going on year in and year out, had been soaked into the Black man, pointing out to him that these are the people that are making your trouble; these are the people that are taking your jobs; these are the people opening businesses and shops depriving you.

The frustration got the better of it but actually it wasn't an anti-... it wasn't a white vendetta against the Indian people. I think it was as I blame it, largely, to the Nationalist policy in bringing about the riot, thats definite.

R.D. I am convinced about it because I met a large number of whites in my daily life, they were not actually anti-Indian. The propaganda, State machinery propaganda, was largely responsible for giving birth to this riot and it took over, over a very small incident.

It was on a Friday afternoon, I remember, in the Victoria street area, in one of the cafes; a little boy stole a cake, you know, just took a cake and the man actually hit him with a bottle on his head. And the rumour went around that the boy's neck was cut off and they placed it in a mosque, and it became, it created a riotous situation as the result of this the riot broke out.

J.F. He was an African boy who stole from an Indian shopkeeper?

R.D. Indian shopkeeper. That's actually... That led to the riot. What the basic cause of the riot is the propaganda that was carried out against the Indian as a small group, was you know very damaging those days. The word 'coolie' was a very common utterance, but we don't hear of it to-day.

J.F. And what about comparing it with the situation now?

What if some kind of person who reads the Government Press and said look it's just happened again, you know thirty years later...the same thing is reported now, look the African and Indian are killing each other in 1985.

R.D. Ja, I mean some of us can explain these positions to the people. Here again now if we look at the thing very carefully, and even we said it, even before the Government offered this tri-cameral parliament to the different institutions . E

R.D. We pointed out to the people, that if we took part in such a ... er.. exercise, to go into this tri-cameral parliament we are going to create a vehicle of violence, for sure. Even to-day, we go deeper into the African areas to point out, very clearly, they point out to us, that you people are responsible, for the army, the navy, the laws that are being passed now. You are also part and parcel of that in the tri-cameral parliament, and unless you'll do something you will also be our enemies. That is quite clear, there is no doubt about that.

The present situation is caused through the present Nationalist Government policy. If this Government tomorrow, breaks down the tri-cameral parliament and gives representation to all groups, in one parliament, I can never see, there can be racial conflicts in South Africa.

When people are actually deprived that they are thinking that groups of people like us will go into the tri-cameral parliament at their expense; and the picture to them is quite clear, we can see it now, these little riots that took place now is a result of that tri-cameral parliament. There is no getting away from that fact. And even day in and day out, every speaker whenever it was a church man layman or a politician or better if it was a PAC or a Black Conscious group or a Progressive Party, every one of them pointed out that the tri-cameral parliament is a vehicle for violence. There is no doubt about that. So we can't compare the 1949 situation which was years of agitation against a small group of people who were flourishing economically and they were competing with the white man, that propaganda has affected them.

R.D. But now its the tri-cameral parliament has replaced it with something else which is more effective and forceful and making the Black man see clearer, that we have now entered into a partnership with the whites to oppress them. That's how they see it now; that's for sure because in my daily life I see it .

J.F. And ... And when I'm talking about non-racialism from your point of view do you think that the class issue is actually more important, for example, in the Indian community the ... the different classes of Indians, the trader, the merchant or the professional versus the worker; do you think that those factors are of more importance in relevance to people in their daily lives or do you think the colour question ultimately unites the people?

R.D. Well to me I want to be quite honest, the colour question means nothing to me. I look at the human being quite physically biologically, as is, to me if he gets food shelter and clothing, as we say from the beginning, that's what man requires; if he gets that he will be able to survive on his own. The colour question won't come in, it is the type of education that we receive daily, the type of segregated areas we are living in daily is bringing about this... widening up the gap between the groups. To me the colour question doesn't even appear even from the time I get up in the morning to I go to bed. I don't think of that at all, it doesn't appear to me.

J.F. Then why did you belong to groups that deal with the colour question, you said that you weren't to happy with the 'Indian' part of the ...

R.D. The tag I didn't but at a latter stage I learnt that these were the only avenues opened to us to expound our theories because we didn't have organisations.

J.F. What about people who criticise the four nations theory and say if you're non-racialist, are you involved with NIC now?

R.D. Yes I'm still NIC.

J.F. You're just a member?

R.D. Yes.

J.F. Yeah ... mmm you know what if somebody were to say that I thought you were non-racial?

R.D. Ja we are non-racial in this .. in this respect because the Natal Indian Congress as an umbrella body has had its historical backgrounds. If you look at its history right from the time it was founded in 1896, it has , it has not only it has got an international support international.. it has an international Character acceptable to the people, it represents a very large section of the people; an organisation which you cannot ignore, because the role its playing except for the word 'Indian', the role its playing is in all aspects an international role. It is not playing a role for the Indians only.

At no stage it said we only want homes for the Indians, we want jobs for Indians or we want equal facilities for Indians it didn't say that. That is where I can work with Congress even up to this minute.

J.F. And after...

R.D. Because we must accept the realities of the situation, we have the Colourds, we have the INdians, we have the Whites we have the Africans.

R.D. And the State has made it more sharper now by cutting us up into the tri-cameral set-up, it has clearly shown now for the first time, even to the Coloured people who were regarded one time as part of the white race but to-day by virtue of the introduction of the tri-cameral system has placed the Coloured in a completely different compartment to say that he is now the House of Representatives, he is not part of the white race. So is the Indian not part of the white race, not part of the human race for that matter.

So therefore we have to work in some of these organisations to put forward our school of thought. I can't come out openly as a Communist and say look because I'm a Communist I can identify with these; as a Communist my job is to infiltrate into these organisations and put forward my ideology eventually so we might be able to bring into one solid front like the United Democratic Front. Because the United Democratic Front is not a political party it is just a front.

If tomorrow the Communist Party emerges I'll be the first one to join the Party and I'll walk out of these organisations because it wouldn't mean anything to me then cause we did our share there. Then we'll take up our class struggle.

J.F. So is the UDF not involved in the class struggle?

R.D. Could serve as a front, it is not a working class organisation It won't be able to lead the working class then you will be depriving the other oppressed national groups who are within you also want to see the ultimate objectives the freedoms.

J.F. How do you feel about those people who are progressives but are coming from the left, with the criticism like the FOSATU criticism saying you know you're someone who always had the interest of the working class, you know, you see by your background you know, why aren't you working, you know, what ... just the kind of criticism you know, of other organisation not being working class .

R.D. Yes I have been questioned a number of times , you get a number of people even there last night, they said you were a Communist and a listed person, how can you now identify yourself, with the groups of people who are also exploiters and lumped with the middle class group and so forth; and you are actually diluting the class struggle now by not participating.

I said no, these people form part of the oppressed group, and until such times we remove these hurdles, these are obstructionists to us, they're obstructing our struggle and we'll have to remove them out of our way. The only way we can remove them is to fight for them to be, to remove them from national oppression and once they're out of our way, then we are clear to fight the working class struggle.

At the moment the Black man is also oppressed just as the Indians and the Coloured even the white workers are also oppressed, as far as I am concerned, where the boss class is concerned. So I feel that we must nationally liberate these people first then the class struggle can take its own shape.

Well many of them use the argument that if we take part in such a process, eventually we'll find that we'll be hijacked

R.D. We'll be hijacked by the very people we're assisting. A glaring example was India, where the Indian Communist Party and the working class went right up to the hilt, in liberating India, eventually they were hijacked. Well then again the Party has come out quite openly in India and said that now we cross the roads, so we'll go on our own and you go on your own, so they are still continueing the fight for the liberation of the working class.

J.F. Not very successful.!

R.D. Not very successful but as I said in all Capitalist countries I'm deeply convinced that socialism is inevitable no matter what anybody says; it must come.

J.F. What do you say to them when they say look what about the hijacking, don't you worry that this struggle could be hijacked?

R.D. Well having learnt lessons from other countries, I'm sure that we will not make those mistakes here. With the strength of the working class we will not allow them to hijack us and we'll not permit such a situation of course if we are not assassinated by then.

J.F. Pardon.

R.D. If I'm not assassinated by then. No we can't afford to allow even if tomorrow if the Coloured and the Indian and the African are free people. We as working class will not allow them to hijack us, they can't, it will be suicidal after all the years of struggle now to permit them to change the course of history.

J.F. And is there anything you want to say about that critic is that how you answered it, I don't know if I asked the question very proper.

R.D. No you you have asked me very well. I don't know if I'm putting it the way you want it. No you questioned me very well.

J.F. I guess the follow up I make is is the people who are ... just be more blunt about. The people who are working in FOSATU would say the only way you could effect change is through the workers from the factory floor, you know, the only non-racialism is on the factory floor not with all these petty bourgeois elements in the community , you know why aren't you with us? Are you in the FOSATU union?

R.D. Right. No, as I said I've come accross that that kind of attack continuously even last night in my own group meetings. I mean my group meetings I meet a number of people with different political views, they still question me. Like I'm the treasurer of the Natal Council of Sport which is a SACOS affiliate, the South African Council of Sport, and there I have my areas of differences inside there.

They are also critical about my role, they said how can you be with us and be there. I said if you don't want me you can remove me but I as a Communist I may infiltrate to put my point of view, I want to make it quite clear to you, if you don't want me you can ask me to leave.

I am very sincere in that because I must say FOSATU has done a bloody good job in the country, there's no doubt about that. But we say unless you give a political direction to the working class then all the education that you're giving to the workers won't take them any further than that.

R.D. And I believe very sincerely, in our trade unions we must tell the workers, as long as the means of production, is in the hands of the business men then we can do all our trade union work would be, still be blocked. We won't be able to further our progress

I believe in then that change must come violently and militantly otherwise, I can't see even our country, a change coming peacefully ... I can't see it.

J.F. But does that mean that mmm then, why did you get involved in the trade union way back when you did, you say theres no point in working with the unions because the only its going to come is war er everyone should just join the army? Join the UNKHONTO WE SIZWE or what?

R.D. Well you see the Umkhonto we sizwe is a liberation movement part of a liberation movement struggle, they felt that there was no other way out for them, right, they sent memorandums and representatives and calling on the government for round table conventions all these legal processes have failed so they said now let us declare war. Right, if tomorrow I know for a fact liberation will ... no where in the world liberation came on a golden plate, nowhere Even is... Nowhere in the world liberation came on a golden plate.

J.F. ahaa

R.D. Even in India the pacive .. Gandhi's logic of the struggle millions have died in that process; they say that India got its freedom without shedding blood which is not altogether true. Thousands have died in the Indian National Army, the navy the Airforce all had to shoot and kill people.

R.D. Thousands have died in the Indian National Army, the Navy , the Airforce all had to shoot and kill people. So in that angle when I look at that only through violence a change will come. I can't see it in any other way. Because you got the Army the Navy, the Airforce we got all that institutions and our own people are serving on it. And who are they going to kill, we ask that question again.

J.F. Mmmm I'll give you one other criticism to see what you think about it and that is the whole... looking at the Freedom Charter. Do you ever get people saying you know how can you support that document, you know, don't you believe in a socialist future, that kind of thing. Socialism , Whats the Freedom Charter?

R.D. Well to be honest we do get such criticism and sometimes some attacks on people, but I, in my own opinion as a layman... as a layman in from my own angle I look at it that the birth of the Freedom Charter was the only (knock on the door).

J.F. Come in ... Yes all right.

R.D. You see as a layman I look at it this way, when I read some years ago, it was very very many, I read the constitution of the ANC and the ANC's constitution of that time, to me appeared to be a sort of socialist document ... and they knew at that time, 1910/12 what they want in this country.

IN the era '55 I'm very convinced, at least the birth of the Charter has given this Government an alternative programme. However critical one may be of the Charter, it has offered a base for the Government to negotiate with the people.

J.F. So you're saying its the beginning.

R.D. Yes, well some say that after thirty years the Charter will be completely out of date. We say that the people can decide whether they want the Charter or not.

J.F. And again mmm do you get the critic of people saying one stage two stage and you're talking about a two stage revolution there. Is that correct?

R.D. Well the whole concept of revolution comes... every time we meet people they talk about revolution... and sometimes we ask the people, are you preparing for a revolution? So the question of revolution... we are living in a revolutionary era but time is not yet ripe for an insurrection.

J.F. Er OK Did your father come directly from India?

R.D. Ja.

J.F. As what did he?

R.D. He came as an... in the early days he came as an immigrant.

J.F. Not as an indentured labourer? And were you married?

R.D. Yes.

J.F. Are you still married now?

R.D. Yes that I am.

J.F. Do you have children?

R.D. YES.

J.F. What ... How many?

R.D. Eight. But I married again second time. I got one child now. So I named her Rivionia.

J.F. Is that the name of the child?

r.d. Yes after the trials. Then I can just remember the trials.

J.F. And how old is the child?

R.D. She is two years and three months.

J.F. And your other children mmm, are they at all involved politically?

R.D. They are not politically bad, but they are quite aware of whats going on in their country. One is a social worker, one is an accountant, one is a teacher in Australia, one is a mechanic.

J.F. And mmm did you mmm being listed, having these things happen, have that affected your life quite a lot. Were you able to work and continue to earn a living or did that affect you?

R.D. Mmm Ja but, my first marriage was very deeply affected by my restrictions and all that, cause she died a very disappointed woman, you know not having the best of.... what we could give, material comforts and things like that ,... it did it did have a bearing on our lives.

J.F. And were you able to work through it?

R.D. Yes we were able to contain it.

J.F. What work did you do during...

R.D. Trade union ... I was secretary of a number of unions.

J.F. But didn't you have to stop at something?

R.D. Ja, when I stopped I took up freelance bookkeeping.

J.F. Bookkeeping?

R.D. Ja, so in the Party, in the Movement, we can't go begging you know, we gotta do something.

J.F. And ...

R.D. So I'm still doing books now, for survival.

J.F. And what does your wife do now?

R.D. She is a nurse.

J.F. Aha.

R.D. At King George V, T.B. Hospital.

J.F. And the work that you are doing with the, the political work, with SACOS affiliate and all those groups?

R.D. Well I'M doing it underground now.

J.F. Pardon!

R.D. UNderground, I'm doing it as underground work. But I can't openly do it, though I come out quite open at present, mass meeting and all, I cannot be quoted. But I still address meetings, as a matter of fact, I'm on the executive of May Day Workers' Unity Committee. I've been addressing meetings throughout the country recently.

J.F. And, do you see this business of FOSATU as causing a split, are you at all worried about it?

R.D. ^{No,} I don't think FOSATU is actually causing a split, I think there is a difference of viewpoint in the leadership struggle ... and some I don't think want to affiliate themselves with any political groups. But, in my own opinion FOSATU up to a point is doing quite a good job. Sooner or later the forces within FOSATU might be able to bring some kind of change because we can see that is coming. Cause when we went out on our UDF Campaigns FOSATU workers openly came out and supported us. And ... eh...then FOSATU chipped into us and said that we shouldn't interfere with their membership. But we not afraid of FOSATU, it's a workers organisation sooner or later we'll have to work with them. At some level we might have to work with them.

J.F. But then how do you answer the question of ... the ... the did I ask you the lessons of the 50's? No I asked the... mmm ... this question people sometimes put and say, ... what are the lessons of the 50's, you know, didn't we learn anything from the 50's ...mmm...did, if you have political unions, won't they be smashed by the state the way they were then?

R.D. You see lessons we learnt from the 50's is very very clear. But... eh ... with the advent of Nationalist party ... they will do everything in their power to crush Trade unions which are going to be militant, and particularly left trade unions, and particularly members ... listed members of the Communist party and the names of people of the Communist party who are still existing.

R.D. The Nat ...eh... security will make sure to see that we don't function in this trade unions. That is the lesson we learnt that repression is now going to be even greater ... though... the state is recognising certain trade unions within the concept of the Riekert and Wiehann commissions that established by the state itself to recognise Black trade unions. And they are going to recognise Black trade unions on certain specific conditions, 'that you follow our rules', on those grounds. But, we learnt bitter lessons, those are just ... just ...eh ... throwing a bone here and there ultimately their whole concept, the Nat concept is to smash the trade unions and to establish a monopoly or a dictatorship.... (interruption: 'But I think') ... that is quite clear we can see it is coming. That's a lesson I've learnt from the 50's to now , trade unions are not as free as we claim to be.

J.E. But the FOSATU people would say, that's why we can't be political now, that's why we mustn't .. you know ... expose ourselves; we'll just be smashed like in the 50's.

R.D. Ja, well you see now... to you ... that excuse, I think it's wrong. We must now despite (pause) the repression, we must MUST come out very boldly cause this is the era because all the conditions are ready there for us now at a later stage might not have that conditions. That's only difference.

J.F. Okay, and then one last thing I was going to ask you. Do you find that people are still frightened off by the Communist party label .. that when they hear you C.P. or they know that they a bit worried and ... what does that represent? ...

R.D. With the state propoganda now.. eh ... that fear is there amongst the people. But ..eh as I said with the more advanced working class individuals they don't fear that ..but largely that fear is there because of the state intervention in a number of areas.

J.F. Did you ... what did you think of that C.P. flag at the Cradock funeral?

R.D. I think it was very brave that they ..encourages that they had to hoist the flag it shows that the Party is alive.

J.F. Were you suprised that it was in a tiny little place in the rural areas, like Cradock?

R.D. Eh ... I wasn't suprised, but I know the Party is alive. It's ..it's gotta emerge sometime but ... it came out there very clearly.

J.F. Okay ...Is there anything else? Okay, I guess maybe my final question would be, ... I'm just thinking if I have asked you all the questions about nonracialism ... (interruption by R.D.: 'But I don't know if you happy? -laughs) ...Ja! But, I'm wondering if I've, if I've put forward your point of view properly. Maybe I can just say how do you envision, this is this terrible final question, eh... how do you envision the struggle evolving in the future ,I mean what do you think will happen ... Again, you know, I'm asking you do you think that ... you know what the , what the working class will do, what will happen in the next few years and then what the future South Africa will be like in terms of in terms of the racial factor?

R.D. You see, I cannot predict the future of the country but what I can say, if the working class leadership from

R.D. You see, I cannot predict the future of the country, but what I can say, if the working class leadership from different groups ~~could solve~~ their personal differences and form a common trade union front, a workers front, then we have great hopes to bring about the change ^{that} we are all looking forward to. And I feel this ideological warfare that's going on now between different political groups can be sorted out. ~~once~~ we take power, at a later stage.

J.F. And then .. once that later stage happens will it be a truly nonracial society?

R.D. I can't predict but I foresee a democratic nonracial society based on the Freedom Charter can be worked in South Africa.

J.F. Okay, alright thanks.