

J.F. I thought because of time I won't dwell on the biographical, but if I'm asking any questions that indicate that the kind of biographies that I've read in movement publications or this kind of thing....

J.S. I haven't actually seen this.

J.F. Try to correct and let me know. It's the updated version she's just done - but that's just for basic factual things. So if I'm asking questions that indicates that I've got wrong biographical, just correct me, but I think probably it's - and the interviews tend to be letting people speak personally about their political motivations, so I'd like to start by asking you about when you - your parents when you first left Lithuania to go to South Africa - can you tell me if your parents were political, how you got politicised, and if you remember your first contacts with African people?

J.S. No, my mother died when I was 12 and I don't really remember much about her except at the personal level - it was too early to have any kind of discussion I - I suppose. My father I think was apolitical in general. He had a nostalgia for eastern Europe, and during the war all the immigrants developed some kind of claim to have some of the honour of the Red Army come off them, as it were, so I was in an environment in a boarding house in the Jewish section of Johannesburg, where generally there was a great sympathy for - for the Soviet Union during the war, and it's there that I sort of imbibed left - broad left politics in - in the international sense, not in the local sense, because in the local sense they were all terrible racists, so they thought it was O.K. for Soviet Union and the rest but not - not for South Africa, so it - and then - well, that - that was the sort of background.

Then at school I was influenced by an Irish teacher, who was terribly anti-British, and had often told us stories about, you know, the - the - the conquest of Ireland and so on, and he always related it to this scene in South Africa and he - at that stage they had the - the discussion group centred on what was known as the left book club, and they also had the junior left book club and he took me along to the junior left book club, and that was the first time that I actually sat next to a black man and felt very uncomfortable throughout the meeting and I - I - he didn't - I wasn't uncomfortable in the sense that I resented it, I was just - it was just terribly unusual and I was very self-conscious because I'd never since coming to South Africa ever sat next to a black man on an equal basis at a meeting or at a table, and I remember that very clearly - it was a very traumatic occasion....

J.F. How old were you there?

J.S. I must have been about 13 - 13 - or close to 14, and it was that same year that I left school because my father was out of a job, and went to work in a - a wholesale chemist, biggest in Jo'burg, and then became active as a trade unionist - I became a shop steward and we had a - a strike, and I was sacked as a result of that - although we won the strike, but four months later they sacked me and I then worked for another commercial firm as a despatch clerk, and then the party instructed all of us to join the army, or whites at any rate, and I - you know, by then - well, that was when I was sort of 16 - I'd worked for three, four years - my father, who himself had joined the army, but mainly because he was unemployed, wouldn't sign for me and they - it wasn't a conscript army in South Africa it was a volunteer army, so if you were under 21 you had to get your parents' permission, and he refused to sign, but he said if I bluffed my age then he wouldn't pull me out, so a few of us when we reached the age of maturity where we could reasonably say we were 21, which was about 17 or - I think I was 17 then - they - they knew - the recruiting office knew, but they - you know, they didn't care.

J.S. And well, so I - I joined the army, but it was - when I worked for - for this firm, (.....) Brothers and Kinovsky (?) which has now become S.A. Druggists - they the biggest sort of drug wholesalers - it's there at that point I joined the party, got involved with the trade unions, the National Union of Distributive Workers - so that is a cameo.

J.F. And was it any big step for you then to join the party?

J.S. Well, I tried - I used to go along on Sunday nights - we had a - a sort of Hyde Park corner outside the Johannesburg City Hall - the party had a regular platform on - seven o'clock on Sunday evenings, and we were regularly attacked by the black shirts - you know, this is during the war - and I remember trying to join - I was in short trousers actually at that stage and - and a leading party guy by the name of Izzy Wolfson, who was a very, very impressive orator, spoke, and then after he had spoken I was so impressed - I don't remember what he spoke about - I - I came up and asked me to join the party, and he looked down at my short trousers and said I'd better wait a while, so I waited a while and eventually joined the party and sort of, you know, did all the things that party people did.

We used to go and address meetings in the townships and sell (?) every Sunday morning - go from door to door sell the Guardian, the party literature - and well, then I went, as I say, after a while, after all these troubles and sackings and so on, I joined the army, and when I came out because I was an ex-serviceman, I was given special dispensation to write a matric exemption exam, which was really sort of like make a sentence out of cat - I mean they weren't particularly worried about ex-servicemen - and I got this grant and went to university, became a lawyer.

J.F. Because my focus is on non-racialism, I wonder if you can go back to that moment where you sat next to the black man for the first time and just tell me a bit about how that progressed that you were able to work with blacks. And you also spoke about how the whites were terrible racists, the early CP people. Is that something that....

J.S. Well, not - not in my time - I mean the CP people were not racists....

J.F. Just when you spoke about the people early on you yourself said that, that they were left but in a....

J.S. No, no, well, they weren't CP people - I mean I'm talking about the sort of east European immigrant community - they were members of a - a club called the Jewish Workers Club, which was sort of left inclined and sang Soviet lands (?) are dear to every toiler and so on, but most of them were very backward on the racial question, but they weren't members of the party - I mean these were the sort of just immigrant community, where there was a general well of sympathy for - for - for Soviet socialism and so on - they'd all left eastern Europe as a result of pogroms and so on - not from the Soviet Union, but from the surrounding areas like Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, and they had this image, you know, that the Soviet Union was a - a contrast to the kind of country they'd come from, and they hadn't integrated in South Africa really - they continued to speak Yiddish and, you know - so they weren't CP people - I mean you know - I - I think in general well, in - in the CP itself, well, I - I doubt very much whether one could say there was any significant racist tendency, except the kind of tendency which is just inherited from a past life, which is - is intuitive more or less based on - on upbringing - perhaps a bit of arrogance on the part of whites, a bit of resentment on the part of blacks, which every now and again surfaces in - in personal relationships, but not at the political level - I mean that still exists and will - will continue to exist for some time.

J.F. But was that the difference for you, that when you actually went to the CP meeting that they were dealing with blacks and that everyone else who kind of vaguely was supporting the Soviet Union and vaguely left actually hadn't made that step?

J.S. That's right - no, I mean the - the party I - I think, you know - we know is - was the only non-racial organisation until the ANC in the - in the country, until 1985 - there's no other organisation, political organisation which was completely non-racial in its composition, right, so you - sorry, I sort of diverted from your question - when I joined the party then what?

J.F. I'm asking you how you moved from the natural discomforting feeling one would have from being in white society to seeing that this CP is actually non-racial. How did you then move, how did you then overcome, and how did it feel to see that....

J.S. Well, I didn't have to overcome much - I mean I just had to overcome a feeling of strangeness because of I - I wasn't used to it. I don't recall in my own life having any particular contempt for people from other colours, mainly because I suppose when I was brought up up to the age of eight or nine, this wasn't part of my life, and I came to South Africa at the age of ten, I think, and - and it was not long after that that all this happened, you see, so I wasn't sort of moulded by the South African socio-economic kind of milieu which - which affects every - every white child and every black child, so the jump was easier in my case, and when I described that feeling of discomfort it wasn't really discomfort, it was just strangeness, it was - you know, I was conscious of it - it was being self-conscious about it - it never happened - and in a way it was an exhilarating experience because, you know, I felt I was moving somewhere - I didn't know exactly where, but I - I felt I was moving somewhere.

But it's really in the labour field that, you know, significant transformation took place in my psyche, my make-up, my political sort of perspective insofar as I had them at this (?) - this stage in a very vague (?) and confused, but it was the - the - particularly the - the - for instance, the strike we - we organised - I belonged to an all white union, because blacks were not allowed to belong to the unions - it could - it would have been de-registered under the Industrial Conciliation Act if blacks - blacks were not workers by definition - they pass-carrying people - so I was then earning four pounds a month at the time of the strike, and we won a remarkable victory, my - my wages were increased from four pounds to 14 - and the black workers were not part of it at all - their wages remained the same, they weren't part of the strike - I mean they didn't scab, but they had no connection at all, and it was at that stage that the whole inequity (iniquity) was - was really brought home to me.

Then I got to know some of the black workers and, you know, I joined the party and we - we started a Communist Party group in the factory - we had a newspaper in the - in the black lavatories. I remember the director of the company, a certain Sammy Siv (?) calling me in and - after he had discovered that I was partly responsible for this small (?) newspaper in the black lavatories, and he was absolutely astounded that I should even walk into a black lavatory - he said: A Jewish boy like you, and I've given you a job and I've given money to - to medical aid for Russia, and you come and do this to me and you walk into black lavatories and so on (Laugh) - anyhow these are just anecdotes.

J.F. Was the Jewish factor a big thing for you? Was your father practising?

J.S. No, my father wasn't very religious. I - I was brought up in a religious school in Lithuania. I never went to any other school. I was taught by rabbis, I - I studied - I started studying the Talmud and things like that, so when I came to South Africa I was still steeped in religion.

J.S. Then my mother died, and in terms of Jewish tradition one has to go twice - twice a day, before sunset and after sunset, to say the prayer for the dead - it's known as kadish - and after about three, four months I - I rationalised myself out of religion because the football ground was right next to the synagogue - everybody else was - was sort of busy playing around there and I was forced to go and - and you know, say - chant this prayer, and after a while I got so sick and tired of it that I - perhaps that was the factor that made me wonder whether it's - it means anything, but I don't know.

Ja, but the Jewish factor I don't think influenced my political dev - except insofar as I was in a community which, broadly speaking, was left inclined in the international sense, and I knew that Jews were the targets of racism, so in that sense, you know, which obviously one rejected, I suppose it was a bridge, little - a slight bridge to further linkage with the local.

J.F. Was it any impetus to joining the army? You said that the party ordered you to join.

J.S. No, party.

J.F. It wasn't that you looked at the Jews and...

J.S. No, no, the party instructed - all whites in the party were - were instructed to join the - the army after the Soviet Union was attacked, but at that stage I was not yet in the - I joined after - just after the Soviet Union was attacked, and I was too young to go into the army for reasons I've explained, and my father wouldn't give permission, so I joined the army because the party felt I should join the army.

J.F. So there was a bit of time between when your father wouldn't give permission and when you bluffed your age?

J.S. Oh ja, ja, a bit of time.

J.F. And then in the army was it immediately a political situation you were involved in? Did Springbok Legion happen right away?

J.S. No, the Springbok Legion when - by the time I joined, which was - by the way, it was only '44, 1944 - the Springbok Legion was already pretty well established in the army, and I joined it.

J.F. So you got...

J.S. I was a rank and filer, ja - I participated, yes.

J.F. So you immediately were politically active in the army?

J.S. That's right, ja, but I had been politically active before - the service was a continuation of politics by other means (Laugh)

J.F. But was it different in that it was obviously a white milieu that you were politicising? You'd been in the unions - the party was specifically non-racial, black and white - the workers were black, then the army was white. Was that a first experience of white consciousness, trying to move it politically?

J.S. You mean working among whites?

J.F. Ja.

J.S. No, I'd worked among whites - I'd worked among whites in the factory in the trade union, so it wasn't my first experience - and I was by then quite aware of the separate levels of existence in South Africa, so I could move from one milieu to another without problems. I found the, you know - revolted by the sort of dichotomy in the army between - and (?) the so-called struggle against fascism in - in the - in - in the thinking of the average white soldier and - and the complete racism of a sort which was equivalent to the Nazi racism, so you know, one experienced that kind of dilemma all the time in - inside this white army, that people on the whole weren't really concerned with the basic issues about which the war was fought - it was a sort of confused combination of patriotism or excitement, adventure, confusion, you know - I mean it - there certainly in general wasn't this shift towards progressive politics except through the Springbok Legion, which cream - you know, had the effect of creaming off a minority of thinking soldiers, who were affected by the war (?) in - in this kind of positive political way.

But in general the average soldier one came across - and I was in the ranks, I wasn't sort of in the officer class - was a racist - and in fact the English speaking soldiers were even more racist than the Afrikaaners - we found the people from Natal, in their own quiet kind of hypocritical way, were far more racist than the Afrikaaner, whom I preferred - they were much more open, you know, they were - and - and it - it's easier to deal with a - a thug who concedes the fact he's a thug because it's a starting point for confrontation at the level of discussion, than somebody who pretends to be something else.

J.F. I'm interested with all the focus on white organisation like the Cape democrats, JODAC, those kinds of groups, now to look back at things like Springbok Legion and COD. So in Springbok Legion are you saying that actually its greatest effect was to cream off and politicise a group that then went back after the war?

J.S. I don't think there's any continuity except, you know, it's the same kind of category of - of event, but I don't think there's a link between, you know, in any kind of continuous way between that - the Springbok Legion and what's happening now. I think the tradition of the Springbok Legion I suppose floated around - didn't disappear completely - as all sort of experiences of the past have a tendency of doing, but I - I don't think there's any - I mean Springbok Legion died in....

J.F. No, I think I asked wrong - just trying to say was its effect primarily in, as you said, creaming off, politicising a group which then went into other things, and would you say that it had a large effect on moving white servicemen to change?

J.S. No, I think it did move quite a lot of white servicemen to change, but I wouldn't say it had this effect on the majority I thi - on a significant minority - and it did succeed in getting thousands of people moving, not just soldiers, after the war, you know, but the period (?) between '45 and '48 the victory of the Nationalist Party, it was pretty active and was perhaps the most significant organised liberal white grouping - it was not left, it was not revolutionary, it - it didn't have a perspective of, you know, moving towards socialism or anything like that - it - it - it - it tried to get across the tradition of democracy, which was threatened by this - by the nationalists, and therefore, you know, all these torchlight parades against the Nationalist Party and its policies, which in some respects were openly fascist at that stage - anti-Semitic, still expressing sympathy for the defeated European fascism and so on - so I think the Springbok Legion had a - an important effect now not only on the - the ex-servicemen, but on the community generally, because at that stage, until the formation of other groupings like the Liberal Party and eventually the Progressive Party, there was no organised white grouping between '45 - I don't remember there being any - between '45 and about '48 and - and the Springbok Legion filled that vacuum, but as we know, it fizzled out after a period of time.

J.F. And where were you in the army....

J.S. I wasn't active - oh, in the Springbok Legion - in the army I - I was in Egypt for - for a while in transit - I then went to Italy, but by the time I reached Italy the allies were already sort of south of Florence, so I didn't see terribly much action, and when the war was - on - on May 8th., 1945 I was just - just outside Turin, and I was with the radio unit, and then because I joined late I - I was repatriated after a year, so I had a jolly good time on the Italian Riviera living in hotels waiting and hoping not to be repatriated. (Laugh)

J.F. I just wanted to go back earlier when you first got involved in the Communist Party, what - the way it was imparted to you, the early history of the CPSA, the purges, the black republic, the native republic debate - again just looking at the issue of race and the way that in South Africa often left politics and race, especially in those early years, didn't converge, how was it explained to you, or was it something that was history that wasn't debated much?

J.S. There wasn't much debate, you know - there wasn't much debate on the early history - it's part of the affliction from which we suffered for a long, long time after that, not only then - I mean I - when I joined, having made my choice, I then became part of this rather mechanical adherence to everything which has a label which reflects the party and its associations and with (?) the Soviet Union and Stalin and so on and so forth, so I don't think there was a hell of a lot of questioning about - about the past - I don't think there was much - much of a debate about the past and about this validity or otherwise of the black republic slogan and so on - I mean one - one began to develop thoughts, particularly after I'd gone to university and - and was then confronted by outside groups who were questioning and debating, and I think it was during that period that one began to think a little more deeply about some of the approaches of the past and the history of the party and so on, but initially I mean, you know, party right or wrong kind of thing - it was a - a sort of patriotism which led to some kind of important cohesion, but also did a lot of damage, I think - I don't know if that's - I don't know what question you - what it is you're....

J.F. The native republic thesis in an important way was quite a contribution in South Africa, and yet the fact that the cloud from the '20s was there as well, I wonder if there was a recognition and if that fed into the rightness of working with blacks, or if that was just kind of the CP is non-racial and accepted on its face, or whether one looked at the struggle that had led to that. I just wonder how you can walk into a CP meeting and see blacks and whites together and how that's understood to be the way forward?

J.S. Well, by the time I walked in of course the - the - the - the white character of the party from which - by which it was characterised between sort of '22 and '28, '30, had undergone a, you know - a very major transformation, so it was no longer the issue - I mean you see, when - when I came in - you must remember I came in during the war - the - the really fundamental question at that stage, which loomed larger than any other issue, was the destruction of fascism, united front defeating, saving the first worker state from destruction, and you know, that just dominated everything, all our activities, all our thoughts, so that point in time there wasn't terribly much kind of reflection on - on - you know, on - on these other questions, and I - I'm still not sure whether I understand what you're trying to get at about this white/black thing - but by the time I came into - joined the party, I think in general as a party we - we were an emancipated lot, both white and blacks, subject to the qualification I made earlier that, you know, individuals bring with them all kinds of personality problems which are inherited from their - their - the racial upbringing, both on the white and black side, and it does occasionally cause problems, but in general one didn't - one felt one was joining a - a non-racial organisation in the true sense of the term....

- J.S. .... and that there was no longer any debate about whether the fundamental objective of the party should or should not be liberation, fundamental - you know, in the first place of the blacks, of the Africans, that is (?) national liberation.
- J.F. When you got back finally from Italy, then you immediately went to university?
- J.S. Almost immediately, ja, I - I got - ja - ja, I got back I think some time September, '46 - September, Oct - no - yes, September, '46, and I started the - the - the term in South Africa starts I think February following, '47.
- J.F. At Wits?
- J.S. At Wits, ja, and I was there for five years - '47, '48, '49, '50 - no, I must have started '46, sorry - I was there for five years, and I qualified in 1950 - I got my - I did BA and (?) LLB.
- J.F. And how were you politically involved from '46?
- J.S. Well, in - in - in the university I was involved - I was editor of a - a newspaper we started - we meaning the federation of progressive students, which was a sort of progressive students' organisation which tried to politicise students in the broad sense of the term in - in - on the side of - of liberation and so on and so forth....
- J.F. Is it just at Wits?
- J.S. At Wits, ja, and we started a newspaper called the Progressive Student - I - I was - I edited it - I think came out for three or four issues, like many student initiatives died - but apart from that I wasn't terribly involved in university politics - I was basically involved outside in party-party activity in the townships and I was - I - I was a member of a branch committee outside the university and so on.
- J.F. So tell me when - what kind of issues you got involved in at that stage...
- J.S. Oh gosh, immediately after the war the food raids - we organised food raids in Fordsburg....
- J.F. Food?
- J.S. Food raids - you know, there - there was a terrible shortage of food like rice, basic staple items, and there was an enormous black market engaged in mainly by small shopkeepers, so we organised communities to actually raid the shops - we took over the shops and we sold - we sold the food and we gave the money to the shopkeeper - we just pushed him aside and went to the storeroom, broke down the doors, got out the sacks of rice, and just sold it at controlled prices, and this was a very, very - if you see the newspapers of sort of '47 you'll see quite a lot of reference to that, to the food raids - I mean I remember on a street corner seeing Bram Fischer with a crowbar breaking over a - breaking open a - a case of Sunlight Soap, you know, and sort of selling it to people who formed a queue, and this is what we were doing, so that's one side of our activities - we were busy in the trade union field, battling to build black trade unions - I was - you know, having had this trade union background, I was also part of an industrial committee which was continuously trying to pay attention to building black trade unions, particularly the mineworkers union - you'll recall the 1946 strike, and I think perhaps the party played the biggest role of any other grouping in building that mineworkers union, and when the strike happened of course in trying to give it support and getting leaflets to the mines and, you know, producing them and helping the mineworkers union in every way - you know J.B. Marks is president of the mineworkers union, and he was a member of the industrial committee as well obviously, and so we - we paid a lot of attention to the building of trade unions, black trade unions.

J.S. We - we spread our gospel, you know, through publications, and every Sunday morning we used to get onto a bus - no cars at that stage (Laugh) - and travel to Alexandra Township or Sophiatown or places like that and just go from door to door the whole - virtually the whole day, sometimes succeeding in selling 15 or 16 issues of our paper in one street, talking to people, answering their questions, and that went on for a long, long time - also meetings - we organised regular street corner meetings in these black areas, and well, I - I then started speaking - also speaking at the City Hall steps.

I never forget, I did anthropology at Wits in part of my BA, and I was terribly excited by - was it a book by Cox, which starts off with a chapter which demonstrates that in fact, physically, the blacks are in advance of the whites, that blacks are - are - are further away from the - the - the ape-man than whites are - I mean for instance, blacks have got thick lips, the gorilla has got thin lips, blacks - whites are hairy, blacks are not hairy, and there are a hell of a lot of factors like that, so I stood up, I asked the party unit in charge of the City Hall steps to give me a chance to speak about this and I started speaking about this, and my God, I had rocks and eggs and they were so incensed that (Laugh) - it was a rather silly speech too, but you know, it's like (?) - so we did on Sunday night, and we used to - we were organised to defend the platform - we have sort of units, because we were attacked regularly - I mean it was really a - a traumatic kind of experience every weekend during the height of the black shirts attacks on - on us, and when one woke up on Sunday morning one had this feeling in the pit of one's stomach that Sunday night we were going to have to try to make a chain and get a - a (.. ..) or try to make a rush and get rid of them and so on, so this used to happen regularly, so you know, there was propaganda meetings, City Hall steps, selling papers.

J.F. What was the response of blacks to you? You would be in a group where the unit from the township would obviously be black, some of the organisers would be black as well. Would you be a minority of whites....

J.S. Ja, we'd be a - we would be a minority of whites in the townships.

J.F. Was there ever any discussion with....

J.S. Often - you mean with the people - oh ja..

J.F. Would people want to know what you're doing....

J.S. Ja, sure, ja.

J.F. Do you remember any specifics of people (?)

J.S. Not specific - I only remember one occasion when I was - oh yes, we put up candidates of course in elections in the white areas, and we had Hilda Watts as, you know - I remember canvassing in - in Hillbrow when - when she was stand - you know, she - she was standing for re-election - she lost on that occasion - and I remember knocking at a door of a white guy and he - and I said : Are you going to vote for Hilda Watts, the communist candidate - and he said sure - he said : I think the government is being too kind to the kaffirs, and I'm going to vote for Hilda Watts - that kind of - but I mean that's not serious, so that happened - but as far as the blacks are concerned I mean endless discussion - this is why one sometimes spent a whole Sunday sort of really seeing only about 15, 16 people - they used to invite some, you know - they responded, they - they were puzzled - some of them wondered whether, you know, we had something else at the back of our minds, were sort of distrustful, but in general the reception was warm and positive, I think.

J.F. Moving on further as politics got more involved, you were working with the party then up through the '50s - do you want to just sketch out your involvement?



J.S. Well, the party was made illegal in '50, you know - it's at that time that I qualified and went to the bar, and we - well, the party dissolved - some of us felt very strongly it was a wrong decision....

J.F. You were one of them?

J.S. Ja, I was one of them and - and in fact we assumed that the central committee had something else up its sleeve and they were just informing the membership of dissolution so as to be left in peace to build the underground, which obviously had to be built in a new kind of a way - you couldn't just say to all the units: You are now underground - we were all well known and under surveillance, so we gave them the benefit of the doubt, we - we assumed that that was so, but we discovered after about six months or nine months that in fact - because we heard that the old central committee had got together to discuss what next, and decisions were taken nothing next, you know, we're not going to - against - some people opposed it of course, people like Bill Andrews (?) and Michael Harmel - I think those two - I don't know whether there was anyone else who actually voted against it - it's in - it's in 50 Fighting Years, I think.

And then I - I - at that stage - ja well, we then - I - we - a few of us then took our own initiatives, we created our own unit, not a party, to just carry on discussions and keep the thing going, and a few other people did the same that we discovered, and eventually we - we - you know, being young and slightly impatient, and perhaps it was justified impatience, we reached the point where we actually made contact with some of the leading people and said: Listen, if you don't do something about it, we are going to come out as a - as a party, we going to issue something and say (?) the party lives kind of thing - and I think - well, this was - other people did other things along similar lines, and I think this pressure was building up, and eventually people were called together and it was re-created - unfortunately I can't really discuss who - who's who and who did it and so on - I mean I don't mind involving myself, but I was involved, but I can't discuss the others.

J.F. I've done an interview with Esther Barsel, who because she'd been to prison couldn't talk about it, so - and this would have been?

J.S. '50 - well, eventually the party was re-created I think in '52 or '53, was it - something like that - there was a gap close to two years.

J.F. And then that was SACP?

J.S. And that was SACP and - and a congress was - after initial preparatory steps a - a conference was called and a central committee elected, and that was the first time that I actually became a member of the central committee - I was not a member of the central committee in the - I was a member of the Johannesburg district committee - I was elected in - during the legal days - I served from, I think, about '47 until 1950 as a member of the Johannesburg district - so I became a member of the central committee, ja, and we have, you know - up to the time I left we'd had six underground conferences - we grew, we engaged ourselves in all sorts of activities of the mass movement - we didn't emerge publicly, and that was a deliberate decision - well, they - even on that question there was very strong debates over a period of time at the various congresses, and I belonged to what might be called the - the left grouping, which felt all the time that we were delaying in emerging as an independent force.

J.F. Publicly?

J.S. Publicly we - we did not emerge until 1960, and that was a result of - because the emergency - there was - the only thing that was left after the post-Sharpville emergency were the few communists that had gone underground, and they just, without a congress decision, issued a leaflet in the name of the party.

J.S. So there was a fait accompli, and this is the kind of thing that there was a debate about, quite a sharp division, over a long period of time - are we strong enough to emerge as an independent force, to speak publicly in our name, because we didn't - from '53 to 1960 we didn't - we didn't issue anything - we - I mean we - we published Liberation - it was ours, but it wasn't under the imprint of the party, but it was clearly ours - I mean we didn't - we didn't hide that it was the voice of - of the left and - but it was legal, it was a legal channel - and then we started the African Communist, which again was not issued as an organ of the party initially - it was issued as a journal to - of - of Marxist/Leninists in Africa or something - I don't remember what the formula was - but as far as our speaking directly to the people in the form of a leaflet calling upon them to do this, that or the other, this didn't happen until 1960 officially (.....) the party - I think you must know this.

J.F. But you were among the group that felt it just took too long?

J.S. I think so, and I think now too, I think we took too long, I think, although I don't know what difference it would have made, but there was - there was - there was a debate, and I was on the side of those who felt that we should emerge, that we must begin to speak in our own name, that while it's important for the party to play a role in the broad movement, we can't get lost in that broad movement - we've got to independently disseminate socialist ideas and spread awareness among workers of their role as a class and not just as part of a broad oppressed mass - so I mean there was no danger of a split on this question - I mean we - we had a phenomenal amount of democratic internal discussion in the party at that stage - I mean once the decision was taken it was taken, but there was lots of room and scope for debate and discussion - for example, the - the programme which was adopted in '62 was really very, very thoroughly debated, and the document which emerged at the special congress which was called to adopt the programme was quite a lot different to the original draft based on the contributions that had come in from all the units throughout the country, and by then of course we had an underground - we had built quite an effective, you know - it - it - it wasn't enormous, but it was quite well organised and functioning efficiently and effectively.

J.F. The parallel to this underground work, you then got involved with founding COD, is that right?

J.S. Ja, I was - ja....

J.F. Why that initiative, can you tell me....

J.S. Well, it - it was not just our initiative - I think we had discussions with the ANC leadership - some of the ANC leadership was in (within) our ranks, and we felt it was necessary at that stage - I think it was during the defiance campaign, wasn't it, or was it before the defiance campaign?

J.F. COD is '53 and the defiance campaign was....

J.S. '52 - oh, I see - so I mean after the - ja well, we - we - we felt it was necessary at that stage to - you know, there was a congress alliance, there was - which we inherited from - from the past, the African congress, the Indian, the Coloured, and we felt place had to be found for radical whites, who were not necessarily communists but who were prepared to make common cause with the objectives of the liberation struggle, and therefore we felt it's important to create something which could be a home for the small grouping - even that was a small grouping.

J.S. So you know, COD was not the party, but lot - all white party people obviously participated in COD, ja.....

END OF SIDE ONE.

J.F. Was - that was certainly a different kind of political work than you'd been doing in things like trade unions. That was more like the work you'd done in the Springbok Legion trying to work with whites, or were you that involved in....

J.S. Again there, although I was a member of COD and at some stage a member of its executive, I wasn't really among the day to day activists of COD itself - I mean I still concentrated on the party and on - on - on party building and party organisation and in, you know - and so on - this was - I don't recall being terribly terribly - I mean I didn't work like Turok full time in COD, and....

J.F. You weren't on any executive?

J.S. I was on the executive of COD, so I used to attend the large executive meeting, but I wasn't part of the sort of day to day working groups or working - I didn't - wasn't active in the branches from day to day and so on.

J.F. What was the kind of day to day work you did in the first part of the '50s that led you being so involved and influential that you were involved in writing the Freedom Charter? That was a national initiative, the demands were brought in from everyone, but the history books record - I think this woman as well - that you were clandestinely participating in writing the Freedom Charter, and I'd just like to see if you....

J.S. Ja well, I didn't write the Freedom Charter.

J.F. I'm just laying (?) it - I'm saying history says (.....)

J.S. Ja, no, I was - what happened was that, you know, when - by about 19 - this is within a short time of the formation of COD - I think by about 1954 the issue of a - a convention, a sort of people's convention, had been raised by Prof. Matthews at a ANC conference - I don't know which year that was - and then the movement began to discuss this idea of calling together a - a congress of the people - this was the, you know - the early stage this - this name emerged, Congress of the People, and we - we began to discuss it with the ANC, with the Indian Congress, with the Coloured Congress, with a mechanism which was the - the joint - which - you know, which sort of was the liaison, the consultative - I don't know - what was it called, joint congress committees - I don't know - we had so many different names for the structures which represented the alliance - it was the congress alliance, but it - it - and - and the matter was discussed there, and then a body was appointed by that grouping, not by the party, by an alliance meeting....

J.F. Which you participated in?

J.S. Ja, I was on it and - and I was there, yes, and Sisulu and Rusty Bernstein and - quite frankly, I just don't remember who - Cachalia, I think, Yusuf Cachalia - and we were given the task of actually putting flesh onto the idea, you see - in principle we (?) decided to have a congress of the people.

J.S. And we then presented a project for the congress of the people, which involved the drawing up eventually of a document to be adopted at a public congress, based on demands which would be collected throughout the country, and we considered that process of collecting the demands even more important than the actual congress itself, because it was a sort of catalyst for getting people moving, organising, discussing, thinking, and we spent - I don't know - about a year or 15 months, I'm not sure exactly how long, seeing to it (?) through the various organisations and all the congresses, the party itself, the trade unions, to ensure a discussion of what people wanted, and then we, you know, collected all this together - stacks of stuff, I mean literally sacks of stuff, I - it's such a pity that, you know, one didn't keep the bits of paper - at that time, you know, one doesn't feel anything, any attachment to - to a greasy bit of paper bag, you know, which had been torn off and on which some demand about the sewerage system in - in Odendaalsrus, you know, is written, and we had, you know, a mass of stuff, detail.

Well, we - we catalogued it as best we could, we - you know, we didn't envisage this document to include the sort of, you know - the current day to day demands of every group in every area and every location and so on - and put them into various categories, and then discussed, and a draft based on these things that had come in was - was prepared. The original draft was written by someone, and we then discussed it and we all - you know, it was amended and - because we were now preparing a draft to be presented to the congress of the people - the congress of the people itself could not sort of sit down and - by its very nature - and go through all this and so on - so this draft was - was prepared and presented - I think it was then - I don't remember whether it was again discussed by the organisations - I'm not sure - I don't think so.

I think we were given the power to sort of prepare the draft, which was then - I mean it was surely seen by people like Lutuli, who was not on the drafting commission, and Dadoo and, you know, all the others who were prominent figures at the congress of the people itself. We couldn't go - I couldn't go to the congress of the people, but I witnessed it - I was lying on a tin roof in Kliptown with binoculars and saw the - the whole thing.....

J.F. Why couldn't you go?

J.S. Because I was banned - we were banned from - I was banned since about '53, I think, so you know, not allowed to attend their meetings of any sort, so - and quite - well, I think most of the people on that committee could not go to the actual congress of the people, so we just watched it from far away, and I saw it from beginning to end, lying on a tin roof.

J.F. (.....) having seen the actual demands (?) to the preparation, is there any particular aspect of it that you feel most reflected the pressing concerns? There're so many issues dealt with.....

J.S. I think land loomed extremely largely in the - all the demands - land and ownership of - you know, being able to own a home and being able to own land and the fact that the land was taken away - in terms of general demands land featured most prominently, you know, because even urban workers when they set out their grievances as a people, not related to their specific factory and so on, you know, the - their contributions consisted of general right, like we want the vote and so on, so land was very important, and of course the vote, the vote was, you know - at the political level was most important - trade union rights in the urban areas - I mean, you know, every - every worker who put in a - a written proposal included something to do with trade unions, you know - and what - what featured - you see, this is why one - one - I wish we hadn't destroyed the stuff or I - I don't even remember whether any decision was taken, so it may even be lying somewhere for all I know, you know (Laugh)

J.S. But non-racism, coming from blacks, it was so touching to see - they who are the sort of targets of racism, a non-racial South Africa, white and black living together in peace - you know, it was that kind of thing over and over and over again - but of course, you see, when we talk about demands that came in, you must remember - I don't know how many there were, you know, 10,000, 15,000, I don't know, but whatever number, even if it was 50,000 or 100,000, this represents a cross-section of thinking blacks, you know - it didn't always come - the bulk of it, you know, must have come from people who - who were already ready to take the step of writing down an idea for a political document which they knew it was going to be incorporated, so this was the - I think the vote, land, non-racism, trade unionism - I mean those are the things that I recall featured very - and then for the rest, just ordinary day to day problems, education, conditions of - of life in the townships, their roads, electricity, you know, all the things that people are concerned about in their daily lives.

J.F. And the clause that worries some South Africans so much, of what they took it (?) as nationalisation, the mines and industries being owned by those who work them?

J.S. Well, some of that came in, and I think it would be naive of me to pretend that, you know, everything that was incorporated in the charter in the form in which it was incorporated came spontaneously in - in that kind of literal way, you know - I think it was a fair inference from what people said that, you know, we were - our - our - our riches have been stolen - they said things like that - our land was taken away, we don't own the factories, you know, all the - the whites own everything, and we are exploited by - by them and the people, you know, must - these things - we must - we used to own them and we don't any more, so you know, it didn't come out in a sort of highly politicised formulation in which it eventually emerged, as it has to emerge in a - in that kind of, you know, declaration - it's like the declaration of human rights and all that kind of thing - I mean no mass of people can actually draw it up in that sense, and therefore the people who are - who - who put pen to paper obviously give it a content which - or reflects their thinking too, you know, so it is a - it's at some level a two way process.

J.F. Just moving along - I was looking at some of the debate that went on in the '50s about this is Dan Thlume answering the big lie after the expulsion of Mudzunya and Lobalo and this whole whites pulling the strings. Can you talk about those kinds of attacks, what you think the motivation was, why there is this thing in South Africa that anti-white and anti-communist, the idea that there's a hidden agenda? Did you encounter it personally? When did it begin to emerge? How did you deal with it?

J.S. Well, it shouldn't come as a shock that there's a certain degree of anti-white feeling in South Africa - it's quite natural - I don't think I've ever come across a - a leading ANC figure who didn't start his life with a certain degree of anti-white prejudice. I remember spending my time in the corridors of Wits University when Nelson was - Mandela was studying law - he sort of came a year after me - arguing vehemently about all these questions - at that stage I think he had a degree of BC thinking - Tambo was anti-communist - he - he was part of the group that moved for (?) the expulsion of communists from the ANC '46, and I've always believed that if - if a - a thinking black militant does not start off his life with a certain degree of anti-white racism, he's never going to be a people's leader because the natural sort of conclusion before one experiences, you know, the sort of content of struggle - the natural reaction of anyone who's going to actually be a fighter, a militant, is to look round him and say these whites are arrogant, dominant, we don't trust them, we must do it on our own and, you know, that kind of thing.

J.S. So you know, I mean that was there - it is there up to a point and will - and will be there for some time. I think that the honest leaders among them, who actually then begin to experience working with radicals from other minority groups, go into the organisation and actually witness what's going on, tend to become transformed - some don't, and I think one's got to look at each individual case and see what the motivation is - in some cases it might be genuine ideological commitment, in other cases it may be a pure power struggle and using the racism as a constituency for being elevated to higher positions. So I don't know - precisely what was your question - have I got away from it?

J.F. What Thlume was answering here was - which was so repetitive - was anti-white and anti-Indian and anti-communist, and just having worked so hard for that cause all your life, understanding what black people feel about it, why is there that anti-communist feeling - among whites it's certainly very understandable through the propaganda of the state, but with blacks where did you think it came from? And then also more specifically to do with your own involvement, how did you respond to that when it was directed towards COD and the CP?

J.S. Well, I didn't experience much anti-communist feeling among those of whom I worked, I really didn't - I mean I gave the example of Mandela in (and) our discussions in - in the corridors - he - he disagreed with - with - with the party's approach to, for instance, the strike in 1950 - we debated that - he felt at that point it was an adventurous thing to do or something like that - I don't remember the detail - and he wasn't a communist in (?) that he - but he wasn't terribly anti-communist - but you know, the people among (?) whom I worked, I didn't sense ever in the ANC any degree of - during my time - any significant tendency towards anti-communism.

J.F. But there was the groundswell (.....) ANC - there were these debates that made Thlume do a series of three articles, Leballo, Madzunya, the kind of stuff that was in the press. Did you get any sense - obviously those wouldn't have been your close people you've worked with, but you sensed it all around you and it did lead to the breakaway.

J.S. Sure, I didn't feel a sense of betrayal - this is politics and - and you know, you - you - you going to get these tendencies, as I say, some based on genuine ideological disagreement - I mean I think it's legitimate for a person to be anti-communist - he's not beyond the pale if he believes that communist theory is wrong and - and socialism isn't the system, it doesn't mean he's - you know, he's outside society. I think in the case of the PAC, for example, I mean it was clear to us what was going on there with Leballo, who worked with the American Information Library, and their anti-communism was overnight transformed when they went out of the country and started getting Chinese whatever the currency is, and then they became radical militant, you know, sort of ultra-leftist, so I think it's also got to do with a great deal of what we call, for want of a better way of putting it, the cliché of opportunism - I think it's got a great deal to do with that as well, but at the pers - if you asking me, you know, whether I felt let down or - or depressed about it, you know, we - we - there are things which are - which - which could be more depressing, if you think about it in that way - the fact that in South Africa the - the white can get actual collaboration for imposing racism, and there are many who - who are a part of the structures, collaborators, so there's no point in time when any movement is going to achieve unanimity - we are fighting an enemy who's also busy and he - he - he has a media and he - he has an educational system, and he creates possibilities of anti-radicalism, anti-communism, even anti-liberationism among blacks themselves, so more so anti-communism I - I.

J.F. I'm kind of jumping in ahead of time because of time reasons, but we'll come back as well, but the difference between COD then and the effort to work with whites and move them, and the kind of broad front politics that's going on in South Africa right now, do you think that there is quite a different thrust - the....

J.S. Fundamental, yes, absolutely....

J.F. It's such a much broader front - there's an active COSATU thing, and then the decision by COSATU to indeed let everyone short of the PFP in and whose (?) five freedoms and even the Black Sash kind of thing. What was the difference then....

J.S. Well, I think a great deal has happened within the white community, that's the difference. I think the, you know - what has happened within the white community is that there's been a sort of bridge of a very important psychological barrier, that in general the whites as a community have lost confidence in their capacity to survive within racist structures permanently, and this has triggered off all kinds of defections, as we know, and demonstrations in practice on the ground by whites, not just the odd communist who was a freak, but by, you know, sections, significant sections - a significant minority of whites acting and even risking imprisonment, resisting the draft, coming to speak to the ANC etc., so I think the fundamental difference is - is what's happened within the white community, and that is that there's a search, a real search, which there wasn't then, by the white community of a way out of a crisis - there was no crisis for the whites in 1953, or even in 1960.

The whites now face a crisis, and therefore an appreciable number are moving not completely to our side, but certainly moving against - they are what I would call part of the forces for change, at least these groupings, not necessarily by the revolutionary forces, and I think I must distinguish between the two things, and I think all forces for change, whether they agree with us or they don't, have got to find a place in this line-up of - of trying to destroy things that we think commonly should be destroyed - that's apartheid, racism.

But that's the difference, you see, the - between then and now. It's not so much what we've done. Partly we've done it, but it's happened because of the changed chemistry of the whole situation has fundamentally altered.

J.F. But how broad is it going to get - the idea now that the freedom that the ANC. SACTU said to NACTU that in fact the Freedom Charter isn't - is no longer a point of departure. There was such a groundswell of support for Freedom Charter from the early '80s. How much wider can it get if indeed....

J.S. Well, I think it's got to get as wide as possible, but perhaps at different levels, and what I mean is this - if there is the fundamental line-up of the radical broad liberation groupings - what I would call the sort of national revolutionary forces consists of the alliance, the trade union movement, the radical, those who really sort of have a minimum common liberation programme - beyond that you get a - an enormous panorama of different shades of opposition - I think we've got to see to it that all this energy is harnessed, and it can't always be harnessed in the form of one structure - I don't think that we believe that the alliance, the liberation alliance should now incorporate Wynand Malan and - and Mrs. Suzman - the liberation alliance as we understand it - but I think we should certainly do our best to find common - a common basis for acting on those things on which we agree, and we don't have to say: Look, unless you - I mean as a party we don't say to people, as you know, unless you agree with socialism, we not going to struggle against the high rents in the townships, you know, and in turn the ANC should not say: Unless you believe and accept and proclaim the Freedom Charter, we not going to have a demonstration with you to protest against the labour relations bill - so I think if you thinking in terms of a - and this is the way the media is sort of trying to present it, a front which is one thing - a front is not one thing - it's a complex of categories and groupings, and there's no - I - I don't think the ANC has moved away from its position or the party.

- J.S. We believe that the Freedom Charter is the fundamental objective of the present phase, and we continue with whoever we collaborate to get that across, but we shouldn't - and we said so even at the beginning, it's not only now - we in fact when - ja, I better not say this - I think even at the early stages, before COSATU was formed, our thinking was that if the Freedom Charter is going to be an obstacle to creating a united federation, it's not necessary to, at this point, make it a do or die question, you know - either you - even - even in relation to COSATU - and it's not just something which has happened now, let me tell you - it's something which we discussed long before COSATU was formed - but at the COSATU congress itself the - the mood was so overwhelmingly in favour of the Freedom Charter from the bottom up - we didn't come there and - in a caucus and, you know, sort of each (?) - you know, it swept - you know, it was - it was a moment when the ANC was sort of.
- J.F. But there're two aspects. There's the socialism debate, which has to do with one stage, two stage, and that's clear, but the idea that there seems to be some reneging on the non-racialism - COSATU didn't....
- J.S. Reneging on the non-racial....
- J.F. COSATU in '85 did not let AZACTU and CUSA, as it was then, in because they wanted to talk about anti-racism and you name it, but they didn't want to talk about non-racialism because they have a fundamental difference, and now that fundamental difference seems to be bridged after this..
- J.S. It's not bridged - I think there is a difference, but it - that difference is not allowed to, and should not be allowed to be an obstacle to acting together on specific issues - they not saying to - like - they haven't said to - not to - look, we coming, we - we now accepting that we, you know - we changing our policy as COSATU - COSATU is not changing its policy - it's still got the Freedom Charter as its fundamental document, but what it is saying - and I think quite correctly, and should have said this from the beginning actually - is : Listen, where we can, let's act together on - on - on this and that, the other - there's a three-day strike, there's the Labour Relations Bill, there's a campaign for a living wage - why don't you join in the campaign for living wage - we - we in - in the movement have never opposed that kind of approach - I think you must remember the movement is very big now, very big, and it's not all part of some monolith, where instructions are handed down - there are lots of people who support us who even go further than we go, you know, who are much more hard-line and who refuse to - to work with people unless they completely members of the church and can recite the catechism, you know, and this is a phenomena which we - we've learned to - you know, to live with, so - but as - as a movement I - I think we must distinguish between what our policy is, like for the party socialism, Freedom Charter, for the ANC Freedom Charter, and what the basis of - of - of alliances are with other groupings - these are two completely different things.
- J.F. But why was it in '85 that the commitment to non-racialism was so strong that they could not have an alliance with CUSA, AZACTU, that there was just - you hear non-racial democracy on the lips of so many people in South Africa today that it seems a bit of departure as opposed to the socialism issue, that this....
- J.S. Ja well, you see, there's a difference at the formative stage, where you're trying to define your character - you define your character and you - you differentiate yourself from other groupings - it's an understandable process - we stand for this, one, two, three, four, five, we oppose what they stand for - right, so we form ourselves - we now become a big strong organisation and we - we - we've spelt out the kind of political objectives of this grouping - right, now the other questions we - we've stabilised ourselves.



J.S. In fact in the early stages when (?) we used to say to COSATU: Why don't you sort of open up to NACTU - they - their answer was we're not strong enough yet, you know, we - it's going to create all kinds of - of diver- sions and in-fighting, internal squabbles - but I think in a sense COS- ATU's new stance is not a change of policy, it's a measure of the stren- gth that they can - they are now strong enough - it's like, you know, the A - let me give you an example - up to about 1984, '85 I was one of the strongest opponents within the movement of opening up the ranks of the ANC to non (?) minority groups - we had - I mean this - it wasn't just discussed in 1985 - it's been discussed since 1965 - every time we have a meeting there somebody or other says: How can we have a racist organ- isation, the ANC, without whites, Indians and Coloureds being allowed to be elected to top bodies - our country is one and so on and so forth - and I opposed it purely for - for the same kind of reason, because the ANC was enormously weakened after 1960 - it didn't exist inside the coun- try - it was like a tender plant in a way that had to be, you know, sort of take root and grow, and at that stage had the ANC decided to open up its ranks, it would have faced such a salvo from right and left, from BC, from Africa, which doesn't really understand what we're about, that it would have been damaging - it would have been damaging to the ANC - and therefore, you know, one changed one's attitude towards that question - A, when the ANC was transformed from a purely agitational opposition into an alternative power which it started becoming - I'm not saying it's going to march into Pretoria - from about 1984 - and the massive sort of welling up of sympathy and support the ANC, its status and its - its recognition and so on, it then became strong enough to risk the kind of flak which inevitably would be hurled at it.

And the second factor is that the ANC could not project itself as the alternative state in South Africa as a body which represented only one section of the community, so for those two reasons, so you know, the - what I'm trying to say is that you've got to measure policy or - or - or - or analyse policy in relation to a context - you can't look at COSATU's attitude in 1986 to NACTU in the same way and with the same kind of ana- lytical concepts as you look at it now - I think things - things change - so it's no use saying why at that stage did they - there are different - things have developed, things have changed, and I think what has changed in COSATU is that it has - it is now a stable - it is not easy to destroy COSATU, it is - has achieved - although it's still got many problems, it is now strong enough to ally itself with other forces without undermining its own policy - that's another factor, you see.

It is strong enough to ally itself with non-Freedom Charter forces with- out risking a dilution of the Freedom Charter as an important factor in the situation, you see, I think.

J.F. And so when did you change your point of view about letting whites onto the NEC?

J.S. Well, I'd say from about 1984 onwards I started thinking it is time now, and even then at the - at the Kabwe conference there was enormous - we didn't - we didn't as a party take a decision on this question, deliber- ately - we didn't - we - we told our units you are free - in other words, we didn't as - you know, as they say in (?) British House of Commons, we didn't put the whip on, you know - we said you can vote either way, and at the Kabwe conference itself I'm sure somebody - people must have told you the two main - the protagonists for the two opposing lines were both leading communists - one who said there (?) should be open, the other said no, so you know, there was a debate, and we left it as an open quest- ion, but I strongly felt - I mean it had nothing to do with my personal position - that it was absurd - it was becoming absurd for the ANC to claim to represent South Africa and yet had an effective colour bar at top leadership level - it was no longer justified.

J.F. Can you just take me back to '55 and do the same kind of sketch you did up to the present, just what the involvements were?

J.S. My own involvements '55?

J.F. Ja, on to now.

J.S. Well, I think you know a lot of them - I mean like '55 congress of the people - of course treason trial took up four years of my life, more or less, in and out, you know, kind of thing - you mean at the purely personal level - we were involved in all - everything that (?) was going on, the bus boycotts, the women's march on Pretoria, the - the - the general strikes, political strikes that were called, the - the build-up towards Sharpeville, you know, the anti-pass campaign, ja - the burning of the passes after the Sharpeville massacre, which I was very intimately connected with, because the congress group met and appointed Mandela, Sisulu, Nokwe and myself to - to make proposals about, you know - that same night, about what should be done, and one of the proposals that emerged was that the passes should immediately be burnt and that literally should take the first step, and Nokwe left the meeting and went to Pretoria, where Lutuli was, and that - that was a Saturday night, and we phoned the Sunday Times and there was then a public demonstration by Lutuli - made a fire - there was a picture in the Sunday Times of his burning his pass, so you know, I mean we were involved in just everything - I - I'd have to look at the papers to - to remind myself, or if I was to sit down and....

J.F. But organisationally?

J.S. Ja, I was busy in the party - I was busy in the party, I was busy in the - all these campaigns, and in some way or other I was very busy defending people who were being charged with all kinds of offences connected with the campaigns, particularly illegal strikes I - you know, I defended an enormous number of illegal (?) strikes all over the country and....

J.F. And the lead up to the Umkhonto we Sizwe founding (.....)

J.S. Well, I mean that - that was the lead-up - well, I mean the lead-up you know - you know why and so on - you know Mandela explained it so on, but he - the exact way it came into existence was as a result of a discussion between the leadership of the ANC in Johannesburg and the party, and there was a unanimous feeling that we, you know - we would be finished if we didn't move away from the old kind of extra-parliamentary but peaceful struggle. I think the first step in - in that direction was really taken when Mandela, having called that unsuccessful strike - was it May 31st., 1960 - a decision was taken that he shouldn't go to a police station and present himself for arrest, and that was an enormous decision and there was a big debate on that question, because the tradition previously was that you were not ashamed of what you were doing, and you couldn't let the people feel that you were running away, that they were getting into trouble and you weren't, so you know, you didn't live underground - if you were there available at the house to be arrested you - and - and in - during the treas - during the defiance campaign you actually presented yourself - that kind of approach to struggle still sort of had gripped the minds of a lot of revolutionaries and there was - it - the transformation was - was not so easy, you know, to move from that phase to the other you know, and one doesn't just do it so cleanly - it couldn't be done so cleanly - so there was a debate whether Mandela should now hide or go to a police station and say : Right, now, you know, you put me in jail and make a good speech in court and - and we carry on as before - and thinking back on it, that was the most fundamental step, it - that was the step - that was the watershed between the previous period and the new one, and having taken that step, we accepted illegality - the beginnings of underground, the beginnings of illegality, and we then of course began to discuss what next and what do we do, and naturally, as you know, this question arose, and it was decided after many, many discussions and debates - some people felt we ought to wait a while, others felt, you know, we ought to act earlier than we did.

J.S. But eventually it was decided to create a structure which would prepare, and Mandela and I were appointed, Mandela by the ANC, I was appointed by the party, to make proposals for a high command, to work out, you know, the whole structure and how we would set about it and - and you get material and all that, and we reported and our proposals were from time to time endorsed (?) - you know, then a high command was appointed, and that high command began to do the things that you know about - I needn't waste time about that - but really I suppose looking back on it at that - you know, at that moment, we didn't really have the perspective of a liberation war, you know - we felt that we ought to give notice, you know, that this is going to come - it was really a sort of warning - it didn't go much further than that, you know, and we were very careful to ensure that, you know, no life was lost and no - no danger to anyone, and just a few symbolic targets so as to - to warn the other side that if, you know - if they don't do any - if they don't (?) come closer to some form of compromise, this is going to escalate - this is how we viewed it (?) but - but of course the thing developed and (.....) of its own - the regime responded in the way it did, and we in turn reacted and - and developed beyond the initial point of just a few sabotage actions - we adopted this operation, Mayibuye, which I'm sure you've seen or read about, and then the concept arose of preparing for guerilla - guerilla struggle - how realistic it was I - I'm not sure, but anyhow that was our decisions....

J.F. You mean at that stage....

J.S. At that stage, ja - at that stage, or even - I - I think we had to learn through our experience even, you know, the exact indigenous form that this armed struggle would take in our country, and the place it has in the overall political struggle, which I - you know, I mean is clear now is not the same as it was in Mozambique or Angola or in China or in Vietnam and - and judged by those standards and by those approaches - I mean you know, we won't get to - to the bottom of what our armed struggle is all about and what its role has been and should be and so on, but that's a sort of quite a long topic.

J.F. Do you think you had a long view that South Africa, unlike Mozambique and Angola, wouldn't have the rear bases - did that emerge....

J.S. I think initially we weren't clear about that - I think initially we had a little bit of euphoria about the prospects - we hadn't had enough experience - we hadn't had any experience, not enough, in this area - we'd read a bit about other guerilla struggles - most of us had never fired a shot in anger - I mean there were a (?) few people who'd been in the army. I think we - we - we were influenced by a belief that we could bring about a situation in which we could make the countryside so ungovernable through the presence of guerilla formations that we would eventually lead the other side to the point where we would win, you know.

We also base - we based our belief - I think I wrote about this in No (?) Middle Road on - on a rather exaggerated understanding of what Africa would be like, independent Africa, and its power, its resources, its possibilities - we really had a most euphoric sort of perspective about all that - we thought my God, the continent is going to rise on our side and - and this puny little state, white state in the south is going to shudder and collapse, you know, and we going to be helped in all kinds of ways with people taking risks - I mean we had a rather exaggerated understanding, or misunderstanding.

J.F. And the issue that I'm looking at of non-racialism, did - can you say something about the fact that people are commenting more and more on the involvement of whites, not only in organisational political structures, but actually in MK structures? Is that something that you would have predicted and....

J.S. Well, I - of course it - it's again - it's connected with the other point I made, because in the recent period - in the last sort of three, four years we've had a significant influx of whites - before that we didn't, and again it reflects what's happening within the white community, because once the kind of process takes place that I tried to describe, in the white community, some are going to behave militantly at the political level, more militantly - some are even going to defy the laws - and a smaller proportion, you know, is going to actually say: Well, we with you 100 percent, we'll risk our lives - and this is what's happening - it's again obviously not happening in - in mass - on a mass scale, but it's happening more - more and more - is that what you're talking about - but I think as far as the - I think what people don't credit is the role that the party has played in - in willy nilly getting across the concept that - of - of non-racism, and of the liberation movement as a non-racist movement - the participation by whites on the basis of complete equality over a long period of time, and it's not only me, has now, you know - has helped to - to get the concept sunk into the minds of at least thinking whites that given an acceptance of basic democratic policies, whites have a place, an equal place in - in the struggle, and I think this is perhaps one of the unique contributions that our party's made, and me I mean I - it's not a question of modesty - immodesty of (?) what my contribution has been, but symbolically what the government has made - they've made something out of my contribution - they've sort of projected me as the, you know - as the - the evil genius and all that, but in fact being a white who has played such a prominent role, and who's been accepted so obviously and given such an important responsible position by the national movement, so on and so forth, I think even among anti-communists, whether they accept it or not, those who are coming closer in the middle to the ANC, our role has been quite important in getting them to this position, even if they don't understand that that is so.

J.F. And what was your exact position with Umkhonto?

J.S. Well, I told you initially I was, you know, with Mandela....

J.F. But I mean up until you left that position - I just want to make sure....

J.S. Oh well, I - we - we - you know, we had different phases, we had a - I was part of an operational or (?) planning headquarters from 1976 onwards - then I was part of a - the military committee of the revolutionary council - I was on the revolutionary council itself too, but concentrating on military work - my main work was military outside from about 1976 onwards.....

END OF SIDE TWO.

J.S. .... over a period of time which were busy - which were busy organising and planning operations - building the army, training, you know, all those things, getting weapons, but then the decision was taken to form a headquarters and, as you know, I was - when it was formed I was chief of staff.

J.F. That was from?

J.S. Was it '85 - I - I'm not sure - was it '85, '84 - you must know - don't you know.

J.F. It's all kinds of confusing (?) (.....)

J.S. Let me think - I would say....

- J.F. And she's got you as probably member of ANC military committee and revolutionary council '69 to '83.
- J.S. I think I - I would say '84, you know - I think '84 - the revolutionary council was then continued - no, it continued to exist beyond that - that date, but - but while - yes, while - I'm not too sure about dates, but I would say the military headquarters was appointed in 1984 - it - or perhaps early '85, when the political military council - just let me think - '69 - '79 we had that - I've got it somewhere, but I - I really can't remember the exact date - and so I was appointed chief of staff until when - until about last year.
- J.F. This time last year? And why did you decide to change?
- J.S. Well, it was decided immediately I became chairman of the party actually - we - we - we said, but at that sta - it went on for - for a year after that, you know, and I tried to do both jobs and it became more - and when I became general secretary, which meant that most of the public responsibilities for the party were now in my lap, it became completely impossible to do justice to the party and to this military work - I mean a chief of staff is really more than a full time job in itself, and so the party, you know, took a decision....
- J.F. Why did you decide - the party wanted you to stay, but you - you could have let one of the two responsibilities go, and you chose to let the military....
- J.S. No, I didn't choose anything - the party - it's the kind of thing decided by the party - I mean it's clear - look, first of all, once I'm general secretary of the party, an independent organisation which is in an alliance with the ANC, it - it's a complete anomaly for me to at the same time be under the command, be the number three, which I was, in a military headquarters, and be subject to the orders of - military orders of Joe Modise - not that there was ever any problems - so in principle it - the whole thing couldn't go - it's like ja, I - I don't know if there're any historical precedent (?) - so in principle it had to be, you know - from the point of view of the party, once I accepted the position of general secretary, I couldn't as general secretary go on a delegation, military delegation with Joe Modise and carry his bag, as it were, you know - I mean it's - so that's the one factor.
- The other factor is the question of time I mean, and also like we know, Moses Mabhida - he was secretary of the revolutionary council - when he became secretary of the party, he also got out of the - had to get out of the chairmanship of the - or the secretaryship of the revolutionary council.
- J.F. So many things I want to ask you. Can I just culminate by asking if you can - I'll just throw out a couple of things and you can decide what's important to pick up on. One of them is just is it worthwhile asking all these questions about non-racialism? The other is this whole issue of post-apartheid South Africa and whites always being worried about their position and trying to push in this minority rights as a group thing. And then the other thing is that some people see it as a contradiction that separate ethnic organisations are around - the TIC was re-formed, that JODAC five freedoms, Cape Democrats - those things are blossoming now. Can you talk about non-racialism in the current context? Is it important? How does it relate to the ideology of the movement at all (?)
- J.S. Well, again I don't think one can approach this problem in an abstract fashion, just non-racialism, separate organisations - two are inconsistent - I don't think they inconsistent.

J.S. I think the existence of the separate organisations in the '40s and '50s contributed more than any other factor to the building of a non-racist front - had we tried at that stage to artificially eliminate the actual differences which existed on the ground and different psychologies and historical legacies of the different communities, we would have not brought about what we did eventually bring about, and that is sort of unity in action between the various groups leading to real non-racism at the level of organisation - so I think again what I'm trying to say it's (?) got to be looked at in - in - in a specific kind of context, historical moment.

I mean if we started on a clean slate say, today with the present situation, and we sitting in a group and trying to decide what organisation(s) shall we create, we would create one organisation, finish, but you - you never, you know - it doesn't work that way - real life doesn't work that way - you've got a historical legacy of movements that have got roots in certain communities, like the Indian Congress, communities which are not yet at the economic level treated in the same way as the other communities, and therefore need to be dealt with in a special kind of a way, like the whites, even the progressive whites - I don't think it's inconsistent with non-racism to support the idea of the five freedoms forum.

I mean we say to whites radical : Come join us - yes, but in addition in - in practical day to day politics, mobilisation and working among people to get them to move even an inch if - if we can't get them to move a mile, it's necessary to take into account continuing realities of differences between the communities, which call for separate appeals, separate treatment - the issues which will get the Indians moving are not the same as the issues which will get the Africans moving, and indeed within the African community the issues which will get the black workers moving are not the same as the issues that'll get the black peasant moving, and therefore one has peasant organisations and workers organi - and so on - it's that kind of thing.

As long as we as an independent force continue to move towards a non-racist kind of phase, complete non-racist phase, the existence of these sep - separatist organisations can actually advance rather than retard the fundamental process towards which we are working. And we know today, for instance, even - it's a little worse now than it was a few years ago - you know, this has been a rather jumpy process among the Indian community, for instance - there was a point in time, sort of '84, when there was a - an enormous groundswell in the direction of black - we black and, you know, among Indians as well - well, the regime has partly within the Indian community, by deliberate policy, succeeded in - in - in weakening that kind of resolve to regard themselves as black, to trust the Africans and so on - they - they've - I mean we - we - the - the struggle has - has got two sides - the other side gains every now and again in the direction of its own objectives, and they have gained a little bit, for instance, within the Indian community, given them the - economically some openings which they didn't have before which - and even among the Coloureds - and therefore I think it is still at a certain level justified that work amongst those sections may require special organisational interim forms, you know, and I don't think the two - I don't see them as inconsistent - I never have and my, you know - it's like the same (?) among whites - I mean I would say among whites it's absolutely necessary for whites to create whatever mass forms lend themselves to the issues which can draw whites in the direction of democracy, whether it is end conscription campaign or, you know, whatever.

J.F. And non-racialism, is it a kind of an overlay or is it integrally a part of ANC and Communist Party ideology? Is it something that's....

J.S. Absolutely fundamental - it's absolutely fundamental I mean - it's what distinguishes us from - from everybody else, is the absolute commitment to - to non-racism.

J.F. Is that the party or the ANC?

J.S. The party, and I think the ANC as well - there's no qualification of - of that at all - I don't know if I - just repeat your question - I'm trying to see what you're trying to get at?

J.F. Is it worth spending all this time on? Is it something that I'm blowing out of proportion by continuing to focus on? Is it something that's worth really clarifying? Are there other more important issues, do you think?

J.S. Well, I think there - there are other important issues, but this is one of the important issues - it's one of the fundamental, you know, key issues, I think so, ja - I think so.....

END OF INTERVIEW.