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Dale: Alright, this is Dale. I am interviewing John Appolis. It is the 17th of March 2010. Thanks John for making yourself available.

John: My pleasure, my pleasure.

Dale: Okay, I think you know that this is an interview with past and present APF leaders. It is about the APF(Anti Privatisation Forum). But before we get started there, just a little bit about your personal information because we want to know a little bit about people who are involved and a little bit about their background. So first of all just tell us when and where were you born?

John: I was born in 1960, in Cape Town in an area called Athlone

Dale: And what places have you... how long have you stayed in Cape Town? When did you move up to Joburg? Have you lived in other places in South Africa or overseas?

John: No, just here in South Africa. I stayed in Cape Town until 1987, so I moved here in January 1987 to Johannesburg and ever since that time I am a resident here in Johannesburg.

Dale: Ok, and just tell us a little bit about your family. Do you have children? Are you married yet?

John: Ja, I am married. I got two boy's one is sixteen and the other one is twenty seven. I have been married now for how many years.

Dale: How many years are you married?

John: Since 1982 so how many years is that? Twenty eight years

Dale: Twenty eight years, wow ok and just tell us a little bit about your schooling. Did you get degrees? Did you go to university?

John: Yes, I went to the University of the Western Cape. I completed a Bcom majoring in accounting and cost accounting. Then I did a BA Honours at Wits University but I did not complete it. That was in 19... in 2000

Dale: What was that in? What subject?

John: It was dealing with Industrial Sociology, that area but I never completed it.

Dale: Alright and finally just tell us a bit about your work history.

John: Well after I graduated at UWC (University of the Western Cape) I went to teach for two years. And ever since that time I have been working in the trade unions since 1984. I taught for two years '82-'83 and then from '84 I worked in a trade union. In 1989 I was sort of on a sabbatical. I took a year off and for six months of that year I worked for some research NGO, rural research NGO. I can't remember the name now, but after that I came back to the unions.

Dale: What unions were those?

John: First it was Plastic and Allied Workers Union and then it was MICWU (Motor Industry Combined Workers Union) and then they merged with other unions to form NUMSA (National Union of Mineworkers SA). So I worked for two years for NUMSA and then I joined CWIU (Chemical Workers Industrial Union). Then they merged and they formed SAPPAWU (South African Agricultural Plantation and Allied Workers Union) and then I was expelled from SAPPAWU in 2003 for political reasons and now I am with an independent union called GIWUSSA (General Industries Workers Union of South Africa).

Dale: And that is now, right now?

John: Yes.

Dale: And what position do you hold there?

John: General Secretary

Dale: Now just describe briefly how you became politicised ... ja, how did you become politicised as an activist outside of your work and even of the unions?

John: Ja, it is quite sort of ironic because when I was still at school, I was one of the top students and the Deputy Principal and my maths teacher called myself and another student just a day after we completed our matric exams and they sort of cautioned us not to get involved in politics at University. I didn't take notice of that sort of talk that they had with us but my second year there was boycotts - 1980. Students boycott for about three months against zero apartheid and CATA (Cape African Teachers Association) education and all of that. The leaders of that boycott sort of divided the student to the areas they were coming from. You know when you came from Oudtshoorn, you were sort of grouped together. They grouped all the students together in terms of their residential areas and then they had a plan there that the students from their areas must go and organise in their communities... you know where they lived. So myself, and a group of students from the Athlone area, we then started to organise our townships and we formed Civic Organisations and Youth Organisations and it is from there that I got involved in the struggle. I mean I became Chairperson of our youth also on the executive of our Civic Association. Then we formed together with Trevor Manuel the CAHC (Cape Action Housing Committee) in the early 1980's. But from there I mean I became sort of involved in politics actively.

Dale: All throughout the eighties?

John: All throughout the eighties, ja

Dale: And then just describe in the '90's was it ... did you continue that or was it mostly through the unions?

John: Through the unions. I was not involved in the Civic in the 1990's, mainly through the unions in the struggle

Dale: And political organisation affiliation or membership?

John: No, no political affiliations.

Dale: Ok and at any point and time in your political activist career, not at all?

John: No.

Dale: Ok why for you this specific interest in issues of privatisation in particular?

John: Well I mean it is part of the overall neo liberal policies of the government. And from our sort of analysis, neo liberalism is a sort of anti working class policies and it furthers the interest of the...or big capital so for us. And for me in particular privatisation means that the control and ownership of the economy becomes sort of expanded for the capitalist group... they now have more access and more control over the economic resources of a country and that is one of the reasons why I think privatisation is a very problematic sort of issue for the working class because the state or... it wouldn't have the necessary resources to actually transform the economy in the interest of the working class and the poor. Because now most of that wealth is now transferred to private to the capitalists and their main concern would be to maximize profits and profits are made at the expense of the working class and the poor and it should be opposed at all costs.

Dale: Do you see any forms of privatisation outside of the economic realm? Most of what you talked about would be considered the economic side of things and also...

John: Ja and there is also the issue of basic services, water, electricity. I mean these are basic necessities for people. And clearly the South African Government through their neo-liberal programme has sort of commercialized and commodified many of these services. In fact now the people can only access these services if they have the money and taking into account the kind of structural poverty and unemployment in South Africa so many people are actually excluded from actually seeing these basic necessities as a result of privatisation of these kinds of basic services.

Dale: Okay. (Sorry I am just having a hard time reading this... ja the light is not so good). Ok we are just going to shift now to the lead up to the formation of the APF. How did you first... I mean even before...and I am talking of before the APF became formed. How did you... just describe to us the events leading up to the formation of the APF from where you were coming from?

John: Ja at that time it was in 2000, the year 2000. At that time I was called the regional campaigns coordinator of COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions) because I was in the unions that were affiliated to COSATU. So I was the Regional Campaigns Coordinator of COSATU. So when the... what's it? There was this invitation to COSATU to attend a meeting to deal with the privatisation at Wits University as well as Igoli 2002 if I remember ja. There was a meeting called by organisations and COSATU. They sent me as the representative of COSATU to attend that meeting. So I mean when I...that is sort of where we discussed the struggle against these two processes of privatisation and then we planned. There was also at the same time... what's it? Urban Futures Conference being organised by the City of

Johannesburg was one of the initiators of privatisation in the City Council. So we were planning to in those... I mean that particular conference and I think ja we went there and we disrupted it. We took over the stage and I was handed the mike and I chaired the session there in the Great Hall of Wits University and you know we were then sort of agitated. The people who were remaining in the hall and about the problems of the ANC government, a neo-liberal program GEAR, privatisation and why we decided to sort of disrupt this particular conference because the City Council is one of the initiators of privatisation. Then after that I think the activists and the people organising this process then got together and sort of said we must form some kind of coordinating structure to resist... continue resisting these plans both from the side of Wits University and from the City Council and I think that led to the sort of formation. The launch of the formation of the APF in July 2000, in fact on the tenth floor of COSATU House and at that time there was myself...there was two co chairpersons. I was elected as one of the co chairpersons and a student from Wits University, what was her name? Sibongile I can't remember her surname but she was a student at Wits University and that sort of laid the basis for the foundation of the APF

Dale: And just tell us a little bit... Something you said , that you were deployed from your union or from COSATU. Now once things started after the initial opposition, Urban Futures disruption and everything else. How did that play itself out with regards to COSATU's and your union's involvement in the formation of this new organisation?

John: Well I mean because of the privatisation. The drivers of privatisation are the ANC government at different levels, you know national and local level, so the struggle against privatisation meant we had to confront the ANC government, we had to start analysing the class character of the ANC government etc, etc and that led to a kind of polarisation between the APF and ANC government because that was really...they became the real targets of our protests and our demands and COSATU being in alliance with the ANC found that very difficult because now they had to confront all these contradictions between being in alliance with the ANC as well as being part of a organisation or a struggle that sort of focused directly on the ANC and exposing the meeting and criticising and attacking it, so COSATU started distancing itself from the APF and they took a decision in one of the executive committees where I was present not to get involved in the APF anymore, so I had to then again withdraw from the APF as the COSATU representative. But I stayed in the APF as a community activist, as an activist who wanted to continue the struggle against privatisation etc., but COSATU then... There was lots of debates in COSATU in the region because people like myself, we sort of agitated, advocated for COSATU to remain part of the Anti Privatisation Forum because of the fact that, you know one of its own Unions SAMWU was directly affected by... sorry two of these Unions were directly affected by this...by the privatisation initiatives, NEHAWU (National Education Health and Allied Workers Union) at Wits University and SAMWU (South African Municipal Workers Union) at the City Council, in fact both SAMWU and NEHAWU were also initially part of the Anti Privatisation Forum so with that decision of COSATU to distance itself from the APF when those two unions also gradually sort of withdrew from the organisation.

Dale: And how did that affect your own position within COSATU itself? You said you separated, so you were doing it as an individual activist but...?

John: Well... it created a lot of tension in the union that I sort of belonged to - CEPPAWU (Chemical Energy, Print, Paper and Allied Workers Union) In fact we were continuing in the union to agitate for the union/COSATU to orientate and link up with the Social Movements. In fact we... because I was the regional secretary in Gauteng - kind of Regional Secretary of the union - we invited the APF to come and speak at our REC. That was in 2002 and that created a big sort of issue in the union because they were accusing us of bringing in ultra left forces, counter revolutionaries you know...into the union because we wanted to link with ultra lefts in the union. And then the union, I can remember now in one of its National Executive Committee's passed a resolution that no leader or union official can stand on any other platform and contradict the union policies and that... and also I can't remember there is also another part of that resolution that sort of restricted. I can't remember the exact formulation, but it restricted my ability to participate in the APF and also to appear publicly, to make pronouncements on behalf of the APF that is contrary to Union policies. You could clearly hear talking about attitude and approach to the ANC and the ANC government and the TriPartite Alliance. So they passed that resolution sort of ... kind of restricting us, our freedom of speech and our freedom of association to put it in those constitutional terms now. So that became a major sort of struggle within the union in terms of democracy and our ability to actually explore working class alliances with other formations other than the TriPartite Alliance and I mean...that was one of the sort of things that led to our... beside all the other struggles, internal struggles within the union, around the political orientation of the union, internal democracy, accountability, worker control you know. There were many struggles around those particular issues within the union. So also my links with the APF and the fact that I was at that time also the Chairperson of the APF created a lot of tension within the union. That also I think was one of the factors that led the National Executive Committee to expel me and other sort of comrades from the union.

Dale: Okay and to your memory just ... Who do you remember as being part of the initial formation? What groups? What constituent organisations came together initially and how did that change over the first two years of its existence?

John: Initially it was as I said it was COSATU who was present, IMATU (Independent Municipal and Allied Trade Union), SAMWU, the Johannesburg branch of the Communist Party and NEHAWU and then it was community organisations like SECC (Soweto Electricity Crisis Committe), Katorus Concerned Residents on the East Rand and the Working Class Coordinating Committee ... even the PAC (Pan Africanist Congress) was present. There was ... and then there were other smaller sort of groups, left groups like APDUSA and then there were activists. You know many left activists that were active in the 1980's and early 1990's who were part of the APF. That is the kind of initial composition and there may be others. I can't remember now exactly apart from the APF.

Dale: And after the first, lets say two years ... how did that change because it changed quite drastically didn't it?

John: Ja, ja it was COSATU and NEHAWU, SAMWU, Communist Party even sort of ... I forgot to mention SASCO (South African Students Congress) and the student organisation at Wits University. They were also part of the APF. So they sort of all moved out you know what I mean... as the struggles sort of became more directed towards the ANC Government and its sort of policies and it became exposed as the source of all the problems that people are facing, so most of those organisations that were sort of moved out. Others sort of fell by the wayside like the PAC and I mean some of those organisations and then more community organisations came into the APF. I mean particularly from the Vaal area. Organisations came also from Johannesburg and organisations came into the APF, so it sort of... its character changed and I think ever since that time...you know what I mean... it became an organisation or movement of community based organisations largely consisting of the unemployed. But then initially if you go look at the composition it was mainly the current unions, students in fact...and activists and community organisations were few actually at that time of the initial phase of the APF.

Dale: And how... just tell us a little bit how since you were at the centre of that leadership, how did the organisational form at the APF change from its initial as you said activist forum? How did that grow or change over the first two years of its existence?

John: Well what happened is because of the fact that the community organisations constituted the largest base of the organisation, we had to sort of restructure it to give effect to this new development where we sort of set up what you called office bearers, elected Office Bearers, the Chairperson, Treasurer and the Secretary. Those were the three sort of official leadership of the organisation and then we agreed to have an annual general meeting... sorry a Coordinating Committee meeting. Those were the only two structures that we used to have. The activist forum also was still in existence... you know what I mean there was that kind of form, of transition where we sort of formalised more the internal organisational setup of the organisation. So the Activist Forum was still in existence even though they were formalising many of the internal structures of the organisation and that led to... I think the first annual general meeting was in 2004, if I am not mistaken ... 2004 where we had our first annual general meeting where we sort of adopted ... endorsed the kind of structures that we have set up in the two years before that. You know Office Bearers, Executive and Coordinating Committee structures and ... those were sort of constitutionalised almost at the 2004 AGM. So I think that gave it some kind of... what's it, organisational coherence and stability because now we have a kind of accountable structure and strategies that could co-ordinate and allow for democratic participation and control of the community organisations in the APF and also in terms of weighting, of voting and its more in favour of the community organisations where they have more voting power or voting delegates at the various structures of the APF.

Dale: Now by the time...as you said...by the time that sort of COSATU and that some of the unions had moved out, the APF still sort of... its constitutional parts... to its constituent parts came from quite varied both ideological backgrounds as well as class and material backgrounds ...did you see that as a strength of a new organisation like the APF and a Social Movement as necessary or as a weakness?

John: I think it was and it still is a strength of the organisation. I think what sort of anchored the organisation is because probably ninety nine percent of the organisations had a common experience in terms of being at the cutting edge of the ANC's neo-liberal agenda, whether it is evictions, water cut offs, pre paid water meters, lack of housing, lack of delivery ... all of that pointed to the ANC government and that sort of cemented the organisation despite people coming from diverse ideological and struggles backgrounds. For me it is a strength because people then bring in... you know what I mean, there different views and different perspectives on kind of contemporary issues that are facing the working class and organisation in particular. And I think that sort of led to quite I must say dynamic debates in the organisation where we could debate things from methods of struggles, internal democracy to the more bigger questions of socialism and I think that gave it a kind of dynamic that I think was not present in many of the other movements and even in the older traditional movements like COSATU that became more monolithic in terms of the ideological political outlook ... I think for me... I mean the APF should maintain that kind of internal culture. I think at certain conjunctures it could have had more kind of uniformity in terms of... around certain tactical questions but I think for me taking into account that it is a new movement, people come from different experiences as they enter the APF on a basis of different understandings, different expectations even though we are united around a common sort of enemy, to put it that way... at certain conjunctures maybe it would have assisted in certain areas, but I think looking back... you know what I mean, I don't think the APF could have done anything different in terms of some of the tactical issues that it confronted, particularly around the issue of elections. You know whether it is local government or national elections. I mean that created a lot of difficulties and tensions within the organisation because we could not find a common sort of tactical approaches to that particular issue, but I mean...I think in the broader context looking back I think the fact that the APF after ten years is still in existence and is still vibrant, is still a pole of attraction to communities and most of the militants are still very attached to the organisation. I mean that says something about its character, its dynamism and also its internal culture, you know...

Dale: We will get to some of those later on because as you say ten years is a long time. But just to follow on one point that you mentioned which is of interest is that ... to what extent do you think the APF at the same time as they coming out of old struggles, coming out of liberation movement struggles but also at the same time there are these new social movements that have been formed. How do you think the APF was impacted on and affected by both of those things in both political and organisational terms?

John: I think politically the fact that you had new movements, new activists, new militants coming through the struggles and then you had people who came from the 1980's, 1970's – 1980's in terms of the struggles there. I think that brought a new dynamic into the APF. I mean... here you had militants, who were...you know at the forefront of the struggle against the ANC (African National Congress) Government and you had militants and activists who could provide a kind of broader context to the struggles that people were engaging with and I think the newer militants could see the connection between their issues and the broader political questions of the day. And I think that sort of allowed the militants to move beyond their immediate sort of issues and saw the need for...to build the APF as a kind of a counter political pole to the ANC government. And I mean you can see that even when some of the



communities, I mean either there is a sort of a decline in the struggles or there is a retreat on the part of the ANC government in relation to some of the issues, they still see the importance of building the APF you know what I mean... so I think that brought that connection together. I mean I think that was a very important part you know to sustain the organisation and I think here it is important to compare us to the (LPM) Landless Peoples Movement who did not want to make those kinds of political connections between immediate struggles and the class character of the ANC Government and the ANC as the main driver of the capitalist agenda in South Africa. If I compare the two, that seemed to be one of the big... and that's why it was so easy for the ANC to cause disarray within... I am not saying that's the only sort of factor that led to the disarray within the LPM... you know, I mean for me that was a quite a major contributing factor to the decline of the LPM. I think particularly when the ANC made certain overtures to the LPM and I think that created a sort of confusing disorientation within the alliance. I think also organisationally because the activists came from trade union background... you know myself, Rob Rees and some others. We had long sort of experience of building organisation, building structures, accountable structures, participatory structures, you know within the union movement and I think we brought some of that experience to the organisation where we were able to organisationally sort of assist in building a much more sort of solid organisation ... like the question of office bearers, the question of accountability in terms of how you organise and coordinate the meetings. You know we brought some of that experience into the APF. However there is a... there is also some problems with that experience in a sense that I think the older left activists, I don't know if it was impatience or not understanding the different sort of phases of the development of organisations, even militants you know what I mean... you get a sense that sometimes militants of the past that want to impose certain ideological formulations or concepts onto the organisation and its militants when people have not understood those things or haven't experienced them or haven't seen the relevance in practice almost or the connection between them in practice. I mean I remember in the APF there was this debate about whether we adopt socialism or not, you know, but for me I was one of the people who were not supporting the adoption of socialism although I consider myself to be a socialist, a Marxist, I think that was in 2003- 2004 ja when we had this debate whether we must adopt socialism as a kind of ideological principle of the organisation. I felt at that time the militants in the organisations, I mean they... socialism doesn't mean much because they haven't sort of seen it, we haven't demonstrated it you know in terms of their struggles, their demands, their organisational practices and culture and I thought that was kind of artificial ... I won't say imposition but artificial adoption of socialism. Also, there were many questions that we had to deal with of the past, you know what I mean, of why socialism failed in the Soviet Union, the problems with Stalinism and how that sort of impacted not only on Stalin's organisation like the Communist Party but even the Left and I thought other comrades who were called .. I don't want to adopt labels ... but who were ascribing to autonomism, you know the valid critiques of some of the components of Leninism, Marxism, Left practices and how they perceived it. And I thought if we had to adopt socialism then it without even allowing for that flowering of engagement of the discussion around these issues and concepts. You know and also demonstrate practical and political relevance to immediate issues and struggles and that's where I felt sometimes the older militants, the

left sort of... I mean something that can be unhealthy to have that kind of almost artificial kind of process of political clarification, development of political consciousness within a movement.

Dale: Okay now there were two events earlier on in the APF's early years, the World Conference against Racism and the World Conference on Sustainable Development. Just from your experience and perspective at the time as the leader of the APF, how do you think what happened around those two events also helped formed and impact on the APF? Because that was... both of those involved both the APF and many other new social movements and they were the most public and largest mobilisations that the organisation had been involved in as well?

John: The World Conference against Racism was the first that was in 2001, ja that was the first opportunity since the formation of the APF you know two years. First opportunity to bring all the kind of new movements together, you know that were sort of emerging from 1990... towards end 1999-2000 and 2001 to bring them together around a common sort of event or theme and unite them throughout the country around the conference. And I think the fact that people went to organise the event together, organise delegations to go down to Durban you know created a particular dynamic amongst the militants. I think they could see now the different connections between their struggles that they are engaging in other people... in other parts of the country and it created some kind of what I call vibe amongst militants you know the newer militants and newer organisations and movements that were emerging during that particular period. I think the WSSD actually took that actually to a much more higher level you know... both politically and organisationally a year later in 2002. I think the big difference between the WCAR and the WSSD, was that WSSD there was a kind of struggle that was waged there in terms of understanding. First of all the question of the summit ... why it is being held here in South Africa? The question of capitalist agenda who are the forces driving this agenda both internationally as well as nationally? Because the question of the Conference Against Racism, many of the political and class questions were sort of blurred and the ANC's role in perpetuating racism was also brought to the fore in 2001. I think with the WSSD, because there was a... particularly amongst the Preparatory Committee, there was this struggle between those who were trying to make it a problem of poverty, the problem of the United Nations and what they called the International Community and those who would say no the problem lies here in South Africa, the South African Government and its agency for neo-liberalism in South Africa. So part of the focus on WSSD must also be on the policies and on the problems in South Africa and therefore the question of exposing the ANC Government as part of our struggles became a contested issue. And I think that sort of led to a parting of ways amongst people who were preparing for the WSSD and that led to the formation of the Social Movements Indaba, because people then had to then take sides whether they're going...you know with that block of forces that were trying to downplay the role of the ANC and the ANC government in the question of neo-liberalism and globalisation and those who were saying no, no. I mean the ANC Government is the source of our problem here besides the overall system of capitalism. So people had to take sides in that fight and I think for me WSSD then unified all those progressive forces around a particular banner under the SMI and I think the march on the... was it the 30<sup>th</sup> of August? (31<sup>st</sup> of August). 31<sup>st</sup> of August sort of demonstrated the significance of that position that was taken then. I think 2002 was probably the

combination of two years of ... two or three years of struggle and then I think when that changed, there is a difference between WSSD and the World Conference against Racism. I mean the fact that the march that was undertaken then on the 31<sup>st</sup> of August was a march that... politically it was clear in terms of the problems and the sources of these problems and also it separated from those who were supporting the ANC and TriPartite Alliance which I think in the year before that was not the case. I think that WSSD sort of cemented politically ... particularly the social movements in terms of their understanding and also their ... their sort of need for unity amongst those who are opposed to the ANC government.

Dale: And how would you respond to... because at the time there was also after the WSSD, there was a debate both within the APF and other social movements about the ... maybe the flip side to that which was that it had potentially all sorts of positive aspects to it, that there had become this tendency for social movements to basically rely too much on large events and big mobilisations and then to exaggerate the claims ... I remember at the WSSD one of the APF leaders had stood up and said "We will challenge the ANC"... you know this...there was that feeling that "boy this is it" you know. Is that a fair assessment or was that something that... because in the next three or four years a lot of negative things happened to a lot of social movements ... can one trace it to that at a certain level or do you think it has nothing to do necessarily with big mobilisations such as the WSSD.

John: Ja I think. I don't think per se the fact that there was this big mobilisation WSSD was necessarily a factor in the subsequent problems of social movements because... In fact if you remember after WSSD in 2003/ 2004 the APF actually consolidated itself, you know what I mean, it sort of decided, taking into account you know the state of its organisations, community organisations that are coming into the APF, the fact of the need to build solid strong rooted community organisations and the APF and that's where we sort of formalised many of our internal structures after post WSSD. I think that... that's what happened in the APF. Maybe one should sort of investigate what happened with the other movements subsequent to WSSD. But as I am saying that is what happened in the APF. We managed to ride that wave of WSSD for a long, long time as the APF precisely because we captured the momentum that was created by the WSSD. And I think maybe the other movements did not do that adequately or didn't think that that was an important task to do. Because such big mobilisations can inspire people and bring about a sense of activism and enthusiasm for struggle, for organisations. And I think we sort of decided to harness that mood, that militancy that was displayed at WSSD into a much-more stronger, solid organisational form and hence we started moving in the direction of formalising the APF. I mean I agree with you there, there were a lot of debate in the APF about what to do after the WSSD and I think there were comrades who were opposed to this kind of internal organisational consolidation and building of organisation and wanted to continue with a kind of big event sort of politics. I remember those debates where people used to argue that if you don't take to the streets, you are not struggling. You know if you don't protest, you know you are not struggling, you know there were lots of those debates within the organisation. I didn't support that kind of approach to struggle. I mean you can't be in permanent... permanent action, you know people get exhausted, you need to consolidate, you need to develop your organisation, you need to develop the perspective of the militants, you have to provide certain training and political understandings, you know for them to sustain the organisation and carry the organisation

through. So I am just saying now that I am thinking about it there could have been that element that people were sort of ... not systematically unpacking what WSSD actually really meant and how that reflects the state of the movements and not taking that into consideration in their organisational and political strategies. I am thinking about the debates we had in the APF even after the WSSD about ...

Dale: Well, just a follow on to that because I think it does speak to the character and development in an important time of the APF ... were the expectations that were created because you previously mentioned that one of the key debates that started to become central in the APF in 2003 was about elections. So just speak a little bit to that, how those expectations that were created, not only about the organisation, but the politics that the APF represented?

John: I think because WSSD was quite a remarkable event. I mean the twenty five, thirty thousand people marching from Alex to Sandton and the Alliance, Tri Partite Alliance march amounted to five thousand so... and these were the people who were deliberators of South Africa. They could only muster five thousand people in a march. So I think that maybe...ja to a certain extent that could've created sort of false understandings of what the APF and other movements represented in terms of their mass implantation in communities, in terms of peoples political understanding of the task that we must sort of undertake to build a strong movement and that sort of led to a huge internal debate on the 2004 national elections. It had started already in 2003 where some people were arguing that the APF must contest the elections, where as others would argue no, yes WSSD represented an important landmark in the development, in the creation of a new mass movement but we are not there at that stage. I think that sort of... that debate did allow us to actually unpack and actually analyse seriously the state of the APF and its organisations and its affiliates and what it represented. I think that was an important sort of debate, even though people had expectations that that the APF now is a mass movement that can take on the ANC particularly in elections. That allowed the militants to sort of weigh up critically where the APF was at in terms of its strength and in terms of its organisational implantation in the communities. I think also politically that allowed us to take stock of the other movements in terms of their political understanding because at that time the other strong movement was the Landless Peoples Movement, the LPM and politically I mean they had the position of boycotts but I mean we understood that boycott was not informed by a kind of political understanding of the task but was more a kind of reaction to no vote, what's it, no land, no vote without actually unpacking what it actually means in terms of political tactics and political strategies. So that debate in the APF actually allowed us to, you know to really get to grips with the APF and what it represented at that particular conjuncture and on that basis it allowed us to decide not to participate. I think militants in general could see we were not in a position to actually participate in 2004 to contest at a national level the APF.

Dale: Okay and then just before I get to some more specific organisational issues internally. At the same time around 2003 the APF, it was the first time the APF accessed significant financial resources for the first time. So as an elected leader, speak to how that impacted, what impact did that have? Because the first two or three years it was getting a few funds from here and there and volunteers and this and all of

a sudden there was significant financial resources that were available to the organisation, how did that effect impact on the APF?

John: Well that allowed the APF first of all organisationally to consolidate itself in terms of setting up organisational infrastructure in terms of office, staff, employment you know all of that. That allowed us to really setup an organisational infrastructure. It also allowed us to have ... to consolidate our organisation in terms of setting up structures, accountable structures, office bearers, coordinating committees, you know. And we actually had the resources to allow communities to actually participate and be active within the organisation. It also allowed us to undertake a number of important campaigns and workshops so to consolidate. It really sort of assisted in that process of both political and organisational consolidation particularly after the WSSD. But also it brought in another element...you know what I mean, because the funds, I think the way we raise funds. Funds are raised both in the APF as an organisation but also for its affiliates and I think because affiliates have their own rhythms, they have their own sort of initiatives in terms of struggles around their specific issues, that created a lot of pressure and tensions in the organisation on how to allocate and distribute the funds. Ever since that time, you know what I mean... up to the present the APF... there is always tensions around the allocation of the funds where communities would want to access the funds in terms of their needs, their requirements ... the APF you know could sort of look at the overall picture in terms of the needs of the organisation and in terms of the needs of many of its other affiliates and try to find ways of balancing all these pressing requirements on the question of the funds and sometimes...I mean not sometimes... on many occasions it creates tensions, pressures within the organisation. Also I think our social base is largely unemployed. So I mean even there in the context of neo liberalism where not many resources are available within the townships in terms of... because in the 1980's churches and schools would readily make available their institutional resources to organisations and to activists, even libraries would allow you to make photocopies and access certain things in the past. Under neo liberalism everyone ... is cutting on costs and looking at their budgets and applying austerity measures in their organisations and that created a lot of... sort of pressures on the APF as a resource of finances. And I think unemployed also, people have to survive so they are trying to find creative ways of accessing money from the organisation and the organisation has to sort of finance many of the things that in the past, in the first two years you know of the APF's existence people used their own creativity to actually transport them from the one end to the other. But because there are funds in organisations, sometimes people find an easy way just to rely on the APF. So I think it brought all of those... while it had all the positives as I outlined earlier, but it also brought a particular dynamic into the organisation and I think we are still characterised by that problem of the funds, you know... it is a contradictory problem that we are having in the APF.

Dale: And just as a follow, as an addendum to that. In the APF's development during what I call the middle years, you know from 2004, 2005, 2006 in the way that it became structured a lot of those initial individual activists that had been involved played a fairly significant role in various components of the APF and its activities whether that was research, media, education and a whole range of other things. In

your experience, how did the relationships internally within the APF between its base constituency and its activist base, how did that play itself out particularly with the involvement of funds now?

John: Ja I think those individual activists... they not only brought in their own sort of political knowledge and experience in organisational sort of skills, but I think also they also brought in their own resources. They had access to resources that they use for organisational purposes, like typing, photocopying, making packs, using their own resources for communication. So I mean the APF also relied...not relied but I mean that became almost part of the organisational sort of resources. And I think the base being unemployed and the activists being largely middle class, unemployed or students created tensions. The activists were quite sort of strong and emphatic on accountability and proper use of resources and you know what I mean? And the base would see that as these comrades not wanting us to access the resources and therefore they ... I don't know, raising all these issues or they want to place obstacles in their path to access the resources. That created that kind of tension between...within the organisation now. The base would argue or some comrades would argue that these are comrades who've got money, you know what I mean but they don't want us to have access to the money, which was not the case. It was more a question of accountability, proper use of the funds and also the question of ensuring the sustainability of the organisation. I think for me that sort of is part of the tensions that were sort of introduced by the funds within the organisation. I think other comrades wanted to use that tension as a way of criticising it and creating a sort of false tension between what they call intellectuals and the base which I thought was politically incorrect and opportunistic to create that...to use that. Which I think sometimes it's a tension one must understand the source of... you know what I mean, how to deal with it, to use it for... to score political points because there are differences in all organisation.

Dale: And at around about that same time around, 2005-2006 internally some of the internal problems that related to the things that you have talked about with regards to the APF's employees and there were some changes that happened as a result of that. How did you view what happened during that phase with the replacement of the organiser who had been a very key component of the APF for a long period of time as well as the administrator who had been there from the very beginning as very key people within the APF?

John: When the APF managed to secure the funds we agreed to employ an organiser and also an administrator full time. Trevor Ngwane was the organiser ... in fact he was the Secretary of the APF and then he became the Organiser and then we agreed we must separate the two functions. I think the Organiser plays quite an important role in the organisation and in fact is the person around which most of the APF's activities and campaigns and struggles and even internal organisational activities revolved. Because he is full time and he sort of was involved in the coordination of the activities and events of the organisation. I think what sort of started to happen is that people were demanding more a kind of accountability from the side of the organiser in terms of how he spends his time, how he engages with the issues? Because people sort of perceived that he was biased towards the section of the organisation that supported his political views in that his time, his activities and even the resources of the organisation were made available more to the section of the organisation, affiliates or activists who

supported his political ideology in approach to issues and people then demanded more accountability and fair sort of access to the organiser in terms of his time and his political systems and coordination within the organisation. It came to a head when one of the affiliates wrote a letter where they outlined all the problems with the organiser in terms of how he sort of executes his duties and functions as an organiser. That led to us agreeing to have organiser reports, monthly organiser reports so that we can evaluate and assess his activities during the month. I think similarly that also became an issue with the administrator... also people sort of felt that organisations and affiliates that are more closely aligned to her politics were receiving sort of preferential treatment in terms of resources and in all of those kinds of things. That also led to us instituting administrator's reports to ensure accountability and all of that. Those were some of the issues relating to our internal staff. I think the broader lesson that we learnt from that is that... and I think sometimes when you work for a mass organisation you must make a distinction between your political ideology and approach and the requirements of the organisation as a whole. And I think particularly the organiser didn't make a distinction between those two and conflated it and I think that created a lot of tensions. Well the organiser resigned I think at the beginning of 2006 and because in the SECC the organiser there passed away and they had to replace him and comrade Trevor then agreed to become the Organiser of the SECC and then resigned from the APF as the organiser.

Dale: {OK that was just a quick pause}. Just describe some of the key activities during ... you had mentioned previously that the APF consolidated itself organisationally and politically by 2005 – 2006, those years. It was probably I would say considered to be...if not the most prominent, or at least one of the key social movements in the country. What kind of activities was the APF carrying out at that particular...had it changed fundamentally from the earlier years in terms of its core activities in what it was doing in its struggles?

John: Ja, not to a large extent. I think one of the key sources of energy and regeneration within the APF is the affiliate's own struggles. And I think during that period different areas occupied the forefront of the struggle at different times. Sometimes you will have the communities in Johannesburg being in the forefront, they recede and then ones in the Vaal ... they recede and others in the East Rand. So that dynamic kept the vibrancy of the organisation intact. I think also the APF started to also initiate its own APF struggles and marches and campaigns to give some kind of coherence and to unify the different struggles of its affiliates and we would sort of also target certain important days of the year... calendar days to have events like March 21<sup>st</sup>, June 16<sup>th</sup> you know ... we would organise APF events on those particular days. Also APF would organise APF marches and actions, either in a particular region or as the APF as a whole to play that kind of unifying and coordinating role in the organisation. But also to a large extent also have quite a number of workshops looking at specific sort of policies like housing, the question of water, you know those kinds of sort of things that also allowed us to reflect on the ANC Government and also on its policies but also to reflect on our own struggles and our own activities. So I think that has been the kind of dynamic of the APF. But also the APF played a role in terms of driving the SMI during that period, which I think was quite important to keep the unity and to keep some kind of continuity between 2002 and the following subsequent years in terms of the struggles around it. And I

think if one...that period almost allowed the APF to have some kind of roots within the communities. You know everyone knows the red t shirt with the yellow markings. If they see the red t shirt with the yellow markings they will know that is the APF. There is that understanding within the areas, particularly where the APF had roots from the beginning. So from WSSD and up until 2006 that, even up to now I think the APF, that's been its character in terms of its struggles, in terms of its...

**Dale:** Okay and organisationally, did the APF during that time ... it was growing obviously. How did that growth as well ... can't remember the exact numbers but by lets say 2005 – 2006 the number of community organisations as opposed to two or three years earlier, had quite substantially increased. How did that impact on... in terms of the capacity and the ability of the APF to respond to its own popularity or its own growth itself?

**John:** Ja, I mean in fact the APF had to take certain decisions, you know not to over stretch itself in terms of expansion. I mean there were demands from organisations in North West, Free State and even in Mpumalanga for the APF to establish branches or allow those organisations to affiliate with the APF. We have always been sort of cautious about that precisely because of the kind of growth within Gauteng where communities in Gauteng became sort of affiliated to the APF. That in itself... because of the fact that one has to take into account the unevenness within communities, within the APF affiliates...as I explained at various points certain affiliates would be at the forefront, others would be receding because of the nature of the issues, the nature of the response of the ANC Government you know those internal dynamics within those internal organisations. Out of that we have to create a pool of activists that not only consolidate and sustain their own organisation but also the broader APF. I think that created its own sort of internal requirements and for the APF to take on responsibilities of organising other provinces, you know I mean our approach was always one of encouraging those organisations and those provinces to form a similar structure to the APF and then we can have fraternal solidarity links between them. But we were cautious about allowing them or making them affiliates of the organisation or branches of the organisation because we felt we were not in a position both politically and organisationally to sustain such a large organisation. But also financially it would not have been viable because already because the funds that we raised were sufficient almost just for what our internal requirements were.

**Dale:** Earlier on you mentioned the fact that the APF stood out in some ways from other social movements but the fact that it had developed a political critique and a political understanding of the state and the ANC and neo-liberalism. That then was translated clearly in its own activities of how it approached what it did. How did the response of the ANC in the state to the APF and what it was doing in those years ... how did that impact on the APF?

**John:** In early years, probably right up until Thabo Mbeki was ousted, I mean the ANC government had a policy of not negotiating, not meeting with the APF or its affiliates around any of the problems and memoranda that we had submitted to them over the years. And for them basically we were characterised as counter revolutionaries, ultra leftists, radicals that don't support democracy etc, etc. I mean they were out to just vilify the organisation, discredit it even criminalise it in many respects. And I



think that sort of... I don't know confirmed in peoples minds the problems of the ANC government. It is not a caring government, it doesn't bother about their issues, it treats them... want to make them criminals in terms of the issues. So I think to a large extent it sort of accelerated peoples understanding of the character of the ANC, its political character because of the way it sort of reacted and the ways it responded to legitimate demands and issues that people had. They almost made it easier, easy for us to politicise the issues, besides the natural linkage between the neo-liberal policies and the immediate problems. But the fact that you can have a neo-liberal Government that is accommodating that consults, that negotiates you know almost co-opts people into co-managing their own suffering and their own sort of social oppression. You can have a neo-liberal Government which is the one that Zuma administration is trying to do now, trying to co opt communities and people and get their consent for their own social oppression and poverty. Whereas the one under Thabo Mbeki was the one that was quite sort of anti-social movements, anti all the struggles around that were taking place. I think that that assisted us in politicising opposing the ANC government

**Dale:** And how would you respond to quite a number of people that would be considered to be on the left in South Africa or progressives who have made a distinction, a very fundamental distinction in between a movement like the APF and a social movement like the TAC and have indicated that maybe the APF's approach and tactics and the understanding of the government has painted it into a corner, whereas the TAC on the other hand has adopted a position which allowed it to engage more openly and successfully in terms of changing policy. How would you respond to that because it has been something that has been constantly raised with regards to the APF?

**John:** I think there is a conflation between a political class characterisation of the State/Government and the tactics or strategies you use in terms of challenging that Government. The fact that we so correctly sort of characterise the ANC as a Capitalist Government, a neo-liberal Government that acts in interest of big capital, doesn't mean that if the ANC Government would say 'look lets talk about issues and listen let's negotiate or create a space where movements can participate in terms of shaping some of the things', that the APF would not have tactically utilised those spaces. I think the fact that the APF... I mean the ANC Government's response was to shut the door and I mean we reacted to that and in our tactics we adopted appropriate tactics in relation to their response. But also there were other instances where the APF and affiliates would participate, for example make submissions to parliament on various issues. Some of the communities would engage with Mayors and participate in some of the things etc so there was a variety of those kinds of tactical utilisation of spaces and institutions within the organisation. I don't know if people have a detailed sense of the diversity of tactics within the APF. I think the TAC ... they are almost conflating these two issues. And I think their reluctance to characterise the ANC has a neo-liberal, pro-capitalist Government creates ideological confusion within the movement and allows it to be easily co-opted into co-managing the health problems and the problems around HIV and AIDs. And I think that is what is happening with the TAC now. The fact that the Zuma administration came in everyone, particularly people from TAC, from COSATU saying it is a left government, it is a Government that is more friendly with the working class etc etc, that I think created confusion and they are co-opted in all these institutions and are co-managing the problems around it and you can see there

are many contradictions that are emerging. Whereas the APF, the militants within the APF was quite sort of clear about the character of the Zuma administration. I mean we discussed this issue when Zuma was campaigning to be elected and even post-Polokwane and we discussed is there a difference between Zuma and the Mbeki administration. Our militants understood it because they already had a class understanding of the state and the government ...yours is a difference in style but no difference in terms of substance and style doesn't change the character, the policies of a government in terms of it. In terms of the TAC for example under Zuma administration many of our communities are engaging with Mayors, but they are clear about who these Mayors, who these councillors are representing and which class forces, class they are articulating. We participate in NERSA (National Energy Regulator South Africa) hearings, we make submissions, we organise but we are clear about the agenda of these institutions, whereas the TAC fails to politicise and really expose and arm its members and its militants about these particular questions.

**Dale:** Okay. In terms of the APF as it developed, do you think its key strategies and tactics remained consistent or do you think particularly once the Zuma administration came in and the politics with the ANC started changing to a certain degree or at least there seemed to be debate and more openness, that that shifted the strategies and tactics of the APF in any fundamental way?

**John:** No not at all. For me there is like a continuity between what we have done under the Thabo Mbeki era and even now on the Zuma administration, as I explained earlier on and I have mentioned already. I don't think there is any fundamental shift because of our understanding of what the Zuma administration represents. It is a continuation of the neo-liberal policies under Thabo Mbeki and it is reflected in many instances in terms of how they approach local Government, the policies, the budgets of local Government and even the national budget ... the two national budgets under the Zuma administration are all neo-liberal budgets. So, it hasn't changed at all.

**Dale:** Given that how would you explain what was ... I guess a fairly widespread understanding that in the period from 2007 to 2009, two, three years there was what generally what some militants and other activists would call a downturn in lots of different struggles and that social movements like the APF seemed to be struggling internally and having a lot of internal problems. How would you explain that particularly with regard to your experience in the APF?

**John:** Which period are you referring to?

**Dale:** From 2007 – 2008, there was a lot of I guess what has been described as a more internal focus in movements and a seeming downturn in struggles and organisation on the ground.

**John:** I think one of the contributing factors to that is the fact that in an organisation, particularly a mass organisation, does reach a stage where the militants and the struggle reach a point of exhaustion and for me that what has happened with the APF. Militants become exhausted and then that is what happened to the middle class activists in our organisation ... after being involved for seven years they decided to explore other interests ...and also the militants from the communities similarly there, they

explore other things, they start to do other things within organisation. Also you must remember that even under the Thabo Mbeki regime they would sort of retreat on some of the issues, like on the water cut offs, electricity cut offs also what some of the struggles would recede for that particular reason. Yes there was a... I think the Zuma victory at Polokwane did have an impact on our mass constituency and I don't think we can sort of ignore that fact that our own constituency, or certain sections of our constituency were sort of influenced by Zuma and that was one of the factors. I took into consideration when we were debated in 2009 about the national elections, that some of our constituencies, particularly the members the general membership were gravitating towards ... not in terms of becoming members of the ANC, but seeing Zuma providing some kind of relief for the problems they are experiencing. I think it did have an impact on the mass constituency but in terms of what I call the militants of the APF and I don't think that has made any... had any impact on the militants from that political point of view. I think that militants became exhausted and after seven years of continuous battles and struggles sustaining organisation and sometimes that natural sort of development more for others than for certain comrades in terms of that particular issue. You must remember that many of the newer community struggles, the APF was not able to connect up because of this internal kind of dynamic within the APF, where the APF found itself at that particular conjuncture ... so that new energy didn't find any resonance within the APF to reenergise the APF etc. I think 2008 that changed a little bit because we had the influx of newer movements from Tshwane. I mean Tshwane became a kind of a growth area for the APF because of the struggles there and those militants there they came into the APF and many of them are quite active in the APF and they are driving certain issues of the APF. So you can see that, as I said earlier on, the dynamic within the APF, those ebbs and flows of communities in certain regions in terms of where they are in terms of the struggles and resistance. Now I am saying in 2008 that sort of changed a little bit because of the influx of the Tshwane communities into the APF, that was 2008?

**Dale:** Late 2008?

John: Ja late 2008 early 2009 and in 2009. That sort of changed. I think that also put pressure on all the older militants in the organisation and I am glad that there is a little bit of shifting of the people playing a role within the organisation. Newer people coming in, I don't think we have had an opportunity to a similar kind of extensive political education as we used to in the past. So I mean that is one of the things I think we are in the process of doing that. You know the conferences we are having, the workshops we are having ... to try to consolidate newer layers that are coming into the organisation.

**Dale:** And given that what you just said, how would you describe... I think you have already mentioned, you have already sort of alluded to this in the earlier, in the last period leading up to the present. How would you describe the general level of what you would call political consciousness amongst the APF's core constituency and the activist base or militant base as you would say? Do you see any changes over time or has that just maintained itself to a degree or has it changed in any fundamental way ... in terms of the way in which as you say one of the successes that the APF had in the mid-years was, that it

developed a cadre, that the militants were able to make the connections and to sustain a critique as well as the struggles. Is that still the case or how would you describe it in the more present period?

**John:** I think it is still the case. I think the community uprisings over the past year have sort of reconfirmed, reinforced the kind of political perspectives that the APF militants are having. I think even the way they analyse and relate to these new struggles that are there. For them those are important struggles and the APF must connect up with that and I mean they have been initiating those kinds of what the NGOs call outreach, you know what I mean? Go out to these communities, link up with them invite the militants to come to the APF meetings, conferences even workshops. So I mean for them the fact that they have that kind of orientation, says something about their understanding of building a broader movement that can resist the kind of neo-liberal policies of the ANC Government. Even their sort of critique of the demands of some of these movements like removal of the councillors - to them that is limited because you are just going to replace the one councillor without dealing with the underlying sources of the problems. Also they are very cautious about... not cautious in fact they look at the struggle, they look at who is leading it and they also caution people if they can see there are opportunistic elements wanting to use people's grievances for internal fights within the ANC, you know they are able to analyse and to respond. So it shows you that the kind of understanding of the ANC is quite deep rooted within the APF militants. I think that question of the ANC was settled in 2004 when one of the political groups proposed that we vote for the ANC in 2004. That issue went for a vote almost ninety percent of the APF voted no in that position. The ANC in terms of where the ANC's at, because the understanding ANC amongst our militants, that question was settled along time in 2004. I think these... as I can see from the way the militants are relating and responding to the other struggles and their preparedness to actually link up and build solidarity and integrate them under the banner of the APF or under the broader kind of social movement banner with a clear understanding of the ANC shows that it has been consolidated and strengthened.

**Dale:** How would you apply the same examination or in your opinion, assessment of the social side, the social relations, because that's more the political and ideological side? The APF has experienced as most movements have, a number of challenges and problems with regard to internally and social values and social relations in particular , the gender question and the relationship between them ... How have you seen that with regards to APF trying to deal with it and to inculcate certain social values that would be consistent with a radical political and economic agenda?

**John:** I think that is one of the major challenges for the APF is what you term the social aspect. I think it is because the nature of our issues and nature of the struggles and we have not to a large extent really thoroughly and comprehensively engaged with those issues. I mean for me it is reflected through this issue of the rape case within the organisation. Yes I think the organisation took a very progressive position in terms of its understanding in defence of the victim as against the perpetrators who were militant activists of the APF, key leaders within the APF. I think the APF adopted the correct and appropriate sort of view in terms of the rape case and analysing that rape case and taking the appropriate action to suspend and charge and expel those comrades who were involved in that case.

But I think we have not politically sort of used that case to unpack all the kind of gender questions and social questions that incident threw up. I think that is why there is always this internal almost instability on this question, where other comrades are mobilising for the reinstatement of one of the perpetrators, where some of them were mobilising supporting the perpetrator at the court case whereas the APF is mobilising to support the victim to ensure that justice is done in terms of the issue of the victim. We haven't been able to create a kind of a solid unity of perspectives and understanding and values within the organisation, particularly around gender as well as the social relations, the social issues within the organisation, whereas compared to the political, we are clear, everyone is clear about that, but this question, these issues. I am not sure, maybe it is largely because we have not been able to really engage with our constituency at the level of the communities because largely the APF's relationship with the mass constituency is through the affiliates and through the leadership of the affiliates. If an affiliate leadership have a different perspective or understanding or view on gender or social questions, you know what I mean the view of the APF I don't think filters through. I think for me that is probably part of the reason why we didn't have that kind of a similar development as in the case of the political. The political it's easier because peoples immediate problems relate with the ANC, you know what I mean, the target, the enemies are the same in the organisation. But gender and social issues are much more personal to put it that way you know there's a more personal element to it. There is a more personal element to it and I think that requires much more closure and deeper interaction with the constituency, with the base and I don't think we had that opportunity you know on this particular issue. I think that issue was the... even with the formation of REMMOHO, the women's structure - as the APF we never really sort of discussed the political, ideological and social underpinnings of establishing REMMOHO. I mean there were discussions I mean where we agreed, you know, but it was done more kind of formal organisationally but we never took it down... what does it mean to have a REMMOHO structure? You know that mobilises women how does it relate to understanding of gender, of all these kind of questions that we are now confronted with. The rape case you know what I mean, we had that rape case also to some extent of the contesting interests and views on this matter, also prevented us from thoroughly unpacking the questions of the issues because we had to deal with the rape case and the fallouts around the rape case in the organisation, so all the other questions we never sort of got around to actually engage with and discuss and deal with it. So for me that is one of the major, major I won't say shortcomings but major challenges of the organisation. It is also reflected in terms of how people approach the issue of money and finance, accountability around it.

Dale: Why do you think the APF despite a lot of the difficulties as we've discussed in the views as you have indicated in terms of over a ten year period. Over the last three to four years, many of the social movements that started in 1999/2000 are no longer movements, maybe there are rumps of that, some of them have split and partly disintegrated. Despite its problems and challenges the APF has remained why? How would you explain that mostly ... the fact that it's sort of still around even with its problems and its challenges.

John: Well I mean it is all the issues that I have raised earlier on, but I can summarize it. I think first of all it's the political and that's fundamental to me. I mean that provided the anchor, the vision and the

clarity for the militants. Secondly I think it is the internal organisational culture of the APF. I mean the APF is probably one of the most democratic organisations around. Where I think everyone...I don't think anyone can say that they have either been suppressed ...or they were not allowed to express their views, or they were expelled or suspended for having different views or they were ostracised for having a different view. I think that is another... for me political as I say is the key, but I think our internal organisational culture. Sometimes it is very difficult, it is unwieldy sometimes because of all the views and people, I don't know sometimes the organisational structures are bypassed and people do certain things, but at the end of the day it always comes down to the organisational infrastructure and organisational protocols and all of that. For me I think those are probably the two, I would sort of say are the strengths of the APF. I hope that it continues in that fashion for the next period to come you know. Because I mean from my experience with other mass organisations or trade unions, you know where the political becomes compromised, people who have different views on it become sidelined, vilified and also because of self interest on the part of the leadership, the organisation becomes bureaucratic ,repressive even, you know what I mean? People leave or some organisations die and if there is not political clarity, confusion, disorientation sort of sets in. That is what happened to many of the other organisations. For me I would probably say those two.

Dale: And to what extent... sorry this is just another separate kind of question. But to what extent do you think the APF's international work and which we haven't talked about really over many years, how as that impacted and shaped the character of both the political and the organisational?

John: Well I think since our early days, the World Conference against Racism, WSSD and then the World Social Forum that flow out of some of those anti globalisation struggles also contributed to the whole kind of understanding of the militants in terms of seeing that South Africa is not sort of unique in terms of the problems the working class and poor are experiencing, but also the sources, the class forces they are up against and I think WSSD sort of brought that more to the fore with all the different movements coming from different parts of the world. Also the participation in the World Social Forum, people went to different parts of the world attending the World Social Forum. Also in Africa there was also the Southern African Social Forum. So I think the APF and our militant's participation in those structures you know brought them into contact with other sort of struggles, other militants, who have maybe similar understandings or different understandings in terms of the sources of our problems. So I think that also helped cement peoples views and political perspectives on different things. Over the past two, three years I think our international workers or links have not been that extensive, those have declined as the movements internationally also declined, you know the decline in the anti globalisation movements, also our international work, our international struggles and participation also sort of declined despite us being part of some of these forums. The fact that the World Social Forum is taking on a particular character now, it's lost its initial militant open, radical sort of flavour , I think also contributed to the fact that the APF international work and solidarity also declined over the past three years.

Dale: Just to flip that around and to say that would you agree that over the last few years however in some ways the APF's own constituency and it's own material and social conditions within which it

operated become more international precisely because of the mass migration of lots of different people, particularly in Gauteng. Now we saw what happened in 2008 and how the APF responded to this. So just speak a little bit to how you think that has impacted, because that was really in communities, it is there on the ground where people are faced with newcomers, people from outside and that raises a range of questions and how the APF responded in its own communities to that?

John: I think that this problem of xenophobia happened at a time when the movements in particular the APF were not at their strongest. I think the fact that, here again even though the APF adopted formally correct positions in relation to this problem of xenophobia and particular the 2008 May violence in many of the communities. But I think the fact that movements were weak, they could not provide an alternative explanation, alternative pole in terms of how to relate to immigrants coming into the townships, coming into their lives to put it that way. And I think that in itself you know what I mean also contributed and created a space for other forces to actually mobilise on the basis of xenophobic sort of sentiments in the various townships. Because you can see where movements were strong or where movements had a presence there were no sort of outbreaks or if there were they were short lived because of the intervention and the activities of movements around that particular issue. And I think as I said. I mean the fact that by 2008 the anti globalisation movement was also in a lull, in a state of decline, so the international connections and links were also missing in terms of people's understanding and also in terms of their struggles. For me that is reflected in terms of some affiliates expressing xenophobic sentiments you know in relation to their issues, their demands and what they demand from the Government in terms of the immigrants. I think that is maybe going to be one of the key challenges, not only for the APF, but I think for the social movement, working class for a very long time to come. Because the only real sort of resistance to xenophobia is organisation and movements themselves without that xenophobia is going to reign supreme in our country and that is going to lead to destruction of any kind of resistance and progressive politics and progressive organisation within South Africa if we are not able to build a necessary mass force that can provide a powerful deterrent to elements who want to exploit the kind of poverty of people for their own sort of interest.

Dale: Okay just the last couple of questions. Given all the things we have talked about, we have talked about a lot of different challenges, strengths, weaknesses, other things ... how would you characterize what you would see as the present role, at least the immediate future role, of an organisation like the APF, given all the things that have happened and where things are now, both domestically and internationally?

John: I think the key challenge for the APF is to find a way of unifying all these different expressions of resistance, not necessarily under its own banner, not necessarily under its own organisational structure, but finding a way around a common set of demands, a common set of programmatic approaches to immediate tactical questions, to unify the movements. I think that is one of the key things the APF and movements have to sort out, it is how do we ... it is something that I grappled with at the conference that we had, you know the conference we organised. Because there we had a number of movements who were new, they don't necessarily have the same experiences, the same experiences, they never

necessarily travelled the same path that the APF travelled. How do we impart our experiences of the past ten years to these movements, both politically, ideologically but also organisationally and out of that create a kind of unified sort of mass movement within South Africa. I think that is one of the key challenges because at the moment many of these movements, my main concern is that it remains fragmented and isolated from one another. Everyday ja, there are community uprisings, resistance and struggles and all of that and for me the APF, that is a key challenge and I think the challenge for me lies into how to create not just a common set of demands but a political programmatic understanding of these demands that exists within the APF ... how to translate that to other movements and then find the appropriate organisational form for that unity. As I said it doesn't have to necessarily have to be under the banner of the APF. What is the appropriate form, taking into account the state of the movements, you know politically, ideologically, organisationally and even resource wise, financial resource wise? Because this movement can also become exhausted ... and that is when reactionary sentiments can take root. In the conference, you know the new movements were pushing the APF must set up a branch in Mpumalanga or they want to affiliate to the APF with people from Durban, the unemployed movement there in Grahamstown, the unemployed movements they wanted to set up a branch of APF in the Eastern Cape or they want to affiliate. So I think many of us in the conference were not sure how to deal with that, you know taking into account our own assessment. So we came out of the conference with a programme of action in one day, but I mean even there it is limited, but I thought at least that...so for me that is a key challenge. There is even this thing about the conference of the left and I think that is one of the problems I have with the left, you know was in the APF the way they see how unity, how mass movements are built, similar mistakes are being repeated now with initiatives that people just want to create structures you know what I mean and think that is going to bring about unity and a new mass organisational mass movement and all of that and not sort of not appreciating the task of building a movement and all the shit that goes with it [laughter] to put it that way. So I think for me that is going to be... that's the key challenge, you know for the APF and the movement generally. We agreed at the conference that we need to convene another kind of meeting or forum where we need to look at the kind of programmatic strategy that informs our demands and out of that create a set of demands that can cut across all the different issues of the movements, a kind of charter of demands, but with a clear understanding of the nature of the problem, the sources of the problems and the demands must both deal with immediate but also at the same time challenge the power relations so that whatever unity comes out there are much more strongly based. I know you are going to give an input on SMI at the conference of democratic left. For me one of the big problems with the SMI and this is something we fought after WSSD, how the SMI must progress. My thing was always that the SMI never wanted to deal with, unpack the demands of the movements. Every year we got people to report on their struggles and after then out of it we get a programme of action. We never spent time actually on housing, what are the demands of movements and what do these demands say of the understanding of the ANC government, the understanding of how they perceive capitalism and how they want to transform it and how they want to address their demands so that it can provide a much more solid basis to unity and also it becomes easier to have a programme of action because all your demands are connected and it is one of the weaknesses of the SMI. So...but I don't think you can have an approach



and say eco-socialism is the answer, because you know people, what does eco socialism mean in terms of the kind of questions people ask, unless there is a clear demonstration concretely and programmatically and people can mobilise organise around it and resist and take to the streets around it, then I mean it will make sense. So for me it is that element that is and we need to, and that is what we said we are going to do in the next meeting of all movements .., is to look more closely to those kinds of things that can provide a much more stronger basis for unity of movements in South Africa rather than have this, sometimes ritual of everyone, it is important to report on the struggles, demands etc and programme of action and we go away and come back the next year to do the same thing and we never get to the sense where we can... even if there is no agreement, but at least people have a sense of what the different views and how to deal with some of these things and you can find unity even in the diversity of the views around some of those issues. For me that's the...one of the key sort of challenges for the APF, I think as well as for the movements as a whole.

Dale: And just the last question. Do you think that ... you mentioned earlier on, you talked a lot about the character of the APF and how it's managed to do a lot of different things, with a lot of problems? Do you think the APF is up to that task, does it remain relevant, does it remain an organisation that can even maybe not with a hundred percent success and I don't think anybody will expect that but at least remain relevant and central to these struggles or is the APF an organisation that has had its time?

John: That's a very interesting question I am actually also thinking about it. I don't have a definitive view on the matter. I mean taking into account the last sort of two years of the APF. I think the APF is at a very critical stage, it either it's going to build on what it has achieved and established so far, you know more politically and organisationally or its going to implode. And the reason why I am saying this is that 2011 is coming, ja 2011 local government elections and taking from our experience over the past, I mean years now, elections always create a lot of heightened sort of tensions within the organisation and sometimes we battle to get the organisation and militants to knuckle down in terms of having a deeper analysis of the state of the movements, or balance of forces you the alignment of the balance of forces both APF and also in South Africa. Most of the questions are sometimes then dealt with emotionally or with fixed, formulated sort of views and my fear, my concern is that, that might happen again in 2011. In a context where the APF, there are a lot of new militants in the APF, many of them are around now I think like two or three years. In fact I made a kind of short test, you were not in that CC, in that workshop, one of the workshops you were not in, one of the political education workshop we had, Rosa Luxemburg, Political Education Workshops. So I asked the comrades, because we went a little bit back in terms of APF, its struggles, how it responded to neo- liberalism and you know and how it responded to the crises of 2009. So I asked the comrades who were in the meeting, there were about seventy comrades to put up their hands, those who were in the WSSD march. You know of seventy people, only ten put up their hands. You know this is a political education workshop with the leadership of the affiliates, so ten, fifteen percent of the people who were part of that workshop, who were part of WSSD. I think for me the consolidation, the political understanding, the organisational continuity, is going to be severed if the APF in the next months are not going to consolidate and entrench some of these things and there is definitely going to be a new leadership this year, within the APF and I am not sure that the

new leadership will provide the necessary political and organisational continuity for the organisation and in 2011 elections will be approached, whatever position it takes, you know the question of maintaining an organisational movement even if you participate in 2011, you know whether that's going to be possible if the leadership does not take over it doesn't have that perspective, does have that understanding of the organisation, the movement, it is imperative and the tactics that it sort of undertakes in terms of responding to immediate sort of questions and spaces that are opening. So as I say I don't have a definitive ... it is a very interesting question that you are asking and whether the next period will show that the APF has played its part and something new must arise or whether the APF is going to be a component part of the new, if it is going to play that role. Anyway, I don't have a definitive answer no, something I am also thinking about.

Dale: That is why the future always remains interesting, doesn't it? [laughter]

Dale: The very last thing I always ask every person I interview in every case, is there anything that I have not asked you, that we have not dealt with, that you think in terms of the history of the APF all of its characters, its politics, challenges, weaknesses, all of these things, that you want to add, that we haven't dealt with?

John: I think the one issue is the gender question, you asked it in relation to the social issues etc. I think our main ... as I said with REMMOHO, I think we envisaged that we, with REMMOHO will be able to develop a strong sort of gender component or organisation and also accelerate the development of women leadership within the movement and within the APF as a whole. I think that has not happened, for various reasons I think we must as an organisation the movement we must still unpack this experience with REMMOHO, because other movements do traditionally have a women's wing or women's league. Clearly we saw REMMOHO as not only being just an APF formation, but something that can become a movement of all movements in terms of gender and in terms of women questions and women leadership, So I mean for that is something that, taking into account that the large majority of our constituency are women, you know and their being in the forefront of the battles at community level, at local level, I think that's one sort of aspect that we need to explore more. Because I think there is a very real social and material basis for a strong women's movement linked to the social movements and I think for me that is a question we need to look more closely at. That is one of our ... maybe not a shortcoming but the fact that we initiated REMMOHO, the fact that REMMOHO is not in the forefront of this case, this rape case, you know what I mean, not in the forefront for spearheading the APF's position on it, articulating it not only through our own constituency, but through the constituencies outside the APF. Clearly I think it is one of the things we need to assess and to find out.

Dale: Ok

**End of tape**

**Re-start of tape**

Dale: We are just restarting and John just wanted to say a few other things.

John: Ja, the other issue in our organisation, that has always been a debate in our organisation is this question of the labour movements and the social movements. Over the past ten years, even though the APF has been at the forefront of supporting strikes and any progressive struggle by the labour movement in terms of COSATU, but there never has been kind of a similar expression of solidarity. Here I'm not only referring to the formal organisations, you know what I mean, but even in terms of the employed workers, you know they stay in the same areas sometimes, the same townships in the same informal settlements, but many of them are not, I mean its not an organic sort expression of solidarity and support for the social movements. So that question has always been addressed formerly, you know you must have alliances you must support and do it. But I mean it has never gone beyond that. We have debated this ... but it's going to be an issue that it is coming to confront the movements in the next period, how the understanding of these questions and how to bring about that organic sort of unity between social movements and employed workers. Ja, that's it.

Dale: Thanks very much John, for the time, much appreciated.

John: Pleasure.

