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Dale: Ok, we are now ready to go. It is the 23rd of February 2010 and this is Dale. Claire, first of all thanks very much for making yourself available.

Claire: No problem.

Dale: There is a range of different questions I am going to ask you and obviously we will just converse as we go along. Just for the record state your full name would you?

Claire: All of them?

Dale: All of them.

Claire: Oh dear, Claire Helen Mary Ceruti – Catholic parents.

Dale: Wow, okay and before we get started on talking a little bit about the APF, I am asking everybody a few little things about themselves, so we get a sense of the activists. Where and when were you born?

Claire: 1966 in Stilfontein, well technically in Klerksdorp, it's a neighbouring town.

Dale: Klerksdorp?

Claire: In the Free State.

Dale: In the Free State, and since then places that you've lived here or abroad?

Claire: I lived in Stilfontein until I was two and then we went to ... no wait I've got that backwards. We ended up in Odendaalsrus near Welkom, then we ended up in Windhoek. At the time it was a South African Protectorate still. My dad worked on the mines, so I got moved around a bit. And then up in Randfontein, which is an hour West of Jo'burg and then I fled to Johannesburg as soon as I could, as soon as I went to University. So that is my total history apart from nine months in Grahamstown which I hated. So that is my... ja.

Dale: Alright then just, and family, you got siblings?

Claire: Three brothers.

Dale: Three brothers?

Claire: Yeah, all older than me. The first politicisation that I had was wanting to be equal to them ... that is probably where I get all my gender politics from, was deciding that I could also be a boy. Parents pretty ordinary white South Africans, not particularly racist, not particularly anti-racist. Apparently my father's family were all syndicalists in the 1920's they came out from Italy so there was a history of all sorts of anarcho-syndicalism and such like, which was hidden from me until I was in my late twenties, when it turned out that uncle Alf and granddad had been in the 1922 strike, much excitement.

Dale: Okay and are your parents still alive.

Claire: Ja, still going, about 76 and toddling along.

Dale: Just tell us a little bit about your schooling, how far have you gone?

Claire: How, what level of education?

Dale: Exactly and where?

Claire: I did school at all those various little towns in horrible little schools in horrible little towns and then went to Wits in 1985 where I started off doing a Bachelor of Science actually, managed that for a year and then discovered that if you do sociology, you could actually do courses about the struggle and about trade unions and things like that so I changed over to a BA and I did that until ... in 1989 I did my Honours and I took six years doing my masters, which I finished in '96, which was about the ANC and nationalisation policy, why they were going to abandon it basically. Ya, that was the education.

Dale: Okay and then jobs along the way?

Claire: Jobs okay ... my very first full time job which was a contract job, ever in my life. I did a lot of student work while I was doing my masters. There were a lot of NGO's around at the time, so things like the farm workers research resource project. Then after the masters I spent a couple of years doing basically volunteer work for Keep Left predecessor – we were then International Socialists South Africa - so I was just a general dog's body, organiser, magazine editor and so on. And I did that until, sorry I just have to work out backwards ... about ten years ago, I then took a part time job at Business Report newspaper doing subbing which was an interesting experience of like seeing the beast from the inside and did that until Tony O'Reilly's empire became unbearable, and then I got a job at the University. So that was five years ago, ja in 2005.

Dale: And that is the University of Johannesburg.

Claire: The University of Johannesburg, yes doing research with a Sociological Research Centre.

Dale: Okay. Now you have intimated there in your description of some of your earlier life there, how you, just tell us a little about how you became politicised, how you became an activist?

Claire: That is a very long story actually. Look the sort of, the explicit thing was that I arrived at University with strict instructions from my parents not to follow in my brothers footsteps and get involved in politics, and it took me until Sharpeville Day, when there was, by then there was a kind of ritual at university about the students organisations would do, usually some kind of mass meeting to commemorate things like Sharpeville, and then inevitably end up marching to the edge of the university. What I didn't know at the time was that we would then get chased away by the police and come back for the next few days and going this is unacceptable and so on and so forth. So I think it was somebody in my physics class who was involved in the student movement who had a piece of carpet at the bottom of his pencil case, which was the first thing that impressed me about him ... anyway he told us about it and I entirely forgotten about my mom and dad's injunctions, they didn't care anyway, so I went along

on that and of course the police chased us away, sjambokked people, a bit of tear gas etc, which was kind of probably quite run of the mill for many students, but for me I was outraged. Not that I particularly thought that I should be part of that, but just the general idea that this was just enormous. I mean this was 1985 so there was enormous propaganda and every things fine there is nothing going on. And this was just... exposed that kind of lie I suppose but I think also just the thing of your life being physically endangered because you dare to say it wasn't very nice to say that people got shot however many years ago and that was basically it. I then joined what was then called Projects Committee which was basically the sort of activist committee of NUSAS (National Union of South African Students) at the time. I don't know if you know much of this history but at that...by that time there was the Black Students Society, black students organised separately from white students and that went back to Biko's day when he quite understandably led a walkout because the white students wouldn't violate the Group Areas Act at their congresses and things like that. Anyway I...that I only thought about later I arrived at university and that was it. There was a white student's organisation that was quite political though and quite big - there must have been you know at that time probably about sixty activists doing NUSAS in various sub committees. The main one was Projects Committee which was like the one that organised mass meetings and rallies and made endless silk screen posters by hand and that kind of thing. So that was all really just kind of... well I threw myself into all of that. And then within 85'...86'...87 within two years of that, they started a ... it had been quite a long ongoing brewing clash within the left organisations in South Africa in general between what was called workerism and populism, so that was basically an idea about do we fight apartheid purely on the basis of where anti-apartheid and we stopped there which was the populist position or a workerist position which was saying that no workers have to fight on their own basis kind of thing but also pulling things... generally the workerists were trying to pull things towards class but I think not entirely clear about how you then relate to national liberation if you like. So that was quite a big formative thing because that posed a lot of issues for me, issues of class that I had already been thinking about I suppose the things about lectures and that kind of thing and just assuming that there was somehow ... getting rid of racism wasn't going to be enough. I can't quite put my finger on how I came to this conclusion, but this seems to have been clear to me from that time - it was already very clear that the populist position had something wrong with it. And it was not long after that, that I met Alan and Derek Mosenenthal, whom you have probably never met, but anyway ... who were involved in basically a small Marxist reading group and who ... what I can very clearly remember is Alan giving me something to read about Trotsky on the United Front and this was just like a ... you know it was literally like a road to Damascus experience, it was like 'ah there! There is the position that doesn't fall in the trap of populism but also it doesn't go as far as workerism in ditching the national question if you like, but has a way of relating to the national question without giving up some class independence or an idea of class independence that we will have to fight further. So that was a kind of... that was an instant ... I don't want to call it conversion because at the same time it wasn't religious. It was just a ... you know after that I was unquestionably a Marxist and the Trotskyist as well, ja it was just like that, it just all fitted with all the debates we'd been having and gave answers to all that kind of thing. So that was the...how I became a Marxist I suppose. When I think about how I became political though there is like little things from my childhood that I can remember that aren't very big

things but that kind of must have been setting me up for this kind of thing. The first thing was that I very clearly remember when I was eight years old, I was playing in the garden and this woman with this small child came to the door looking for employment with my mum and I don't know quite what was going on, but she went inside with my mum and left the child outside and I was like 'oh dear I will have to now entertain this guest whom I don't know' and like feeling very kind of... you know how children feel like, 'eh, I've got to be good' and so I took out a ball and I started playing catch with her, with this little black child, this is the bit that mustn't be left out. And instead of my mum coming out and saying 'what a good girl you have been' she like came out and said 'Claire, stop that, come inside' and dragged me in because I was playing catch with the black girl in the front garden and that just like made me very confused about what the hell is going on. So that was something that I don't know that got parked in my head as being some kind of weird contradiction. But by the time I got to matric I can remember already having arguments with my friends that apartheid was terrible and bad and it shouldn't be there and getting angry with people for saying things that were quite normal in our social circumstances...[pause].

Dale: Okay sorry we just took a quick pause. Now we're back - go ahead.

Claire: Ja, so that was...you know there were statements that were very common in our social circles. You know people would say things like... I mean this would have been '84 so this was the first beginnings of some kind of revival in township uprisings and people would just say 'you know we should just nuke the lot of them' and people then being the operative word. You know things that you would have heard your parents say very easily. And I remember having a huge fight with one of my best friends ... that was like the end of the friendship after that, over her saying a statement like that. That bit - I have no idea how I came to that point but I can remember the fight because it was quite a big thing but I don't know how I got to the point where I was thinking differently from most of the people at my school about issues like that and that was probably... my brother was nine years older and went to university long before me and got tangled up in politics in the '90s. He wasn't particularly political himself, he was sort of soft left and involved in the Catholic left. So he wasn't really an activist or anything, he was actually just into girls and getting drunk and that sort of thing, but got caught up in a mass arrest by accident and things like that. So I suppose that kind of thing had been somehow influential on me.

Dale: Once you had become a Marxist and sort of moved quite far away from that point, what groups did you started joining a particular group or particular political formation?

Claire: Well I was involved in this reading group with Alan and Derek and there was the three of us and I think another two people at the time. All white, we didn't have any black members and we were in contact with the people in the Socialist Workers Party in the UK. So we started seeing ourselves as being part of the international socialist tradition as we would have called it. And the main thing there for us was... I think the thing about the United Front was really an important thing because that was an immediate answer to practical strategic questions of the day, about how do you take forward a fight about apartheid on class terms, basically as a way to put it. But also the other thing that obviously impressed me very quickly was the kind of things that we were reading. Now when I say we were in contact with them, I mean I suppose that maybe we might have a ... Alan might have a discussion with

somebody once a year. It was in the middle of the state of emergencies as well so you know things like that –people were cautious about getting people into trouble even though we weren't really at much risk. I do remember things like a lot of books that I would take for granted now were not available, were banned at the time and there was a book that Alex Callinicos wrote on South Africa which was produced especially for us with a blank cover because it was banned in the country. So it was produced instead of having its normal cover, it just had a white blank cover on it that they sent especially to us so that we could read it. The other things that were... the other part of the politics that I found really, not just impressive, but practically useful was understanding what had happened in Russia. I remember in my undergrad days being set an assignment about Stalin and ending up writing an essay about which I am totally ashamed of to this day. Trying to argue that Stalin didn't really have a choice, you know there he was trying to build socialism in this world where he was surrounded by capitalists and so of course he ended up doing some nasty things kind of thing, and at the time it fitted a lot with the way that the main stream movements would deal with a contradiction like that. But also it wasn't quite fitting for me, you know, like I put the essay together very convincingly but there was something that jarred, that said okay you can like do anything if it is for a good cause, you know. So there was this of how did the means and the ends link up with each other and Cliff's argument about Russia being a form of capitalism, state capitalism also for me answered a lot of questions and it was a way also of also sticking to some kind of idea of Marxism as being like freedom. Freedom for everyone rather just you know you get this small elite of people deciding what is freedom for the working class. So those things really opened up my thinking and critical thinking about the world or gave me a place for those things you know. It is not that we were not thinking critically within NUSAS at the time but there were also ... I mean things were incredibly... it is hard to imagine it now, but we were actually really incredibly isolated in a lot of ways. I mean there was for example 1985 there was this giant mine workers strike going on in the UK which I only found out about four years later sort of thing. You know there was no news coverage or that kind of thing ... uprisings that happened in other parts of the world just didn't get covered in South Africa in the news and so on. You know there is a very highly censored in a way ... I can't even imagine it looking back. Okay so that was... I am getting side tracked. We were talking about ... so that was our connection with the international socialists. So basically I haven't really dumped that politics ever since or connections or with those comrades in the world. I always found, particularly the new groups that have sprung up in Europe in the last few years have been really... you know the kind of discussions that we have had with them have been really stimulating and really thinking hard about what is going on in the world, and not just from an academic perspective, but you know thinking about how do we... how do revolutionaries actually throw themselves into that kind of thing, you know. So I found that very, you know time when things were... when it was quite hard to be politically active on the left, it was quite a sharp kind of politics that you could really, you know it was not lazy in any way you know really you had to think through everything. And at this kind of time when everything is opening up, you know it is also been important that the comrades we were talking to from that point of view and it's not the only political influence on me by the way. I had to specify that, but that comrades were also able to say okay we've been doing this like very intellectual politics for the last ten years but it is time to throw that out the window and get our hands dirty and these new waves of struggle that are happening around

Europe. Okay so at that time we were just a reading group when I first joined, which was '87 and then within two years of that I think we formed ourselves as a organisation, which we called International Socialists of South Africa. We had a big argument about whether to put South Africa on the end given that we were internationalists. And not long... okay the dates are fuzzy for me, but it was probably not long after that, that we got involved in Workers Organisation for Socialist Action and we got involved in that which was something quite a lot broader than just us, that seemed important to be linking up with other activists to try and put forward some kind of left perspective. We had a lot of arguments within that particularly over... for some reason we had an argument about the nature of Russia, which seems strange looking back because it didn't seem at that time ... I am trying to think of the dates, I suppose it would have been quite a big argument with the collapse of the Soviet Union, but again the big practical argument was how to relate to things that were going on and negotiations to end apartheid, like the constituent assembly and so on. So we had quite large... [Pause]

Dale: Okay we are just back now. So you were talking about your political group ja.

Claire: So obviously that was now obviously during the negotiations period. We then... we basically got... it is still unclear whether we got thrown out or left WOSA. There was a very strange... a kind of a witch hunt suddenly started which again looking back I am not too sure why that would have happened, why people didn't go for just saying okay we are from different organisations. But I think part of it was because it was for some people it was an attempt to form a unitary party, and therefore for us to be saying we still stick to these ideas that we were going to keep on arguing, was like saying we were going against this discipline. Whereas for us, we saw it much more as some kind of a united front saying we can work together very closely, but we don't have to give up all our pre-existing ideas to do so or agree on everything. Anyway, so it got a little bit nasty and we ended up... In fact the hot heads amongst us – by that time we were about fifteen or sixteen people - walked out before we got thrown out basically. We then...actually that was then shortly before the elections, so at that time we basically did built ISSA and were really successful shortly after the elections in terms of meeting people and signing up people that we stumbled into the situation where that was a total... there was just a vacuum in politics suddenly after the first election that all the mainstream organisations were now tied up with running a government. And at the same time there was an enormous confidence on the ground that people were expecting everything to change. The recent history was, we got this far by major struggle and therefore we... you know there was a real willingness to just go on the streets sort of thing, you know. So we as this tiny little organisation of fourteen people were able to hold mass meetings in Hillbrow over rent control for example. There were things like the Spar strike which I think was a piece of history that still needs to be properly documented where a couple of workers got fired for going to Mandela's inauguration and there was basically a national strike over this issue. And we related to that and so on and then especially in Potchefstroom in particular where our comrades there were able to actually be quite instrumental in leading a number of struggles over relocations and over services and this was not long after 1994...it probably was in '94 or '95 I have to check those dates. But for example they were very influential in helping to organise a...there was an attempt to move some people out of one part of the township to a squatter camp up on the hill and basically the comrades helped to organise the thing

that said we don't want to moved until... we will be happy to go because people felt overcrowded if, when we get there services are in place - there must be water, there must be lights, there must be all of these kinds of things. People are quite used to building their own shacks in the area. So in some ways that was like a bit of a preview to what started to happen much later in the struggles that the APF related to ... so they actually successfully managed to win that in Potchefstroom through these giant you know mass marches where half the township was coming out and marching to say 'we are not going to Zonderwater without water' and actually won that where today the place is fully serviced ... whereas at a lot of the other places there was this site-and-service without much of the services coming in. So I suppose that was a... that was a kind of period where you know you were able to be a revolutionary in a very practical way about very day to day issues to say look we can really push the envelope at the moment, we can win some victories. To put it quite frankly, what we fucked up was trying to then link those issues much more directly to a much bigger picture of society and looking at capitalism in general, it is not that we didn't do it at all. But we weren't really focusing for example on education of members if you want to be it in a very boring way or just like you know taking seriously that thing of building Marxists within the struggle. And that meant that then there was this big upturn in struggle that was starting to hit this wall of people were getting on the streets because they expected that this government would be in their favour and then as people started to discover well it is actually not in our favour and started you know that disillusionment started setting in and obviously that whole struggle just started to... went down. And we were pretty slow in recognising that that was happening just because it was so exciting, you know we spent all our lives being this small organisation within the bigger movement and to suddenly be a small organisation that in some localised cases was at the centre of the bigger movement in some way, like having real influence. I think was so exciting that we couldn't see past it. So the upshot of that was that we ended up suddenly in that... oh I don't even know what year that was in. Can you remember when we joined the Communist Party, the three of us, four of us.

Dale: I believe it was probably around '97-'98.

Claire: That late, when was that year?

Dale: '97, the APF was formed in July 2000.

Claire: Oh ja no okay that makes sense.

Dale: From '97?

Claire: '97 - '98 then ja. So basically we got back to that point where were sort of back down to four people in a room - it is not that all those other people disappeared completely, but a lot of members just got burnt out because it was a really high level of, you know we really were... we did nothing else for three years except the struggle. You know there were just so much happening and so much potential but there didn't seem any point and then when that stopped getting results then people just... you can imagine, people just collapse. A lot of people moved away, that kind of thing and some people just dropped out of activity subsequently re-appeared a lot of them. So that is the point at which we were

sitting around the three of us thinking 'what on earth are we going to do now' and there was a public meeting of the Communist Party where I can't remember who was speaking, but the person basically said the Communist Party has now thrown open its doors, we are not a sectarian organisation, we are open to all sorts of things. It had obviously been going through its own upheavals with the collapse of Soviet Union where people were being forced to question things and coming up with some very shoddy answers to that but that's... you know the official answers. But nevertheless there was this idea that somehow the Communist Party could be more open, so we thought okay let's see. It seemed to be the only thing still moving politically around Johannesburg at that time so we went off and joined and that's, that part of the story you know.

Dale: Well that was my question then. My next one is about leading to what then became the APF. So just speak a little bit from your perspective once you were in the Communist Party in the Jo'burg central branch in particular. How that and the activities there led to eventually a couple of years later into 2000, to the formation of the APF?

Claire: Okay I hope to say that the dominant memory I've got of that time was of the period we spent in the Communist Party, I think it was two and a half years, was just of the huge frustration that before you could take any fight to the streets, you had to have a huge fight inside the organisation. So even though there was a section of the Joburg branch that was left leaning, but there was also a section that was very conservative in the sense of sticking to the kind of Stalinist way of doing things and Stalinist politics, you know, some idea that the role of a Communist Party was simply to encourage the ANC in government and support it in every turn and support it in everything it did. So of course it was as you can remember, hugely contradictory because that was the time when the first moves towards... well not the first moves because privatisation was actually something that the apartheid government started to initiate but where we suddenly found this ANC government carrying through all these privatisations and just swallowing the Washington consensus whole, you know that kind of thing. So that was the first thing I remember was that there was always a fight with that right wing in the party before we can take anything to the streets which didn't stop us from nevertheless taking things to the streets anyway. I remember the first... what was it the September 26th the World Bank- IMF protests. I remember that I was still wearing a Communist Party t-shirt at that time. In fact I got quoted as a SACP spokesperson which was mainly people like Vincent Vena after we stormed the offices of Anglo American. So there was you know...we were able to still get involved in all sorts of things. But the other thing that I remember from that was the effect of having that huge right wing in the party was also that the people who were trying to be left, ended up getting... they were still limiting their own imagination to what might be possible within the confines of the party so there was still the sort of... everything was still about keeping the party together even if we were challenging where it was going you know. So I can remember getting quite frustrated with that way of approaching things of you know people like the... there was that one year quite a left, the election of quite a left executive in the Joburg branch, which was...I am trying to remember Mazibuko Jara, Kim Jurgensen I even got elected onto it somehow God knows how... Ziko Tamela. Okay they are not necessarily these hard left people, any of them but compared to the thing it was seen as the left, a victory for the left in the branch. And I just remember

that people would be so careful about saying 'okay, we want to challenge this thing that the organisation is saying or doing, but we have to do it within the proper structures and yes we want to do something about Igoli 2002, but we must do it within the proper structures and take it through the province first and that kind of thing, which drove me absolutely insane. Okay but the one good thing that came out of it was the formation of the APF which I believe of all people Clive Swan was quite central in that, everybody's favourite. Ja let me not call him a Stalinist on tape ... I suppose I just did. Stalin is groping out of it. Okay, so if I can remember quite in the beginning and this is again we would have to check my facts. What I recall is that the early APF was basically people from the Communist Party, I remember people from SAMWU being there. I remember Trevor Ngwane being at some of the earliest meetings and he would have been organising with ... it was basically a committee ... he was an ANC councillor still at the time and it was just in the course of that, that he got expelled for criticising Igoli 2002 and then that group of people from the university which would have been people like Nic and so on who were... they were taking up Igoli 2002, but there was also some program at the university that kind of meshed with it which I don't remember the details of.

Dale: They were doing some outsourcing and they were fighting the rights of a lot of the workers, ja. Okay so that was then and coming together there. Do you remember that initial anti-Igoli Forum, I think it was called and people started meeting and then when the APF actually formed itself. What do you remember from the initial groups that were ... I should say the founding members or individuals members who were founding members of the APF?

Claire: Pretty much that what I have just said. I remember SAMWU being there. I seem to remember John Apollis being there for some reason. I am not sure if that's accurate. You were there obviously. Again I suppose the thing that came in very fast was that contradiction; SAMWU ran quickly into that contradiction that had somehow been pushed to this point of wanting to oppose the thing but was still very nervous of being seen as being outside of the alliance in doing so or breaking the alliance. So I remember that happening quite fast, that SAMWU seemed to peel away. And of course in the middle of all of this there started being the right wing in the party and in the ANC obviously hadn't given up their fight. So there was Trevor's expulsion probably within a year of that, you Dale getting expelled and that kind of attack on the Left. By that time the APF was pretty much no longer anything to do with Congress if I recall correctly by the time you got expelled... because I remember that we at that point had a... in the lead up to that whole thing when there was that attack on the left in the Joburg branch and generally and all those expulsions and so on. I remember that we talked about it and said look okay basically this was an interesting experiment being in the Communist Party, but actually there was now...we came in there at a time when there was very little else happening and now something else is happening. And there is this potential for organising and for struggle to continue that has ended up outside of these mainstream organisations, which was the APF. And I suppose that is what at that point we just thought you know the Communist Party is not really worth the effort any longer.

Dale: And from your recollection at the time and tell me if I am incorrect but right from the beginning, you almost reformed that group, that previous group that you had and it had now taken another name called Keep Left?

Claire: Oh ja actually the Keep Left name by the way was ... we took that before we joined the Communist Party actually and the reasoning - let me try and explain that... the reasoning behind it. It wasn't actually... it was around the time that we were going into the Communist Party but just a little bit before if I recall. Basically the name 'Keep Left' meant we were here in a situation where the sort of leadership of ANC and so on would drifting rightwards very fast and we could see that there was obviously a large number of people who weren't entirely happy with this, you know people who had fought apartheid, who expected much more from it, who weren't happy with it and who maybe didn't yet in fact definitely yet didn't have the confidence to leave. And so the idea of the Keep Left thing was to say look we are not making a big deal about are you in or out of the Communist Party or in and out of the ANC. But the question is what is it that you would have liked the ANC to have been doing, you know like the idea that they... of sticking to what it was that people expected from them you know and trying to build something around that. So again it was an attempt to do something a bit different from what we'd...you know what I'd cut my teeth on politically was about being - political clarity theoretical clarity getting the argument right on a... you know the ideas right, you know in that period in the eighties when there was a lot of struggle happening, you know struggle was a dime-a-dozen but getting the ideas right was a lot harder. And what we found ourselves in with this situation was something where we were more trying to... trying more and more to think strategically about how do we link up with layers of people broader than ourselves and try to build something that can go, you know where we can start to have those kinds of arguments about theoretical clarity and so on. So Keep Left came out of the beginnings of that and so I suppose the thing of joining the Communist Party also fitted with that kind of thing. We kept Keep Left going all the way through that time as a magazine which also got us into trouble in the party, but not as much as I would have expected strangely. And then by the time that the Communist Party had become impossible to work in with all the expulsions and so on, we still had Keep Left and we then linked up and I don't actually remember how, oh no I do remember how. We were involved with someone at the university called Lawrence who was a member. Throughout this time we kept a small group going to university, at WITS university and Lawrence had been talking with people in his own township which included particularly Tebsa, is one of the most important in terms of who is still active in Keep Left and so we were already a little bit in place by then to start building something that was just itself, 'Keep Left' we called ourselves. I think for a while we called ourselves Young Communist Lions, that was before the YCL was formed - Communist Young Lions. When the YCL was formed that name became a bit more confusing and I think we'd moved on from that sub title. I think we just called ourselves 'Keep Left'. So the group around Tsakane was one of the... a group that grew quite fast, a group of young socialists in particular, not just within the APF and so on, not just around ideas of how do we get socialism and that kind of thing and that was just around the time that the APF was really starting to build its name as an organisation of struggle.

Dale: And let's say from those two or three early years after the APF was formed. What kind of practical struggles do you remember that drove that formation and growth of the APF? Why were people responding to the APF in that particular period?

Claire: Okay the electricity struggle was obviously a big one and that is the one I remember most clearly around Soweto and that was I mean that was very obviously ... for the people affected it was just the outrage of being you know someone who sees yourself as being a respectable pensioner, or you know someone who had done their time, done the work, put in the fight against apartheid, expected things to change and now suddenly you were being cut off for being in arrears. So I think that was a big driver, the basic outrage of that group of people who were in some senses a marginal group and ... let me just explain what I mean by that ... it's not that they were marginal to society or marginal in you know some kind of group of outcasts or something, but preferably ordinary people, but people who were very short of money, pensioners and unemployed and so on. So where as when the... so even though I think large sections of society would have been very confused by the push to pay when that started coming in, you know at the same time you kind of... the confusion would have been matched by yes you could somehow scrape the money together and put it out and be legal. So the confusion remains like somewhere just in your head you don't talk about it with other people but you might be thinking about it. But there was like a big layer of let's call it the proletariat, the propertyless whatever, who would've just kind of fallen into line even though they wouldn't have liked doing it when the whole thing came in of paying for electricity. Whereas you know this was a layer of people that ...actually a lot of them just couldn't - it wasn't an option - and I think that could've been, you know that outrage, you know you want to be legal maybe, but you can't. So that sort of thing of being pushed into a corner, I think was a big thing. At the same time there would have been that whole layer of people who have been around the block a few more times who also within that... within those marginalised sections by the way, it wasn't just like middle class activists if you want to call it, like the university students and so on - who would've seen a bigger picture also of this being part of the... you know like a push toward neo-liberalism getting its claws and trying to oppose that. I also remember on the East Rand the anti-eviction struggles were big and I think a very similar thing coming in, people who thought we were at last going to be able to be legal, we are going to be able to have a house, we are going to be able to live somewhere without these things and suddenly with SERVCON ...what was the name of it ... SERVCON or whatever, by getting their debt sold off to a private company and then they ended up being unable to pay and getting evicted, all these people who would've thought of themselves as being very respectable, suddenly discovering that there was no space for them to be respectable in the new South Africa. Anti - evictions, water and electricity became an issue quickly. I mean I think also it was, the whole APF thing that was crucial was the first crack in the monolith, you know that actually the ANC had been or at least the Congress Movement had dominated all struggle since the early eighties at least, in my memory, my whole political development took place within a circumstance where it was a nationalist organisations dominating, nationalist or Stalinist organisations dominating so I think it was very significant that there was this beginning of something that was beginning to something outside of that and I think that's what APF represented. People remained trapped in that.

Dale: Okay we can come back to that. But what do you remember about the early organisational development of the APF, in other words how it started from what was really your activist forum into what became more of a formal movement with structures and things like that?

Claire: Not very much.

Dale: ... well you don't have to ...

Claire: Look what I can remember is that things were...at the beginning things actually were very... I found the APF a very open... let me call it...because maybe it wasn't an organisation... but it was a very open grouping. You could pretty much... you know you felt... I always felt absolutely comfortable and free to say whatever I thought in that forum. And I can't say that I have ever gotten to a point where I didn't feel that way, you know I've always felt that I had as much right as anybody to say just what I wanted, you know from a personal point of view. There was obviously as things started there was that period when there were all arguments about political organisations and should they be allowed, which I remember as being quite a big argument for the organisation, you know one of the few times that I felt that my right to be in the APF was somehow in question. I understand that there were issues of... the issues of politics was really in some ways more about the ANC and so on than about an organisation like Keep Left, but obviously it did start to come over to say somehow any kind of politics is not allowed. So I kind of remember that being one of the... one of the big points as things started to kind of settle and to solidify if you can want to put it that way, organisationally is that that was one of the big arguments, like should an organisation like Keep Left be able to affiliate as a political organisation. It wasn't just us there were other organisations as well. So there was that period where there was a bit of a debate about whether only community organisations were legitimate and what gave you that legitimacy. Apart from that you know, I think it was a shame to lose the activist forum in some ways. I think there were always inevitably going to be issues that as soon as you started trying to move from it's early days which was quite an impromptu front if you like of organisations that were being swept along together in a general direction, in the same general direction you know. It was easy to find unity, it was easy to find things to unite on. As we started to settle down and try and become more of an organisation and more formal and have the formal structures. I think that was where some of those contradictions start getting exposed about who...that you...of course it...there is an issue when you've got an organisation that's partly composed of so called communities, you know and people who are just someone who from the township because their water has been cut off, compared to someone like me or you who is there because of much bigger political vision. And off course issues start to come up about who speaks the most, whose voice gets heard most, who's most confident to speak and that kind of thing. So I think that was part of the issues that were playing themselves out. At the same time I think the APF hasn't done badly in terms of making sure that the voice of the APF is not just like a middle class activist voice which I don't think is like any less valid in one sense than any other voice. But you know you don't want a thing where people don't feel confident to talk. I think there was also a lot of politics that got fought by organisational means though and that is a pity, you know that it got ... instead of just confronting political issues head on and having an argument about those things, a lot of it subverted into what kind

of structure do we have, do we have the activist forum, or do we have the... what was it, the organising committee that replaced it? I'm so fuzzy about all those details

Dale: And then we had elected office players, executives, co-ordinating committees and all of those things, yes.

Claire: Sure, sure. I mean I think okay look, those things did all have to happen, you know you can't like sustain an organisation, but I think it also got us onto... there's like a kind of slightly more... there was also questions about what we were that we never, well maybe could never have been hammered out satisfactorily in terms of how we organise that, that it's...it became a question of is the APF an organisation? Well, yes of course it is an organisation, but is it like a unitary organisation where everyone has somehow to agree to be part of it, you know and where there is now a discipline of the APF over everyone, or is it still a meeting place of organisations involved in struggle where we can get together and talk about what we are doing and co-operate. And I think that's never actually been quite resolved. I think in a lot of ways we still operate as - to the extent that we are operating - as the latter getting together to struggle, but there is also I think quite often underneath the argument of no politics in the organisation, there is also a kind of thing where quite unconsciously people are saying we don't need a political organisation, we just need to organise like end up trying to substitute the APF for that political organisation and kind of try to turn it into what they would like to see politically. Okay now for me there's no problem with saying politically, I think this is where we should be going, this is how I think about the world and I wish everyone else would too etc, etc. Sure, but if you try to make an organisation like the APF into a political party so to speak, especially without saying that's what you are doing, and I think that that did happen unconsciously at some point that people were saying we don't want politics, but at the same time politics was there and they were trying to make the whole APF into that. Whereas if you can say ja okay we disagree on things, we don't all think the same on all of these issues and we are here not because we all agree on politics but we agree on this or that struggle. You know it means that those kinds of issues don't have to become make or break in the same way. So for me that's if there is a weakness it was that kind of thing was never... has remained very unresolved in a way you know. That the APF kind of hovers between being like a party and not quite a party, but in some ways like a party and in some ways still a front for struggle so from... I do remember paying careful attention to all those details of organisation but it all basically went out of my head the minute the argument was over. Yes I think they are important and that kind of thing but I care more about thinking about where is the next struggle and what are we doing about it, you know.

Dale: Sure. And how do you think in those early years, particularly after the large events of the World Conference against Racism, the World Summit on Sustainable Development - that sort of in some ways put the APF on the political map. How do you think the response of the state, of the ANC, of the traditional left affected the development or shaped the development of the APF, because there was clearly quite a response?

Claire: Well I think even never mind the response of the State to begin with... we got a little bit... we were tripped up by our own success I think and I think that was a very big thing that actually... okay the

first thing it showed was that there really was a space for organisations outside of those mainstream organisations to do something, to get something together and I think it also showed that that space was open you know even to relate to people who were a little bit still within the orbit of the mainstream organisations, so the fact that all the Palestine Solidarity work ended up in the same march with us, you know because a lot of that would've been softer on the ANC than we were as a grouping of organisations. I do think though that we got big headed about what we were, you know we made the mistake of thinking that it was all because of us that it came together. And that was a bit like the anti-war movement really that it was... there would not have been that anti-war movement there was without us, but we shouldn't think like this just because we went and did the work that it materialised. Okay, there was like a whole lot of things, currents pushing in our favour and we were able to coalesce it, we didn't invent it, we didn't create it and I think the same thing was much... was very much true for the Summit for Sustainable Development march in particular the Alex to Sandton march and also the World Conference against Racism. I don't know if that contributed to our - you know that kind of arrogance - that in the following years that people, when things did start moving still under you know when there was beginning to be these movements that were still very much under the umbrella of the alliance somehow. So particularly the strikes for me is the biggest issue, but also you know the moves that ended up in Polokwane and ended up in Zuma and so on - that we kind of, quite honestly I think we pretty much stood back from all of that and I think that is a tragedy, still I look Julius Malema getting to be the guy who say's, you know yesterday that the problem in society is the owners of property and I want to scream because it should be us getting that limelight quite honestly, you know. And we could have been getting it if we had been less arrogant about who we were and who we could talk to. So ja, I think unfortunately those things were great successes and that's a good thing, but it was also a bad thing for us in a way, no it wasn't a bad thing. Our interpretation of those things I think we got arrogant after them. The state's response, you know pretty much the state was bound to respond like that, you know how else can they respond? So for me that's not...it wasn't like there was a major crack down, there was in a sense there were... it wasn't like we were living through a state of emergency where our organisations couldn't continue. So for me the state's response wasn't really the main thing and when you look, subsequently its also become very clear that it wasn't personal, well yes it was personal, but it wasn't just the APF that's been responded to like that. Basically anything that's ... anything that puts out any kind of challenge has gotten a very similar response. So all of those delivery protests that started up, you know they all got attacked with rubber bullets, every strike that has happened in the last five years has... every single strike have been met with you know somewhere along the line there's a story of peace breaking things up, rubber bullets, teargas, people saying but we weren't even doing anything you know, or one stone was thrown or whatever, you know. So I think that's not a unique experience. So for me that doesn't really...it doesn't come much into my ideas of how we developed as the APF, it doesn't really feature big.

Dale: Okay alright.

Claire: Other people could obviously have a very different experience. I mean I am talking as someone who is based in Joburg and...

Dale: Not as of right now, I think it's okay.

Claire: We could move into that room if necessary.

Dale: I think we are okay. Again - these are from your recollections what I call in the early to middle years from 2003 after the WSSD... What was your recollection of the APF's work with other progressive forces both domestically and internationally and the extent to which it went beyond its immediate constituency?

Claire: Okay in terms of international work we were the flavour of the month okay and I can remember APF people appearing in the oddest corners of the world like popping up at conferences in London and far flung corners and you know if I went... the times that I went to places in... I am trying to remember where I went in Europe, but that would be 'oh, you are part of the APF, we have heard about them, ah' and you know they would come up with names, Trevor Ngwane was particularly well known and you know people were really interested in the APF and what it was doing and so on. I think in local terms, I think you have made a name for ourselves undoubtedly and obviously a name that was... I think the real challenge that we did pose to the mainstream movements was clear in response to us. There was a concerted effort to try and discredit the ultra left or the... that ultra left is actually a kind of counter revolution in those early few years, you know I think that tried the real potential we had of growing way beyond our numbers but again I think we really didn't... we never broke free of a kind of parochialism of thinking we've got these issues that we are struggling over and we want to go and ask other organisations to support us, which yes we did, we did make demands I think at some point for example SAMWU to support us, but there was never an equivalent notion of saying if anybody else is fighting, we are not, we going to go and support it regardless of whether or not they are supporting us or not. Okay and I think that was... I can remember the discussions, okay with the anti-war movement I think there was a difference there that people did come around to saying 'yes we need to do something about this even if it isn't about my cut off or my eviction or whatever'. I do remember that we had to go through an argument about solidarity though a lot of people were saying okay, we will go through this but then we can expect the Indians to come and support us when we've got a cut off, and it is not a bad thing to say 'look, we supported you, it is not a lot to ask that's fine, but it was almost like people were thinking if we do this the solidarity will come back automatically. That's not an argument, it is not something you have got to build and you don't have to get used to the fact that maybe you never will, you know. In terms of and I think it comes back to the fact that I think the opportunity that we missed and that we still keep on missing is that when things did start to you know what I said earlier, you know as the APF said was the first crack in the monolith. The next crack in the monolith came actually around the... where are we? it was probably around 2005 when COSATU and Mbeki started to clash more and more over the issue of jobs, is the thing where it shows up, okay and I am sure that underneath that would have been a thousand little incidents of people going, 'no fuck it, this is not what we fought for, for so long against this new elite that's developed and so on as well as a lot of some unscrupulous people going ' Well you know, I didn't join the struggle to be poor and somehow I am still poor or middle class, instead of right there at the top and that is also because all the opportunities for councillor has been

taken up by these existing people and I want to get in. There was that as well, but there was also layers and layers of people who were saying this is just not what we have fought for and that I think starts to really show through with the clashes between Mbeki and COSATU over jobs, this is where it starts coming out. Again in a very... you know like the way leadership of those organisations took, it was terribly confused, you know that we were still saying we... they are not saying okay we need to fight for another society, they are still saying we want a President who will listen to us and what I remember in the APF was that big debate around the time when 2005-2004 we saw a retail strike, I think it was Pick n Pay and there hadn't actually been a big national strike where people had actually been active for, I don't know...

Dale: Was that Checkers?

Claire: No, no Checkers was in 2006.

Dale: Okay.

Claire: So it was, it must have been 2005. So it's around that time when Mbeki said that we have turned the corner, and they started getting themselves these... the executives started giving themselves these big pay increases and around the same time the delivery protests are already beginning. So I can't remember which places it was but there started to be this wave of delivery protests that are outside of APF borders, right? Outside of where we are organised okay and I think that in itself was telling us something is changing. Now what I remember of the debates we had inside the movement, this wasn't just in the APF, but that the way the debate took itself was that we ended up complaining pretty much that we could do what we could to the service delivery protest which was absolutely necessary and to try and link up with them, but which also was practically not that easy, because they were often in very far flung places. So okay now this part I am hazy about exactly what we did, but I do know that the APF did send delegation to a lot of places to try and make links which was great, pools all around. But when it came down to sorting like a thing like a picket line in Johannesburg or in Soweto, or in you know one of these places it was a giant argument where again people were sort of saying well, COSATU has never supported us, they are part of the ANC, therefore they are part of the enemy, therefore we don't go down to a picket line and I think one of the results of that that now again I don't want to give us too big a head about what we could have done, you know, so I am not saying that APF could have changed the course of events that instead of things going to Zuma, they went in a slightly different direction although that's not impossible in my imagination, by the way, but you know how do we answer a question like that? But certainly I think there is a huge layer of people who were active, going on strike for the first time or maybe not for the first time who were active in unions and that kind of thing, but whose ideas were getting challenged about that, you know because Mbeki was being such a shit, that people started saying 'this isn't what we wanted, we need something different' and at that crucial time we weren't there saying 'here is something different' that's this, that's socialism, that's like a particular idea of how to organise those kinds of things that could have at least influenced a layer of people and certainly broken us out of the little gate that we seemed to be in, to be largely unemployed pensioners. I was really surprised on one of the marches of the ABI workers of Coca Cola when somebody popped up in an

APF t shirt, first time I have ever seen such a thing and he was just a worker there, yes so he happened to meet the APF and got involved in it, but there shouldn't be by now... I feel like now there should be a thing like four or five t-shirts from the APF that's come on, not from people from the outside. So I think we were really slow about that kind of thing and I mean I can remember we did... it is not that APF did nothing about any of the strikes, okay I remember finally on the Shoprite issue people got moving and did a couple of pickets and that was brilliant. And people in Soweto were quite active in the Shoprite issue, and again on the Public Sector strike and I can remember one general APF intervention in the Public Sector strike there was one particular march that the APF came out full force. But I always felt there was never much you know after these... oh and I am forgetting that actually there was a point where we went a couple of times to COSATU shop stewards, now this would have been in the first few years of our existence to COSATU shop stewards councils and collected names as I remember of people who were interested but again we didn't really do much to follow it up and I can sort of understand why we had enough to get on with just with what was already with us, you know let alone running after people who were kind of just interested but I really do think we missed a giant opportunity to break out of our sort of existing narrow groove that we have gotten ourselves into and to really spread out to a much wider layer of society and started getting influence there you know. And I think that's really... I think that shows in the fact that suddenly people like Zuma and Malema have seized the limelight of that so called opposition to Mbeki and it's all of that you know it is just when people think about what brought down Mbeki, we don't feature, you know as the APF and that's... you know and yes we actually didn't bring down Mbeki, we have got to be honest about that, but also if we hadn't existed, I think things might have taken a lot longer to get to this point and all of those kinds of things, so I think we were selling ourselves short.

Dale: To what extent to what you have just described and some of those that you would just classify as missed opportunities and lack of orienting towards others outside the conventional constituencies that made up the APF. To what extent do you think that, that was impacted on by very limited human and financial resources in relative terms? Do you think that was a factor at all, or do you think that and relating it particularly to the political consciousness and activist consciousness within the APF?

Claire: Ja look finances it's never... people didn't have big funding when they went, you know. In the beginnings of the APF there wasn't big funding. The very early... you know the early work that people... I don't want to call it Trevor's committee, just I can't remember what it would have called itself at the time, but you know that wasn't done by big funding from the APF that was done by word of mouth and blah! blah! blah!. And the whole point with things like especially Pick n Pay, Shoprite, those kinds of strikes was that those were strikes ... you didn't need money to get to a local Shoprite, you probably went there everyday shopping you know. So I think money was not the issue either even though we could have done better without money. It was... it would've been much more of an issue linking up to leading of doing of re-progress in Balfour which was far away. I think the political... and again I think again where it comes back to some where we didn't win ourselves to an understanding of...there's again it comes back to a kind of arrogance of thinking that because I have broken with the ANC and seen the light or whatever, anyone else who hasn't, there is something wrong with them. Okay so I think that was

one version of it was...and I came across quite explicitly if you remember those arguments that we had about should we support a particular strike or not or should we go to a COSATU rally. That would become people saying quite explicitly 'no this like the ANC is the enemy and COSATU is with the ANC, therefore COSATU is the enemy, therefore any member of that is the enemy. So I think it was much more a political question. And part of the political question was also about how to... we conceived of ourselves, what we thought we were doing as a group were we seeing ourselves somehow and I think it is easy seeing ourselves that way and seeing ourselves as kind of vanguard in a very... even though very many of us would run away from that word, just that the hearing it, but because we were by accident the first challenge to the ANC monolith again giving the idea that somehow we were also enlightened the enlightened few, so to speak. I don't know I mean I am exaggerating for a fact and it makes us sound really horrible and I think, it is obvious why you would easily fall into that trap without even thinking hard about it or feeling that we have gone so much further than other parts of the movement and we need to keep ourselves somehow like we have got to hang on to that fact that we were ahead of things, that we have broken with the ANC, that we have broken with the whole congress movement or any notion of it, you know. So I think part of it was almost a kind of unconscious protectiveness in that sense of believing in ourselves to have gone so much further and to be able to hang onto that purity almost. I think another part of it though was also just parochialism, you know that people just get caught up and particularly if you are unemployed, living in somewhere in the Vaal or something, you know your horizons are very limited by the fact that you don't have much in your pocket. Okay so it is not always so easy, and just that money itself was such a hassle. So when I think about a lot of the arguments we had within the APF that ended up in arguments over resources and where would the resources go, why did that struggle get things and our struggle didn't get money, you know those kind of little bickering if you will excuse me using that word. But it was essentially that we ended up bickering about things like that and I think that was also partly the...that was partly a result of the base that the main base of the APF being very much being pretty much the people being at the bottom of the power. And I then think there was also an issue of how we conceived of that layer of people that... I am trying to think whether we had that argument explicitly. To some extent when there was a argument about COSATU and what the strikes meant in 2005 which you know there was that long paper that Oupa wrote which was the sort of...but it wasn't only...yes that wasn't over the formation of the new UDF, so called, that it started but it turned into a much bigger argument about conceiving of the nature of COSATU and the nature of so-on and there was quite a strong notion within that argument that somehow kind of almost quite like a wretched of the earth argument, that the people who were the natural constituency of the APF, I say natural just that this is how it turned out, the people who were first pushed who were at the cutting edge of the early days of neo-liberalism. Not the cutting edge... what is the word I am looking for? Ja the people who got bashed hardest by it first, who therefore naturally gravitated towards what APF was trying to do, the people who quickly saw that this government was somehow not our government and most clearly. And that deterred unemployed pensioners etc , but there was also sometimes quite an explicit argument that tried to address this section is somehow more prone to like revolutionary sentiment or something than say someone in a steady job who is a member of COSATU and that kind of thing. And I think that was also a huge mistake, because what it underplayed was... or what it didn't

recognise was the very many ties between these different sections of the proletariat that you know that ranging from a very practical thing if you're living in the same townships. And one of the key things that kept working people away from the APF was the fact that people tended to set meetings at times that were a bit inconvenient for unemployed people who have had nothing to do anyway. So to spend the whole of Tuesday in a meeting of the SECC, I am talking about that because I've got more experience, was a great thing if you've got nothing else to do, but if you are a working person and you want to get involved in something, thinking about maybe an hour on the weekend. So that left us with very simple practical blocks to getting...for other people to really getting involved with us, but also I think it came back to just not thinking beyond ourselves and that was partly about thinking that we were already this terribly revolutionary section of society that had nothing to lose, but missing the point that what we didn't have was an awful lot of power actually in terms of our... When I say our I don't mean a little middle class element like me, but the actual communities, you know in terms of what wage you could throw around was limited you know, we could rock the boat in that in the early days and when some real things, but then we very quickly came up against that block where it was now. We've blocked a few roads, we've faced the teargas you know like the next step has to go to either something much bigger numerically or something with a lot more strategic power or both. So that was where we ended up in, the only parliament on the basis of saying we can't change things or whether it was issues of more practicality and so on. I think obviously the other thing for me, the main thing of putting up the last couple of elections when I have argued for us to do some kind of election strategy was about taking a chance to put some kind of alternative into the public eye in a very upfront way and again trying to do that thing, because if you are going for a vote and it's a very fine line to walk because you can easily get caught up in saying that vote becomes everything, and you start changing what you are saying to get that vote. But if you are saying okay we want to get a vote on the basis of these... this set of what would you call it - ideas, notions about the world, commands, whatever those are going to be - we want to get a vote on this idea, you can't just go to people you already know. So if you are going to blockade the road with tyres, you start off... you go to the people you already know and if there is fifty of you, you don't actually have to go any further, you know you can do this with fifty people, you can do it with ten actually you just got to get your heads cut very quicker. If you are going to you know even if you are going to do a strike, you can do it with fifty people and even there, there is a little bit more pressure, you've got to try and get the person who wasn't on your side to begin with and a similar thing I think happens if you are going for a vote, you are going to have to go and talk to somebody whom you haven't talked to before and you're going to have to try and convince them to put their eggs on that box and at the end of it you've got a very clear... you know you've got some kind of a test of how many people you've convinced. Okay so I think that is where an election strategy can be useful. I think at the same time though to do it at, you know it is not useful in all circumstances so I think for example now we have missed the boat, it's late for coming with that and things are pretty much sown up at the moment for the next couple of years that Zuma has kind of recreated the illusions, even though he has also recreated a new set of contradictions which could work themselves out in some very scary ways as well as the alternative ways. You know I think it is pretty much people who are looking for an alternative at the moment and I think that things can sort of and again there is a possibility that things can change from

inside these structures where there was that brief period where Mbeki was on his way out, when you know people were really saying 'okay what is the alternative to Mbeki and they weren't kind of necessarily just going to flock to us', but it meant that we could have arguments with people who wouldn't have been able to argue with us, you know five years before. So ja that's on the election strategy, a tactic, not even a strategy.

Dale: A tactic, ja.

Claire: A tactic.

Dale: Okay just shifting a little bit in terms of more organisations... but related to all these things that were happening in the APF during the years and the debates and arguments and things. How would you, and from your own experience describe the relationship between the various component parts of the APF, either individual activists, political groups, community organisations?

Claire: Difficult, you see I think for the most part it's been... I have never had the impression that there's like a...I think that's like...let me just preface this by saying what I said earlier is that, that was one of the long standing uncomfortable areas in the APF was between communities and so-called individual activists. So people would come there you know just as yourself or coming in as part of a political group like keep left and so on. So you know the only thing that makes our credentials different is that people come in there from communities who are generally there because they are directly affected by something and not always by the way but very often that would be the thing. I have been cut off, so your day to day living is on the line in your struggle whereas for someone like me and other members of Keep Left we were there because we have a vision of change in society more broadly in someone like Nina Benjamin etc, etc, Dale McKinley you are coming there somehow as an individual. Obviously the uncomfortable thing about that is obviously that thing of people who are coming with much more experience, much more resources in terms of like your background; that you're more confident to speak and so on. And so yes there was always the danger of these few individuals voices dominating at the same time I...you know I think I don't think we've ended up having a giant problem in defending the APF in the end. I think the people in the APF are pretty confident to say what the hell they think from community organisations. I think the part where it was a bit of an issue was that thing of what I mentioned earlier of some of the political arguments amongst us being fought out by organisational means rather than directly politically. So especially that AGM that we had, I can't remember the year, but it was in Braamfontein, in the funeral parlour, unfortunate.

Dale: Funeral parlour, it was in 2007, the other.

Claire: Yes that was the nasty one. I remember like the political debate being extremely short and then debates going on for like hours and hours about like finding details about who wrote what letter to who and these behind the scenes manoeuvring that seems to go on, which made things seem easier behind the scenes. But you know it was kind of... there was a lot of stuff that went on that wasn't entirely open somehow and kind of backbiting like questioning peoples credentials. Not like saying I disagree with

your strategy for how we go forward, but by saying well what happened to that money that you took, when... when... when... whatever, you know that kind of thing. And actually I think that in a way was a thing of the let me call them for now the intellectuals, no that is not the right word because there are very many community intellectuals as well, that maybe the sort of middle class element and that is also not the right word, but the individual activists being afraid to stand up as themselves and say this is what I think, but here was one person, I am not representing anyone except myself saying 'this is what I think, take it or leave it', you know and just argue it straight. Because that was coming after if I can remember it correctly, all the arguments about who was allowed to, who represented what in the APF, so those arguments about how many left political organisations get and blah! Blah! and that did lead to a problem of like people who were there in their individual basis fell through those cracks, we never did quite come up with what, you know how does someone who is there just as themselves without an organisation, where do you get represented, you know. I mean when we had the activist forum, of course there was then potentially the opposite problem, because you can be one person representing nothing except your own turf, where you could have an awful lot of influence by just working hard, you know because you had the luxury to be able to do it. So yes there were those dangers, but I think then also when that got like... when we moved towards the sort of representative structure, if you want to call it that way, but without somehow making a way for individual members to also be represented that I think there was, I mean I am speculating quite honestly about other peoples motives, because I could always still speak through Keep Left. But I think maybe there was a thing that people maybe then felt unsure about standing up and saying I am arguing my point here as one person, and that maybe drove a lot of things underground, so that was an issue. Can I just take a break?

Dale: Okay we are back now; you said you wanted to say a few things about finances.

Claire: Just one other thing about finances and I actually know nothing about finances. Even though I thought that it was great that we got all the money that we did, allowed us to do a lot of things, but I think it was also again a double edged sword that it was out of proportion to our real size and I still think to this day it would have been a lot healthier for us to have found other ways of getting things done other than just hurling out money, a lot of things that could never have happened without having to just finance a bus for an organisation like us. But in the long term it might have been healthier to... for people to have found some other way of arriving... getting to a place, you know.

Dale: Okay alright. Just on a broader level you have talked a lot about what I would call the strategic picture of the APF and the back and forth over the years, some of the good things as well as the missed opportunities. As the APF, you have been there pretty much from the beginning over the period of it's existence, how would you sort of describe the strategic... have there been a lot of shifts in the APF in relation to where it started towards now, come almost ten years now later in relation to its orientation, to strategic orientation, its goals, and if so why?

Claire: I think certainly there have been... I suppose I am seeing things more in terms of the shifts in the circumstances what's around us and I think in those terms there has been massive shifts, which I think I have already outlined. The cracks opened up inside the mainstream and now have been patched up a lot

I think. In terms of our own orientation, I suppose when it very first got started it was perhaps a much more kind of broader vision of what we were doing, that we were fighting a particular broader ... that there was Igoli 2002 and that was the issue. So it was at once a big thing, not necessarily like people coming out of their own water being cut off for example, imagining what would happen if this thing went through, so that turned to a bigger vision, but that was obviously the earliest thing. Subsequently I think okay I have already gone through some points about the way the difficulties in deciding what kind of an organisation we are, ja I don't really have much to say about that.

Dale: Okay.

Claire: I will think about it further, but...

Dale: Okay over the last several years in particular you mentioned Polokwane and the changes at the ANC and state level and what happened at that front. But there have also been quite a few developments around what one would call the new social movements that did come up after 2000, the APF wasn't the only one, there were several others that arose and there have been a lot of shifts and changes and to what extent do you think the APF has been affected by that? The LPM for example, the Jubilee, the former CCF - all of these other movements that came up as well and have had serious organisational, political difficulties over the last several years and particularly now we don't see so much of that anymore?

Claire: Ja, okay again I am kind of a bit parochial having rated the APF parochialism. I am not that much in touch with those kinds of things, but I think obviously it's, the biggest role that have affected the APF was because those organisations have dropped off. The kind of easy way of being part of something bigger has disappeared you know that it is... we couldn't just link up with something in Durban that had a national profile because things aren't going so well there that kind of thing. So that is one of the biggest ways I think that affected us. In terms of how, I mean am trying to think of how it has affected us politically and just because I have never really been at any of those national SMI things, I don't really have much of a picture of that kind of thing. I mean obviously it makes a difference to be able to say we are doing this thing here in Joburg and people in Cape Town are doing a similar struggle and we haven't been able to say that really since those organisations have declined. I think in a lot of the... in some issues I think more about... because obviously a lot of those things that went on in those movements and there have also been similar thoughts and dynamics to what has gone on inside the APF, not identical but variations of several kinds of feuds, but ja again, I don't really have much useful to say about that.

Dale: Okay then just a follow on ... you specifically spent quite a bit of time talking about the orientation, the failures and the missed opportunities of the APF towards ... lets say for example, organised workers and others. Do you think that it was a strategically correct thing to do or that the orientation towards other like minded kinds of social movements and constituencies which doesn't seem to have really worked out too well, in the long run?

Claire: Ja, I mean I think that's a shame and I think we had to try and make those things, you know there is no question about it we had to link up with anything in this movement at that time. I am also still... I am sometimes mystified by how things foundered, you know why those things fell apart and those links fell apart because you would almost think that it's a... but I suppose it might be from very much an outsiders perspective. But I imagine it might have been some sort of bigger version of what happened sometimes happened within the APF is that quite a lot of things get diverted, politics get diverted into petty squabbling and squabbles over resources because of again the nature of our constituencies. Ja but look. the fact of trying to do that was you know, a no-brainer for me, we had to try and link up and make something bigger, there is no question of that.

Dale: Looking back over the, since the APF was formed, it's still here irrespective of how we will characterise its character or impact. What do you think have been the APF's main achievements?

Claire: Quite a lot really. I mean I think okay... I think putting up a fight against the cut offs is not just the fact that everybody did that was invaluable, that there's...you know people in a place like Soweto or the East Rand and so on. You can look back and say you know it actually wasn't just that we got... you know the new government came in and got away with that, you know like people from the beginning were starting to do something. I think the... just the kind of learning process that has gone on for a layer of activists of being through this experience of being in the APF, of trying to make sense of what the ANC is doing. You know for all my criticisms of some of the problems that have happened within, that going through that learning experience, I think that was invaluable. And its very different to what you will learn from as a period in history unfolds, what you learn from sitting at home, being an individualised victim compared to what you have learned from being part of an organisation that tried to influence events is vastly different and you know I think that those things remain a foundation for the future. So you know it is not accidental I think that the... for example the forum of the Soweto organisation was actually a group of people who had been active in the ANC, you know that is not an accident at all, because those are people who were already political in some way who are already trying to think in the world environment and how to influence it and came out against this issue. I think the role the APF played in organising the anti-xenophobia march was absolutely... you know its again, I think if we hadn't been there nothing like that would have happened and I think that really has made, you know I don't know if we... one kind of impact we had at the time I still see a lot of xenophobic attacks in South African society, but if we hadn't done that, I think also that that did shift things ever so slightly, you know even if it was quite small, that at least on national TV there was a big march that went through Hillbrow of people saying we are anti-xenophobia. I think that must have been crucial. I think of course again when you look at the micro level there is a lot of work that we needed to have done inside ourselves in the run up to that, that we missed opportunities on, or didn't miss opportunities but just maybe... you know its kind of a difficult thing that you don't always see it, there could be like soft xenophobia going on inside an organisation that never appears in the big organisation. But I think the fact that we kick started getting that march going for all that it was largely, you know the kind of class composition wasn't what we would have wanted it to have been, but the fact that it happened was crucial and apparently it was also like no other organisation thought it was important to do that, so that really made sense. Of course

the World Conferences against Racism and probably the WSSD, you know those were again absolutely crucial for all the problems that it created for us later, the fact that it happened at all was really important internationally not just for us. And I think the fact that we just temporarily existed, that did matter as well. Again it has kind of pushed things a little bit faster than they might have gone otherwise, you know that some people got together and said 'you know we just don't lie down and accept neo liberalism', or sit back and keep quiet about it.

Dale: And on the flip side, what would you describe - you have already mentioned a couple of weaknesses - but lets say stronger than that of failings?

Claire: Ja, that's it, failure to push -out beyond ourselves. Basically in parochialism and that is just like not thinking beyond ourselves and there's a practical side to it of course. I was thinking of linking up with someone else so political conceptual side of you know just like how do we see what we are doing ... is what we are doing just getting together to fight the cut offs that some of us face on a daily basis, or affections or whatever? Which I think is a very important thing of what we are doing. It is not meaningless but you know trying to understand and it is really about a political conception of how things change, you know, understanding that to really win on our own issues of cut offs or whatever is going to need... to sort of win conclusively, is going to need a much bigger change in society and we can't do that if it is like fifty people in the Vaal or even two hundred. You know you've got to get the vast majority of society is going to have to move, the vast majority of whatever you want to call it, dispossessed people, working people, proletariat what ever it is going to have to move against the way things are for things to really get changed and that means starting to think about who's our friends and who's enemies in life you know. I mean I've been thinking about class, what does it mean, you know conceiving of, you know obviously if you are going to a township there's a... there would be a perception that there's a class of destitute people and there is a class of just okay people and it could often be the way that people see things. Now I think from a broader Marxist perspective those are the same class of people who have been shaken out in, you know concretely have fallen out in very different concrete positions on a micro level. Like there's is a big difference between just putting food on the table and not knowing where your next meal is coming from, like through your daily life, but in a broader sense we have got to start thinking of ourselves as being a part of the same group of 'We', the same group of screwed around people, you know. So I think that is something that we've quite never come to grips with in the real ways, understanding who is wearing things. And in terms of that - understanding reform - I think is a massive gap in our knowledge is even though many of us actually have come through a period of being and many of us still are by the way reformers of course, many of us were, but you know there is still all sorts of reformers in the APF of you know that belief that we can change things through parliament or you know that people, for some people would have seen the water case in the Supreme Court as being an end in itself. The way that we are going to win or lose which is, it is not unnatural for people to think like that you know, it is not a cardinal sin or anything, but there is also... I think we have lacked an understanding of how... why people might still be tied to the ANC for example. You know so we tended to see things in very black and white terms, you are or you aren't, you are with them, or you with us and not really understood that there is also certain things that might keep people tied into the ANC and the

Alliance and so on. They don't make them counter revolutionary actually, you know that would just make them a bit confused or not even necessarily confused but it seems that power lies there, there's a possibility for real change and understanding how do people start to... how do those ideas start to break down or get challenged and what role we could have played in helping that along or linking up with people, I think that...but you know maybe I am making a... here these things are perhaps comments that might be more appropriate due to a different kind of organisation and then the APF you know. Something more political but at the same time I think that influenced our ability to build and to keep going and go forward.

Dale: Okay in that answer you have covered the last four of my questions. The last thing I always ask in the interview is, is there anything that I haven't asked you or what we haven't talked about that you, you know this is about the history of the APF and people, that you wanted to mention or say that you don't think has been covered or maybe you think is important to say?

Claire: Surprisingly I can't think of a single thing considering that I pretty much said what I wanted any way.

Dale: Okay.

Claire: Sexism.

Dale: I am glad that you mentioned that because that is the one area that I missed out. Let's just ask that one question - what people would say... the gender question, sexism or and not only as an activist, but as a woman in the APF, how...?

Claire: Look I mean I think... okay firstly my experience as a woman in the APF is not at all representative, because I'm a forty year old white woman who has been standing up for myself for twenty years now so unlike the average. But then there is a lot of other forty year olds, black women who have been doing the same thing. For me the issue I mean I think in a lot of ways the... on a practical basis the APF actually isn't bad in terms of participation of women and being a little bit conscious about it and its very uneven. Okay but the truth is there's a lot of the community organisations started off as being mainly women as people who were first affected by a cut off or whatever as the household head, so the kind of contradiction of... because of the gender stereotype of society and of being the first one to fight. But you know having said all of that I still think there's a lot of stuff that hasn't been tackled head on and the thing when it really came to a head for me was with the issue of the people who got expelled for being... alleged to have been involved in the rape of a sex worker and two things about that disturbed me. The one thing was that people who were so high profiled in the APF, apparently didn't have a clear idea in their own heads of what would constitute rape, but then also when it came to an issue about what to do about it we talked... the discussion about it was procedural and unless I missed it, which is quite possible, I don't remember us at any point sitting down and saying okay look this thing has happened and it is terrible and we've got to think about what to do about the three individuals. But equally important we need to sit down and for ourselves think about what constitutes rape, okay so a

basic thing like that again a sort of bureaucratic kind of approach kind of filled in for a more political approach of using a terrible thing as an opportunity to try and you know think through for ourselves what exactly, what constitutes rape. You know because it is by no means an easy... you know it seems like a... and there is an end and you can get it out in a one sentence definition without consent. In real life we know that things are not always so clear cut for a person who hasn't thought through the things carefully. And I think for women and men that would've been enormously useful to approach it like that. So I think there are still issues like that. I think there was also, you know things like, with the formation of REMMOHO which I think was extremely positive as a way of getting women to start talking, you know but I think again the sort of thing where things that slipped up was how does that then feed back into an organisation where actually we are going to have to rely, not just on women, to stand up to sexism. You know you can say 'okay obviously we don't want a thing where men take themselves again as the champions for women and I am going to protect your interest', but you know we want actually like a to build a layer of men who are aware of sexism and try not to do it, you know and are aware that when there is an issue, that seems to be a women's issue maybe it is not even a women's issue, it is a peoples issue, you know things like child care and blah!blah!blah! Things like that. So ja, there is a little bit of a gap there and how the things that happened in REMMOHO fed back into the broader organisation and opened a broader discussion. I mean I also found the one session that I was able to attend, because they were also doing that thing of having weekday meetings, they were meeting very often. I don't know if it was just that session, but it was going through issues of sexual abuse and that was useful, you know trying to encourage people to speak out about it, but I also found that, what I found myself thinking was 'oh I have never actually been abused by a man, so what do I have to say?' There is no place for me here, that kind of thing, you know so there was like issues like that I wasn't quite sure how to, you know how do you get around that because it was important to do the thing to say this is not something to be ashamed of, you know if someone screwed you around it is not your fault and we need to speak up and that was important, but it also felt a bit like there was nothing else ... of avoiding issues of sexism and beyond and you know some men demanding that you should be home at a certain time or worse, or beating you or whatever and that is also for me was problematic, because there is as much bigger systematic issues that lie behind that kind of abuse as well. So ja that's the only other thing I can think of.

Dale: Okay ... I am glad that you raised that.

Claire: I mean I am just as stressed though, in general I think the APF hasn't done badly, considering that there is so little discussion of that, that's happened, but actually it is not too bad...in terms of women's representation and so on.

Dale: Thanks very much Claire.

Claire: It is only a pleasure. It has given me a chance to rave on for hours and hours to a captive audience.

Dale: Okay.

