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**Dale:** Are we ready?

**Nicolas:** Yeah.

**Dale:** Nic, first thanks very much for making yourself available for this. I just want to make sure that you understand everything and the consent and what the projects all about, ja?

**Nicolas:** Yes.

**Dale:** Okay just state your full name for the record.

**Nicolas:** Nicolas Dieltiens.

**Dale:** And Nic, just before we get started with the actual things about the APF, I just want to know a few basic things about yourself— where and when were you born?

**Nicolas:** Johannesburg in 1975.

**Dale:** 1975, and places that you've lived in South Africa mostly?

**Nicolas:** Growing up, I mean I have been mostly in Johannesburg, but I have been in a primary school in Mpumalanga for two years and in Swaziland for three. Otherwise, all in Johannesburg.

**Dale:** All, so you are a Joburg boy?

**Nicolas:** Yes.

**Dale:** Okay and also just tell us a little about your family, parents, siblings, marriage, single any children?

**Nicolas:** I am single; my parents are immigrants from Belgium. They came here in 1971.

**Dale:** And siblings?

**Nicolas:** I got two sisters.

**Dale:** Two sisters, older, younger?

**Nicolas:** I got an older and a younger sister.

**Dale:** A younger sister as well. And do they stay here as well?

**Nicolas:** My older sister stays here, my younger sister stay's in India for now.

**Dale:** Okay and tell us a little about your schooling, in other words, how far have you gone school wise?

**Nicolas:** I am currently registered to do my Masters at Wits University where I did my honours in 2000, so there has been a bit of a gap between then and now.

**Dale:** So you got your bachelors?

**Nicolas:** Also my bachelors.

**Dale:** Also at Wits University?

**Nicolas:** Yes.

**Dale:** All right, and tell us also just a little bit about your work, jobs and other interests as well.

**Nicolas:** I am self employed. By that I mean I generally edit texts or design book covers, layout booklets and such. I try to do websites as well, but I have only done two, so do those informational types of services and also graphic design to get by.

**Dale:** And other interests, what are the other things that you spend your time doing?

**Nicolas:** What do I spend my time doing, goodness, I am perhaps more of a home body of late, then recollect to any other interests. I don't watch too much TV, so can't say anything.

**Dale:** Do you write, for example, you know outside of your work?

**Nicolas:** Outside of my work, do I write? No I haven't been writing, I mean I should've been writing but I haven't.

**Dale:** Just describe a little bit how you became politicised, how you became into getting to be a political activist.

**Nicolas:** I started, by going to Wits I suppose and I joined the student newspaper which was immersed in student politics of the time, particularly SASCO being the predominant political body on campus at the time and particularly with respect to the newspaper I suppose. So I would often in my work with the newspaper engage with people around student issues, and I didn't join SASCO formally at that point but after leaving I couldn't find employment in any fruitful way, so I wound up volunteering for an organisation called CANSA - Campaigning Against Neo-liberalism in South Africa - and I suppose that way was something of a

politicisation, because even prior to that I actually worked for the ANC as a branch election coordinator.

**Dale:** Okay before 1994.

**Nicolas:** 1998.

**Dale:** 1998?

**Nicolas:** 1999, I am sorry.

**Dale:** Okay.

**Nicolas:** And after that I went to volunteer at CANSA. My experience with CANSA was a conduit to other engagements one of which was the Anti-Igoli 2002 committee and in Jubilee South Africa I was involved in a South-South Debt Summit that was held here in 1999, and by 2000 I was back at Wits and at that time I suppose the subject of this interview became more a pressing force.

**Dale:** So that is when you met up with quite a few people that formed in the APF?

**Nicolas:** Yes, and I was formally a member of SASCO at the time.

**Dale:** Okay.

**Ahmed:** Just tell us something about CANSA.

**Nicolas:** CANSA was a ... they organised workshops typically held in Cosatu House or Elijah Barayi and this other venue here invited people on the basis by word of mouth and then fax lists and email lists to workshops about various issues, like trade, GMO's, privatisation, big dams and the effect on the environment and they tended to be workshops that attracted the usual suspects, people who were of the associational left or, discussions I mean that didn't lead to anything it was more for an information sort of sharing. Eventually the one workshop did realise the Anti-Igoli 2002 Committee for instance which did happen, which did give some formation of the APF, so since it was the Forum where I met Trevor Ngwane for the first time and Daniel and I were sitting at that Forum like beginning an engagement with SAMWU, because we were meeting at SAMWU at that time. CANSA also didn't merge with AIDC, the NGO in Cape Town because, the point person there being George Dor, initially CANSA was working from his house and he was working from home, and then it even had a budget, thanks to Patrick Bond to employ somebody for a while, that was David Leetsia and he, he and I for a short bit publicised these workshops.

**Ahmed:** And then at WITS in 2000, when you went back what was going on politically on campus?

**Nicolas:** When I arrived there, I didn't, I don't remember have any preconception of any great political movements underway on campus, but it was soon into the year when the retrenchments were announced as part of the WITS 2001 restructuring of the university's non-core services, cleaning and catering, most particularly, otherwise there were the usual student issues I suppose, exclusions being the perennial issue of students from disadvantaged backgrounds being excluded. I mean that goes without saying, but I suppose in 2000 the issue of retrenchments brought to the fore what the implications of the privatisation of these services on campus would be.

**Dale:** And just on that, just give us a sense of why you became interested in the issues of privatisation, was that particularly because of what had happened at Wits?

**Nicolas:** Yes, it was very much the experience of being at Wits, I personally knew a lot about the workers that were going to be affected, I felt that it was something that we had to make an intervention about and there was very little that was happening in terms of student mobilisation on the question and, so I joined SASCO to see what sort of political program they would be pursuing.

Short pause during recording

**Nicolas:** I was saying why I got involved with the issues of privatisation and the fact of my return to campus and having I guess some sort of conscientisation around the issues, given my exposure to, or having the benefit of retrospect I guess. I mean, coming also to campus means that I also was new on campus and finding friends in these networks also there was a strong role to play in how much interest you can convince in issues.

**Ahmed:** At the time, what was the response of NEHAWU on campus, the Union?

**Nicolas:** We particularly had gone to meet with Dan Motaung on behalf of SASCO, just as a more informal kind of meeting to ask him how he wanted the students to demonstrate their support and he was very open to it, and he said he would speak to the membership at the next branch meeting and such, and in fact then we even invited Dan to come to a EMARU meeting in Yeoville at your place and he did.

**Dale:** Please explain what EMARU was.

**Nicolas:** EMARU was another project that we had in the same year, Ahmed and I and others. It was going to be an online web journal where writing and any other art we could collect could

be published. I suppose that was a kind of side project that like consolidated sort of relations you develop in other struggles and in other political engagements, and that was just the one media project we had. Anyway, so Dan Motaung came as NEHAWU, it wasn't for a EMARU meeting, I don't know, I do remember him sitting there and it must have been around the privatisation or something on campus and as I was saying, NEHAWU apparently was very open to the students support of the struggle, they said that they were negotiating, they are still in negotiations with the management at the time, and they couldn't really for that reason do more than lunch time pickets that the workers had been organising on the Senate House Concourse because of the , not indictment, but the... what was the word?

**Dale:** An interdict?

**Nicolas:** There was an interdict preventing them from disrupting work at the university outside of those lunch time pickets, so.

**Ahmed:** They might also have had to go through the CCMA process.

**Nicolas:** Yes and I mean at that time NEHAWU looked like it was interested in broadening its support base against the threatening retrenchments.

**Ahmed:** And what came of the student's kind of attempts at mobilisation?

**Nicholas:** We remained very small, it was SASCO, the couple of us that had kept SASCO active organising lunch time meetings, public meetings on the concourse, so there was also a solidarity march when a student got shot at UDW in Durban and the few of us that were like organising that at a point I suppose became stifled by SASCO because the other comrades in SASCO had just become, it was around the time of the SASCO congress, I don't know where the other members of the branch were - just not becoming involved in the campaign to the extent we thought was necessary, so those SASCO members who were most concerned about doing something proactive about the retrenchments did call ourselves the Wits Crisis Committee and we continued doing the kind of students solidarity work, sort of that we could do, which principally meant making banners and dropping them on the concourse, and still not getting SASCO support. There wasn't perhaps too much of a clear distinction between who was the Wits Crisis Committee and SASCO and there was, I don't know, it wasn't so emphatically declared, I don't think.

**Ahmed:** Who were the constituting members of the Wits Crisis Committee?

**Nicolas:** Daniel Hutchinson.

**Ahmed:** Organisationally?

**Nicolas:** Organisationally it was the PGA (Post Graduate Students), I mean we had just nearly got the PGA to endorse a statement against the retrenchments, but Noor decided that it wasn't procedural, that it was a, that we were rushing the resolution without adequate matter, at that point. But the PGA supported the Wits Crisis Committee as those members of SASCO, I suppose, I don't know, it's not SASCO, it was maybe I don't know how you would say they declared their support, but we were SASCO members who were part of the Wits Crisis Committee.

**Ahmed:** What about the SRC?

**Nicolas:** SRC, no, the SRC was not politicised at all around the issue.

**Dale:** And were there any other political groupings on campus, like ANC, SACP that were involved at all?

**Nicolas:** At the time there was a toenadering between the SASCO and ANC Youth League, that still was in a formative stage, like at WITS, RAU what is it now – UJ. That relationship was closer already but at WITS is was still at the formative stages of the Progressive Youth Alliance, but there was no real presence of the Young Communist League at the time, no. There was also Keep Left which had an active branch on campus, a couple of Keep Left members were good cadres in some of the actions that we organised, yes, and other groups escape me now.

**Ahmed:** And there was at some point the university applied for an interdict against some of the people who were part of the WITS Crisis Committee, what was the background there?

**Nicolas:** That was the disruption of the Urban Futures conference. The Urban Futures conference in July of 2000 was celebrating the restructuring of the university at least at one session of the Urban Futures conference, the restructuring at Wits and of Johannesburg City which was celebrated and with a couple of us students who were active in the struggle to stop the retrenchments, and with NEHAWU formally. Well they agreed at their forum that they decided to take an action to disrupt the conference, that they would be part of the mobilisation against the conference, but their disruption of that particular session where the Vice Chancellor of the university and someone from the Mayoral Committee, I forget his name, was speaking on the restructuring of the City and the workers were ... because the interdict against their own political actions, or their own actions against at the university, because they couldn't protest other than during their lunchtime, pickets, they weren't able to make a illegal disruption, so those of us who were students could do so and with their support we were able to disrupt the session and brought it to a stop. I mean the interdict applied to picketing of the university students who were involved in that action, applied only to that particular disruption ... prior to

that there was the Urban Futures conference being a week long, there were other sessions where we had organised, well similar disruptions, the other one was we helped ourselves to food, that was laid out by the City for something about Johannesburg Water, the privatisation of water and we were also leafleted, pamphleting the other progressive academics who were attending the conference.

**Ahmed:** Before getting on to the actual kind of formation that stormed Urban Futures and how that came about, I just wanted to ask you ... there was also an occupation of the Vice Chancellors' office by members of the Wits Crisis Committee.

**Nicolas:** Ah, yes that was also, I didn't think there was an interdict sought for that. If you're correcting me, then I stand corrected. Yeah there was a couple of members of the Wits Crisis Committee, there was Papi and Papi was a student who was doing his masters and I think he was researching the transformation of the Wits in fact itself as part for his masters, he was part of the occupation I think, as well as Lynne from WOZA, I shouldn't mention her name, that would be a real factor at all on campus. I mean the occupation had not succeeded though, it had been pre-emptively called off and people had left the office at the end of the day. I mean we were, I remember sitting at the ... I was working for CANSA at the time and I was at the AIDC office and having to do some of the media work for the occupants, sending our press releases to say that we were occupying the Vice Chancellors office to demand that there be a moratorium on retrenchments, but it was pre-emptively ended, the occupation, I don't, didn't remember how that happened.

**Ahmed:** Okay and tell us about how the kind of formation ... how did the decision to target the Urban Futures conference come about and ... what was the background to that?

**Nicolas:** I mean a couple of months before the Urban Futures, I've seen on email that there was this conference happening and Emmanuel Castells was going to be there and Susan Sondheim and you know I was kind of interested and so, but then I looked at the program and I noticed that there was Colin Bundy, the Vice Chancellor of the university and there was Kenny Fihla speaking at the conference, and I sent an email to Patrick Bond to say that this was happening and shouldn't there be something done about it? I didn't get a response to the email, but later closer to the event, after discussions around the problematic content of the conference ... I am mixing up my time here ... but we as Wits Crises Committee at that time had called an activist forum to discuss what we would do about the Urban Futures Conference, and the activist forum also brought besides, Wits Crises Committee because of involvement of Kenny Fihla and the Igoli 2002 programme, we invited the Anti Igoli 2002 forum, which was meeting at SAMWU - I was eluding to that forum a bit earlier - and we invited them to the activist forum and the activist forum was organised on a Saturday and we had it at COSATU House and at that forum



were SAMWU members, quite a few SAMWU shop stewards, maybe six and the NEHAWU branch was there and myself as SASCO and some students and we decided at the activists forum that the conference would be disrupted, and it was on hearing that, that Patrick Bond invited you and I to meet with him to see what he could do to reconcile the differences that had been created around the forum and he made an offer to us to participate, because the conference had a registration fee that none of us were really going to be paying to attend, so he made an offer of, I think it was some eighty tickets to people who want to attend and, so because we were no way representing everyone we had to go back and we couldn't accept this offer on behalf of anybody. So we took it back to our constituency this offer from Patrick Bond who turned out to be in some way an organiser of the Urban Futures Conference himself, and we decided to decline the offer and then continued with our programme to disrupt and to the publicise issues around retrenchments, using I guess the conference as a publicity opportunity.

**Ahmed:** And at the time, the Communist Party and other formations, I mean apart from the unions, I mean who else was involved in that activist forum?

**Nicolas:** There's the unions, SACP Johannesburg Central Branch, SASCO, Keep Left, there was also the Democratic Socialist Movement, Wiseman Hamilton and them, the Anti Igoli 2002 Forum, and there was also, I don't know exactly if John, John Appollis was coming through the, because I have a picture of the Urban Futures conference and John spoke from the stage and he was an active part of that disruption and he was in CEPPAWU at the time, so I don't know, he must have been from the Anti Igoli 2002 forum, not from the CEPPAWU. And there was this other guy from SADTU and he wasn't as SADTU, he was an individual, what was his name - Hassan, Hassan Lorgat - he was at SADTU at the time he came to one or two Anti-Igoli 2002 meetings, but I suppose the others would be individuals who considered themselves amongst the concerned left I suppose. I can't remember the other organisations.

**Ahmed:** And I mean ... maybe put into context for us what the significance of this forum was to the formation of the APF?

**Nicolas:** Well I mean for the first time the restructuring of the public institutions like Wits and the Johannesburg Municipality were coming together with a common concern that there was a restructuring of public institutions underway and Urban Futures was a serendipitous opportunity that laid the stage for us to meet on common issues. There were some previous actions where like Wits students would be involved, but it would be about the Anti Egoli 2002 breakfast meeting in Rosebank by Khetso Gordan with business leaders, the support of Wits students, but it wasn't in any way about Wits. Urban Futures was for the first time about Wits as well as about the City and there were other actions that even the SACP had organised, something in Sandton. It was a privatisation gig; I don't know the name of it. I was also a

member of the SACP, Johannesburg central branch so I was involved in the organising of that to an extent, that again didn't involve Wits now, Urban Futures allowed the platform to be laid for both restructuring plans to be critically engaged.

**Ahmed:** And the move of this, what do you think it was about the particular period that allowed for these different formations to come together in a common form of action?

**Nicolas:** I mean the political climate of the time was, there was the influence of the Seattle generation, the 1999 closure of the WTO in Seattle, there was a sense that there was a global movement underway that the issues of economic restructuring was something global and something that we could, that we were part of. Otherwise, outside of the traditional organisations of the left, out of the mass based organisations, the alliance, there seemed to be something of a space, an inability to respond to these new challenges presented by the restructuring of labour relations at Wits at the Johannesburg Metro that called for something like the Wits Crisis Committee or that would move around the structures of familiar organisational terrain. I felt that particularly as a student, because we were a very small group of students who were organising protests on campus, I mean we had a juke box just to make a lot of noise and as small as we were only because we had the sense of indignation that retrenchments that were done would be affected and that the regardless of how small we were we could do something about changing, or the passivity of the student body or the WITS community.

**Ahmed:** Alright.

**Dale:** Just one quick extension of that which was ... you mentioned that you were part of the SACP Joburg central branch and you were talking about that space began to be created outside of the alliance ... what was your sense of what was, how the alliance itself - because you were there and many other people who eventually became part of the APF were also alliance structures - what was your sense of what was going on in the Alliance toward the restructuring, of what was happening?

**Nicolas:** I mean by that time I hadn't lost faith in NEHAWU that must have happened a bit later. That had been part of the Activist Forum, but we could only respect that they were in this mediation phase of the retrenchments, but their retreat from any militant position against retrenchments was to follow, I mean their involvement like soon nitrified. At the Johannesburg central branch level, some of the prominent members were themselves employed in the Johannesburg metro and were resisting attempts by the branch to take positions against privatisation and SACP branch did manage to take a resolution to the provincial structure to make a statement against privatisation. That attempt failed, the SACP provincially saw the need

to continue to engage around the issues recognising that the Johannesburg metro structure still reflected I suppose unreconstructed apartheid era traits. SAMWU more particularly was divided around what to do around the retrenchments the national office was quite set against privatisation having taken resolutions at their national congress to support what initiatives were being organised against the threatening retrenchments or what would the threatened retrenchments at the level of the City and yet the Johannesburg, the SAMWU regional structure took quite conservative positions there. The individuals at least tried to frustrate the resolutions that the national office had taken and the SAMWU involvement like came in fits and starts, I mean like the activist forum, the ostensible support of SAMWU of the disruption of the Urban Futures conference, after that they were not at the disruptions of the Urban Futures conference, SAMWU wasn't attending and shortly thereafter they announced that, it wasn't shortly after that, it must have been a couple of months, but they announced they could no longer be involved in what was by then the Anti Privatisation Forum. And then another resolution at a national conference later they were backing the forum and then and again the Johannesburg structure just didn't respond to that decision and they withdrew again for allegations of there being anti ANC elements within the APF that they could not work with and they withdrew again. So I mean SAMWU had taken very progressive looking resolutions around the participation of community structures in the union struggle to protect the municipal workers but we didn't see the results of those resolutions. SAMWU never rejoined the APF after their second departure.

**Ahmed:** Do you think the tensions within the alliance formations at all affected the way the activist forum came about as well as the tactics that they adopted?

**Nicolas:** I don't think so, actually I remember SAMWU shop stewards had been quite decidedly in favour of the disruption, but I don't know if that can be attributable to those differences within the SAMWU structure. I think the move to disrupt the conference may, certainly the impetuous came from the students in a large measure since they would facilitate the disruption of the conference on campus allowing people from off campus to come through the turnstiles and get in beyond the security.

**Ahmed:** And so what is the case that this activist forum became the APF? How did that transition from the activist forum to the APF come about?

**Nicolas:** We decided that the activist forum ... that there was still common cause for we as an organisation to continue to undertake actions like the disruption. And the name Anti Privatisation Forum, I am not sure where that first was coined but after the Urban Futures meeting, we started a meeting where the Anti- Igoli 2002 forum had then met at the SAMWU

office. A couple of meetings, like the first meetings of the APF meetings happened at the SAMWU provincial office.

**Ahmed:** And what was the content of those early discussions?

**Nicolas:** Well it was around the interdicts being, as a result of the future disruptions but, at that time I don't know if there had been a conception that we were building an organisation that developed into Anti Privatisation Forum. We were discussing matters that pertain to where the union was with discussing its own position with negotiations with the city, I mean often it was an information kind of sharing between the groups that were coming together in APF, in those formative stages.

**Ahmed:** What was the formation for that this forum now took?

**Nicolas:** Well in those early stages it was still very much formed like the activist forum, it was an informal structure, we were meeting once a week as just activists in the struggle against privatisation like the decisions around committees and the more formal structures of the APF were to come later, I mean the coordinating committee. Those weekly meetings even had that name coordinating committee, coordinating committee as we understand it now in the APF is something else, but we were considering that activist forum that to be meeting weekly was the coordinating committee, coordinating different struggles against privatisation in what was an Anti Privatisation Forum, I suppose with small matters.

**Ahmed:** And again I mean there's perhaps not such a big distinction always between this, but do you think at the time the APF saw itself as more of a coalition of left forces within the City or did it see itself as an independent organisation with a distinct political identity?

**Nicolas:** Oh it didn't have a distinct political identity by then, I think the coalition of forces were somewhat despaired, there were the alliance groups like from the unions, SACP and there were, the other probably ultra left who were wanting to do political actions around issues also involved that kind of involvement, of course there being reasons for why the SAMWU members had some discomforts about remaining in the forum. Political identity came I think increasingly from the involvement of community structures that followed the disruption at the Urban Futures conference. I mean there was a flurry of affiliations from townships, the community organisations. The first having been the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee that was, Trevor Ngwane was active in, that was one of the first community structures to join the APF. It might have been formed, ja it was at the activist forum, because Trevor who was there, he was there as the expelled councillor not as someone representing the SECC. Political identity came after

the growing sense that the basis had been laid for a common struggle against restructuring and the effects of privatisation that had increasingly been visited on poor communities.

**Ahmed:** Alright. And do you think that the organisational form that was initially taken by the APF, at all reflected, or how did it, what kind of a relationship did it form to the kind of organisational forms that were traditionally known for the left, for example within the anti apartheid struggle, civics, so forth?

**Nicolas:** Are you asking about the traditional community based organisations like the civics?

**Ahmed:** No, just more the kind of organisational forms that characterised the emergence of the liberation movement and various kinds of ... I mean did it have any relationship, did it actively kind of borrow organisational forms from previous struggles and it needn't be from the liberation movement, it can be from anywhere? What were the, I mean for instance why the activist forum, what was the kind of experience or do you have any sense of the kinds of experience that motivated that as an organisation ...?

**Nicolas:** I suppose there was a sense, there was something of an organisational inertia amongst those old organisations and struggle that we need to have something that was, that opened up the possibility for different struggles and different languages to articulate. The kind of civics that were present in our formative time, like in a formation like the APF, there were new organisations that had no relationships to SANCO branches or anything. The kind of actions also that characterised these civics were something like typically direct actions like KCR, Kathorus Concerned Residents, for instance were very early on members of the APF and they were taking that decisive sort of actions against the evictions from homes in the East Rand. In that sense I suppose that their form of struggle was already quite direct and not mediated by the old organisations that were mediating community-state conflicts, I suppose. And of course the SECC was politicising the reconnection of the electricity as direct action themselves. So I suppose characterising the programme of action of the early APF it was around taking direct action against the city or against ESKOM , also SERVCON where KCR was concerned, SERVCON of course being the parastatal housing finance scheme.

**Ahmed:** Alright.

**Dale:** Once this APF was formed, was constitutionally formulated as the APF and began to attract these community organisations, how did you as an activist there, what was the response of the ANC and the traditional left as well to the formation of the APF?

**Nicolas:** Quite hostile, I remember early on we were frequently trying to win the support of workers- the COSATU strike, SAMWU strike and the march and you know comrades who have

been deployed to be part of the throng to hand out leaflets and SAMWU would even give a platform to someone from the mayoral committee to speak and no one from the APF, you know, there was very little comradeship coming from SAMWU. ANC, I mean we didn't really engage in the ANC that I know of, but statements from the ANC were, had always been that we were just a rabble rousing kind of element, counter revolutionary was never used, but I mean ultra left certainly characterised their response - that we could not be taken seriously.

**Dale:** And what about COSATU as a whole, given the fact that the APF once it formed, resided within at least physically, had a space at COSATU House?

**Nicolas:** Oh yes, yes of course the APF had an office. The APF first was borrowing the office space of AIDC, when AIDC closed down because their Cape Town office didn't want their Johannesburg office to be fostering these anti government elements, so after the AIDC office closed, the APF managed to get some funding and appropriated that same office space and were for awhile in COSATU House, were there for one year until they came up with the renewal of the lease, they refused them, evicted the APF.

**Dale:** Just tell us a little more about the, you said, you just said that the AIDC did not want their Joburg office to ferment such anti government ... how did you know that, how did you experience that?

**Nicolas:** Well I mean at the time Trevor Ngwane was employed by the AIDC as part of their campaigns, I think he was at the campaigns office or something like that and his colleague in the Johannesburg office George Dor ... when we had one meeting he brought a letter from the Cape Town office that was saying that or announcing that the Johannesburg office of the AIDC would be closing, their concerns in Cape Town being that anti ANC elements were organising from AIDC offices in Johannesburg and that the organisation would not want to be represented in that way, so they closed the office. I mean a copy of that letter, I don't know if Trevor would still have it.

**Dale:** You've just described the various kinds of responses from some of the other constituencies that initially were part of the Anti Igoli Forum, and that pulled out like SAMWU and others, what effect did that have on the early politics of the APF itself?

**Nicolas:** There would have been people who of course would have wanted the unions to be involved in the APF, there were important constituencies, they were bearing the brunt of the restructuring. The kind of enthusiasm or positive responses from communities to the initiative did give a lot of impetus to the political programme that saw our terrain is not being on the shop floor as much as being in communities and directing struggle against the privatisation,

against water and electricity and particularly at the point of conflicts where disconnections were threatened. So the initial growth was towards the Vaal area - there was a Evaton group that was for a while involved, further along in the Vaal, and then Tembisa joined, the Tembisa Concerned Residents joined kind of early on; East Rand there was some networking, but the fact that the unions had left the APF did not foreclose ... the organisation to find growth potential within these communities and the kind of politics that did foster in the organisation was one was around community mobilisation I think more than we would have found if we were dealing with preponderance of unionists.

**Dale:** And what was your experience in those early days of the APF with regards to the ideological heterogeneity of the APF, pulling together a range of different activists from quite a number of different traditions, how did you think that also impacted on the APF, either positively, negatively or not at all?

**Nicolas:** I mean yes, there were Trotskyists and Communist Party members and SASCO whites, Black Consciousness, people from SOPA, particularly Vaal affiliates. I mean I don't think that debilitated the organisation, I mean there were personal conflicts that did arise, it didn't strike me as there being political differences between individuals, I don't remember there being ... actually the one issue for instance where in the kind of political heterogeneity that influenced decisions was for instance the issues of Zimbabwe, the Black Consciousness members of the APF being more conciliating to Mugabe's land reform programme, for instance those issues kind of would I suppose make or could make the heterogeneity of the organisation a problem, but I don't know if it is so problematic as much as it allowed us to make it a point of discussion and to develop our own political understanding.

**Dale:** And what about the importance for the APF which drew into its ranks in their early days, individuals that had been marginalised, expelled, kicked out, fired whatever from various alliance structures of various sorts. In your experience in those early days was the role of individuals or the community a tension within the APF, how was that managed?

**Nicolas:** I don't think it was a source of tension. I mean Trevor from the activist forum was a welcome sort of voice in the forum, it wasn't as though anyone was second guessing his representativity in the struggle, he came with experience as other individuals, yourself included, with experience of expulsion from these organisations. Perhaps somehow Trevor might have been conscious about that. Soon after the activist forum I think the SECC did formerly go here and joined the APF movement and so individuals did feel a need to have some sort organisational structure behind them before they could formally participate. I mean this issue came about for middle class activists like myself you know when evictions were happening in the city other members of the APF pointing out to us middle class people based in

the city the need to take these struggles up it was imperative that the evictions, that there was some organisation to resist the Johannesburg City's Clean Buildings programme which was evicting people from inner city buildings. So there was that kind of compulsion or that call put out to individuals to formally I suppose be part of the struggles not just to be only themselves involved.

**Ahmed:** Just going back a question. In terms of that kind of political heterogeneity of the constituent members of the APF, I mean you have said that in your early phase, you didn't see much tension kind of emerge as a result of it, but at the same time, do you think, were there any kind of positive effects and do you think that, that heterogeneity was reflected in the kind of ideological and tactical positions that were taken by the APF?

**Nicolas:** I mean absolutely. I mean the point where the heterogeneity would I suppose have prevented the organisation from taking probably self defeating kind of positions was particularly in respect of participation in the elections, I mean that decision came around before the 2004 elections where the heterogeneity of the organisation demanded as was decided, that we could not decide to be a part of the elections or our organisational unity would come apart. So at that level I suppose with respect to how we engage with power that we always had to remain an independent body and not commit to certain positions that might have limited our future growth, heterogeneity in those cases would have influenced and strengthened our position. Perhaps I am speaking from my own political persuasion, you know it's not effected this was an inherent benefit. I don't know to the organisation, but I personally do think the circumspection around our involvement in the elections and our commitment to any mechanisms of capture that Joburg City could have put in our way for instance stuck to our benefit.

**Ahmed:** Alright. And do you think that the kind of public profile, the public speech and voice of the APF reflected the heterogeneity of the organisation generally?

**Nicolas:** No, I wouldn't say so. The public voice I mean ... often like in the early years I was a member of the media – there wasn't even a media committee at the time - on behalf of the organisation. I would sit at a Wits computer lab and push out a press statement, it was very much ad-hoc, my voice was certainly not enough to represent those who were part of the APF. Similarly our first newsletters were put out by another middle class activist – Lucien and the APF monitors - it had to be done and it was the voice of the APF. It wasn't as though there was any kind of participatory production of the newsletter and even the representation of the organisation from mic's, from stages and platforms did fall to individuals who already were leaders in their own organisations, they did not represent for instance the kind of organisations that would be politically important to the APF in future, like the likes of the Kathorus Concerned



Residents. What was crucially important for the APF at that time and for me as well as somebody who was at the time trying to organise the inner city, getting solidarity from organisations like the KCR was great, in the inner city it was very difficult to mobilise residents, getting a bus load of people from KCR to come and support an action here in Joburg did lend a lot of confidence to ourselves in trying to organise here. In that way the APF facilitated sort of solidarity, which was something for an organisation to do, to volunteer in support of struggle, to organise a kombi themselves and bring it across. At that time the APF didn't have money so there was no funding, so it was more a demonstration of solidarity. Sorry I only went on that diversion because I remembered KCR that was coming to a certain action.

**Ahmed:** Sure, but do you think that the voice of the APF, even if it kind of reflected or sometimes, what was the voice, the particular voice, did it still allow for diversity of particular voices?

**Nicolas:** I mean the kind of voices and people speaking at meetings for instance, ja there was that sort of diversity, not enough, I mean it was limited, it has improved over the years. Early on you did get the spokespersons for organisations being delegated by the structures to make the input, there was that sort of privilege given to certain spokespeople representing the APF to the public. It did tend at the time I suppose for his public profile to be Trevor Ngwane, and often people would associate the APF with Trevor Ngwane ...a result that I would attribute more to the interest of the media of Trevor as being somebody already expelled from the ANC and he would gladly, undertake that sort of role to speak for the APF. Because for him I suppose the APF did represent a new political beginning that he was going to be spending his post party days building.

**Ahmed:** Just a follow up on that. In terms of the different constituent members, did you have the sense at the time that there was a tension in terms of the long term vision of where this formation was going, in terms of for example what's different, what keep left wanted, where it wanted it to go where, for instance, Trevor or Dale or so forth?

**Nicolas:** There were definitely tensions, again around the question of participation in the elections. Organisations did not know whether we would be forming a party to contest the election or whether there would be an alliance with another party. The tensions then typically fell between those who were wanting to form a party, a mass workers party to seize the state power or send somebody into the Joburg council to take our issues there and other affiliates and activists who were rather more weary of the political consequences of forming the party. Given those differences that came out in the election debates, I think that the character of the APF was successfully maintained as an open forum where an ideology wasn't prescribed. I think it was the 2003 APF AGM took a resolution on socialism - it didn't prescribe any differences in

any way between the constituent organisations, who all agreed that they were socialists, but disagreed on what that meant. But that was also to the organisations benefit, you know you were going to ask the organisation to decide what socialism meant, there were invariably going to be splits and differences that the socialist principle has left an open sort of question that we would in our own political development define and refine or stick to for our benefit.

**Ahmed:** Sure, I'm going to move on now in terms of some of the high points of this early period. In your memory, what were the kind of key, apart from Urban Futures, the key kind of points from urban mobilisation that the APF were involved in?

**Nicolas:** I mean of course there is the 2001 World Conference against Racism in Durban, and the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. Those were like significant occasions for our mobilisation. The National Exploratory workshop, I don't know if there, I mean that was the APF's attempt at inviting people from around the country to participate in a discussion around what we could do at a national level around advancing the struggle against disconnections, but I mean the big events were the world conferences, the one in Durban saw a contingent of about three hundred go down to Durban on a train where they would stay in a marquee tent for a couple of days and probably spent a lot of the time regretting that they had even come because the living was a bit rough for them. It was important that the APF was there because the kind of challenge to get a national struggle, or network of struggle happening, that the national exploratory workshop had tried to initiate was given great impetus by the World Conference because the APF had gone there without any like expressed support from the Concerned Citizens Forum in Durban, it was only out of the couple of us who were in Durban at the time, who were able to organise what modest accommodation in the marquee tent that was available, and some food. But the Concerned Citizens Forum didn't know APF and APF is a new act on the political scene, not as much as they were, there was no meeting of comrades prior there to, so that the World Conference brought the APF to Durban it was more a match of the event rather than a national coordination of struggle. The level of cooperation I suppose improved at the WSSD, we got not even the APF at that stage, we got the Anti Eviction Campaign from Cape Town to come up to Johannesburg for the World Summit on sustainable development and people from Durban as well, the Concerned Citizens Forum to participate in the mobilisation against the World Summit so, at that level those events-were key points in the development of a national vision of what struggle could become.

**Ahmed:** Did you find ... for instance WCAR - I mean you were saying that what the national exploratory workshop attempted to do the WCAR help to do the practical phase of songs that they got from there ... what was the sense of this kind of national movement emerging at the time of the WCAR for yourself?

**Nicolas:** I at the time didn't think that there was something of a national movement being possible. I thought it was pre-emptive of a lot of like groundwork in Johannesburg that was going to be necessary because on the face of it you had a couple of affiliates who were taking, or making important political actions and my sentiment at the time was that our priority really should have been to like build the struggle in the inner city for instance which was facing an offence from the municipality around the King's buildings program because you know it was difficult as it was to organise in the city, organising now with people from Cape Town and from Durban seemed to me to be over-reaching to what we could realistically achieve and I thought at the time that, that those kind of initiatives that took form more in the Social Movements Indaba coming out in the World Summit on sustainable development, that they were pre-empting the kind of work that we need to be doing locally. I would never say to the exclusion of those, the possibilities, but the kind of imperative to be a nationally representative structure that was opposed to National Government programs was weakening our political development at the local level.

**Ahmed:** And through the kind of political imaginary of the APF, what do you think the effect of WCAR and WSSD was?

**Nicolas:** You know the assessment coming out of Durban I got conflicting stories from members of the contingent who went down, some people had the extraordinary like a sense of an insurgency that had almost taken place, or their own self-development having come from their own engagements with different people whom they've met on the train going down and such. Other people had had a torrid time you know finding the accommodation and food and all that was really tough going for them, but coming out of that it didn't seem to debilitate the APF's organisational development. The Durban social forum that the APF's did part with that, it didn't seem that, I think that the divisions that happened in the Durban social forum around the issues of Palestine and the Landless People's Movement and the APF, manifested mostly in the sense that these struggles were, that there was some common groundwork, at that time there was still not a recognised common interest. I mean there was a separation of those issues in marches that didn't allow for a co-mingling of issues for us to be a coherent march of the Durban social forum against the WCAR. I mean that kind of political development took place more clearly I think in the WSSD, when we were able to as a socialist movement unite it, get the Landless Peoples Movement to join the APF as well as the other movements that have come to Joburg in the march from Alexandra to Sandton and that experience and the mobilisation towards it, I think that did develop as a critical perspective on the global system of capture that the UN represents, the Johannesburg, not the Johannesburg, the South African government's own capture within that Joburg structure. There was a sense that the UN was something that needed to be critical of and I suppose in that sense these occasions gave the APF and the other

organisations involved a sense of a global struggle. There were also occasions when we received many activists from overseas that allowed for comrades to recognise a global face in the local struggle.

**Dale:** Coming out of those two very large mobilisations and events, describe in your experience as an activist in the APF, how that impacted on the APF with regards to its organisational make up, its growth, decline and also its scope of activities.

**Nicolas:** The WSSD for instance did certainly bring into the scope of APF activity an engagement with environmentalists to an extent the Environmental Justice Networking Forum that was part of the Social Movements Indaba, you know and part of the Alexandra to Sandton march. I mean that kind of work between the organisations had not brought in environmental issues, environmental activists within the APF fold, so I suppose at that level it grew, otherwise the move to globalise or develop a sense that there's a global struggle underway was something that allowed the APF to see itself as not just being Johannesburg based.

**Dale:** Okay and what about the internal sort of like organisational democracy, decision making, the structuring of the APF?

**Nicolas:** Since 2000, there's been increasing like tiers put to the organisation, with shifts and changes here and there where before the weekly coordinating team committees or activists forum were called coordinating committees ... committees soon were forming around the media and research and the hierarchy of the organisation, the executive committee and coordinating committee with their own respective jurisdictions or representations from organisations. Now the World Summit I suppose did amp up that sort of need to have a structure one way where organisations involved would be part of decisions around who or how the communities were going to be mobilised for Alex's and Sandton march and it did allow us to grow into an organisation that I suppose might have been ... I mean I didn't know if it even necessarily gave us more of a hierarchical character than otherwise. Internally we became part of the Social Movement Indaba and in that respect we became comrades with other organisations similar to the APF in other urban centres around the country.

**Dale:** Okay just shifting a bit in terms of being more specific, your work in the APF - where have you been ... from the early years and subsequently ... been most involved and give us a sense of positions you've held or what kind of work that you've done in the APF and how you've experienced that?

**Nicolas:** I started out typically doing media work, then when the media committee was formed, I was a member of the media committee, and then in 2003 the research sub committee was set

up particularly to research the pre paid water meters, so I was involved in that committee as well and that was to do, organise field work in Phiri and in Orange Farm. And then also part of it was to do some of the media around research and pocket book media and such - a pocket booklet on the finding of the research so that we could distribute those in the communities. And early on I was part of the inner city community forum, we were trying to organise the inner city. How I feel about the media, I mean coming to that perhaps it is a bit frustrating to how the media lapses and builds and lapses all the time constant cycles of frustrations and relief ... the media committee is not exactly a representative body of the APF, the decision of the APF it allows for one representative from every community to be part of the media committee, but that doesn't mean that everybody that one represented from every affiliate that attended the meetings of the media committee so essentially the media committee becomes those people from the organisations, activists who are interested in introducing media and more than one from that affiliate coming to the meetings. So we would train, do training among these comrades who would come through and they would be active for a while and that activism would then lapse and new people coming to typically afterwards and after new year's, you are left with familiar demands around the need for training and workshops and media production and at that level doesn't advance, it just keeps in a sort of a stasis.

**Dale:** Just as a follow up to that - you have been involved yourself all the years in the APF with a range of different media related educational activities as well capacity building, computers, writings and so on - give us a sense of what kind of challenges there are with regard to ... just going back to the earlier period, you know the formation of the APF was a range of different individual and middle class activists and communities, predominant constituencies unemployed and fairly largely unskilled labour ... how has that in your experience, the challenges to kind of forge a sustainable kind of organisation with people who were able to take those activities and be able to run with it themselves?

**Nicolas:** The issues around computers and the need for offices in regions was one that was coming up quite regularly, not so much recently as earlier on where organisations were saying you know quite justifiably that they needed a base from which to work, that they didn't have offices and could the APF assist in the establishment of offices and that would typically mean that a computer would have to be made available and besides the rent for an office and such. That may have improved the ability of these organisations to continue their organising work, but the technical side of things, I mean we haven't had much success outside the Johannesburg central office, the couple of computers that we put in, tended to go into somebody's bedroom and remain there and didn't move, you know didn't ultimately serve for long term organisational development or purposes like that. These organisations are as you describe, in situations of poverty so trying to get people to be active does require a lot of their own energy

and that in itself is inspired I think by the levels of conflict brought about by actions from Eskom or banks or whoever, who would be disconnecting services or evicting people. So trying under those circumstances to maintain organisation coherence and maintain an organisational office are very difficult. I don't know if the regional offices, there was a regional office that was piggy backing in the Vaal for a while, but I don't think it's ever maintained the APF identity and I think it is closed.

**Dale:** Okay I am just shifting to the last few remaining questions that are a little bit larger in the macro context looking at the development ... I mean the APF is ten years old now, hard to imagine, but it is a decade old. Over the period of time, how would you describe the changes or similarities or commonalities in other words towards consistency of the basic vision, campaign strategies of the APF, how would you look at this? Have you seen things fundamentally shift, remain more or less the same or defined by exigencies, practical exigencies of the struggles themselves?

**Nicolas:** There have always been like four pillars of APF activism, water, housing, electricity and unemployment, and there is the fifth, education. Education has not always been so active, I mean there was the education committee and these campaigns around electricity, housing etc have always been around, but these have tended to spike an urgency at particular times when there are exigencies. I mean for instance around the water, the pre paid water system that has since 2003 until last year had been quite an overriding concern for the organisation and has borne the Coalition against Water Privatisation and besides these general campaigns, there would be elections that come along where the APF's decisions have been to advance its own interests, or its own campaigns, using the platform of the elections as a point in which to be heard I suppose. And of course WSSD when the notion of sustainable development relating to and how poverty undermines and challenges the notion of sustainable development, it only ever got that interpretation, sustainable development it was interpreted in that way in terms of how people were being disconnected or evicted from their houses. So there have been times also when certain concerns of affiliates had influenced the kind of direction the organisation has taken where labour would become a concern for SAMANCOR retrenched workers, then the labour committee would become more active and would meet at the APF in trying to network other affiliates of the APF around labour issues, but these haven't been consistently sustained. I mean at the mention of SAMANCOR, their issues would be taken up by Richard Spoor, you know once a lawyer has in hand, there is something of a soft peddling of the issue the activism of retrenched workers, other unemployed workers in the APF is diminished at a broader level. It has happened at the pre paid water level where the failure of the pre paid water meter constitutional challenge has seen the activism around water dip, consequent to the ruling by the Constitutional Court. So we are in the cycle of representations and petitions to power and

you know lapsing to a nil until another urgency comes from either one of our other affiliates or elsewhere.

**Dale:** Okay and just tied to that, I mean the nature of that sort of rollercoaster character that you described, how would you link that to the development of what you described in the early years - how the APF tried to gather itself around a particular kind of political activist, one that had moved outside of the general traditional forums that were on offer because there was no space and all that - how would you describe the development during the period of the political consciousness or activity, I mean the character, should I say the APF activist himself or herself?

**Nicolas:** I mean at several points we had the benefit of activism of youth in structures and they definitely found a lot of space for growth within the APF and some particular activists benefiting a lot from the kind of World Social Forum, sort of engagements, Southern African Social Forum and opportunities of those to where meeting up with activists from Durban, from Cape Town, Zimbabwe, from Malawi, would develop a consciousness of people around the levels of poverty in Kenya that comrades saw there. There was a sense of a struggle that was against poverty that was at a definite African political imperative. The consciousness of members other than the youth, I think, I can't really say now, a large portion of some of the affiliates, some of these constitute pensioners, I am thinking of Soweto particularly. I can't say that, maybe it is because I don't relate to them as easily, but their pretty conscious it seems to ... to have always been quite militant. They haven't tired from taking kind of strong stands with respect to ESKOM and often times its the youth who benefited from that sort of example, other times, not other times, other affiliates, other activists, where they would see an imperative to struggle, others would see a need for understanding of the issues to be developed and some need for conciliation and sharing of the differences and sharing of the issues and the religiosity of some of the participants who would see a need to come to an APF meeting and share their experiences, but not necessarily come with a programme of action which is something that the solidarity from the other members of the forum would give them, and suppose they would go ahead with it.

**Ahmed:** Nic, I've got a question, it is a little bit difficult for me to articulate, but maybe you can help me here. You were speaking earlier about the impact at least of immigrants on how the APF and kind of political community that the APF sees itself as a part of ... now to what extent are the politics of the APF figured around the community of the nation and to what extent does it articulate positions that go beyond that as a kind of basic unit of a political organisation?

**Nicolas:** I mean it is the ... you implicitly refer to the xenophobia that has become...?

**Ahmed:** I implicitly refer to the question

**Nicolas:** Well when xenophobia did become pronounced when it took a violent form in 2008, I did become, I mean I had been prior to that aware of a sense that there was xenophobia amongst comrades in the organisation, by comments said by the by about coming to town, they were Nigerians ... but 2008 did bring to the fore quite a disturbing level of xenophobia among, articulated by members of the APF. I mean it would be said like xenophobia workshops in the APF were running as a result of concerns around what our position was with respect to what had happened, people would say they are not xenophobic, but that foreigners must just go, there was a sense that, that to be xenophobic you had to be violent. It is not as though APF members had been violent, they had not been, if there had been xenophobia among comrades it seemed to be clear and that was kind of disturbing because there is a sense in the APF that the notion of citizenship is tied to struggle. There seems to be a sense that if you struggle to defend your right to water for instance that is circumscribed by the fact that you are South African and that those rights are due to you, you know why else be petitioning your city to be fighting those services, so you can like take direct action and break the law, but only ever to reaffirm your rights to the fruits of citizenship. There is moral sense of what citizenship entitles you to and that does not preclude that immigrants have not been part of the APF, they have been mostly here in the inner city and Soweto a little bit as well, that I know, particularly Zimbabweans, but there is a sense in which petitioning the state to provide services has a circumscribed the position that the organisation can take to a exclusive and nationally circumscribed level.

**Dale:** Okay just a few last questions. Over the last several years, many of those, what some call social movements organisations, whatever you want to call them, formed in the late '90's early 2000's, have either split have become very inactive or very disintegrated to a large degree and ceased to exist in some cases. Two points: one is how do you think/why do you think the APF did to avoid that situation that has befallen many of the others that the APF worked with for a number of years?; two - how has that affected the APF?

**Nicolas:** I think the longevity of the APF has a lot to do with people like yourself Dale, who have sustained the organisation through the funding that has been well accounted for and the fact that we do have funding allowed us to have meetings. When we were first starting, we got pieces of handouts from Patrick Bond, you know one lump sum of a thousand rand to hold a coordinating committee sort of thing from the Municipal Services Project, that was how meetings would take place and affiliates would organise some tomato sandwiches and that was lunch kind of thing, but as funding has been secured from different donors, we have been able to maintain a organisational regiment of monthly, weekly meetings and then subcommittee meetings, but besides that sort of organisational coherence, there's the experience of members of the APF like Bricks in Orange Farm and then John, from you know John Appollis,



who bring to the forum an appreciation of the process of democracy and that would be a need for discussions to always be entertained, that splits should be pre-empted and that the unity of the organisation will be paramount and had certain positions been taken around participation in the elections, I don't think we would be in the same organisation as we are today. Maybe it is the fact that there is a middle class influence, but I don't think so now, because in Cape Town too there were middle class elements who were trying to be part of the anti-eviction campaign, but were soon disaffected and left the organisation and similarly in Durban, so I don't know about the involvement of middle class activists being necessarily an explanation for the APF's longevity. The ability of the APF to grow has also allowed us to continue, I mean the, though it is fits and starts, we have an affiliate who down the line is a skeleton that was at the start. It does nonetheless mean that newer people are affiliating as the organisation progresses. It does question whether me saying that the organisation is growing. You know a certain number of affiliates are reflective of organisations that are active in the organisation at one time. It is not the case that the APF is all of its 32 odd affiliates, some are diminished and not as active as they once were, they're not much more than the committee that they have become.

**Ahmed:** It is a kind of follow on question to that. You have spoken about the longevity of the APF one that kind of reflects but I am going to ask about the health of the APF, but before that, what constitutes for you organisational health and do you see the APF at present in a healthy state?

**Nicolas:** I don't mean to sound cynical, but I am cynical about the APF. My sense is that people are often part of the APF because there is nothing better to do, that it presents an opportunity to come to Joburg, to meet with other people and almost be like in a social network rather than an activist network. The questions of resources, organisational resources, monies are always the most fervently like argued in meetings you can spend a whole meeting like discussing whether somebody's going to move or who is going to be representing the organisation at a conference, and then substantive issues are not adequately dealt with, but you know that is of course justified by the fact that those are the concerns of comrades who are hustling to get to the APF and be part of the organisation. My cynicism is also about the sense that the APF has become an academic curiosity, because I am dealing with the website and media, I often get messages from students and there is so many students who want to come and do research at the APF, it has just become something of a cliché and maybe that affects my own appreciation of what the APF is doing, my sense of us being rather more of academic value, than activist value. The most recent activity the APF has been, the pre-paid water meter case, and prior that in 2007, I was also, 2007 was a really good year for the APF, there was a lot of activism that the organisers had brought to the Vaal area, to Kliptown in different poor neighbourhoods, there was a sense growing there that activism was something that could be communicated and could

grow and through the offices of the APF, I mean that was 2007, those organisers are no longer in organisations, so I don't know where they, like the impetus of the organisation is going at the moment because there are service delivery protests that are taking place and the APF had been marginally related to them. I say marginally because I only know in the East Rand the KCR being involved in a multi sort of multi organisational initiative to bring services to Thokoza. The other ones, say Diepsloot and what is the other behind Bara?

**Ahmed:** Motswaledi.

**Nicolas:** Mostwaledi, yes and they had protests recently, other projects around the city and around the province. The APF is not necessarily doing well to communicate to that struggle, it seems rather to be APF's two's and formation, APF one is somewhat pitiful to it. I am concerned that we are lacking organisational relevance; it is as though we have been institutionalised to an extent and people have a sense of the APF having become an office and a certain voice that's apart from that.

**Ahmed:** Given that, those and I think you have outlined what your sense is of a wide range of challenges, facing the organisation. One, do you think there, organisationally there is a sense of these challenges and two, as a follow on to that, that is there in your opinion any kind of coherent attempt within the organisation for addressing some of these?

**Nicolas:** Yes, as far as I know for instance there were organisers for the APF in Siyathemba, last week at the march on Monday, Siyathemba in Mpumalanga which is quite a way out and there was the sense also that there was a need to relate to these so called service delivery protests, by the deployment of comrades to go as far as the Eastern Cape to meet with people there around what was those issues. I can't really speak like to confidently about any strategies that are currently been taken by the organisation, because my level of involvement is being only at the media committee and I haven't been really attending and decision making forums.

**Dale:** Two or three last ones ... things that have happened at the level, the macro political and economical level in this country over the last two years, physically since Polokwane. How would you assess the impact and the consequence of that with regards to the APF's both organisational relevance as you put it as well as politics?

**Nicolas:** There is a sense in which the ascendancy of Zuma has stolen some of the thunder of the left alternative that had been going for the last ten years. I mean the ascendancy of Zuma has seemed to capture the notion of the alternative still being possible in the current structures of government within the ANC. Now I said that despite the fact that Siyathemba, the one community that mobilised and were protesting against the government. So the APF itself has

not envisaged support or sympathy for Zuma that I know of or that I have heard. I do think that Zuma has been able to restore some faith in the ANC, so that, to deliver on its promises. It hasn't made the APF irrelevant and I think the continued protests in poor communities in the country at the moment is testimony to the limitations of the Zuma alternative, but our separation kind of from those discussions, I mean maybe there is a need for the APF to consider how it is we should engage poor communities that are either nonetheless disinfected by ANC elements. I mean that seems to be in cases around the country where disaffected ANC elements used, I advisedly use the word used, the latent concerns around service delivery or whatever local democracy compromises and to use those opportunities to develop a struggle that also pulls the alternative that the APF envisages.

**Dale:** Okay and just lastly, the broad question ... we talked quite a lot about the weaknesses, the failing, the ups and downs and all those other kinds of things ... what do you think have been the key achievements of the APF in its ten year existence you have been involved for more or less the entire ten years within degrees of intensity as you look at that history?

**Nicolas:** Paramount for me was the solidarity to and among the poor communities, that experience of getting KCR support for an inner city action that was looking miserable otherwise was great, I certainly appreciated that. So the solidarity you get from between poor communities is probably the most important like the achievement of the APF. I mean the failure of for there to be an organisational form cohering around the service delivery protests and the rashes of riots that happened is an indication that there is that solidarity being communicated only subliminally, I mean I don't know, I don't think there is a third force at work at all. I do think that a third force is something that is there and that is poverty that the ability the APF to articulate a voice around resistance to poverty has been important. I don't think without the APF there would have been as coherent a challenge to the privatisation of water as there has been, similarly with the struggle for electricity in Soweto more particularly also representations of a post apartheid struggle that the APF has taken to the World Social Forum I think has been an important achievement, this idea of being post apartheid as being a political situation that is rife with conflict and with resistance I think has been a significant achievement.

**Dale:** Okay.

**Ahmed:** Thank you.