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Interviewer: It's the 9th February 2011 and I'm interviewing Phineas Malapela, thank you Phineas for making the time

Malapela: Okay. Sure.

Interviewer: A number of questions, some of them deal specifically with the APF some of them deal with the affiliate you are leader of. Just before we start that I'm asking everybody just a little bit about themselves, first of all when and where were you born?

Malapela: In Pretoria, around Cumen Mine.

Interviewer: What year was that?

Malapela: In 1959 and I grew up in Pretoria Maximum Prison.

Interviewer: You grew up in Pretoria Maximum Prison? Why was that?

Malapela: My mother was arrested there and I had to stay with my mother.

Interviewer: Okay, until what age?

Malapela: Until one and a half.

Interviewer: Then after that where did you stay as a child?

Malapela: I had to go back to my grannies in Sekhukhune then Afdale and attended school there.

Interviewer: And that's all the way through high school?

Malapela: Through High school and when I finished my high school I had to go to Zululand - University of Zululand.

Interviewer: And what did you get there?

Malapela: BJuris.

Interviewer: And from UZ what did you do? Did you come to Joburg?

Malapela: From that I joined the Civil Service in Sekhukhune Magistrate Court. I started Clerk of the Court, I became the Prosecutor and then eventually I was forced to leave the Public Service because of police harassment, the special branch and then from there I joined the Community Advice Centre. I started an advice centre in Marble Hall and in the Fordsval area which was part of the ACA - Advice Centre Association. From there until 1992

I had to move to the Vaal and established an advice centre legal there, Vaal Law Clinic which then was modified to become Vaal Legal Centre. Vaal Legal Centre incorporated University of Potchefstroom Law Clinic and we got Legal Aid from the government, the Legal Aid Board and then it became the Fair and Legal Justice Centre now. And then I had to leave it and open a separate office because of the criteria that they use. Most are people that were excluded from getting service because of the criteria which was used by the Legal Aid Board and I had to protest against that and they agreed with me that I can take whatever I can take from the office in terms of furniture and I had to establish a separate office which is existing even now in Vanderbijl Park as Vaal Legal Centre.

Interviewer: You've also done quite some work with unions, is that correct?

Malapela: Ya I've worked with unions. I started working with unions as early as 1986 because in 1986 we eventually formed NAWUSA which was National Union of Workers of South Africa, a general union in Pretoria and I was instrumental in forming it. From NAWUSA I also established Food and Beverage Worker's union which is now an affiliate of NAPTU and eventually we formed TUSA which was Trade Union of South Africa State Authorities which was now incorporated into PAWUSA and I'm working for PAWUSA.

Interviewer: Quite a resume you have there, and obviously because of that you became politically involved earlier on in your life. What - after 1994 in particular - would you identify as the main political trajectories that you were part of?

Malapela: In fact apart from that, the political stint I got it in 1976 when I was in high school, the teachers themselves were the ones who were teaching us politics, they were forcing us to read from *The World, The Weekend World* every Monday they will get us into the hall and ask us political questions around that. That's what actually forced us in 1976 to start participating in politics. But eventually the real student politics which is when I was at the University of Zululand in 1982 joining AZASCO which was Azanian Student Congress which eventually formed part of the APF but when it split into two, the other part went into the APF and became when was called AZASCO, Azanian Student Movement which was an affiliate of the student wing of AZAPO.

Interviewer: When you say the APF, do you mean the ANC?

Malapela: The UDF

Malapela: So AZAPO split into two. The other wing joined UDF and remained AZASCO and then the other one then joined AZAPO ... so that's when I learnt politics and eventually when

I became the magistrate the politics followed me there. I launched the first Sekhukhune branch of AZAPO and then after the launch harassment followed by special branch. They will come into my office when I was the prosecutor and question me on my dealings with other organisations and eventually it reached a limit where as prosecutor we had to prosecute former COSAS president who was hiding in Sekhukhune, Mabaso Brian and we eventually got an instruction, we had to get an instruction that that man is implicated, he was incarcerated at the time at Sekhukhune Police Station, he was picked up by special branch. And as prosecutors then we were told if we can help to get that man out of prison a car will be waiting to whisk him away to Swaziland then we intervened at that moment. The guy was released before the special branch arrived, we took him to court, withdrew the case immediately and he got into the car and was whisked away. That then was regarded as breach of our code as civil servants and the minister of justice came personally to question us ...why was that person put to court at that earlier moment and we answered that we don't know but we realised that man was implicated wrongly and to keep him in the cells more than 48 hours might have caused the state a problem so we were just intervening on behalf of the state. But anyway they were not convinced that is why they now started harassing, particularly they will come at night and say that if I did not cooperate and became one of them they will come and take me and throw me into a dam. That's when I realised I could not stay longer and be safe so that's how I left the area of Sekhukhune and then went back to Johannesburg, I started participating fully in AZAPO and eventually AZAPO as part of organisations which were piloting advice centres, sent me to Makobohestal to establish an advice centre .

Interviewer: After 1994, politically things began to change. When was the first time that you sort of ... obviously you were involved in a lot of community organisations ... but when was the first time you started participation in what will be considered as part of anti privatisation struggles in broader terms?

Malapela: That was in 1998 when the president of the Socialist Party Lybon Mabasa came to the Vaal to address us that we are about to launch an anti privatisation forum and then we think what we are doing at community level can be beneficial to make that movement work. And at that time we had just launched Working Class Coordinating Committee which was arising of ordinary residents who were about to be evicted and their property was about to be taken by government, about failure to pay the rates and taxes and also the workers who were retrenched by Arcelor Mittal which was ISCOR at the time and the soldiers themselves who were not integrated into the army were fighting, struggling to get into the army. So we launched that structure, we said we can call it Working Class Coordinating Committee to

encompass everybody and when he came to address us he advised us that it will be logical for the Working Class Coordinating Committee to be part of the anti privatisation forum. And when the Anti Privatisation Forum was launched we became part of it.

Interviewer: And what areas specifically does WCCC cover?

Malapela: In fact most organisations in the Vaal which are existing are in the APF now they were part and parcel of WCCC like boKananana Development and whatever and it covers all townships because most people who were gathering are from the different townships of the Vaal. Most of the people were from Bophelong where we launched a project called Tsibo, an educational project, from Sharpeville, from Boipathiong, from Sebokeng, we had a branch in Meyerton old location because they were fighting for houses there as well and the plot owners were being moved because they are black. So we were also fighting that struggle and especially at the time my office was in Didiri Vaal Legal Centre was in Didiri so I was able to reach that level. But we haven't had much inroads in Rotshi and other areas which are not African communities, we haven't had much in the coloured community, much in the Indian community, we haven't made much inroads in the poor white areas around there which we can call typically the traditional townships.

Interviewer: In terms of WCCC it sounds as if it covered quite a range of issues and activities, housing being a key one. What other sort of key areas was WCCC working on?

Malapela: Other key areas are environmental issues because eventually we made inroads into environmental struggles and then managed to gather people together and we eventually launched Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance which was basically an APF initiative because the APF sent us to the Elijah Barayi workshop where environmental organisations were there and the instrumental ones as WCCC and Samancor because they were having environmental issues both of them. And we decided to take the initiative in the Vaal and then gather other organisations in the Vaal and then launch that project which is viable now. And then it has moved to a level where we have even developed an environmental plan for the Vaal and we are part of the monitoring with the government, industry and other bodies and I think we made an impact there and now the focus is on the pollution of water and air quality and waste management and we are all in that things with the municipalities and engaged in that. We are participating and waging the struggle as necessary.

Interviewer: What I have been able to see as an APF person has been a lot of activities around workers and retrenchments and conditions of retrenched workers, is that right?

Malapela: Yes, the worker's issues we have grabbed them especially that the bulk of our membership were people who were retrenched from Iscor which was Arcellor Mittal. They were staying there and recalled and unable to fight until we then meet them and make their case to labour court which is now laying in the labour court - unfortunately they don't have an advocate. Recently we've got some advocates who are interested in pushing up the case but that was the case which affect all retrenched people especially the ones in ISCOR because they were retrenched while most of them were old and were about to go on pension. The retrenchment document which was signed by NUMSA and all other unions was saying within two years if there are vacancies within that company they will recall those people. When we check the vacancies which appeared within those two years were more than those people and they were not recalled so they had to treat that as unfair labour practise and then refer it to court. So it's at the labour court laying there now until we can get somebody who can push it. Apart from that we take several cases as they are; we had a big thing around pension funds which remained unpaid. People were underpaid for that pension fund so we fought for it, as far as Arcellor Mittal they were paid a little bit which was supposed to be paid and Samancor also they were paid a little bit which was supposed to be paid but unfortunately that was not enough. And we target also the issue of environmental health and many many times up to this far its Arcellor Mittal which said it will access and it is accessing already. Over 200 people were medically accessed from November last year until now so that they will be compensated. we took that sample but there are a lot of people who are supposed to be accessed to check as to whether the chemicals from the company are the ones that causes damage. But the reports from the company are clear, they are saying as a company there are chemicals which causes sinuses, causes cancer, causes asthma, causes kidney failure and they even indicate that they cause early death, they shorten the life span of people so that is what the report say. But in the meantime we are fighting with them, they are refusing to give us the environmental health master plan which they were supposed to have given us long ago. They said it's a public document but their lawyers are refusing it must be divulged to us because we will sue them. We don't know what they are hiding but it means that that document has got information which can be beneficial to the people to exercise their rights but unfortunately they are not realising that document. They have said a lot of things that are now all companies never trying them, every Wednesday they meet at Zone 11 stadium to present their problem and we handle their problem as they come.

Interviewer: Back to the APF, WCCC was one of the founding members of the APF. Just talk about WCCC's perspective and also you as an APF activist in those early years there were a lot of activities like WSSD, WCAR and those things, how did you see that early

period of growth of the APF in relation to the kind of struggles that were being waged in the communities, was it a positive development?

Malapela: It was in fact, a very positive development. The early time especially when we were still having the soldiers forum as an active member in the Vaal we were travelling by train free of charge anyway because the APF was not having funds at the time and then the dedication was the struggle other than any other reason and then we were not doing that for personal benefit or whatever but we saw APF as an organisation which can boost our own struggles on the ground and it did that. Because when the government decide to evict people from Kwa-Mazisa because the officials of the ruling party bought the building, they allegedly bought it for R5m a building worth R22m they wanted to sell it to the government for R15m so that they will get a profit of R10m and when we got the information we informed the government because according to the agreement that building was supposed to be handed over to the government not sold to the government. The government decided not to buy it and those guys decided they want to evict people from there. So APF played a very important role in that resistance eventually that building now has been taken over by the government, it's going to be reconstructed and be part of the township. That eviction failed and those guys who bought it lost it as the government has taken it as it was supposed to be done originally. When it comes to the other struggle, the struggle of anti racist struggle which is one of the points which made APF what it is now we took trains and mostly people from Kwa-Mazisa came out in large numbers and we had to take trains to go to Durban and the soldiers forum was there as a major component of us, I think that made APF one of the forces to be reckoned with in that time march needed, you remember that the march was not only of the APF but social movements joined most of them but APF made a mark in that. Cosatu march, the black consciousness at the time but the march was as well made a greater impact as a social movement were there. I think that's the mild road we made and then personally I was taken into organising for WSSD on behalf of Trevor who was having his own challenges here, he wanted to do it at home but the international trips that he was supposed to take then were taken by me. I was sent to New York to meet international NGOs and we even went as far as the capital the Opposition, Mr. Miller was the host of the opposition, the Democrats were opposition at the time. We made a presentation, they also organised a big gathering a Georgetown University and then I had to go there and address them showing them the impact of NEPAD to the people of South Africa which is just an extension of what the APF was opposing. They were calling it the extension of Gear and most of the people bought into that and after that we had a big conference at Wits University which was addressed by us, I shared the stage with Mr. Mayekiso, Vavi and others. We

were emphasising that people need to unite themselves, the congress is not about them it's about talking about people but people are not real they want to save themselves. Then the march went there which was big enough. It was a milestone although we lost the moment a bit because of internal strife's of social movements, social movements are not coherent in most cases maybe we can blame the poverty of the people who constitute social movements because the one who got greener pastures they jump ship and they go and they do not always have had brain drain as a social movement, it can't sustain it on cadres. I think that it is partly parties are desperate mostly. I think most social movement lost brains except for LPM people like Martin Gcaba not only at the APF, the APF lost Trevor, lost you, lost everybody. . I think that's basically it, now it's at the lower ebb but I think it needs to be reorganised.

Interviewer: Okay, I'll come to it. You mentioned that in the early years APF didn't have much resources, it relied on solidarity. Afterwards the APF received funding which allowed it to do a lot of things but in your experience over the years what have you seen in terms of the impact both negative and positive of that kind of funding?

Malapela: The funding was supposed to be good, to boost the struggles of the APF because it becomes easier now to struggle, to wage battles like taking for instance the battle for water in court, it needed resources you can't do it without resources. But resources on their own they became a hindrance to those who are in ... who do not know where the struggle is going and the resources themselves became the struggle and that is the negative impact of resources because people think that they are struggling because resources are there. They became committed to the resources rather than the struggle itself so that's a bit negative but resources on their own they need quality management. Without people who can manage resources there can be damage in the organisation. We need people who can manage them properly and channel them to struggles rather than benefit individuals. I think in the mean time the positive part of it we need also the capacity of the organisations to function without that I don't even think they are incentives in the struggle they are rather killing the struggle because we spent most of the time talking about them rather than the struggles.

Interviewer: Over the last seven years you've been elected to the office bearers of the APF, you've been dealing in projects and campaigns, give an indication of the things you've been involved in the APF level in that area.

Malapela: The projects can be viable struggle to sustain the struggle of the APF sometimes but unfortunately they also had their own negative impact if the project itself becomes the struggle you might not be able to contribute to the struggle because the project must not lose

focus of why are they formed because the struggles are supposed to be ameliorating what the major struggles are. Take for instance when we started VEJA from the beginning it did not make much impact in the APF most of the comrades saw VEJA as a separate entity owned by other people. No amount of convincing was able to penetrate, it's only now that this is the same struggle as what you are struggling for and then this vehicle can be utilised to supplement where the APF cannot do and then we can be able to penetrate. As far as that project is concerned it penetrated the white society most of the white people are now part of the environmental struggles which we are wagging around the Vaal River so this was supposed to be the APF owning that struggle so the affiliates in the Vaal, not the affiliates alone cause when we talk about Vaal we talk about South of Johannesburg as a whole because the monitors which have been put because of the pressure we have put on the government. One of the air quality monitors is in Diepkloof, its monitoring the whole mining area which is polluting the area so when we meet as Vaal Air Shed the municipality of Johannesburg is supposed to be there but unfortunately we are finding that Vaal communities always assume that it's supposed to be Johannesburg community because it's part of that so we were supposed to start as a launching pad for the struggles. So projects on their own can be grounding on the interpretation of the organisation but they can carry a positive impact if somebody can own them, they become yours and they are not bringing back anything to the organisation. So I think that needs to be avoided but the APF itself is not ready for that project they are still reluctant and doubting as far as the project is concerned. They think that getting to the project, maybe that will require experience as Trevor Ngwane once said 'if you get into the project and get money, you are going to forget about the project and become a bourgeoisie' but I don't think you can become a bourgeoisie by getting a little out of a project but it occupies wheels of the time for people and can even lose the sight of the struggle. Take for instance Orange Farm; Bricks - it's got a big project now which was supposed to be beneficial to the struggle from the very first beginning we now seem to be losing it bit by bit. Maybe not because Bricks wants us to lose it but because we, ourselves don't want to own our own babies we let them go, we form, let them go learning to have something to bind this project which we are building together so that there will be control from the centre. Take for instance some of the organisations that for projects they have even Trusts which is owned centrally by these organisations and that projects all of them put back, plough back what they are getting from that project into the Trust and the Trust also supports them. Not until we develop that level we will always have a problem of what that and I think this is what is prevailing in the APF - it's a resistance around the project and whether they are part of the struggle or not but it's not only in the APF. Last time I was in Britain in the trade union movement 'cooperatives are very conservative, they are a

drawback, you cannot, they are not benefiting the trade union movement they are in fact bourgeoisie organisations so I think that debate is so big. The socialist organisations almost all of them are in that problem whether the cooperatives, whether the economic entities are necessary for the struggle or they must just fight for political power. But its wrong to fight for economic power without building the economic and social organs.

Interviewer: A few organisational questions. How would you describe particularly in the Vaal ... the Vaal after a period of time became by far the largest region in the APF in terms of affiliate activities ... how would you describe the relationship between different communities and structures within the APF particularly at regional level?

Malapela: Basically I think we had an ambitious programme in the Vaal which we were carrying out successfully meeting now and then but unfortunately this seems to be going down. Maybe it's going down because the struggle itself seems to be going down but I think the people especially the leadership are no longer going along properly. According to our decision as Vaal we were going to act to have an assembly every Wednesday where we come in and then every community, every affiliate bring its programme and we get the programmes together and clear some of the things out. But unfortunately some of the affiliates are not coming up and some of the affiliates are existing by word of mouth. They are not even entities and they do not even meet in their areas so that is the problem we are having in the mean time but there are a lot of affiliates which want to come to the APF in the meantime but that needs to be discussed at a regional level. The regional level itself is not in order - you cannot take the communities of Meyerton and get them in, you cannot take the communities of Rotshi and get them in. The communities next to the Vaal University of Technology are ready and knowing: 'we want to come to the APF, we want to become communities of APF' - so things of that nature they want communities also want to be part cause they are saying we have got technology, we have got knowledge but they are saying you have got the muscle to force the council to do what we want so they want to join into that things but our house is not in order especially in the Vaal.

Interviewer: And on that basis give me your opinion why you think that is? Why is the house not in order?

Malapela: The house is not in order because comrades are just not honest with themselves, they are just not honest with themselves in the sense that if you don't have struggles in your area you need not pretend to be having struggles and give false reports to the organisation like APF and say we have struggles of this nature, we want funding knowing very well that if you are going to get that funding you are not going to prosecute the struggle you are going

to prosecute the stomach struggle for yourself. So that dishonesty is the one causing the problem of refusing to meet because that leader knows this one has done that, that one knows this one has done that so if you know your unbecoming activities of each other you can't meet unless if you call a meeting of truce and you admit the truth and say let's start on a clean slate and say let's work together while you've disclosed that. Our problem is that leaders who are there now in the region are all of them in the mud. They have done things which organisationally it proves that they should not be in the leadership. I think that's what kills the struggle a bit even the struggles that come on their own. Take for instance now the North West University is prepared to go into research with us. When you call the comrades and say 'no let's go into the university and go into them with the research, they have got their own funding as the university which comes from the municipality, government and whatever to do research on water, we have got our funding to do research on water and then say lets collaborate on your research, we can do the research, lets finish your report and then we can continue doing the research, we gain the experience and we as the university we can accredit and give you some accreditation but still things coming on their own it will respect the APF for what it was and they are not grabbing that opportunity. They are reluctant to grab that opportunity.

Interviewer: You mentioned earlier, you were talking about the struggle in the broader context not just the APF, you said 'it might also be the fact that the struggle is going down' ... do you think in general terms just not specific to the APF - how do you think the macro environment, economically and politically has affected the struggles of the APF and communities in the last few years?

Malapela: Generally I think most of the APF comrades most of the people who are working now in other institutions had stints in the APF. As a result everyone now seems to be using these struggles as a transition, you do the struggles and then you move to positions and the APF is out recruiting. As a ruling party they realise that most of the people who were active in the communities are the ones who are from our affiliates, they pick them up and take them up so that's one of the things in general which make the struggle go down and the ANC programme now is go to the people, talk to them, get whoever is possible to get into the band wagon because their cadres are corrupt so they want to replace them with people who are active in the community - so in that case political activists that enter actively through COSATU, through SACP, through their other projects on the ground. Take for instance guys like Oupa Hlanganani, he is now the key person in the ruling party so most of the people are being taken like that and put there. That actually has impact on the struggle; it's got impact on the struggle not only of the APF but general community struggle because people now are

looking forward for opportunities. Youth are now becoming materialistic, they look at those guys in government, they move to this level and that and that and they want to reach that as well no matter what. So things of the struggle are going down that way and then they need to be resuscitated most in all levels. We see white people are grabbing the struggle, the black struggle is going down in the townships, in white areas the struggle is getting on.

Interviewer: How would you respond to the argument that an organisation like the APF and indeed some of the social movements are victims of their success meaning that some of the demands the ANC has shifted talking in a particular language and therefore the social movement has nowhere to go ... that was one of the criticisms from the Left, that if you issue and the government answers that then what would you want to do after that? How would you answer that?

Malapela: That in fact has got some form of credibility although it has got flows as well, the success, the only problem with us is that we don't claim and own our successes. We fight for things like water we fight for things like poor people must be given certain concession from the government. Take for instance in the Vaal. I was part of the first people taken to court because we failed to pay the rentals and they took a sample of us, we were 18, we filled up the necessary court papers answering whatever and when the day of the court came I was the only one who was allowed to make representation to the court and they announced that Mandela was scrapped the existing debt and it was just after one year after Mandela had scrapped them but when you look at what they say people are owing its R30 000. I had to ask them this guy were explaining where does this debt come from and break it down because we have got Mandela as paper here which says debts are scrapped and the courts had to put it to council and council was unable to answer. As a result the cases were thrown out and they even told them that they had to pay costs to us. So such things we were unable, maybe we didn't have the capacity to claim that victory then we did not claim them. People in Soweto they fought heavily until some arrears were scrapped, but when arrears were scrapped the government still claims victory that we fought for you and we are scrapping that and the people who were fighting that were unable to claim that victory. I think to an extent we did not actually own our own victories, if we had owned our own victories and emphasised and everybody know that these people did not change, these things were not brought to them on the platter they were fought for by us then we might have made a mileage out of that but our victory became nothing because we did not claim it. Instead that people we were fighting against said now we felt mercy, felt mercy for you. I think to an extent it's like that.

Interviewer: What you describe now, you've gone through a lot, strengths, weaknesses, challenges, in the present situation clearly there are a lot of problems not only in the APF but generally with lots of different struggles. Two part question; Do you think there is still a role for an organisation like the APF and communities now 16 years after independence?; and, what is that role?

Malapela: I think to an extent there is still a role for the APF especially that most of the people are not organised into a form of organisation. The APF and social movements are seen as an organisation that can channel the struggles of people on the ground which are not parse political. I think it's really necessary for the APF and the social movement to exist because there is a role. Most of the people don't have trust in the political organisations anymore. They say the political organisations used us to get where they are and dumped us. The trend in the world as a whole there is uprising elsewhere in the world but that uprising are not led by political organisations, mostly political movements form the basis. Take the Latin Americans mostly the social movements are leading struggles there so I think the role is still there. Having a role the social movement is playing and having a role to mobilise the communities irrespective of the political affiliations of those communities and the things that affect those communities.

Interviewer: There were a lot of different questions but you answered them in a lot of your responses. Is there anything that we haven't covered here that you want to add? This is about a history of getting different people's testimonies, their own community struggles so that it's recorded and we know these things.

Malapela: I think the thing we don't have as social movements is the time on the alternatives which people always ask – 'but what alternatives are you giving us?'. If you can have a tie there which can be able to debate alternative infrastructure which can sustain the people's initiatives we will be going a mileage. And Israel is saying it's the conservative or whatever we call it but I had the benefit of going to study in Israel and I realised one thing which is important - the economy of their villages is run by the villagers themselves. They have got these schemes which are completely cooperatives which are run by them. They have got the biggest land in the land bank which is run by trade union movements and workers invest directly into that, they have got the biggest insurance in the country which is run by the workers themselves. So as a result the people created the organs which make people own the little economy which they have in that particular little county. So as a result the loyalty of the people which they have in that little country cannot be shaken. So if we can be able to establish in the social movements the organs which will make people be able to do things

themselves because there is no any other source of economy, there is no any other consumer other than the poor person on the ground so we always get that power and then give it to other people rather than do it. We can learn from women, women are running societies; they are running stovels which are able to sustain them. We as organisations for people on the ground why are we failing to do that? We can learn from the Boers. I always say the Boers were poor whites on the ground and they deliberately started organs which were able to up lift them from that poverty. They started cooperatives they started building what they can do on their own to lift themselves up. We also are supposed to inculcate that into the people themselves otherwise our struggle will then be wasted because we are not a challenge to the system.

Interviewer: Thank you very much.

