

MURPHY MOROBE
Cambridge, Massachusetts
May 4, 1991
Interviewed by Gail Gerhart

[We spoke following a workshop on SA at the Albert Einstein Institution. Morobe is spending academic year 1990-91 at Princeton University. This interview focuses on the Soweto uprising of 1976]

WHEN DID YOU COME INTO STUDENT POLITICS? WERE YOU A MEMBER OF THE AFRICAN STUDENT MOVEMENT?

I wasn't a member of ASM. I joined SASM later, in 1973. But I'd become aware of its existence in 1972. At that time my own political consciousness was evolving; I had entered secondary school, and in 1973 a number of things had taken place. There had been a number of arrests of students, especially at Orlando High School, people like Mathe Diseko, who stayed in the same township as I am. I was at Orlando North Secondary School.

I grew up as someone very interested in news. How I acquired that I can't tell, but it probably had to do with the fact that I was quite devoted to my studies.

DID YOU HAVE OLDER BROTHERS, OR OTHERS WHO SPARKED YOUR INTEREST?

No, it was just from my school days. I loved discussions, especially philosophy. My parents were not politically involved. It had more to do with the friends I made in secondary school, and the kind of things we looked at together. It was that, and just my own experiences growing up in Soweto.

WERE YOU IN A RELIGIOUS GROUP OF ANY KIND?

No, though I was quite religious. I actually grew up in a church, the AME Church. In fact, my uncle was the minister in that church, and he brought me up before my higher primary school education. Of course the church itself wasn't very political. I grew up in the Eastern Transvaal (partly), in towns like Ermelo. My early years of school, my starting years, were in Ermelo, until I got to higher primary school, which I did in Soweto. I was born in Orlando East (as Gastow says), at the same address where I'm still staying today.

So I got some ideas, like many young people in Soweto, from our experience with the police, getting arrested for not carrying passes. Our homes used to be raided, people arrested randomly, and those things impacted on one, and one developed a reaction of rebellion against those experiences.

HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN YOU MOVED FROM ERMELO TO SOWETO?

I think I was eleven. In 1966, we came back from Ermelo and we stayed in Pimville; then in 1967 I joined my family in Orlando. Before that I was with my uncle.

Then 1973 was the pivotal point for me. At my secondary school I began to be involved in cultural activities. We had a group at my school ["Khindlimuka", which means "Arise" in Tswana] that had a strong Black Consciousness emphasis. It got students together to perform and conduct cultural activities -- poetry, drama, exchange of literature, reading. In terms of my concentrated involvement, that was one of the most crucial things. The approach we had was a very pivotal one. We saw it as getting into cultural activities so that they could be used to achieve political conscientization. The people involved were all members of SASM. We had cultural groups as one of the organizational strategies. We were looking for different ways to reach out to students, ways that would interest them.

Because talking about politics was very difficult. Students feared to engage in that; they feared the authorities, the principal, the officials of the Bantu Education Department. But starting such groups gave you a way to handle the situation. If you wanted venues, it was easier to get one in a church or school for a cultural organization than for an overtly political organization.

If you recall, that was a critical period for Black Consciousness and its conscientization approach. And we were questioning the lack of cultural expression amongst our people. There were values that we had been exposed to that we were beginning to question; beginning to pose things that were antithetical to the status quo. And with this cultural group we could begin to travel. On days when SASO would have events at Turfloop we would travel to Turfloop and present some of the plays, poetry. And this would expose us to people outside the ranks of high school students.

And we tried to get other Soweto High schools to form other cultural groups. Then we'd get those groups into joint activities. For example, at Orlando High School; one of the teachers there was Curtis Nkondo, who was the English language master. The one way SASM was able to establish itself in the schools was to go in through the debating societies. Curtis made that possible for that to happen.

TELL ME MORE ABOUT YOUR CONTACTS WITH THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS PEOPLE.

In 1973 in particular, I didn't have many contacts with those people, except on occasions like -- The BPC was formed in 1972. Then I got to know more people in the BPC from the township, some were ministers of the church, etc. And I would have contacts with SASO only at the time of conference, which I would attend. I wouldn't say there was a very organized way in which we interacted with them in terms of actual discussions.

THEY RAN FORMATION SCHOOLS, FOR LEADERSHIP TRAINING. . .

Yes, I attended a number of those, at Wilgespruit and so on. I was involved and that was one of the ways we got exposure to ideas. I don't recall many details any more, but we got introduced to a way of thinking, a way of taking responsibility; how to take initiative, those kinds of requirements for leadership in the kinds of situations that we were involved in.

Of course it took a much stronger Black Consciousness slant, in the sense that those who were actually exposed to Black Consciousness ideas would be involved in discussions about them. And the various ways in which communities could be organized, the ways you could do that, over and above just trying to get someone to have a membership card. That's where this whole notion started that people must get involved in what we called community development. Now SASM tried to do that; but my involvement was more through BPC which had a community development subgroup or committee. NAYO also had a community development committee.

WERE THERE PARTICULAR PROJECTS?

The projects that I remember had to do with an old age home, somewhere in Meadowlands. We went to these places, to assist old folks with painting, etc. It was more community service. But even then it was an attempt to get us involved in community work. As I recall, it never really developed fully to the point where it could be replicable, but it nevertheless was always one of the stated objectives, work in the community.

The leadership training courses were important, because those of us who were amongst the key people in SASM tried a number of times to use this also with new recruits, to take them too through the process. We would then invite people from SASO, like Jackie Selibe and people from NAYO to come and actually do it.

TO REPLICATE THE PROCESS?

That's right. We never conducted the sessions ourselves, but we had people like those from university to come help us, to conduct those sessions. Then we had things like literacy training, various ways of using literacy to reach certain target groups. We used to think more in terms of hostels.

WERE YOU ACTUALLY INVOLVED IN SUCH TEACHING?

No-- I actually took a few courses in how to do it, but it never really did happen. Because one of the really big problems for SASM had to do with resources. In 1973 in particular, when I got involved, the organization virtually went dormant. And then we came round in '74 again, with people like Amos Masondo, Billy Masetlha, Super Moloji, and we came back and tried to reconstruct the organization.

IT'S SO OFTEN ASSERTED THAT SASO AS A UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' ORGANIZATION, WITH ITS RATHER PHILOSOPHICAL OR ABSTRACT APPROACH, WAS AN ELITE OR ELITE-ORIENTED ORGANIZATION. DO YOU AGREE WITH THAT?

Well, sitting down and looking back on that situation, at that time-- If you get involved in a process like that, you develop friendships; it becomes a group, very close-knit group of friends who get to know each other. You are always together; it's a weekend, it's a meeting. And the sense that you have of yourselves becomes, I would say, looking back, becomes an inflated one, in that you begin to make judgements of the rest in terms of the self.

YOUR OWN SUPERIOR CONSCIOUSNESS AND SO ON.

Yes, that's right. You get introduced to concepts, you have to interpret those concepts, and how you interpret them is a variable that depends on what you do and how you do it. And we got involved in that way of doing things which in my view did not contribute actually to mass consciousness. The way in which the movement at that time found it very difficult, let's say to reach out to the community. It actually got constrained by the fact of itself being a student organization focussed more on very high flown notions of change and concepts, etc. and debates. And we always spoke about these things but it never got done. The fact that most of our meetings got conducted in English, because we all could speak English and we'd converse in English. Those things invariably constrained the extent to which we could interact with the community, especially in a situation where we were at a stage where we were saying psychological liberation was important.

But the important question which should have arisen was how do you go about raising people's consciousness? And in our view as students, it was a matter of going out, recruiting students, getting them to a workshop, and thereafter introducing them to Black Consciousness. It's more like preaching. You tell them about Steve Biko and SASO, BPC, the history, and the concepts, etc. Whereas I think there were other approaches. I think even SASO did have cultural activities, which in my view did have a big impact, at least among students in the universities. And over time, it was something that caught on with people who were involved in cultural activities even outside universities.

We had groups like Mihloti (?), musical groups like Basuni, Chiki(?) based in Pretoria, and all those were actually groups whose performances were looked on as embodying the typical black authentic cultural perspective. And if any group was to be relevant, it had to have those kinds of sounds. That was the one thing.

Then as far as the period of 1973 was concerned, when many of us got in, a lot of the guys who were taking us through the process either got arrested, banned, and some of them went into exile. Then we had to try to reconstruct the organization.

Now for us, we had a situation where building SASM had to begin in Soweto. The people who were trying to do it, at least we knew each other as being based in Soweto. In other parts of the country there were pockets of people who were supposed to have been involved in the student movement who in a sense were before us, and we spent a lot of time trying to reach out to those people, trying to make contact with them.

It's only 1974 when we begin to make the moves. It was very difficult and also perhaps our concept of resources then was a different one from the one that we have today. The extent to which one has resources like money and transportation.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO AT THAT TIME IF YOU NEEDED MONEY, A CAR, OR SAY A DUPLICATING MACHINE?

In fact the need for an automobile never even occurred to us. You would bump into people driving automobiles if you go to a SASO meeting, but to us as high school students-- Even organizing in Soweto, we'd have a meeting late at night at Morris Isaacson school, at 8 p.m. transportation comes to a stop and we'd have to walk all the way from the other end of Soweto and walk home, arrive home at about midnight, and go back to school-- We had to organize these meetings and get people together. The only way we could get them from one conference to the other was just taking to the road and hiking, hitchhiking.

DID YOU EVER GO TO WELL KNOWN PROFESSIONALS TO ASK FOR MONEY?

Yes, we did. It was supposed to form an important part of our activities. We did try to do it through some of the plays that we had, going to perform at schools or in church halls. But it was really nothing much to talk of that you'd get out of that. Sometimes SASO would advance us some funds, or BPC or BCP. But nothing much.

In 1974 I was treasurer of SASM. It's hard to remember if I ever handled any money. I'd probably pass for one of the few honest treasurers: "Income zero, expenditure zero." [laughter]

But we did try to go to professionals, and it was not a very pleasant situation. People like Dr. Nyembezi - he's late now. One shouldn't talk of people who are late. But it wasn't easy with those people. Even some of the famous doctors today. If you went to the guy and asked for money to go to Durban to organize, if you got R 10 you were lucky. Nevertheless we continued to try to organize.

In Soweto in particular we were able to pick up a much stronger and more active membership. Strength differed from school to school, with the principals and their attitude. Like the school where I was, Morris Isaacson, later on. We were able to make a strong base there.

BECAUSE THE TEACHERS WERE SYMPATHETIC? OR THE PRINCIPAL?

I think in Morris Isaacson it was more the sympathy of the principal then. They were able to allow us to get involved. And also as far as the senior students at the school, we had a much more stronger contingent of people who were committed to the ideas. They were of the kind of size and number where you could have a presence at the school.

CAN YOU PUT A FIGURE ON THAT? DO YOU MEAN 5% OF THE STUDENT BODY? 50%?

Well, SASM defined its branches in terms of certain numbers. To have a SASM branch, it was about 10 or so. In a school like Morris Isaacson, we'd have more than 10, you'd even have 20. Having a SASM meeting at Morris Isaacson, we'd be able to fill the school hall, draw the participation of the student body. In that sense our strength relative to others could be judged in how effective are we to draw students to issues and get them involved.

STILL IN 1973-1974, WAS YOUR FOCUS STILL ON CONSCIENTIZATION, GETTING YOUR PEERS TO SEE THE LIGHT? WAS THAT THE PARAMETER OF YOUR TASK THEN, OR WAS THERE MORE TO YOUR SENSE OF PURPOSE AT THAT STAGE? WAS THERE A "PHASE TWO"?

I think our much sharper focus in those days was on conscientization. No-- There was a sense in which there was an anticipation that beyond conscientization there would come other phases, like confrontation, etc. Basically confronting the issues that we were faced with, ones relevant to the

situation in the township, that could be issues relative to even confronting the authorities. They were couched in these terms.

Now those of us who were quite keen at that time, in '73, '74, we kept very tight and committed units where we were able to engage in discussions, go out in search of literature, read more stuff and go to libraries and try to broaden the scope of participation at events like the debating societies.

One of the big things SASM would try to do was fight that the issues or subjects for the debates-- SASM members were encouraged to push for the inclusion of debating topics which were what we called "relevant" subjects. We didn't want debates on daffodils and butterflies. We'd try to draw in social issues. So that for those of us in SASM was something informed by the processes we'd gone through, the leadership training programs we'd had at Wilgespruit and other places. And the literacy program, where methods like Paulo Freire's, etc were the focal point, which spoke about using the images (relevant to people). So we tried to replicate that through these debating societies.

Much of our focus then in '73, '74, and right up to '75 was on conscientization, and on getting membership for SASM. Our main focus in SASM as well was in trying to be as national as possible. Because our big concern was to always end up in Soweto, and we wanted the organization to be spread, to go beyond Soweto. So in the Reef we were able to have contacts in Daveyton, and some places in the West Rand.

PRETORIA?

I think we had some there, though I don't seem to remember. But I think so because that was one of the stronger BPC constituencies, from some of the ministers who stayed there.

IN DECEMBER 1974, THERE WAS AN ATTEMPT TO HAVE A SASM NATIONAL CONFERENCE IN DURBAN. BUT A LOT OF PEOPLE DIDN'T SHOW UP. THEN THERE WAS AN ATTEMPT AT EASTER 1975 TO DO IT AGAIN, IN KINGWILLIAMS TOWN. BUT AGAIN PEOPLE DIDN'T SHOW UP.

Yah. The hiking part I was referring to earlier was to that meeting which was to have been in Durban. But the Durban one was not really a conference in the sense of a full-blown conference. It was one of those continuing efforts to get together a more national spread in SASM. Because then we had hoped in Durban that we would be able to have people from the Eastern Cape and Western Cape. But we ended up being only ourselves from the Transvaal and Natal. Then we had to come back after months again and try it again.

DID YOU ALSO GO TO KINGWILLIAMS TOWN?

No, I couldn't go to Kingwilliams Town. Remember I was a student who was very much devoted to his studies, to his books.

IN THE RECORDS OF THE TWALA TRIAL [trial of the SSRC leaders, 1978-79, in which Morobe was Accused no. 4] , THERE ARE SOME VERY INTERESTING DOCUMENTS FROM THIS TIME, BUT IT'S NOT QUITE CLEAR FROM THE RECORD WHETHER THEY'RE FROM THE DURBAN MEETING OR THE ONE IN KINGWILLIAMS TOWN. ONE IS A VERY NICE SHORT PAPER BY MAMPHELA RAMPHELE ON THE PRINCIPLES OF SETTING UP AN ORGANIZATION, AND ANOTHER ONE ON STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES OF ORGANIZING GROUPS, RATHER ABSTRACT PIECES, BUT VERY PRACTICAL. DO YOU REMEMBER THOSE?

No, they're more likely to be from Kingwilliams Town. Because the Kingwilliams Town one was the one meant to be more of a real conference, in terms of inputs from outside speakers. I think that's where Mamphela would come in there.

DO YOU REMEMBER WHO WAS INVOLVED IN THE DURBAN MEETING?

It was myself, Amos Masondo, Roller Masinga, who is presently in Toronto; Billy Masetlha, Super Molo, also I don't know in Durban if we had Bheki Langa? Some of the Langa brothers were involved there. Bheki is a brother of Ben and Mandla and Pius. There were quite a number of other people, some from KwaMashu high school, the one strong area in Durban. Then the one area where we had a strong SASM branch was in Kingwilliams Town.

WOULD IT BE ACCURATE, THOUGH, TO CONCLUDE THAT SASM NEVER SUCCEEDED IN BECOMING REALLY NATIONAL?

My honest assesment is that it tried but it did not succeed. The name "SASM" was more like the reflection of desire. But in the actual attempt to get that, there were so many obstacles that we ended up struggling just to get the organization to spread beyond Soweto.

However, those of us who were organized within SASM became quite dedicated over time, and still continued to carry the idea of the formation of a student movement. And we then-- Even in terms of the student uprising in Soweto, much can be said of the involvement of SASM people in those events, the influence of the more vociferous types in those high schools where the Afrikaans thing was an issue. And even in terms of coming together to give people some kind of direction. Which was quite important for me, because at the time most of us who were the leading people in SASM, where we were schooling Afrikaans was not really a big issue.

BY THE TIME YOU GOT TO MATRIC LEVEL?

Yes, it wasn't an issue. In fact, there was no question of introducing Afrikaans as a medium of instruction at that time.

WERE YOU A FINAL YEAR MATRIC STUDENT IN 1976?

Yes. But then we used the fact-- because we sensed progression here in the way the thing was introduced. Basically, getting students even in the high schools--Morris Isaacson had Form I, II, III, to Form V. Whereas the secondary schools, where the thing was more for secondary schools that had Form I, II, III.

The Bantu Education system was developing and they were moving toward divided high schools, junior, senior, and secondary. The senior would be standard 9 and 10 only (the last two years). Those of us who were at the Morris Isaacson and Naledi High Schools, they were able to use the fact of the desires of the government to eventually have a situation where all high schools would (phase in) Afrikaans. Now there was a general idea at the secondary schools about the rejection of Afrikaans. Apart from the rejection of it as the language of the oppressor -- that was the notion that would be held by the more political -- but the vast majority of the students body's rejection was not political, but purely on the basis that it was not practical, that they were struggling with English as it is. And Afrikaans was just too complicated. Though I did much better in Afrikaans than in English sometimes.

But that's why in the secondary schools you had what on the factory floor would be called wildcat strikes, without any kind of formal organization. And that is when the SASM fellows, people like us, entered later on in the period. Because it took a bit of time before we got involved in the organization of that. Because even in '75, around late '74, '75, when some of the first signs of this problem began, we didn't get involved. It's only when, in '76 it was spreading, and at that time they were bringing in the system where primary school was to end at Standard 5. But then, primary school ended at Standard 6. We had how many years of education? Twelve years; sub-A and sub-B, then standards 1 to 10. And what was happening was that they were trying to introduce a bridge between primary school and secondary school. Standard 6 was stopped and then made part of the secondary level.

We then took the matter up. The advantage with us was that we were much more conscious of methods of organization, about pulling things together, you know. And for us, it was one of the first opportunities to be quite practical and to be involved in organizing people.

IF I COULD BACK UP JUST A MINUTE, IS IT TRUE THAT YOU WENT TO BOTSWANA TO THE FUNERAL OF TIRO?

No, I didn't go.

WERE THERE OTHER PEOPLE IN SASM WHO WENT, OR WHO HAD BEEN IN TOUCH WITH TIRO THERE?

I'm not aware of it, but there may have been. Lots of people went in those days, and people kept things quiet. I didn't have a passport.

IN THIS PHASE WHERE YOU WERE ACTIVELY READING AND GOING TO LIBRARIES AND THINGS, CAN YOU TELL ME MORE ABOUT WHAT YOU MENTIONED THIS MORNING ABOUT THE SEARCH FOR THE HISTORY [OF THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE] ?

Well, with me it started as early as 1973. From having joined the cultural organization, much of one's sense of history was actually kindled, because it had to do with the way in which we saw the system as trying to deprive us of our culture, trying to impose the kind of cultural values that we didn't think we really wanted. We wanted something that was indigenous, and we wanted to know more about those things, even about the culture. And how people do things in Africa, other places. And our readings included a lot of the African writers series. Many of these books were banned in South Africa, but we had some that were available in the libraries. I remember we had the book by Ngugi wa Thiongo, I think it was; the one that dealt with Patrice Lumumba in the Congo, *Conflict in the Congo*. It was very popular reading among activists in those days because it was one of the books that dealt a lot with the anti-colonial struggles.

LUMUMBA WROTE AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY CALLED CONGO, MY COUNTRY.

No, this one is called *Conflict in the Congo*. It dealt with Lumumba and his assassination as well. From those cultural activities we would go, we used to have poetry and cultural days. It was one of the favorite things to organize, and you could involve some of the groups, in the community halls in the township etc. And we developed very close units, discussion groups, and they would share books and get together to discuss. And it grew amongst us, and we had interest groups even at the high school where we were. We were not that many, and we got to know each other, we had books circulating amongst ourselves. This was one of the important periods in the formulation of my own thoughts.

And round about that time we also began to be more conscious about the existence of the ANC and the PAC. And from time to time, somebody would come around with an ANC underground publication, like Sechaba. I remember we used to listen -- My first contact with Radio Freedom was in 1974.

WHO INTRODUCED YOU TO THAT?

A lot of this happened amongst us who were in the leadership of SASM and who were in office at that time. People like Amos Masondo.

DO YOU MEAN YOU WERE IN THE OFFICE OF THE BPC IN TOWN? OR DO YOU MEAN "OFFICEHOLDERS"?

No, I mean officeholders. Our office was in Soweto, at one of the community centers; we had a SASM office there. And at some point later on we had it at the DOCC, the YMCA in Orlando East. So we used to have meetings, and we used to meet at night. You must know that we were still under parental guidance, and we had to work out all kinds of tricks to be away from home. But when we got to high school, we got greater license from home, to come back home late, because we'd go to the

library. And later we'd get involved and study the whole night at school, so this was our excuse to get involved in more politics, you know.

COULD ANY RADIO IN THE TOWNSHIPS RECEIVE RADIO FREEDOM, OR DID YOU HAVE TO USE SHORTWAVE?

I think it was shortwave. They were quite scarce. There was a time when there was a shift in the frequency, and we used to interpret that as a government attempt to limit our access to information. But that radio that we had, whenever we went to the SASM office late, we would gather around it to listen to Radio Freedom under cover of darkness, because it was supposed to have been illegal to listen to Radio Freedom. At least that's what we thought. In fact, I think it was.

FURTHERING THE AIMS. Yah. BUT YOU HAD NO FORMAL CONTACT WITH FORMER PRISONERS, OR PARENTS OF FRIENDS WHO HAD BEEN MEMBERS? WAS ALL YOUR CONTACT AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE ANC COMING THROUGH LITERATURE OR THE RADIO?

Well some of the guys, like Roller [Elias] Masinga, his family or his father came from Mozambique. Among our group he was one of the ones to have initial contacts with the ANC.

WAS HE A DEFENDANT IN THE NAYO TRIAL?

No, he was in the Joe Gqabi trial (*S v Sexwale*). His father most of the time was in Mozambique.

DO YOU MEAN HE WAS IN EXILE WITH ANC?

Was it Mozambique? I can't remember. But Roller always had these connections with Mozambique from those days. Travel to Maputo was quite easy then, until '75. It was still under Portuguese control. Then some of the guys, like Super Molo, his uncle, Elliot Shabangu, was one of the ones we used to call the "old men." These were some of the people we used to have contact with. SHABANGU HAD BEEN ON ROBBEN ISLAND.

Yah, but not for long. He didn't have a long sentence. He was one of the early generation of prisoners who got 3 or 4 or 5 years. So he had come back and had always maintained ANC activities, though he was quite old, grey-haired and so on. We had contact with him, much more in 1975, '76 than in the earlier period, because in the earlier period, many of those people-- (kept their heads down). Nobody was advertising that they're ANC. Even when somebody came out of jail, it wasn't like these days when there's media attention. So they were in the shadows, you know. Many of those we got to know were restricted, for example, banned etc. People like Samson Ndou. Shabangu was house-arrested. So this was 1974, '75.

Now there were other groups, other people who were involved in political readings, and we were always looking out for leftist literature to read, you know, Marx and Engels. In 1975, I got involved with another group, which was led by one [guy?] who was a lawyer. We used to meet in the evenings, to go for political discussions. That was my first contact with Das Kapital, for example.

WAS THIS A WELL KNOWN PERSON?

Not really well known, but people involved in politics would know him. The group was called Pufusa(?), Peoples United Front for the Liberation of South Africa, or something like that, which as one of those breakaway groups from APDUSA.

ON THE LEFT, BUT ANTI-SACP.

Yah. Much more on the left actually. I think there was a trial that this lawyer was involved in, because he eventually had to leave the country. He is based in Botswana I think. His name was Solwande? Mlonzi.

HE WAS ALSO LINKED WITH DUMISA NTSEBEZA'S TRIAL IN THE TRANSKEI.

He could have been. So they had something running in Soweto. Now this was quite an interesting group that we got ourselves entangled with in this pursuit of this search for light, for ideas and information. And we end up landing with this group. These were guys who had developed a network amongst themselves, and what one noticed was that it was a network that comprised a lot of people who were connected with the library system, with libraries. Or they were librarians working for the city library. And they had their own network. Because one night when I went to this meeting I realised that these are the guys I always borrow books from in the library! And I'm sitting there to discuss *Das Kapital* ! This went on for some time. We'd meet about once or twice a week for discussions. We always started about 10 p.m. They were mainly older people. But in our crowd, it was myself, Billy Masetlha, Super Moloi and Amos Masondo. We got entangled with this group. This was in 1975.

HOW LONG DID THAT GROUP STAY INTACT?

Well, we couldn't cope with that group.

WHY NOT?

We felt that the level at which they were looking at things was just too far removed from us. It was highly intellectual, although we found much to appreciate, and we were exposed to some new concepts. But it was exhausting, because we would meet at about 10 p.m. and it goes on throughout the night, until about 3, 4, 5 a.m. And after that we'd have to go home, and in the morning go to school.

WAS THIS ALSO IN ORLANDO EAST?

No this was in a different area, on the other side of Soweto. We used to meet in this one house with candlelight because they didn't have electricity then. But that was also important, because it was quite useful later on when we got to learn more about political issues.

AT THAT STAGE DID YOU START TO QUESTION WHETHER BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS WAS A VALID IDEOLOGY? WERE THE PEOPLE IN THIS GROUP CRITICAL OF BC?

No, I don't think at that stage one had come to a point where one could criticise black consciousness. We hadn't reached that stage yet. For us, at least as I saw it, I went into some of those processes as part of my own development, forming my own ideas, my own worldview etc. And one at that stage was not seeing any contradiction between what one was reading or getting in some of those discussions -- because the way they were couched it was not to criticize black consciousness. It was like you start by reading "Twinkle twinkle little star" than at some point you go on to John Keats. That's how we basically saw it. Probably at different levels people would give their different slants to the thing. But our brains were still very soft then, and we were ready for being formed into one thing or the other.

But when I stopped actually going to some of these meetings, it was through a realization that there seemed to be an attitude that these people had towards the ANC. And we were very young and we had all these romantic notions. And you could sense that whenever you raised Mandela or talked about the ANC, reception was not so positive in this group. This made us put question marks, so that outside of this group when we discussed amongst ourselves, we started questioning as to what these people are doing.

I mean, we didn't know much about the ANC; we knew such old men who we'd met and we were quite impressed with them. We also were listening to Radio Freedom, and there was that growing affinity for the ANC, reading *Sechaba*. One of the things we used to do was to compare *Sechaba* and this other one by the PAC, I don't know what it's called. *Izwe Lethu*, I think. There always were some very clear differences that one could pick out.

DID YOU REJECT THE PAC?

Yah, I think at that time I never was able to get attracted to the PAC. I knew about the PAC, because I remember in 1975 or 1974, even within the BPC, this question of the ANC and the PAC had actually arisen. And the position that was taken at the BPC level was that the BPC was made up of people who support either of the two organizations. Our hope was that we are going to play a pivotal role in bringing them together. We saw ourselves as playing that role. So we knew from those days that one was free to support one or the other of those organizations, and that was how one understood it.

So when one got involved in this group in 1975, which was sometime after one's involvement in BC, you did get the sense that they were not really talking black consciousness. They weren't saying anything bad about it; but about the ANC they were quite critical and this put a question mark. Besides they were just too complex for us. It was something I got to learn later, about the APDUSA type, always intellectualizing. That's what we criticized these guys for.

WHEN YOU LISTENED TO RADIO FREEDOM, WAS THERE ANY RESONANCE THERE BETWEEN THE BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS PHILOSOPHY AND THE IDEAS COMING ACROSS THERE? DID YOU SENSE ANY CLEAR CONSISTENCY OR INCONSISTENCY BETWEEN BC IDEAS AND WHAT THE ANC WAS BEAMING INTO SOUTH AFRICA AT THAT TIME?

No, one didn't sense that. It was more really like anti-government kind of stuff, more than focussed on the BCM.

ANC WASN'T ADVERTISING ITS NONRACIAL POSITION ?

Not to any great extent that would have been noticable. It was an issue when you come to the ANC in exile after Morogoro. But inside the country I think most of us were operating through the black conscienciousness organizations.

SOMEONE IN YOUR GENERATION WOULDN'T HAVE HAD THE NUSAS EXPERIENCE. WHITES MUST HAVE BEEN ALMOST IRRELEVANT.

I'm actually still struggling with that because whenever I reflect on that I always think it quite curious that I never go to the point where I developed any kind of rabid racial attitude to any degree. I've known people who would have been much more rabid about it. But somehow with me it never really got to that point. The one thing that I had actually thought of was that my high school education as well, in a way, had an influence in the way I saw things. Because I was doing science I wasn't doing history or mathematics. But there was a way in which the science that I was learning was also influencing my way of thinking. At that age we used to get involved in these schoolboyish debates and discussions. As one looks back now one can see in some kind of remote way that those activities were molding my way of looking at life in general. Some of those philosophical things about mind and matter. But the other thing, that perhaps influenced my attitude, perhaps it's my nature, or something to do with my genes, or God -- I don't know.

The first white folks I had met and was able to relate to in a more intimate and struggle context in those days was Beyers Naude, and people like Cedric Mayson at the Christian Institute.

WHAT WAS YOUR LINK WITH THEM?

Well, my whole contact with Beyers increased during the 1976 era, when it came to things like funding, etc. I've known Beyers to be handling funds from those days on. But I had come to know about him even before then, in '75 in particular. And for some of us he was always intriguing. But then there was a way in which overall within the Black Consciousness Movement those kinds of organizations were actually viewed in a sense that they were not so much partners as people who could be used. You know? That was the overriding attitude. Of course we were always suspicious of liberals. Black Sash was always criticized as being too liberal, irrelevant, etc.

But maybe one of the reasons why one never developed very strong "anti" attitudes was there was so little contact. So when a relationship had to develop, for us in SASM in those days, it was a time when we were dealing with crisis. And when things like resources became necessary. Then we began to make contact with groups outside of ourselves. And they played a useful role. When we had to make pamphlets. That's how we linked up. It was actually through a person like Drake Koka. Much of the pamphleteering that we got done through him, who then put us in contact with those guys. And then afterwards we had our own contact with people like Beyers and Cedric and Pastor Bruckner of the Christian Institute, I forget what denomination. He was also finally forced out of the country. He was actually cited in our trial as a co-conspirator.

But we got to know Beyers; we used to go to his house even late at night. He always was the old man who wakes up whatever time of the night you came to him if you wanted him to help you. He was always there to be of help to us.

But the important thing about the question that you asked earlier about the ANC was that from the time when we parted company, that group, I think our curiosity about political issues beyond the Black Consciousness frame or mode was actually enhanced. We went out on our own, trying to look for literature along those lines. Not that we found much. They were not easily available, they were banned, etc.

DID YOU HAVE ANY SENSE THAT THERE WAS AN UNDERGROUND SOMEWHERE AND YOU WERE LOOKING TO MAKE CONTACT WITH IT? OR DID YOU ASSUME THAT THE ANC WAS SOMETHING ONLY OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY?

One had a sense that there was an underground. But I never thought of going out to look for it. There was always this notion of these people being there, and we had this romantic idea of an underground movement, that they are there and they see you even if you don't see them. So they'll contact you at some point.

WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT.

Yes. And because of the secrecy aspect and the fear of exposure or of being compromised, we never really went out of our way searching or wanting to find out. And hence, in fact, as we understood as the way they operate, they will be there within the BPC, within whatever organization; and they've got a type of people that they want. And when the time is right, they'll approach these people to recruit them in. Because in those situations you fear poking after these things, wanting to find out, because you then run the risk of being suspected for being nosey, you know? So you just keep some distance, cautious distance, until they make the contact. Like it happened even with this network.

But at that time there was even an increasing notion amongst us that we need to begin to operate in a certain way. That's why when the NAYO trial began, the NAYO trial in particular was an example of the way the underground type of operation was beginning to find its way into the movement at that time. I can't say who started it or how it began, but it is fair to assume that it is people who had an understanding, who had connections with the underground structures. Of that I'm sure. That there was careful selection, that it is not everybody who was included.

I remember my own involvement, at the time when I began getting involved within the exercise much later on. And it was unfortunately at the time when the thing was exposed and detentions were taking place. My lateness in being drawn into that activity was to save me from being picked up.

BUT AMOS MASONDO WAS PICKED UP.

Yah. Amos was now in the thick of things. Amos and some of the other people in that political unit were beginning to have political discussions now. After the Mlonzi group we began to get involved in that, the NAYO crowd, as well. At least they took people we knew, and we studied together, and we were beginning to have access to some of this material.

CAN YOU TELL ME MORE ABOUT NAYO? UNFORTUNATELY I HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO GO THROUGH THE NAYO TRIAL OR GET MUCH NAYO MATERIAL. HOW WAS NAYO DIFFERENT FROM SASM? WHAT WAS THE NAYO GROUP DOING THAT WAS DIFFERENT FROM WHAT YOU WERE DOING?

Well, NAYO was more youth; it was not looking at university students. It was looking at people who were either at university or school, or employed or unemployed. As far as youth are concerned it was meant to be a kind of overarching structure, with membership across different structures. It was including students, because we were students as well. You could be in both SASM and NAYO. The main distinction was that they tended to be slightly older, people who actually were employed etc. And NAYO was more militant as well, in its analysis.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY MILITANT?

Perhaps not militant, but NAYO tended to have a much more Marxist interpretation of the political situation. When the progression towards NAYO came in, they formed groups or cells throughout the country. Things that were happening in those groups were the kinds of political discussions now that would deal with some of these questions in a much more deeper way, like we'd have the same discussions or literature. And NAYO as well was meant to be a national organization, but there is something in almost all these organizations that somehow would not allow them to move beyond-- There was a certain ceiling in terms of membership, and it tended to rotate amongst the same people. Some ex-SASO people, some BPC people were also involved in NAYO, even though they were much older.

HOW WAS NAYO DIFFERENT FROM BPC?

BPC was to be seen more as an umbrella organization for black people in South Africa. And NAYO was to focus much more on questions that affect the youth. Whereas BPC was not necessarily youth; it was to involve older people.

SO THIS NAYO GROUP WHICH INCLUDED MASONDO DID AT SOME POINT ACTUALLY BECOME A SORT OF ANC AUXILIARY, HELPING TO RECRUIT PEOPLE TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY OR WHAT?

At least Masondo, I had got to know him quite closely from our high school days. Him I know, he had very definite and strong ANC inclinations. And so were a number of other people within NAYO at that time. They may not have told us, but we were so curious that some may always have suspected that this guy, you know, must be an ANC man. But with Masondo, and a guy named [Joseph] Molokeng, and another guy who died in Botswana, a short guy who died in an accident in Botswana, (Kgoti?) They all, when they left after that trial, they all joined the ANC.

AND WHAT WAS THEIR CONNECTION TO ERIC MOLOBI? HIS TRIAL WAS AT ALMOST THE SAME TIME, AND WAS SAID TO BE LINKED TO THEIRS.

Eric was more into recruiting, you know. I think he had acquired a skill of being able to take people out of the country, so he did a lot of that. Helping people to skip the country to join the armed struggle.

SPECIFICALLY FOR ANC?

For ANC, yah. But even then, I haven't actually asked. Eric is my close friend, and I haven't actually asked him where he was sending those people to in Botswana. But I do know that Eric was quite close to that crowd of Bokwe Mafuna.

I WAS QUITE BAFFLED BY THAT TRIAL, BECAUSE ALTHOUGH YOU CAN NEVER TELL WHAT MIGHT BE A COVER STORY COOKED UP, IT LOOKED A LOT LIKE HE MIGHT HAVE BEEN TRYING TO EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITY OF THE BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS MOVEMENT

HAVING ITS OWN MILITARY MOVEMENT, SEPARATE FROM THE ANC. IN THE TRIAL HE TALKS ABOUT MEETING THABO MBEKI IN BOTSWANA, AND HOW CONTEMPTUOUS HE SEEMED OF THE BC MOVEMENT. AND MOLOBI'S REACTION TO THAT WAS NEGATIVE.

In fact I don't think he was recruiting for ANC. Maybe some of his recruits may have ended up in the ANC, but I don't think he was; because we were on Robben Island together and when he came, he wasn't ANC initially. But through his stay in prison, that's when he joined the ANC. He came out and he was ANC.

IT LOOKS LIKE THERE WAS A BRIEF PERIOD IN '74 AND '75 WHEN THERE WAS A BRIEF BUT SERIOUS EFFORT BY THE BC PEOPLE, BOKWE MAFUNA AND OTHERS, TO EXPLORE IF THERE COULD BE A BC MILITARY WING. AND IT LOOKED TO ME LIKE HE WAS PART OF THAT.

I think it's possible. It's possible.

COMING TO 1976, I GUESS I'M PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN THE QUESTION OF BROAD STRATEGIC THINKING, SUCH AS IT WAS. ALSO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANY LINKAGES WITH ANC ONCE THE UPRISING HAD BEGUN, AND OTHER ADULT INPUT INTO THE STEERING OF THE THING.

WE DON'T NEED TO TRY TO GO INTO THE DETAILS OF THE ACTUAL EVENTS, BUT PERHAPS I WILL JUST ASK YOU ABOUT THE CRITICAL MEETING WHICH TOOK PLACE ON THE 13TH OF JUNE WHERE A COMMITTEE IS FORMED AND THE DEMONSTRATION IS DISCUSSED. CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT THAT? YOU MUST HAVE BEEN AT SO MANY HUNDREDS OF MEETINGS DURING YOUR POLITICAL LIFE IT MAY BE HARD TO REMEMBER THE PARTICULAR DETAILS OF ANY SINGLE ONE OF THEM.

Sometimes it was every day ! You know the meeting of the 13th was an important meeting in the sense that in the past, we had always struggled to get people to come to meetings. This one in a way was indicative of the point which things had reached, perhaps at that time not because of us in SASM but independent of us. The issue that actually got things to where they were. And when we came in now, to attempt as I said earlier to try to give direction in that situation -- and of course, as political animals, activists, we saw potentials, the things that we've always dreamed of. Of getting the organization to grow, the membership. And we felt it was actually our responsibility to move into that situation and assist in organization.

AMONG YOURSELVES, DID YOU LOOK UPON YOURSELVES AS A KIND OF VANGUARD, OR DID YOU USE THAT WORD?

No, I don't think we spoke of ourselves as a vanguard. Perhaps not at that early stage. It may be that as time went on, given the way that things unfolded, in some speech or in some pamphlet the word "vanguard" may have got in, informed by the way things had actually unfolded. But I don't think we used that term.

But what we did then, it was actually even a gamble. Because we had gone around to all the high schools in Soweto, and we addressed meetings there. And somehow even the principals became responsive. And in some instances not so responsive. But we insisted talking to students. We couldn't get into all high schools of course, but we managed to spread the word through adjoining high schools. It was basically to call for a meeting at the DOCC on the 13th of June. The representatives from the various high schools and the schools that were affected by this issue were to come together so they could formulate a response. And to our big surprise, we had very good attendance. Students came; it was a Sunday afternoon. And on deliberation we eventually ended up with a proposition to set up an action committee. Now we had the sense that we needed to act quite fast and decisively. Because our suspicion was that then there was a mood.

Now I know that probably the question in your mind is who is this "we"? As I said, we had some of the key SASM people involved. And we'd been having debates amongst ourselves or discussions amongst ourselves in the sense that we discussed how we could intervene or get involved in this situation. And that's how the idea came up to call a township-wide student meeting. Even at that time I don't think our plans were so formulated, what we actually wanted to do. And it was then that we actually hatched up the idea of a protest against Afrikaans as a medium of instruction.

SO WHEN THE MEETING ON THE 13TH WAS CALLED, YOU DIDN'T ALREADY HAVE A PLAN?

I don't think so. My recollection is that we didn't even have a concrete plan to say this is what we're taking to the meeting. I remember how the whole thing started, because my being involved had to do with a teacher I had known, who was involved with us in BPC, who was teaching at one of the schools, the Orlando West Secondary School, where this issue had been taken up much more strongly. In meeting her we were discussing about this problem, and she wanted to know what we are doing. This was about a week or two before June 16th. Basically she put it in terms of reaching out to our consciences, saying you guys in the leadership, what are you doing about this; look what's happening to these people, you know. Why don't you help them? And then from there I took it up with the other guys in SASM, and it led to the meeting of the 13th.

What then happened was that from that meeting the idea of the demonstration was actually mooted. Because we wanted to ask what kind of action could be taken.

HOW MANY CAME ON THE 13TH?

It could have been a hundred or so, or slightly less. I think actually less than a hundred. Because what then happened was at that meeting we set up an action committee, and that action committee was given the task of going out to the schools. Because at that time we were afraid of police intervention, the security police. Since that was an open forum, our feeling was that if we are to be effective at all, having had this discussion, we have to move very quickly before the police begin to move against us to try to stop the thing. So that even if they get to know about it we should have set this process in motion.

And then we moved, so fast in fact that it was our last day of school. And it was the last day that some of us slept at our homes. We then moved the following Monday and Tuesday so that we covered-- Soweto at that time had about 40 something secondary and high schools. So we were able to cover almost all those high schools. It involved going into each and every high school and conducting mass meetings.

THE 13TH WAS A SUNDAY. HAD YOU ALREADY FIXED ON THE DATE OF THE 16TH?

Yes, we had already fixed on the date of the 16th. We were working towards that date. We then moved and held meetings throughout the townships. Our decision was that we are not going to release the date, especially on the Monday. The march was only to be known on the Tuesday. So we then went around and got into organizing things. But we didn't even do much preparation. It was so much touch and go. If you ask me about the shooting, that was not even in our minds that these guys would shoot. Although I mean there was Sharpeville 1960, which always concerned us. But we really thought that they won't open fire.

SO IT WOULD BE A ONE DAY PROTEST, AND THEN WHAT?

We were actually looking at it much more as being a one day protest. We were not even thinking beyond June 16. We were saying that here is an issue; let's choose one day where as students we are actually going to make a big statement. And hopefully even from there we would hopefully get our parents to be moved by the thing and to begin to think themselves as to what to do with this thing. There was a degree of passiveness on the part of parents, and students were very critical of the role the parents were playing. The parents didn't seem to get involved. Students were being expelled from

school. And students were being left alone on this matter, and given the level of resentment there was no adequate response. So we hoped that this exercise would actually get parents sensitized and also get them involved.

The basic slogan was just "Away with Afrikaans", and "Down with Bantu Education."

DID ANYONE ON THE 13TH SUGGEST POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS? PERHAPS OF A MORE EXTREME NATURE?

Not at this particular meeting. But there were always people who came up with more extreme things for people to do. And remember that at that time the petrol bomb was still largely an unknown thing.

HADN'T THERE BEEN AN INCIDENT NOT VERY LONG BEFORE WHERE A TEACHER HAD ACTUALLY BEEN KILLED BY SOME STUDENTS?

There was an incident where school inspectors, educational officials, had come to one high school -- some of the incidents actually leading to the explosion on June 16 -- where students at Naledi High School had overturned the DET official's car and set it on fire.

OVER THE AFRIKAANS ISSUE?

Well, there were always protests; I mean, people were always displeased about DET officials. And it was compounded in the townships by the atmosphere of resistance that was building up towards the Bantu education system itself. Now when June 16th came, it just caught on like that.

Our plans were basically to move-- I know that in many papers they always write about Orlando Stadium. I don't even think it was our intention to go as far as Orlando stadium. In fact, our main intention was to end the march at the school in Orlando West which we had chosen symbolically as being the school that was longest on boycott at that time. So we'd have all the students of Soweto marching towards this school to pledge solidarity with those students there.

HAD THE BOYCOTTS BEGUN JUST IN SOME SCHOOLS?

This was the one school which was longest on boycott. But then we had others. And some weren't even high schools; they were secondary schools and higher primary schools, which had other problems. So that when the students at this secondary school began to take up that issue, students at other schools began to take up other issues that they were disaffected about. There was a kind of snowball effect; they began finding one or another issue to take up.

WHEN DID THE BOYCOTT START AT ORLANDO WEST?

From early '76, I think by March of '76.

WAS IT TOTAL, OR JUST SOME STUDENTS STAYING AWAY?

Initially it was some students, and then it became the whole school. And then another higher primary in the vicinity joined them. And other schools in Diepkloof as well.

WHAT WERE SOME OF THE OTHER ISSUES? CORPORAL PUNISHMENT?

Well, issues like corporal punishment were then included. As the boycott grew, as each and everyone had his or her gripe against the system, we had as the protest developed beyond June 16, we had a set of demands increasing and beginning to be much broader. And we had the SASM crowd, and the SSRC coming in, beginning to brainstorm and discuss and work out ways of actually sharpening the demands in a coherent way.

IT'S OFTEN MENTIONED THAT THE INTRODUCTION OF THE HOMELAND CITIZENSHIP RULES IN ANTICIPATION OF TRANSKEI INDEPENDENCE WERE A MAJOR GRIEVANCE AFFECTING EVERYONE. WAS IT PARTICULARLY SALIENT IN THE THINKING OF STUDENTS?

It was, but I wouldn't put it as a major causal factor of the June 16 thing in particular. But you know that was in people's minds, that the bantustan system was being carried out. And there were many students who had family, who had relatives, who were going to be subjected to the ruling. So there was that strong feeling towards that. But then the '76 atmosphere made it possible for a strong anti-Transkei independence campaign to take place, because we had the right political climate. Which I thought, if it was a different set of circumstances, that situation would just have passed without much protest.

SO YOU THEN HAVE THIS UNANTICIPATED CATASTROPHIC THING THAT HAPPENS ON THE 16TH. CAN YOU TRACE FOR ME WHAT HAPPENS THEN IN TERMS OF THE STUDENT LEADERSHIP AND THEIR THINKING?

Yah. By then we still have only the action committee. And when the thing explodes, the center is in a terrible state of disarray. Because we had hoped -- the original plan was we were going to have this one day, and thereafter go back for reevaluation, and decide on what to do farther. A step by step thing. But then the thing explodes in our faces and we had this problem of what to do. Because it spread like wildfire, and the whole place becomes chaotic. And within a week, the department comes up with a decision to close all the schools. So that meant that no students were going to school. So the violence continued. now of course we tried everything we could. Bishop Tutu-- at that time I think he was not even a bishop-

HE HAD BEEN ELECTED BUT NOT YET INDUCTED AS THE BISHOP OF LESOTHO.

Yes, he was the dean of Johannesburg and he was to go Lesotho. And we tried to get him not to go. I remember we went to his house that night, and we said we want you to stay and help us out with this problem, to get the government to {cool?}. But of course his calling was very strong. But I'm just trying to indicate that even at that time there always was this attempt on our part to draw in adults and parents to be involved in the situation.

THIS WAS AFTER THE 16TH, BUT NOT BEFORE?

This was after the 16th. Not Before. Before the 16th, I mean the view that we had was that we want to keep this amongst ourselves as students. We had this notion that amongst ourselves we would keep this thing together and move quite effectively. Teachers were to be kept in the dark. They were not to be told; because we always suspected the teachers, that if we tell them, they'll tell the department.

EVEN PEOPLE LIKE MANTHATA OR CURTIS NKONDO ? THEY WEREN'T PRIVY TO THE PLANS?

No, they weren't privy. So then the period after the 16th was chaos. We had to figure out what we were going to be doing. Now this was the 16th; then I think some schools were suspended for about a month, until sometime toward the end of August. by that ime we were beginning to get parents involved in what came to be known as the BPA, the Black Parents' Association. Motlana, Winnie Mandela, and others, Manas Buthelezi. Because what we said was that we had grievances, and we want them to be the ones who actually submit our grievances to the department.

DID YOU APPROACH THEM INITIALLY?

My recollection is that we did the approaching. But it wasn't a very organized thing. I think it had to do with the fact that the department wouldn't meet with us. They always preferred to deal with parents or teachers. So we thought, well, we'll make the thing easier. We have no problem. But it had to be a committee that we recognize, and there was no problem with the BPA. We had hundreds of meetings with them, basically with the theme of trying to bring control to the situation. And then later on, in July-- Or in fact what happened is that in June, the thing spread to other parts of the country as well. There was the eastern Cape, the western Cape

And then later on we then began to call upon students to go back to school. This was our own call for July, that the students must go back to school. And I remember very well, even to call for students to go back to school was something that we had seen as a tactical move on our side. On the one hand, there was a way in which the situation had had a very deep impact on us and on our thinking. We perceived our role in that situation as students, as youth. And we really began to see the situation as an on-going thing. I remember that some of us thought even that if we carry on with this situation long enough, we would actually make it possible for our big brothers in the ANC also to come in. Because at that time the militancy, the anger in the townships, people were looking for guns, people were coming to you looking for ways of how to make petrol bombs, and so on.

AFTER [TSIETSI] MASHININI GOT OUT OF THE COUNTRY AND WAS GOING AROUND SPEAKING AND BEING HAILED INTERNATIONALLY, HE USED TO SAY TO AUDIENCES THAT THE STUDENTS FELT BETRAYED BY THE ANC BECAUSE THEY HAD EXPECTED WEAPONS TO BE BROUGHT IN, BUT THIS DIDN'T HAPPEN.

...we had quite close contact with people like Joe Gqabi.

BEFORE THE 16TH? OR AFTER?

I had known him before the 16th, but -- Before the 16th, the situation was not as intense. It was known that Joe Gqabi could get involved with some discussions now and then. But after the 16th, it became more of the case of actually beginning to draw in more people around us where we would have discussions with people like him. But he was also a very secretive man as well, in the way he operated. And so even the contacts that he was going to be having with any one of us, they had to be limited as much as possible to avoid exposure. He was under house arrest as well-

24 HOUR?

More or less, because all he had was time to leave his house and go to his office at work, and come back from his office back into his house. It was virtually like 24 hour house arrest. We had to find ways of meeting up with him either at his office, or at night, to slip out of his house in the darkness, etc. So we had people like Gqabi and then [] as well. But also at that time other people began to be active as well, also with part of the underground of the ANC. A number of people got in touch with me; for example, some of the guys in SASO. I remember one, Mongezi Stofile. We used to have meetings with people like Mongezi, trying to find out what it is that SASO could do to help in this situation

DO YOU THINK HE WAS DOING THAT ON BEHALF OF THE ANC, WITH WHICH HE HAD MADE A LINK?

I can't tell, really. I was basically seeing him as a SASO guy that I'd known not really so well, to get a way in which their organization could get involved as well. In the event, after they left the country, they joined the ANC.

WHAT SORT OF ASSISTANCE WERE THEY PROPOSING TO PROVIDE?

Look, our main demand, our main requirement at that time was things like transport, for example. Production of pamphlets. And those kinds of things were offered. This group I'd met for discussions with [Mlonzi's group], we met some of them also at that time. They were the kind of guys who always had [things to print] so they made available some kind of roneo machines, hand operated roneo machines.

DO YOU MEAN THE LIBRARIANS ?

Yah, those guys. We would make use of them. In the backyards, spend the whole night sweating over the roneo machines, running out of paper and ink. That's why if you see some of the pamphlets, that's how they look.

AS I WAS LEAVING YESTERDAY, I GRABBED A BATCH OF THEM. WE HAVE DOZENS OF THEM. THERE ARE LOTS REPRODUCED IN YOUR TRIAL RECORD.

This is my handwriting.

WE MAY NOT HAVE TIME TO LOOK AT ALL OF THESE. WE WILL CHOOSE A FEW OF THESE TO REPRODUCE. IF THERE WERE PARTICULAR ONES THAT YOU REMEMBER DETAILS ABOUT IT MIGHT HELP US TO SELECT-- BUT THAT WOULD BE QUITE A TIME-CONSUMING PROCESS. I COULD SEND THEM DOWN TO YOU AT PRINCETON, BUT I REALISE YOU'RE LEAVING VERY SOON.

THIS MORNING YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT SELECTING THE SLOGAN "AZIKWHELWA", WANTING TO LINK BACK WITH THE TRADITIONS OF THE 1950s. IS THAT SOMETHING YOU AND OTHER STUDENTS CAME UP WITH, OR WAS THAT SUGGESTED TO YOU BY OLDER VETERANS ?

No, this we knew actually, also from SASM, from our studies. Because at that time the one book I remember that we read a lot was [Edward Roux's] *Time Longer than Rope*.

ISN'T THERE A CHAPTER IN THERE CALLED "AZIKHWELWA" ?

There's something like that, about the bus boycott, in this book. His was one of the more popular and authoritative works.

TELL ME ABOUT THE PAMPHLETS IN GENERAL. YOU SAID DRAKE KOKA WAS INVOLVED IN PRODUCING THEM. WHAT DO YOU PARTICULARLY REMEMBER ABOUT THE WAY THEY WERE PRODUCED? WOULD ONE PERSON SIT DOWN AND DRAFT SOMETHING BY HAND, THEN JUST ON HIS OWN TAKE IT TO BE PRODUCED? OR WOULD YOU DO THEM AS A GROUP ?

It depends. If you look at this one, for example, ["Bantu of Alexandra. . ."], and look at the way it's been made, and compare it, it's much more-- I know this one we did in the township ["Black students message to their beloved parents. . ."] --

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

The style. This one is more professional ["Bantu . . ."]. The typing is more tidy, and the printing was done much more efficiently. This was done at work. This was one of the ones we -- 25th and 26th of August -- I remember when I went to pick up this pamphlet at-- Then it was the SACC building in Braamfontein when it was still in Jorissen Street. The police actually had pictures of me coming out of the building, waiting for a van with boxes of pamphlets! ["Bantu of Alexandra. . ."]

AND HAD SOMEONE AT THE SACC ACTUALLY TYPED THE THING ONTO A STENCIL?

No, no. I think this was one of those we actually drafted and gave to Drake Koka to go and get typed and printed. And we were to go and pick it up and transport it to the township.

WERE THERE QUITE A NUMBER FOR WHICH HE PROVIDED THAT KIND OF ASSISTANCE?

He did help us quite a bit.

WHO WOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ACTUAL WORDING?

It was us basically, and what would happen was that we had like, say, the chairman of the SSRC who would be involved in drafting the pamphlet; then there were those of us who worked with him. Basically, I mean, about eight or so people formed some kind of a permanent kind of committee. And

we were always in permanent session; we even used to hibernate and sleep at the same places, hide together throughout Soweto.

WHO WERE THE EIGHT?

Here I'm in trouble [remembering]. You had myself, whoever was the chairman of the SSRC, you had Billy Masetlha, Super Moloi, D. D. (?) Thenjane, Paul Langa. Roller Masinga we used to link up with at a different level. He was always around but he was not part of the SSRC. At that time he was quite deeply involved in ANC underground work; he would always come in and then disappear for long periods. And whenever he came back he always had interesting things to say or to discuss with us.

HE'S THE ONE WITH THE MOZAMBIQUE CONNECTION?

That's right, yah. And then there were some others. I think we'd have been a core of about eight or ten at the most. Depending on who gets arrested when. We kept it quite tight, because those of us who had been involved in working in small units were quite key as well in making sure that at least there is that kind of group that works together, that is always around to be able to take decisions and coordinate meetings as well.

AND WERE YOU ALL MOVING AROUND, NOT SLEEPING AT HOME ?

Oh, yah. We'd sleep in different places almost every night. And there were one or two situations where if you'd overstay our departure was always unceremonious, with the police in hot pursuit. They were continually seeking us. But we'd always get to know where we are, and we'd meet at one or another location.

DID THEY NOT HAVE ENOUGH INFORMERS TO ALERT THEM?

It wasn't easy. I mean, because they were hot in pursuit. But the situation in Soweto from June 16 to December was plain crazy, basically. That chaos also gave us a cover where we could avoid them as well. But it only meant that we had to be on our toes all the time. Just keep on moving, change cars ever so often, get involved in all kinds of disguises, etc.

SURVIVAL WAS THE MAIN PRINCIPLE.

It was the big thing.

BEYOND SURVIVAL, THOUGH, WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT, IN THE AUGUST-SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER PERIOD, LET'S SAY, OF WHAT YOUR CONCEPTION WAS OF WHERE THIS THING WAS GOING?

The August-September period was the key period in a number of ways, in that it marks an important advance in terms of what people were seeing spread before them, and what they wanted to do. When we made the call for students to come back to school in June, we had made an analysis that told us that whilst boycotts are fine, our experience through the June-July period was that we became almost ineffectual, because we had no constituency. We could not make any statements, we could not call upon anybody to do anything. And the only way to put control in the situation was if we are able to have students back in school. We can begin to redirect things much more effectively. And that informed our call to have students come back to school. To that end, I think we succeeded.

But at the same time we were then also working on a way to make the Action Committee more representative. Trying to get it rooted in more or less almost every high school. Which we could not attain on June 13th. So one of the advantages in calling students back to school was we would be able to do that. But even there we had to move quite quickly so that when you call students to come back to school -- that happened about the end of July.

And then we called a big meeting at Regina Mundi on the-- On [your chronology] I think it says the 1st of August. I think actually this date is not the right one. On the 2nd of August, which was a Sunday, where we had this meeting, after one of these-- There'd always be a march here or a protest there. And then we had this SSRC meeting on the 2nd of August where this was to actually form the

SSRC. The decision was that each school-- The SSRC was not even established precisely at that meeting. The decision was that there should be an SSRC. We didn't have to form it there; it was for each school to actually arrange that it has two representatives that come and become part of the body at a subsequent meeting whose date was set. And the students did come. We had a council which had about -- Sometimes when we were slightly well-attended, we'd have eighty to even a hundred sometimes, with almost every school participating.

STUDENTS DOWN TO WHAT GRADE LEVEL?

This was secondary and high school. From Form I up to standard 10. Those become the SSRC. Now that was important because even in terms of campaigns it made it possible for a number of campaigns that we were able to take. Because at that time there was this notion that we need to keep the pressure on, and keep on going. Because we began to have, perhaps in some kind of unintelligent way, we also had the sense of insurrection, if I recall very well. We just saw this thing really moving on up to a point that the folks in the ANC also could also come in and could make a big impact.

But the important point about August the 2nd was that in terms of the demands that the students had, we began to see demands developing beyond the demand for the removal of Afrikaans.

BY THAT TIME THEY HAD ALREADY CONCEDED THAT.

Yah. I think that they had conceded to suspend that, or not to proceed with it. Which I think was one of the things that made it possible for us to call for the return to school. But already there were detentions. That's why some of the first campaigns calling for the release of detainees begin to escalate at that time. Now it was in that kind of situation, with each campaign that we made soliciting a response. And then we had issues coming up. We had the overall goal, you know. The perspective was there, that we want this thing to be done, apartheid to-- Afrikaans as a medium of instruction to be abolished. Then you had Bantu Education must be abolished. The list became longer and longer as the year went on.

KISSINGER MUST GO HOME.

Kissinger decides to come on the 17th of September. We decide to somehow find a connection, to say Yankee go home, etc. And so as the situation unfolded you began to see more broader political demands coming onto our agenda. As I said, I mean, some of us were beginning as well to influence the situation in that direction. Because we were sensing that we had this momentum. We almost went on as if we had this feeling that we had this obligation not to allow this momentum to die away. Because we remembered only too well how all along we had been struggling get people mobilized and actually involved in action. But of course the police did not help the situation, because people would be arrested; there'd be deaths in detention, there'd be shootings at funerals; and the funeral thing began, and that generated its own cycle that went on and on and on.

And from then comes in the stayaways now. I think the 5th of August, we then called for a stayaway which was to protest in the main against the shooting that had taken place, and also to call for the release of students. Because students were arguing that we can't go back to school with our colleagues being in prison. So we had this campaign calling for the release. And we had to link it, and we decided to link it with the stayaway. That we should involve parents as well. Now this was a very, I would say, novel idea for us. We had always read about stayaways, "azikhwelwa" in those days, and we'd always had this notion of a strike and how it can be used. We'd read the literature about strikes; marxist literature had told us about that, etc. We worked out a way of incorporating it and relating to these demands, and also drawing parents in, saying parents can't just go to work; they have to demand [things]--

And the August 4th, I think, stayaway, was quite effective in a sense, in terms of the numbers of people who were involved. Some of the scenes of that day, of collaboration between parents and students in the marches-- Because that's one of the biggest marches we'd ever had on that day. Our

target was to march to John Vorster Square, to demand the release of those detainees. But of course more people were detained, and there were more shootings. And we couldn't reach Johannesburg.

I think in that [chronology] you said that it was from Baragwanath to-- But actually we moved from different points of Soweto, and the convergence point was through New Canada, which is where the police blocked us.

WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT HOW THE DECISIONS WERE TAKEN TO STAGE THE VARIOUS STAYAWAYS? WHOM DID YOU CONSULT WITH, FOR EXAMPLE?

I must say at that time we were really acting on our own, even in terms of the BPC. We saw the BPC as more or less acting as a liaison between us and the authorities etc. And then the other organizations like the BPC of course, the fact of the matter was that the BPC was not a very strong organization, even in Soweto. One could say also that SASM, relative to the entire Soweto student population, was very, very tiny. But when the key events of that time took place, it was SASM which was able to have the leadership to put to the fore, to work out, to assist in that process. And it caught all these other organizations off guard. Everybody was overwhelmed. And they were not party to the initial process; but we were right in there from the beginning. And we had this personal responsibility to the process. And I think that from the intensity of the engagement we even lost sight of these other organizations, as to what exactly could be done. Although I mean we did have contact with them. I can remember many people that I used to be in contact with, from Baba Jordaan, Thenjie Mtintso and them.

BPC PEOPLE ?

Yah. But I can't recall any moment where there was some kind of joint strategizing. It was as if even within them, you know, they were just out of their depth in terms of knowing what exactly to do in the situation.

WASN'T THENJIE THEN LIVING IN THE EASTERN CAPE ?

No, no. We stay in the same township, Orlando. Because that's where-- My last meeting, in fact, with Steve Biko in fact was at her house, because he always went past Thenjie's place at the time of the [SASO Nine] trial when he was coming to the trial to give evidence there.

But it was more like we always had this sense of being on our own. And always putting challenging demands on our parents, etc. I suppose it would have been different if there was an organized way in which parents would have been able to respond and could have come to relate to the situation. Because even when one looks at the BPA, for example-- The BPC did not come out because the BPA was there, etc. The even the BPA itself was very much more a committee that could not go beyond the fact of its being a committee made up of eminent individuals in the community.

As for the rest of the people, their situation was that of engaging the police, of being involved in the streets, with all the rioting, etc that was taking place then.

But then we had our own demands developing. And in some ways one would say that in a number of respects, I think even our own perspective on the situation was getting distorted somewhat, just from the way things were beginning to happen, they way people implemented some of the decisions. If you take, for example, the stayaway of August 5th, there was an immediate and genuine reason why it was necessary to call for parents' and workers' support for the stayaway. Now we had no skill, no views about how to organize workers. We merely met, we issued pamphlets, and we called upon the community, all people, to support us.

DID YOU TAKE THOSE PAMPHLETS TO HOSTELS, OR TO STREET CORNERS ?

Usually we distributed them in stations, train stations and bus stops in Soweto.

JUST ON THE DAY BEFORE, LIKE ON THE 3RD OF AUGUST?

It would depend. Sometimes two days before or three days before. We never had this kind of deliberation that you'd have now, to decide whether May Day would be a stayaway, which takes weeks and weeks of debates, getting mandates, etc. So we'd have this decision, and we'd have to implement it. We felt that in order to get the state, to shake the state, we didn't want to give them time to think of counter-measures that would not make that action possible. Because we saw that we had to keep the momentum going as well.

WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF BARUCH HIRSON'S CRITIQUE IN YEAR OF FIRE, YEAR OF ASH THAT YOU "NAIVE" STUDENTS THOUGHT YOU WERE GREAT REVOLUTIONARIES BUT YOU HAD ABSOLUTELY NO CONCEPT OF REVOLUTION BECAUSE YOU NEVER EVEN THOUGHT OF WORKERS AS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF A REVOLUTIONARY FRONT AND YOU NEVER TRIED TO ORGANIZE THEM. WHAT'S YOUR REFLECTION ON THAT?

Well, it's probably right, perhaps in terms of the level of naivete that one would see existing amongst the student population then. But a generalization is not necessarily applicable, as I've indicated. You'd have your more informed sections, and have less informed sections as well. But even the workers themselves, as far as that consciousness also amongst themselves as being that kind of vanguard may not even have been there. Even those who were organized under trade unions. The unions at that time were very conservative, under the TUCSA. I know even people like Lucy Mvubelo were quite unpopular in the township. So it's probably true-- I mean as I said, as the situation unfolded and began to impact on people who were involved, depending on where you are, even if you look at the SSRC, people were beginning to have the sense of importance, you know, about ourselves, that we are the ones who are leading this thing, and will continue to do it. And we got caught in that kind of thing.

DID TSIETSI MASHININI'S PERSONALITY INITIALLY SET A SORT OF PATTERN OF WHAT ONE MIGHT CALL "CHARISMATIC" LEADERSHIP, MAKING PRONOUNCEMENTS ?

Yes, Mashinini was quite charismatic. But if you had to judge us today, I mean if you judge us in terms of today's standards of organization and participation, you'd probably draw the conclusion that it was undemocratic, the way in which we functioned then. But who was democratic then, at that stage? We learned from that particular process. At least to the extent that the SSRC was quite representative of students is a good indication of the learning curve that one sees in terms of participation.

But of course implementation becomes a different thing, because to choose your subjects, to choose your implementation mechanism becomes the key thing in terms of which you get judged as to how your performance was. I think in our case I'll be the first to concede that we were not always democratic in our practice. At that time we thought to actually start getting involved in lengthy debates we'd just be getting ourselves to prison. So there were considerations why this was so.

BUT COULD ONE SAY THAT THERE WAS AN ATTEMPT TO PROCEED FROM A CONSENSUS AMONG THIS INNER GROUP OF EIGHT OR SO? WERE YOU CONSTANTLY DISCUSSING WITH EACH OTHER WHAT TO DO ?

Yes, that always was there, I think. We were able to be involved in a situation of consultation, that was actually a key component of our relationship. And the same even for the SSRC.

WHICH NOW BECOMES A MUCH LARGER BODY.

Which now becomes a much larger body.

DID THE SSRC TAKE VOTES? OR WAS IT BY ACCLAMATION? HOW WOULD YOU CHARACTERIZE ITS DELIBERATIONS?

There was generally almost always a consensus that came out of the discussions on some of the issues where decisions had to be taken. If one tries to dissect that, to understand why that was so and

how it came about that consensus was achieved, you'd find different interesting points to raise about the way in which discussion was taking place. Or even about the level of participation of people within the SSRC. If you say that each school must choose a representative to come to represent them at the SSRC, you then have no control over who they send to these meetings, or whether they report back, or what the level of participation is that they will have. So there were those limitations to that system.

However, I think that the key thing for us was that at least we had the semblance of representation. But I don't know, like at Morris Isaacson, for example, whenever there were these SSRC meetings, whenever we came back, we'd be allowed by the principal to hold report-back meetings. Of the whole school, in the school hall.

WAS THE PRINCIPAL ANXIOUS NOT TO BE CONDEMNED AS A TOADY OF THE SYSTEM?

By that time, I think the options had narrowed. I remember one principal where representatives of the school would not be allowed to report back to the students. What he did instead was to separate the boys from the girls, and actually refuse that the girls should come to the meeting. The school was about 400 meters away from us, and they came all the way up to Morris Isaacson to inform us that they are having a problem. So myself and Tsietzi then had to leave class and drive down to that school. When we came into the school -- we were quite arrogant at that time -- we found that this principal was in a staff meeting. He had the teachers there, and he had all the male students in the library hall. The girls were locked up in the classes, and he wouldn't allow them to come in. And then we walked into the meeting and literally took the meeting over. And we told the principal to sit down (laughs), and then we started talking and we demanded that the girls must come also, because it's their meeting as well. And that's how the girls then came in.

SO THE PRINCIPALS WERE SOMEWHAT INTIMIDATED, MAYBE BY THE PROSPECT OF HAVING SOME KIND OF RIOT?

Well, it was quite an overpowering-- In fact, this particular principal, in peacetime generally he was quite notorious, and students just feared him like hell. And I think after that event his profile changed considerably. Because the students were now thinking that this man is not infallible; because he was a terror to students; they always feared him. This school was called Tisile (?)

WHEN YOU SAY YOU DROVE DOWN THERE, DO YOU MEAN YOU HAD AN AUTOMOBILE?
Yes. PROVIDED BY ONE OF YOUR BACKERS?

Well, we somehow had been able to find transportation here and there, you know.

WAS THIS GROUP OF EIGHT ONLY ACTIVE IN THE PERIOD BEFORE THE FORMATION OF THE SSRC ? OR DID IT CONTINUE ON AS A CORE WITHIN THE SSRC ?

Yah, this was during the SSRC period. It was usually a group that generated around the chairman of the SSRC.

SO THIS WAS THE ACTION COMMITTEE" FROM JUNE?

Not even necessarily the SSRC. But these were people who had grown to be able to work much more closely, around the chairperson of the SSRC there was this group of people who worked jointly with him, to assist him.

DID THE GROUP SELECT WHO WAS GOING TO BE THE CHAIRMAN, OR WAS THE CHAIRMAN ELECTED BY THE SSRC?

No, no. The chairman emerged, came out of the whole joint SSRC sitting.

THERE WAS NO CRUDE VETTING OF WHO THE CANDIDATES WOULD BE?

No, I think even with Mashinini, for example, it was an open election. And his successor-- because I was a deputy to Mashinini and there was this expectation that I would succeed him -- but I preferred to play a much more lower profile, and argued that he should have someone volunteer to take the job.

SOME SUCKER!

Yah! So I continued to play my role as his assistant when Khotso Seatlholo came in.

AND THE SAME WHEN MONTSITSI CAME?

When Montsitsi came, I was already in jail then, from December '76. And Seatlholo left immediately after our detention. I was in jail, and out of contact until I made contact with people round about 1979, before the end of our trial.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOU HAD CONTACT? BACK WITH THIS CORE GROUP?

In 1978, just another detail I saw there about Joe Gqabi and his detention, because in that [chronology] I think you have a question mark about the date of his arrest. We were arrested on the same night actually, December 31, 1976. We were all picked up together and taken to John Vorster Square.

WERE YOU IN THE SAME PLACE?

No, it was a big swoop in two places. Because in the period of 1976, September-October-November, I had been in contact with Joe Gqabi throughout that period.

TELL ME MORE ABOUT THAT.

We continued to have our contacts and our discussions. [tape ends]

[We look at a document from the Twala trial which describes an incident at Park Station in March 1976 at the time of the NAYO trial, Molokeng and others.]

WHAT DO THESE WORDS MEAN, WHICH HE QUOTES FROM MEMBERS OF THE CROWD?

"These police are dogs." "After Rhodesia, we will get them. The terrorists are coming." "Go on, children. Even our fathers used to do just like you are doing."

AT THE END, THE WRITER SAYS THIS ALL EXPOSES "THE ILL-TRAINING OF THEIR POLICE AND ARMY AND A REVOLUTIONARY PREPAREDNESS OF THE BLACK MASSES. THEY ONLY NEED A POWERFUL VANGUARD PREPARED TO TAKE UP ARMS WITH THE PEOPLE FOR A SHOWDOWN WITH THE CAPITALITIC RACISTS". THAT'S A PRETTY EDUCATED REMARK.

This is not Seth Mazibuko, and it's not either of the Twalas; it's not Sibongile [Mthembu] even. But you know what happened in our trial, they really just took documents and stuffed them in. It could have been [none of us]. It could have been put under Seth, because here it refers to "Sandile", which is his other name. The cops might have just stuck it in.

THIS COMMENT ABOUT THE PEOPLE JUST NEEDING A VANGUARD, WOULD THAT HAVE BEEN A TYPICAL REMARK BY A MEMBER OF THIS CORE OF EIGHT?

It's actually possible. It could even have been me!

-- end --