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& Struggle Archives



RECORDING THE ANTI-APARTHEID STRUGGLE IN KWAZULU-NATAL

Oral History Project of the Alan Paton Centre,
University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus

Interview with Dr Peter Brown
conducted by Prof. Norman Bromberger
in Pietermaritzburg
on 17 October 1995

6th interview in a series of 8

(Edited, corrected version)

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1 UNIVERSITY OF NATAL (PIETERMARITZBURG)

2 KWAZULU-NATAL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

3 Tape 6 of the interview with Peter Brown, conducted by Professor N
4 Bromberger. (Edited version)

5 N: Okay, this is the sixth in this series of interviews of Peter Brown
6 by Norman Bromberger. It is taking place in Pietermaritzburg on the
7 seventeenth of October, after a bit of a break. Peter, the last
8 time that we talked, we spent some time on various people you had
9 known in the Party, and you produced some recollections of them and
10 made some judgements about some of them. I thought that today we
11 could continue doing that sort of thing, but would focus, to start
12 with, on Neil Alcock and through him, and your friendship and
13 working relationship with him, get into another whole aspect of your
14 activities, your work with AFRA, the Association for Rural
15 Advancement. If I remember correctly, it was during the first State
16 of Emergency, was it, that Neil joined the Party?

17 P: Well I think it must have been, it certainly wasn't before that
18 and, as far as I can recollect, he was inspired to do it by a
19 poster which Olga Meidner had on the back of her car, while
20 Hans was detained, which she used to change every day saying
21 that 'My husband has been in jail, without trial for..' (however many days it was by then). Neil had been Chairman of
22 the UP, I think, in the Bulwer/Underberg area. His farm was
23 between Bulwer and Himeville. I'm not quite sure whether he
24 started to think about joining the Party, and then came in
25 occasionally after the Emergency, or whether he had done that
26 before the Emergency. Anyway, in the end he joined.

28 N: And, I think we also noticed, in talking about the Party's
29 activities in Natal, that he built up quite a large branch in
30 that area where he farmed....

31 P: Yes, he did. He lived either next door, or very close to a
32 freehold area called Beersheba, and you had to drive through
33 this place to get to his farm and he obviously had a good
34 relationship with those people. But in that area there were a
35 whole lot of fairly small black spots which were all

1 threatened, and through Neil we made contact with those people.
2 A lot of them joined the Party. We had Christopher Shabalala,
3 who later became a Party Organiser working in that area. So
4 Neil certainly brought quite an influx of members from up
5 there, including one or two white ones. Two, I think.

6 N: Who were they, do you remember?

7 P: They were a chap called Archie Mackellar, and I think his wife
8 joined too. I think that was all.

9 N: I had the impression that he was born in farming - that the
10 family had had either that farm or a farm thereabouts?

11 P: Yes, I think that is right. Certainly his father was alive when
12 I first knew Neil. I have a feeling he was on a different farm
13 - he certainly wasn't on Neil's farm. He may have retired, but
14 he was certainly around.

15 N: He spoke Zulu? Did he?

16 P: Oh, yes. I think he was completely fluent.

17 N: Completely fluent?

18 P: Ja, I think so.

19 N: Simply grown up with it?

20 P: Yes.

21 N: Digging in my memory, I have a sort of recollection of either
22 him or somebody else telling me about some kind of mechanical
23 contraptions that were rigged up on his farm. How, what would
24 it be? There was a pasture which was on top of a

25 P: That's right - the farm went up to the top of the hill behind
26 Bulwer but on the side towards Himeville, and it was almost
27 inaccessible - the top part, which as you say, was on top of
28 this hill. So he had a sort of cable system for taking feed
29 and salt and things up there and bringing whatever had to be
30 brought down, the same way. So, I mean he was quite an
31 ingenious chap, Neil. And this, I think stood him in good stead
32 later on when he was involved in CAP.

33 N: In the early days of his membership of the Party, did he get on
34 reasonably with other people? Because one thinks that there
35 was always this problem in later years, of Neil going off on

1 his own, kind of thing. Or at least some people would say
2 that. I just wondered how he'd got on in a Party, with a line
3 and a policy and a?

4 P: At that stage I think he got on quite well.

5 N: Aha.

6 P: Because he was a new boy. And he came into something which
7 already had its organisation and its leadership, or whatever
8 you'd like to call it, and he, in a way I think, was respectful
9 of that, and probably felt that he should have made the move to
10 the Liberal Party earlier. So he had some sort of regard for
11 the people who'd done it before he had. That's just my
12 assessment of why he was an easier person to deal with in those
13 Liberal Party days than he was later on, when he was involved
14 in things which he himself had initiated.

15 N: Yes. Would you be able to date roughly even, the time at which
16 he began the Kupugani Pro- Project, or got involved with it?
17 Was he the pioneer?

18 P: Yes, he was the pioneer. And it started because there was a
19 milk round about '62. And milk was being thrown away. And he
20 felt that something should be done about this. And so he
21 brought this idea of somehow getting an organisation which
22 would set about distributing surplus products to needy people
23 to the Liberal Party. The debate about it, whether or not it
24 was something that we should support, took place at a National
25 Committee meeting in Grahamstown - although I can't remember
26 what year. I remember Peter Hjul, (I'm pretty sure it was),
27 putting the old argument that you're just alleviating suffering
28 and holding back change and so on and so forth by getting into
29 this kind of social welfare work. Anyway, the Committee didn't
30 go along with that view, and Kupugani, in fact started,
31 although this was never publicised, with a hundred pound
32 donation from the Liberal Party and that was the money it
33 started off with. A hundred pounds was worth quite a lot in
34 those days.

35 N: That would have been in '62 or '63, I think...?

1 P: I don't think it was as early as '61.
2 N: Ja, ja.
3 P: So that suggests to me that Neil didn't join straight after the
4 Emergency, but a little bit later.
5 N: Let me stay with the question of Kupugani in its early stages
6 after the donation from the Liberal Party. What other kind of
7 supports, or what other inputs were there from people, or
8 institutions, or - anything of that sort - that you might know
9 of?
10 P: Well, I don't know. What is known as a foundation member - and
11 those are the only people who are allowed to vote for the new
12 Directors and so on. Jack Unterhalter was very much involved
13 with the Johannesburg end and Leslie Weinberg, here in
14 'Maritzburg. Leslie until a couple of years ago was still a
15 Director. He may still be one. I'm not sure whether he was
16 one right at the beginning but certainly Jack was.
17 N: (Peter talks to Leslie on telephone). Okay, well, Peter now
18 you're fortified with information from Leslie Weinberg - could
19 you tell us about what you've just found out?
20 P: Well, Leslie says that Neil tramped the streets of Johannesburg
21 with Dr Lufi Martini, who was, as far as I can remember, the
22 medical person at the Chamber of Mines Native Recruiting
23 Corporation who used to look after the health of mineworkers
24 who were recruited.
25 N: Yes.
26 P: He was involved in Kupugani right from the start.
27 N: I see.
28 P: And according to Leslie, he and Neil were the people who went
29 canvassing, and Les' seems to think they raised something like
30 thirty thousand pounds. He also thinks that either the Daily
31 Mail, or the Argus Group, supported Kupugani in those early
32 days.
33 N: Did Neil actually become almost full-time on this work - the
34 Kupugani Project? At some stage?
35 P: Yes, he did. Norman, I was never sure whether his farm was not

1 really viable or whether, because his outside interests
2 occupied so much of his time, it went downhill because of that.
3 But in the end he sold the farm and was working for Kupugani.
4 N: Aha.
5 P: Then of course his marriage started to break up, he having met
6 Creina Bond, as she then was. And, in those early days of
7 Kupugani when things were getting very hot, prior to my banning
8 he in fact, stayed, lived here for a while. He had that room at
9 the end of the house, next to the swimming bath so he could
10 come in and go out. But he left here, prompted by Creina, I
11 think, who thought if he went on staying here, he'd be banned
12 too. And then, for a while, I think he lived in his car, in the
13 plantations - something like that.
14 N: Aha.
15 P: But by then, he was involved full-time in Kupugani and was
16 trying to expand it. He had this scheme - I think at that time
17 the Natal Game Reserves were overstocked and there was a
18 culling campaign on. And he somehow got to hear of this and was
19 trying to make some plan for the meat to be sold and a market
20 found for the heads and the skins and so on. So, Kupugani,
21 through Neil, got involved in all these strange things.
22 N: Did his involvement with it effectively come to an end? Did he
23 move onto other things in due course, and did conventional
24 administrators kind of take over?
25 P: Well, that's what happened. Neil was a person of ideas, but he
26 was hopeless at administration....
27 N: Aha.
28 P: I should perhaps mention what we thought was quite funny. We
29 were raided here. Neil wasn't living here any more, but we'd
30 given him a room out at the back there - to put his goods and
31 whatever he wanted to. And what he had put in there was these
32 heads and skins and things from the impala, or whatever they
33 were, that had been culled. And the Security Police policemen
34 set out on their search of the outbuildings, and one of the
35 first rooms they came to was his. And they had a hell of a job

1 to open it because he'd tied the door up with wire or
2 something, so they thought they were going to find something
3 very exciting in there!

4 N: Aha.

5 P: Which they did, because when they opened the door, this
6 terrible pong came out and the bloke staggered back and more or
7 less gave up his search after that.

8 N: Aha.

9 P: So he was full-time at Kupugani but it wasn't working. There
10 was no proper administration. So, as you say, it was taken over
11 by the people who would do the books and so on and who saw that
12 it had really to succeed as a sort of business, just balancing,
13 coming out...

14 N: Yes.

15 P: And, Neil in a way didn't like that. He thought the thing
16 should come from the heart, not from the bookkeeper.

17 N: Do you remember the names of people (associated with Kupugani)
18 who became more prominent nationally, after that - or were
19 there no single figures like him? Simply Committees working
20 all around the place?

21 P: Well, Martini was and he was somebody that Neil always got on
22 with. He was really the engine that drove the thing.

23 N: Aha, aha.

24 P: But people like Buntly Biggs ran it in 'Maritzburg, and
25 eventually, in fact, 'Maritzburg became the headquarters -
26 because it was the best-run section of Kupugani.

27 N: Is that right?

28 P: And it has remained so ever since.

29 N: I didn't know that. When Joan, briefly at one stage early in
30 the eighties had something to do with the organisation it there
31 was somebody called Pridmore, was there?

32 P: Well, she's still there. And I think she is certainly the kind
33 of person that Neil would not have got on with. I mean I think
34 she's quite a tough business cookie.

35 N: And it still does have a national spread does it?

1 P: Yes, I think so. And does quite a lot of nutritional education
2 too. It's not simply distributing the commodities ...?

3 P: No, no...

4 N: I guess you wouldn't have in your head a kind of date by which
5 Neil had effectively moved out? We've got him to about '64,
6 somewhere there perhaps?

7 P: I would think not long after that - which goes up to the
8 beginnings of CAP. There were Catholic Missions in the
9 Himeville /Underberg area. Whether Neil got the idea from
10 there, I don't know, but there was this perception that the
11 churches weren't using their lands productively, or running
12 them democratically, and generally neglecting them.

13 N: Mmm, Mmm.

14 P: Whether the inspiration for a Church Agricultural Project came
15 from Neil (I think it probably did), he was the person who was
16 going to take over the management of these church lands. Now
17 the churches which were involved were the Anglicans, the
18 Catholics and the Lutherans, and they each had a representative
19 on the Board of Directors for quite a long time. In fact until
20 a couple of years ago Bishop Hallowes (an Anglican) was the
21 Chairman, having succeeded Hurley. But you see, Neil fought
22 with Hurley, fought with the Catholic Church. at Maria
23 Ratschitz they found it impossible to get on with him. And he
24 found it impossible to get on with them. There was probably
25 fault on both sides. He was a difficult person to get on with.

26 N: He regarded himself as an atheist, didn't he?

27 P: I should think so, yes, which wasn't the best kind of
28 foundation.

29 N: At times he couldn't forbear to kind of ... "taunt" is not
30 quite right...

31 P: Taunt Taunt is very nearly the right word, ja.

32 N: So, it - Maria Ratschitz came to be where he was staying and
33 working, am I right?

34 P: Yes.

35 N: But the CAP, as a project, had then a far greater spread than

1 Maria Ratschitz?

2 P: Yes. Now with your saying that, I'm revising my dates a bit.
3 Because, Neil became involved with an Anglican Mission, I can't
4 remember what it was called, which was right on the border of
5 Swaziland. And I can remember going to that place when Jordan
6 Ngubane had been banned, and before I was, because Jordan was
7 in Swaziland when he was banned they couldn't find him, in the
8 end they stuck a notice on his - on his door. And his wife sent
9 word to him, and he never came back.

10 N: Yes.

11 P: But I, in fact, went to this farm which was on the border, and
12 I met him there. So, what I'm really saying is that was
13 probably early 1964, and Neil was involved in CAP by then.

14 N: Did Neil, at some stage, spend time going from one mission farm
15 to another giving advice, and supervising and so on, or was he,
16 as I'd rather thought, say by the time he got to Maria
17 Ratschitz, located in one place and all his energies went into
18 developing that particular estate? Or did he do both at
19 different times?

20 P: Well, I think the intention was that he should keep moving
21 around, between these places. I think in the end he really was
22 only regularly involved in two. They were Maria Ratschitz,
23 where he lived, and the place between Richmond and Ixopo, St
24 Faith's Hallows had been the resident priest there at one time
25 -

26 N: The impression that I got from somebody, it might have been
27 Morrison or Aitchison was that Neil had succeeded at Maria
28 Ratschitz in persuading African members of the Church, who were
29 using the pastures, to introduce rotational grazing and perhaps
30 other things, the details of which I don't know. By so doing
31 they improved the quality, and I suppose therefore, the yield
32 off that estate, or that piece of land, very substantially. In
33 other words, in an initial phase, he succeeded in getting a
34 group of Africans who were cattle owners, to cooperate in
35 grazing according to some sort of scientific plan. And then

1 after that problems arose because he wanted to bring in others
2 and they wanted to keep them out. But at the first stage was
3 there some success, as you understand it?

4 P: Oh, I think so, yes. What appeared to be his major achievement
5 there was that he persuaded the people to put their cattle into
6 a pool, sort of bank, and you were credited, in a book
7 somewhere, with the value of the cattle you had put in. And if
8 you wanted to withdraw, if you wanted an animal for some
9 traditional ceremony or other, you could get an animal. And it
10 was deducted from your credit. Or if you wanted some money,
11 you could draw that out. It was certainly a very original
12 idea. But when Neil left to go to Mdukatshane, a lot of those
13 cattle were sold, at a time when the prices were very bad.
14 Others were taken to Mdukatshane where almost without
15 exception, they died of heartwater; which is a tick disease
16 which you don't get at Maria Ratschitz. It had never occurred
17 to him that this might happen. Anyway, the upshot of it all is
18 that I don't know what happened in the end to that bankbook.
19 I'm now the Chairman of the Board and terrified that one day
20 some chap's going to come along and say that 'I put all this
21 money into the bank for those cattle all those years ago, and
22 by now it must be worth a great deal. Where is it?' I don't
23 know what arrangement was made to return that money, and there
24 are certainly people who suspect that whole bank business and
25 who feel that their cattle were stolen. They certainly weren't
26 stolen for, and certainly not for Neil's advantage. But the
27 whole thing, in the end, probably because of his row with the
28 Church and him leaving there and so on, didn't work.

29 N: Why has CAP continued? Did it become responsible for the new
30 Mdukashane Project? Or was that under CAP as well?

31 P: Yes. I wasn't involved when it moved there except as a sort of
32 spectator. Hurley was still the Chairman, and there was a
33 Board with people like Duchesne Grise and Hallows and then
34 there was a row with Hurley and he resigned, or left. Neil had
35 written some terrible letters to Hurley. Hallows stayed on,

1 but in fact, it's now called CAP Farm Trust and it's no longer
2 got anything to do with the church. The money to buy the farm,
3 or farms as they actually were, was put up by Anglo American,
4 and the farm, I think, still belongs to them. The Chairman's
5 Fund has been the mainstay of that Mdukashane Project - ever
6 since it started.

7 N: Yes, I'd forgotten about those Johannesburg Personal Assistants
8 to O'Dowd, who used to end up with sand on their shoes - at
9 Mdukashane, and I was their next port of call in
10 Pietermaritzburg. Ja. So, you would say that there was
11 evidence, at least at a certain phase of things that there was
12 some success, but that over time, partly through his falling
13 out with the church, and moving, and so on, in the end, it
14 wasn't a success?

15 P: Well, I think probably the rehabilitation of the farm was a
16 success, but this cooperative bank, cattle bank thing
17 collapsed. I think what happened was that the Church found that
18 its following became divided. Half supported Neil, in what he
19 was trying to do, and the other half were against him. And I
20 suppose the church authorities had to listen to the ones who
21 were against him, as much as they listened to the others. And
22 when they found that they were having difficulty with him, they
23 may have thought 'well, perhaps these dissidents are right..'
24 I don't know.

25 N: Just one more thing on the actual operation. Was the herd
26 managed as a single herd? Everybody put their cattle in a book
27 sense, but were they also grazed as a herd, sort of moved
28 around together, or did individual families still make their
29 own decisions on a day-to-day basis?

30 P: I doubt it. I think it must have been controlled, although it
31 may have been a mixture of the two. It may have been that each
32 homestead had whatever it needed for milking purposes, in its
33 immediate vicinity but that the main herd was rotated. I
34 suspect something like that, but I'm not sure.

35 N: Yea. Right. I'd like to clock in on the dates. I seem to

1 remember reading one of those newsletters which Creina wrote in
2 '78 or '79, where there was actually a description of the trip
3 down from Maria Ratschitz to Mdukatshane. Now is that
4 conceivably right, that the Mdukatshane project began in the
5 late seventies? Or do you put it rather earlier than that?

6 P: Well, I put it earlier. Only because they set off on this
7 journey of exploration and found this empty farm and discovered
8 it was for sale, and then Neil asked me to go there with him.

9 N: By this stage you were unbanned?

10 P: Yes, and I don't think it was all that long after that. And, so
11 that's why I ...I think late 1974, '75.

12 N: I see, okay.

13 P: But they certainly didn't move then. The move and the selling
14 of the cattle and so on might have been a year or two later.

15 N: Perhaps, what I'm remembering is a reference in one of them to
16 what it had been like on the trip down. You know one of the
17 things I was interested in at that stage was this whole
18 question of how poor Blacks really are. Whether, in fact,
19 there's a whole lot of subsistence income and so on. And I
20 remember very vividly reading this account of how, as they came
21 down with these cattle, a car would draw up and sort of skid to
22 a halt and out would leap a man with a big roll of notes, and
23 say 'I've heard you've got cattle for sale. Will you sell?',
24 peeling off notes. I've no doubt exaggerated it a little, but
25 at the time I thought 'Aha, there's more there, at least for
26 some of them'. Anyway, so he got you involved in looking at
27 the farm and so on, probably fairly soon after your unbanning?

28 P: Yes. But, I, I kept at a safe distance - or as safe as I could.
29 I never went on to the Board, partly because I was worried
30 about this damn cattle bank and whether people were going to
31 start claiming. But also because there was a period of quite
32 a long time when I had nothing to do with Neil. We'd had a row
33 about something - I can't remember what - but he was a very
34 difficult person to deal with. But, in the end, I suppose
35 really after his death, I went on to what was called the Farm

1 Committee. Elliot Mngadi was on that too, and it really was
2 just an occasion for the people who were most closely involved
3 in the farm to talk about their problems. One of the
4 highlights at these meetings was not talking about the farm,
5 but telling about what was going on in the rest of South
6 Africa, of which they were very ignorant. So, in Neil's later
7 days I didn't really have all that much to do with that whole
8 project.

9 N: The reference you made a little while ago to now being worried
10 about the bank because you're Chairman of the Board, did you
11 say?

12 P: Yes...

13 N: Is that through the Farm Committee thing you've just been
14 talking about, or is it through the CAP Farm Trust?

15 P: Well, it's way back to Maria Ratschitz. There might be people
16 there who are suddenly going to arise from the dead or their
17 great, great grandchildren might produce a piece of paper and
18 say 'what happened about this?' I don't think that'll happen.

19 N: Yes, but it's in what capacity that that concerns you?

20 P: As Chairman of the Board of Trustees, or whatever they're
21 called.

22 N: Of this CAP Farm Trust thing?

23 P: Ja, ja.

24 N: Now that's separate from the Farm Committee, is it - the
25 Mdukatshane thing?

26 P: Like most things, CAP now has a proliferation of committees. It
27 has a Board of Directors, it has a Management Committee, which
28 is responsible for overall supervision, I suppose; and then it
29 has the Farm Committee, which is really just a get-together of
30 the people who work there. (end of first side).

31
32 (Second side of tape 6)

33
34 N: This is a continuation of the interview of the 17th of October,
35 '95. Having got to this point, are we fairly close to the

1 start of AFRA, or is there still some time to run? Do you have
2 a date for its beginning?

3 P: I think the inaugural meeting was late 1979. Perhaps to go back
4 a bit, one should say that while Neil was at Maria Ratschitz,
5 the Lime Hill removals started. And he, I think, was as
6 responsible as anyone for getting Cosmos Desmond involved in
7 that 'cause I think Cosmos was then the resident priest by that
8 time at Maria Ratschitz and the publicity for Lime Hill was
9 initially, I think, the result of Neil's making a big noise
10 about it. So, he had that background already which, in a way
11 was a carry-over from his Liberal Party involvement with those
12 Southern Natal communities. And then of course, when they got
13 to Maria Ratschitz, it was at the time when the Nationalist
14 Government started to enforce the 'five families per farm' law
15 - that old stipulation that you were only supposed to have five
16 resident Black families on one farm, which nobody had ever
17 taken notice of before but which they now started to apply.
18 And there were mass evictions from farms, particularly in the
19 Weenen area. And those people ended up - many of them - on the
20 borders in Kwazulu, adjoining Mdukatshane. And the Weenen
21 emergency camp was set up all those years ago - I remember the
22 Black Sash was very involved in - in exposing that too. But,
23 Neil, in a way, was the person who kick-started that.

24 N: Ah. Would I be right in saying that a way of describing what
25 they were doing, was attacking the practice of labour tenancy,
26 or at least that was part of what they were doing. A
27 traditional labour farm - you might have, I don't know, what?
28 twenty, thirty or more families and, to some of those they
29 began to apply the five family thing?

30 P: Yes, I think that's right.

31 N: I see. So they didn't act against the institution of labour
32 tenancy, by looking at contracts and so on, and saying 'you're
33 not allowed to do this', but they acted by imposing this
34 numerical quota?

35 P: Well, that's my perception of what they did.

1 N: Yes, I see, I hadn't realised that. 'Cause I do remember in
2 '76 at the first SALDRU conference, that Francis Wilson set up,
3 that one on farm labour - there were more than one paper from
4 Natal and one was by a journalist - the name Yule, or something
5 of that sort, comes to mind...

6 P: Yes, I remember that too ...

7 N: And that was about the Natal attack on farm labour tenancy. So
8 in the Natal case at this stage, in the early days of the
9 response of Neil and others, it wasn't simply evictions of the
10 'black spot' variety, it was also very substantially this
11 eviction of farm people ...?

12 P: Yes, that was what affected Mdukatshane...

13 N: Yes. Because it had been cleared, had it, before they moved
14 in, or do you mean the people across the boundaries?

15 P: Mdukatshane was virtually empty as far as I know. I'm not quite
16 sure how that happened, but the previous owners must have
17 evicted those people. How long before, I don't know. But
18 obviously people soon found out that Neil was sympathetic, so
19 people threatened with eviction would have gone to him with
20 their problems I suppose. Moreover the consequences of farm
21 evictions were being felt all around them. At Tugela Estates
22 and those places there were those very congested resettlement
23 areas virtually next door to Mdukatshane.

24 N: Now, as, as you remember, the first meeting, did you have a
25 sense of this as something that might grow and that would, in
26 fact, be a serious continuation of some of that old Liberal
27 Party work that you'd done before?

28 P: I don't know what I thought, Norman. I must say that I was
29 cautious about getting involved closely with Neil again and I
30 remember, I'm not quite sure because this is second-hand, from
31 Maimie Corrigan, a - the, the, there was - I'll come, I'll
32 come back to that point, just now. Anyway, the inaugural
33 meeting was held, I think in what was called (at) the Bantu
34 Presbyterian Church - on the corner of Buchanan Street, here in
35 'Maritzburg. It was chaired by Phillip Russell, who was the

1 Bishop of Natal at that time, Anglican Bishop. And Neil
2 related what was happening, and that was the beginnings of what
3 turned out to be AFRA. I'm not sure whether there was then a
4 follow-up meeting, to elect a committee, or what. Peter Rutsch
5 was elected the Chair at that first meeting. I don't know
6 whether Marie Dyer was being approached to be the Vice-Chair,
7 or what, but anyway, Mamie Corrigall told me that Marie had
8 told her that she felt (she was wrong about this!) that I was
9 the only person who might be able to control Neil (he laughs)
10 and would she persuade me to come on to the committee -
11 something like that. Anyway, so I ended up on that committee.
12 Then soon after that, Peter Rutsch resigned and then I became
13 the Chairman, and Marie was Vice-Chairman for a long time too.

14 N: Am I right that Ruth Lundie was Treasurer at one time?

15 P: Ruth was Treasurer.

16 N: Yes.

17 P: And AFRA, as far as I know, and I think it's still the case,
18 has always been very well run as far as looking after the money
19 goes. And that's was largely the result of Ruth's work in those
20 first years. We were always very careful about that, and this
21 has paid off. God knows how much money they get per year now,
22 but it was shoestring stuff in, in those early days, but
23 because what money there was, was properly accounted for, we
24 then managed to get a bit more and so on. So Ruth was the
25 Treasurer, from the beginning, yes.

26 N: Was it fairly soon that you obtained some overseas funding or
27 did that only come rather later?

28 P: No, that came later. The first bit of funding, and it wasn't
29 all that much, was enough to be able to employ Cheryl Walker
30 for six months and came from the South African Council of
31 Churches. And it may be that more came from them later.

32 N: Right. When overseas funding it did come, what kind of
33 institutions gave it?

34 P: Basically, Church bodies like ECO - I can't remember what ECO
35 stands for but it was a Dutch Church organisation.

1 N: There are these continental church charities, aren't there
2?

3 P: Which are supported by tithes collected by the State, I think,
4 'Brood fur die Wurld' and Misereor, which is the Catholic one
5 in Germany. And I think Miserior has certainly funded AFRA, at
6 some times in its life.

7 N: Right. Peter, in the period, from, I think you said '79, did
8 you through to the late eighties, or even the early nineties,
9 the fundamental work that AFRA did was resisting removals and
10 evictions. Is that accurate? Or was there another range of
11 activities which I'm leaving out in that description?

12 P: No, I think that was the fundamental task, as it was seen to
13 be. The interest in, or the support for development really
14 only came later when it seemed possible that those places
15 wouldn't be moved. But really it was, was an attempt to delay
16 the process. There was no direct link, but it was a
17 continuation of what the old Liberal Party and the Northern
18 Natal African Landowners' Association had been doing.

19 N: Yes.

20 P: Publicity, and trying to persuade people to be bloody-minded in
21 the face of the authorities.

22 N: And to insist on their full legal rights, such as they were,
23 under the law, which was part of the delaying tactic, wasn't
24 it?

25 P: Yes.

26 N: The administrators would forget to do something or other which
27 they were supposed to do, and a court order would insist that
28 it be done, and that sort of thing?

29 P: Yes, that kind of thing, though the ones that really come to
30 mind were much earlier in the Liberal Party days...places like
31 Charlestown where they gave ejectment notices based on a
32 proclamation which didn't exist. And, there was another
33 successful challenge at Kumaloville. But, of course, the
34 government learnt as it went along, so it became more 'with it'
35 in eliminating its mistakes.

1 N: Yea. There was a stage in the first half of the eighties I
2 think, when there were a few agricultural students at the
3 Agricultural Faculty here, who were not typical farmers' sons.
4 They were Jewish, or they came from Johannesburg, or they
5 smoked the pot, and they had copper bangles, you know,
6 identifying with the African aspirations and so on, and they
7 were interested in the Subsistence Agricultural Study Group,
8 which Nathanson and John Lee and so on had got going and with
9 which I was trying to collaborate. But these students had
10 their own little organisation, with some SRC support, and they
11 were trying to help some of these places where people had been
12 resettled. And I remember making one trip with them past that
13 place that Elliot Mngadi was moved to that was called....?
14 P: Ezakheni.
15 N: Ezakheni, that's right. Now, that's near Ladysmith, is it?
16 P: It's not as near Ladysmith as the place they were moved from.
17 It's about twenty to twenty-five k's from Ladysmith.
18 N: And then one kept going past that and then you came to another
19 place...
20 P: It was called Ekuvukeni...
21 N: That's right, that's the place. And then we went on, if I'm not
22 mistaken, beyond that, and there was an old farmhouse which the
23 Whites had been moved out and there was a denser settlement not
24 too far from that. In the farmhouse there were African
25 extension officers, from the Department of Agriculture, who
26 were trying to teach a group of women to farm the gardens of
27 the old farmhouse and that type of thing.
28 P: Ja.
29 N: Now, when I went on that trip, one of the things that struck me
30 was that part of all this business that was going on
31 (admittedly in a rather authoritarian manner) was (the) process
32 of getting people into denser settlements. And then, visibly
33 at that stage, there were roads being built and there were
34 water reservoirs on top of hills from which water had been run
35 down, and there was a certain amount of development of that

1 kind of infra-structural stuff going on. Let's leave aside the
2 argument as to whether that justifies anything like ordering
3 people off their land and so forth. Am I right that, in some
4 of these areas over time, in the eighties let's say, in fact
5 there was a certain amount of development at the crude level,
6 of roads being built and bridges, and water supplies and so
7 forth? Or was that rather insubstantial, as you see it?
8 Basically it was just Apartheid grinding out its formula? This
9 sounds perhaps a little more controversial than I really
10 intended it to be.

11 P: Thinking of Ezakheni, which is a town now, most of the houses
12 are substantial, built of bricks and mortar, the roads are
13 alright....

14 N: Aha..

15 P: Water, bloody awful originally ...but by now, I think probably
16 a fairly reasonable water supply. And willy nilly, people have
17 made something of it.

18 N: Yes.

19 P: To the extent, perhaps, although I don't know this, that some
20 people if they get their land back, wherever they were moved
21 from, (as they will, I think) will think twice about going back
22 there because they've made something else and they've been
23 there for twenty years, or more.

24 N: Yea.

25 P: Now, I'm just thinking of Elliot Mngadi, I don't know what he
26 would have done, but his wife, I think, is not going to go back.
27 On the other hand his children, who are in good jobs - they're
28 a headmistress and a social worker with the Durban Municipality
29 - I think they will build something at the place that the
30 family was kicked off. But Elliot might have decided to stay
31 where he was. I don't know.

32 N: Aha.

33 P: But his wife's situation is complicated by the fact that she's
34 his second wife so she almost has to do what the children in
35 the first family suggest that she does. But it looks to me as

1 if the accommodation within the family is that she will stay at
2 Ezakheni, and they will do whatever they want to do at the
3 other place.

4 N: Peter, this is going off at a tangent perhaps, but how do you
5 understand that decision of the children with these jobs,
6 Durban and so on? Why will they build a place at Roosboom - is
7 that correct?

8 P: Ja, well, I think the ancestral roots have something to do with it.
9 You can't get away from the fact that this counts for a hell of a
10 lot. But there is also that having been kicked out of somewhere you
11 only remember the good things about what it was like when you lived
12 there. So I think they look back to that as a more or less utopian
13 life that they was lost.

14 N: Is it somewhere where they will retire to?

15 P: Well, I think that may well be.

16 N: Maybe that's the point is it?

17 P: Yes, I think that that may well be. Or they may even feel that
18 it'll be better for our children to go to school there rather
19 than in Umlazi, or somewhere like that. To have a base there
20 meant they can go to the local school and they won't be
21 subjected to all those pressures.

22 N: And, they'll probably run a kind of split household at some
23 stage?

24 P: Yes, that is very common.

25 N: Some people stay in town and others will be back there and look
26 after the kids and - as you say, send them to school.

27 P: Let me top your beer up....

28 N: One or two other things about AFRA, Peter. When that work was
29 being done and you found yourself being drawn into it in the
30 way you described, was it a question of doing what one could in
31 the face of what was a kind of moral outrage, rather than
32 thinking you could win this battle, knowing that the outcome
33 would be the one you wanted?

34 P: I'm not sure that one ever thought one could win it but I
35 suppose as time went on, that began to look possible. As

1 regards the moral issue, in many ways the whole resettlement/
2 Group Areas/removal thing seems to me to have been one of the
3 worst aspects of Apartheid.

4 N: Yes. Somewhere in the mid-seventies South Africa went into,
5 what with hindsight I guess one could call a new phase of
6 politics, from the time of the Soweto Uprising - I can never
7 remember whether it's '75 or '76...

8 P: '76, I think.

9 N: '76, ja. Since what we're doing is talking about you and your
10 politics and AFRA in so far as it involved you, how did that
11 new style of politics, that new eruption of political force on
12 the part of Black and Coloured and other people affect you?
13 Did you experience excitement? Was it good news, was it bad
14 news, were you ambiguous? Is there a question there you can
15 answer?

16 P: Well, looking back, yes, it was some sort of a watershed. But
17 it didn't strike me as being that at the time. I just thought
18 it had been squashed. But, the Biko influence was obviously
19 strong, and a good thing, I think, in general. Except that I
20 suspect that, although he wouldn't have wanted it to it's
21 become a racist thing.

22 N: The Black Consciousness thing...

23 P: Ja...And I think that it permeates all Black organisations in
24 the lower echelons. In ANC upper echelons - no, maybe not, but
25 I think down below, it comes out quite often in the kind of
26 statements that people in Parliament make - attacks on the
27 D.P., like saying 'what do you know about it? You're White...'
28 - that kind of thing

29 N: Yes..

30 P: At the time, however, Soweto was just another event, a terrible
31 event, but, you'd had Sharpville and all those things. But in
32 retrospect there was clearly something stirring there that wasn't
33 going to capitulate.

34 N: Yes. As the eighties went along, I guess that became clearer
35 didn't it?

1 P: Yes.

2 N: Now, in that phase of things, somewhere around mid-decade,
3 there was actually a belief going around wasn't there, that it
4 would be possible to overthrow the state and make things
5 ungovernable and so on, (which then receded somewhat I think).
6 What was your attitude to that kind of politics? Perhaps an
7 easier way to put it is to refer to one of the things I listed
8 as one of the functions of the Liberal, at a Liberal Party
9 History Conference. I talked about a defensive role against
10 violence, and the violent overthrow of the state. I don't know
11 whether I spelt out what I meant by defending the state against
12 it's violent overthrow, but is that a phrase that you would
13 have, perhaps hesitantly, nonetheless endorsed? Or was that
14 not a choice, perhaps you felt you were required to make?

15 P: Well, I was, I was certainly against the violent overthrow of
16 the state but I didn't somehow like the idea of actively
17 defending that state.

18 N: Right. (In the staff, as I said to you, some of those who came
19 to work with AFRA, kind of, you know, taking AFRA back on board
20 again for a while. If one thinks of the, admittedly, it, it
21 went beyond that for a bit, something like - the surplus
22 peoples' project, you know, which I think Cheryl was very much
23 involved in, and at the time, I think that she was still was
24 partly an AFRA ...

25 P: Yes, when she, when she started on that, the search, yes.

26 N: Now my, you know, view, let's say of the four iron maidens, as,
27 as (some) called them, (inaudible), was at least, you know, two
28 of them, I would have said were on the left. Cheryl, you know
29 wouldn't have quite known). In that whole phase of things,
30 there was a sort of antagonism between the Left and some old
31 Liberals (myself included). Now, was this something that
32 bothered you at all, or was this not something that you got
33 involved with?

34 P: Well, it did bother me a bit. It didn't bother me in AFRA. But
35 it did bother me when the National Land Committee - was it? -

1 the umbrella organisation was set up. Then I was rather on the
2 defensive with regard to those people. I think AFRA was quite
3 lucky. Cheryl I think is probably closer to me now than she was
4 then.

5 N: I would guess so.

6 P: And let me say this: for a long time AFRA only had one person
7 working for it and some of them were alright and some I had
8 great reservations about. But we were lucky with Cheryl. We
9 were not with our second appointment, but he wasn't a big
10 problem. Anyway, he was only there for a year or so. The
11 third one, Dave Walwyn, who married Sheila Meintjies, was a
12 very good person. I didn't get on with Eunice Carrim's wife.
13 She worked there, but not as a fieldworker. And then we were
14 very lucky with Richard Clacey, who is not an ideological
15 person....

16 N: So if you try to define the kind of reservations you have about
17 some people, would it have to do with the fact that certain
18 types of left-wingers act 'ideologically', though that may be
19 a little difficult to define?

20 P: Yes.

21 N: Can you expand on that a little?

22 P: Well, when people have a sort of rigid mindset, I mean I'm much
23 more interested in people, ordinary people who aren't quite
24 sure about anything ...the ones who are certain about things
25 that I ...am very suspicious of.

26 N: Aha. Right.

27 P: Maybe that's age, I don't know.

28 N: Yes. Alright. I think there were one or two final things
29 about AFRA, I had in mind, but the beer seems to have kind of
30 ...

31 P: ..washed it away?

32 N: ..washed it away, I fear.

33 P: Well, we can start off with AFRA, next time.

34 N: Yes, yes.

35 P: You can probably even write them down so that ...

Q: Yes. Okay, well, what about... the tape is switched off and
some clank to the end.

A:

Q: