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LYBON MABASA

Lybon Tiyani Mabasa, a leader in the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) at the time of this interview, was born in 1952 and graduated from Sekano-Ntoane High School in Soweto in 1971. He studied at the University of the North, but did not complete a degree because of his involvement in student politics. In 1976 he began teaching at Meadowlands High School in Soweto, and joined the Black People's Convention [BPC]. Following the outbreak of the student uprising that year, he was detained for four months. Evading arrest in the crackdown of October 1977, with like-minded colleagues he helped organize the caretaker Soweto Action Committee within days of the banning of all black consciousness organizations. The committee held countrywide consultations that led to the formation of AZAPO in April 1978. Mabasa was elected its treasurer. Detained soon after, he was banned for five years following his release in late 1978. When his banning order was lifted in May 1982, he resumed organizing for AZAPO and subsequently served as its president (1983-84), vice-president for political education (1985-86) and vice-president (1986-87). He was detained again for three months in 1989, and was hospitalized along with other prison hunger strikers. In the 1980s he helped steer AZAPO and its ally the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU) towards advocacy of "scientific socialism," but the organizations gained little ground against their larger, better-funded rivals in the United Democratic Front and the Congress of South African Trade Unions. After the advent of majority rule, Mabasa split from AZAPO and formed the Socialist Party of Azania.

Mabasa was interviewed in New York City on April 7, 1991, by Gail Gerhart, who was involved in preparing volume 5 of *From Protest to Challenge*. The following is a verbatim transcript from tapes.

WERE YOU PRESENT AT THE BPC MEETING IN MAFIKENG IN MAY 1976?

No, I wasn't there. I was at that time the convenor for community development for BPC and we had a work camp. So I couldn't go because it was all in the schedule, but I was already in the BPC at that point in time.

THERE ARE VARIOUS PEOPLE WHO SAY THAT BY THE TIME OF THE CRACKDOWN OF OCTOBER 1977 THAT IN FACT THE BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS MOVEMENT WAS DISINTEGRATING, SPLITTING, SASO GOING ONE WAY, BPC GOING THE OTHER WAY. DO YOU THINK THAT WOULD BE A CORRECT HISTORICAL LINE OF ANALYSIS?

No, I wouldn't think that it would be correct to say so, but maybe it would be important to say that at that time, there were quite a lot of arguments going on as to whether or not the organization should come out very clearly on the question of how race relates to class, and how class relates to race. And I think those were the major issues of argument at that time.

As to whether, say for instance, programs like BCP, the Black Community Programmes, were not helping to make the face of apartheid acceptable by providing services within the black community. Why don't we let it all become clear that the apartheid system was doing all this? I think they were more academic students' arguments; in the meantime we have come to realize that you don't say that because you are suffering, let our people suffer more. I remember at the particular work camp I'm talking about, we had very serious arguments: why go and work in the Orlando Home, why go and paint and so on. Because it is the system, and the system should — We really had those type of—

But I wouldn't say we were falling apart. Basically it was because, as you have observed, during that time when the uprising came up, the movement sort of came together in its responses. And this was probably even evident later in '77, at Steve Biko's funeral. But the resonance of the organization was that of unity, despite the arguments. It was the same thing— . I think all organizations go through that same phase. If organizations didn't go through those phases, then they would really become undemocratic institutions. Because when you agree and agree and agree, something is definitely wrong. Everybody came up for Steve's funeral; it was a SASO issue, it was a BPC issue. And immediately after the crackdown, we had a meeting in Chiawelo [in Soweto]. I was the chairperson of that meeting, and in that meeting, we had people from SASO—

IMMEDIATELY AFTER?

Within five days. I was chairperson of that meeting. I can remember the people who were there: Jacky Selebi was there — he wasn't picked up yet. Sandile [Seth] Mazibuko who was SASM; he wasn't picked up yet. Thami Mazwai, [Zwelakhe] Sisulu, Juby Mayet, all sorts of people.

ZWELAKHE SISULU?

Yes, he was there. He wasn't a very pronounced person at that time, but he was there. All sorts of people. I'm sure we had about forty people.

WHERE WAS THE MEETING?

In Chiawelo, at the Lutheran Centre, on a Sunday, exactly five days after the crackdown [of October 19, 1977]. That's the meeting where the Soweto Action Committee was formed and it was formed by people who came from BPC, people who came from SASO. Jackie Selebi was already a very senior person in SASO, but all of us were agreeing that it's our problem, and at that point in time there was no question in terms of the correctness of the politics of black consciousness. There could have been questions as to how do we make ourselves effective, which is a healthy set up, so—

WOULD IT HAVE BEEN PREMATURE AT THAT POINT FOR SOMEBODY TO SAY "CAMPS" HAD FORMED? THAT THERE WAS AN ANC CAMP OR AN ANTI-ANC CAMP WITHIN THAT GROUP?

I wouldn't say it was so. Throughout the existence of the BPC, people understood that there were people who come from the ANC tradition, who understood that there were people who came from the PAC tradition. The black consciousness movement became the melting pot of activities and in the committee in which I served as convener for community development for BPC, there was one comrade who was serving also in that executive which was for the whole Reef, Vuyisile. Amongst us we knew he came from the ANC camp; it really created no problems from us.

If you remember earlier on, there was the TRYO trial, Transvaal Youth Organization. The number one accused in that trial was Joseph Molokeng. It was the trial where Jairus Kgokong refused to give evidence. The tilt of the case was toward the fact that people were associated with the ANC. We didn't fight about that; we treated it as one political movement. When Jairus refused to give evidence, he wasn't saying I'm doing it because some of them were doing ANC; it was comradely. They were part of us. There were never very serious conflicts in the direction of one belonging to one political organization or another. I think that's how things were going basically.

I know that in later years people have emphasized that that was so, and that's why later there was COSAS [Congress of SA Students], there was AZASO [Azanian Students Organisation], which I would say again, there are gross distortions. I am a founding member of AZASO. I was banned when COSAS was formed. I will tell you the people who formed COSAS. It was Roller Masinga, Billy Masetlha, Super Moloji. I gave them the AZAPO car. They organized COSAS with the AZAPO Volkswagon, because as far as we were concerned, we didn't see these differences.

There are also historical— . I think what needs to be seen as important is that from that time onward, politically, the ANC started seeing that maybe they didn't get credit for the big cake. For the June 16 uprising.

THE BIG CAKE, IS THAT WHAT YOU CALLED IT AT THE TIME?

No, I mean at the time it became the most important thing. People were asking "what was your role in June 16?" and so on. The ANC didn't get any organizational credit for it. And in a way, they then started wanting to do things in a very deliberate way, things which would be seen to be ANC, or which would be seen to be one organization. And from that time onwards, when COSAS was formed (and we really helped in forming COSAS), but very soon we realized that it seems there are efforts to make COSAS completely independent from the tradition which we had in the country. People were wanting to have their own organizations, their own structures. It's understood. We were naive to—

THAT CAME AFTER COSAS WAS FORMED, SORT OF LATE '78?

Yah, it was formed in '79.

SO IT WASN'T UNTIL THEN, OR AFTER THEN, THAT THESE FEELINGS BEGAN TO—

If these feelings had been strong, it wouldn't have been possible to form AZASO. It wouldn't have been possible even to form COSAS at that time. Because initially the base that existed was the BC base. And indeed, when people came in, they couldn't use any other ticket than the BC ticket. And then later, of course, they would say they had a new organizational approach. Sometimes it was even rude. We would be called all sorts of names: agents of the CIA, and all sorts of things. But we didn't think the world was coming to an end because of that. We understood that in a political struggle lots of things come up.

I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH CONTACT YOU HAD WITH BIKO AFTER HIS "RUSTICATION" IN THE EASTERN CAPE. CAN YOU GIVE ME ANY INSIGHT AT ALL INTO HIS VIEW OF THIS QUESTION OF WHETHER THE ANC SHOULD BE SEEN AS A RIVAL?

Biko, I think— . Barney Pityana put it very well, when he came back at the end of last year. The interviewer said "Lots of you guys have since left the BC movement and joined the ANC." He

said, no I had ANC links as early as 1961 and so on. And they said, okay, we realize that. But do you think Biko could have done the same? And he laughed and said, "Well, I think Biko would be bigger than those type of things." I understood his response to say that Biko understood the importance of the unity of the liberation movement. And to him, the liberation movement was not the particular organization which he led. Nor the historical organizations in the form of the ANC and the PAC. The liberation movement was all these components brought together.

And his death is closely linked to that particular belief. He had already spoken to the PAC, "Prof" [Sobukwe] in Kimberley; he had been arranging various meetings with the ANC. If you read Adelaide Tambo's book, there is somewhere where they mention that they had been trying to get Biko, to talk to him. He was going to Cape Town to speak to Neville [Alexander], and to him, they were not rivals.

And I think probably that still remains the position of the BC movement. That the liberation movement is one. It has various components; it expresses itself through various political streams. Other people may not think the way we do. They might think that they are the liberation movement, or that the liberation movement is someone else. We hold that the liberation movement in South Africa is one. And I think Biko held to that idea. The concept of BC that's espoused by him at the court case in Pretoria clearly indicated that he could not have believed that all people belonged to BPC. He said it was important to form one united front of black people as a bargaining force with the status quo. So I don't think he ever regarded the ANC or the PAC as rival organizations. Those politics came in particularly after 1985, very strongly.

DURING THE ACTUAL STUDENT UPRISING IN '76, YOU WERE TEACHING IN MEADOWLANDS HIGH SCHOOL. WERE YOU AT ALL CONSCIOUS OF ANY ANC UNDERGROUND ACTIVITY TO TRY TO BE IN TOUCH WITH THE STUDENT ORGANIZERS?

No, I wouldn't say that I was aware of that. I would think that if it was there, it could not have been such a factor at that point in time. When SASM organized the meeting of June 13, it was a meeting which the BPC was aware of. And we had discussed and agreed that the position that they were particularly taking was correct.

A week before, at DOCC [Soweto's Donaldson Orlando Community Centre], BPC was holding its meeting every first Sunday of the month. And we had held our meeting one week before at DOCC. And the question of education and what was happening particularly at Orlando West [High School] had been one that we had seriously focused on. And we had continually been talking, particularly to people like Zweli Sizani, who was in SASM and a very active member of BPC (he is now with the ANC) and various people. And basically, I don't think that the ANC can particularly claim that they actually influenced the actions of the students. It wouldn't be so, because at the same time, the key students who played a role at that point in time, the majority of them remained within the BC movement. Tsietsi [Mashinini] remained within the BC movement. Pocks, who was in that meeting, (he is here in Washington)—

WHO IS THAT?

Pocks [or "Pax"] — I have his number—

WHAT'S HIS LAST NAME?

I'll give you his phone number [doesn't remember last name]. He is in DC. He's from Kimberley. He was in that meeting on the 13th. And Barney Mokgatle; he is still with the BC movement.

WHAT ABOUT A LITTLE BIT LATER. PEOPLE TALKED ABOUT, OR ANC PEOPLE TALK ABOUT JOE GQABI AND HIS —

Joe Gqabi had a contact but I think a minimum contact with the student leadership. Indeed he had a contact with people like Murphy Morobe. He had contact with people like Super Moloi, Billy Masetlha and so on. But at that time, they were probably some of the players, but not *the* players. Murphy could have been *the* player, but the others were some of the players. People like Roller [Masinga] were not even still in school, practically. So it could not be made an issue.

I think what is probably happening here, is that things happen, and in trying to take a post mortem of the corpse, we are trying to see where the poison could have come from.

THIS IS THE TASK FOR THE HISTORIAN, BECAUSE PEOPLE WILL TRY TO GO BACK AND RECONSTRUCT IT.

But I think everything should be based on the ANC statement on June 17, 1976. They called June 16 "a flash in the pan". And they could not have called June 16 a flash in the pan with full knowledge of the amount of underground work they have done. It really went on for two and a half years. And suddenly they realized that this had a much bigger basis.

Biko's comment on the effect of BC— . One journalist asked "what are the effects of BC in South Africa?" And they say he answered in one word. He said "Soweto." Because to him, he saw a culmination of lots of things, lots of education, lots of approaches.

And also the fact that people— . Unlike later, people were able to differentiate very clearly between the oppressor and the oppressed. It became that which belongs to the oppressed and that which belongs to the oppressor. The culture of say, for instance, targets; each and every car which you don't know. It's a culture which came very late in the struggle. In 1976, people went to the offices of the cars, UBC [Urban Bantu Council], the bottle stores. They went to everything which is conceivably a symbol of the apartheid regime. And that needed some education to do that. Hardly a single shop in the location was actually burned down.

UNLESS IT BELONGED TO THE UBC.

The UBC people were forced to resign. And basically the approach was very political.

SO AFTER THE CRACKDOWN, AT THIS MEETING IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH WITH THE FORTY PEOPLE THERE, CAN YOU TELL ME MORE ABOUT THE SOWETO ACTION COMMITTEE?

Yes, in that meeting, two things emerged actually. We agreed that we would have to address the urgent issue that was coming in weeks, the issue of community councils. Because they were being introduced just at that time. You remember the Committee of Ten came in because already they were talking about community councils. And we then agreed that we need to have a two pronged approach. To address the issue of the community councils, and the Soweto Action Committee was then constituted to look at that particular problem. I think they did very well. The first elections for the community council were 6.5 percent [voter turnout]. They did extremely well. And another subcommittee, which I was made head of, was a subcommittee which would look at what was loosely defined as "national possibilities". What does this present set up mean? What is the pulse at the national level? Going around throughout the whole country.

AT THE INITIAL STAGES, THE SOWETO ACTION COMMITTEE WAS JUST LOOKING AT SOWETO, NOT EVEN EAST RAND OR—

No, the concentration was going to be Soweto, and this [other] committee was then going to do that which the Soweto Action Committee was not doing. Look around, see if there are structures nationally, and talk to people. We were aware that the majority of people were in detention. We who had not been in detention, who on days when people had been raided, were not home. I remember I got back, one time they even raided Regina Mundi [church] looking for me. It was a bad situation. Looking back, I don't know how we got the strength and maybe the courage of not being so fearful as to leave everything to God. But then, in that committee, there was George Nagota(?) who is presently with the ANC, a prominent businessman in the ANC.

THIS IS THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE?

Yah. And there was Ratshitanga, who is a very well known poet. There was Mandla Khuzwayo, who was once president of NYO (National Youth Organization, not NAYO). There was Sammy Tloubatla (?), who was chairperson of REESO; there was Mlungi Simavana(?), who had served with me in the BPC; there was Jackie Selebi, who got arrested immediately after the meeting. Two or three days, he got picked up. We then went around, throughout the whole country, we talked to lots of people. People like Monde Mditchwa(?), who presently is the general secretary of the health workers union, the ANC—

IN THE CAPE?

In the Cape. You know he is based in Johannesburg now, but it used to be in the eastern Cape.

AND THIS GROUP, DID ALL OF YOU TRAVEL AS A GROUP?

No, we used to send individuals. We didn't even have the resources.

YOU TOOK THE TRAIN OR—

Train, hike, whatever was available. We literally went throughout the whole country. In Cape Town, we got people like Nombulelo [?], who later became acting president of AZAPO after Curtis Nkondo was suspended. She also was SASO. She was one of the 22 Ngoye students who were charged after at June 16. We went to the northern Transvaal.

WERE YOU BUILDING A STRUCTURE, OR WERE YOU JUST CONSULTING WITH PEOPLE?

We were consulting with people about whether they think it's important to have another national structure coming up. And initially you meet two or three people, and you say "Okay comrades, look around. Sit with people, consult, give us a report." By the end of February '78, we had got feedback from each and every area that people think we should not allow what happened in 1960 to happen again. We should not allow a vacuum to develop. People feel that there should be a national organization started. We then went about consulting, seeing how to go about it, checking the leadership, were there people we know? Incidentally, Nthato Motlana had just been released.

DECEMBER '77. THE PEOPLE WHO WERE in MODDERBEE [prison]?

Nthato was among the first releases. We talked to them to find out the situation. We then went ahead to start organizing for what we called a convention, a delegates' convention at St. Ansgar's.

I was the convening person who wrote letters. We had people from almost all areas, eastern Cape, western Cape, Soweto. We had people from Natal, we had people from the northern Transvaal. We had a few people from the Free State. There were about 82 people. And all of them, the majority, were from the leadership level, of course.

We had people like Desmond Tutu; they were not big then. We had people like Motlana, throughout. And two things happened. Okay, the first thing which was put into the agenda was to argue, or debate, the issue of whether to form (now that we had everybody together) and finally a resolution was agreed upon, that we should form another political organisation.

NOW WE'RE TALKING ABOUT THIS MEETING AT ST. ANSGAR'S. THERE WERE ABOUT EIGHTY PEOPLE THERE?

Yah, who were delegates of various regions.

THERE WAS NO NAME TO THIS THING?

No, there was absolutely no name. We debated and that day we agreed to form a national political organisation. And we then found out what people thought.

Because the issue of whether to continue with BC was also an issue. It was an issue at two levels. One, that we will not be arrested for continuing the tradition of a banned organisation. And it was interesting that overwhelmingly people said, if we get arrested for that, we'll get arrested for that. But BC did not belong to the ANC, to the BPC; it's an ideology. There was no word of dissent. Nobody said, no I don't agree.

All these people were there, Jabu Ngwenya was there, who is now top person in s in the ANC. All people were there. And we didn't even have a constitution. We are starting this organization in the BC tradition. And we also then debated what name we should give to this. It was lots of names, and we ultimately ended up with AZAPO. An interim committee was then elected at the end.

DID ANYONE OBJECT TO THE AZANIA TAG AT THIS POINT?

No. If you remember the '76 era, you never saw South Africa on anything. We can argue now that it's a slave name and so on. But that's why I say when people argue about that there were influences from other people, obviously, because other people felt very strongly about the name Azania. It would not have come as strongly— . If you look at Zindzi Mandela's earlier poems, they all refer to "Azania". But anyway, that's really not an issue.

We then went ahead and formed AZAPO. I was in that interim committee again. Ishmael [Makhabela] became chairperson of the interim committee. We had George Nagota (?)—

THE FIRST COMMITTEE THAT EMERGES SEEMS TO BE YOUNG. I MEAN YOU WEREN'T STUDENTS, BUT YOU WERE UNDER THIRTY, OR SLIGHTLY UNDER THIRTY—

No, I don't think George was under thirty, and I think Rashitanga was above forty. He was in his late forties.

WHO IS RASHITANGA?

He was the man who produced the film "The River . . ." something.

THAT'S TWO WORDS OR ONE?

Ratshitanga. He was old. George was also.

GEORGE WAUCHOPE?

No, Nagota(?). Nagota is a business person of the ANC. He was at one time president of the Black Management Forum. Anyway, we then agreed that we needed to look at issues of constitution and so on. And of course it is history that three days later we were all picked up under section six of the Terrorism act.

AT THIS MEETING AT ST. ANSGAR'S, WAS THE PRESS THERE?

Yes. The press was there.

WERE YOU INTERESTED IN PUBLICITY?

We got good publicity from *Post*. *Star* gave us very bad publicity. I think it was another "black power organization."

TERRORISTS BACK AGAIN.

Yes, and I think one journalist, she wasn't a member, but she took very strong issue with them and it's Pam Lutuli(?). I remember she really took issue with them. And she wrote, and it was good that it didn't come from us. She wasn't a radical type of person. But maybe we got much publicity, because after the formation of AZAPO, then branches of AZAPO started springing up in places where people had not thought that politics was taking place. Particularly the Free State.

SO THE IDEA WAS THAT THE PEOPLE WHO HAD COME TO ST. ANSGAR'S WOULD GO BACK TO THEIR AREAS AND START BRANCHES? IN A SORT OF TRADITIONAL BRANCH STRUCTURE?

Yes. We then started having lots of branches. The press commented about that. Immediately, there was a branch in Bethlehem, a branch in Kroonstad, a branch in Bloemfontein, and of course that led to the picking up of Isaac More, who came from that area. He got banned also, and after that left the country. And he also joined the ANC.

SO THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE WAS TO TRY TO WIPE THIS OUT.

And then Nombulelo and them got picked up in the Cape, people in the northern Transvaal got picked up, and there was a complete crackdown on the new leadership of AZAPO. We stayed almost the whole year. We came out in December [1978] with five year banning orders.

WERE YOU TOGETHER WITH THE OTHER SOWETO PEOPLE IN DETENTION?

No. No, we stayed six months under section six of the Terrorism Act, which is complete isolation. Because at that time they were looking at the possibility of charging us with furthering the aims of banned organizations. We were all in solitary confinement.

THERE WAS NO KIND OF POST-MORTEM EFFORT WHERE YOU COULD TALK TO EACH OTHER?

No, there wasn't. Then, after six months, the majority of people were released. But Isaac More, who came from the Free State, myself, and Ishmael Mkhabela were kept. And we got released toward the end of December. With five year banning orders. And I think it had a terrible effect. Because while we were in detention, the organization almost went into a complete lull, basically.

And then we came out, people again started talking, and people started working again towards the inaugural conference of AZAPO in 1979. And after that, we were again agreeing the issue of students' politics, what to do with students' politics. And there was close working together, particularly Roller [Masinga], Billy [Masetlha] and Murphy [Morobe] who we knew. Our last period of detention, we were under section ten of the Internal Security Act. The last two months. And they were there too. So we were sitting—

WHAT PRISON WAS THAT?

Modderbee. They were there too. So we were talking to each other. That's why I say, we never really saw this-

IS MURPHY IN THE AZAPO FAMILY?

No, Murphy was being charged by them. He was being charged in the Kempton Park SSRC [Soweto Students Representative Council] trial [*S v Twala*]. He was being charged. And of course you must remember when they were being charged, the theme song every day when they came to court was "Azania is my home that I love so much." Every day when they come in, Chief Twala would start chanting "Azania my home, which I love so much."

Anyway, we stayed there, we came out, AZAPO had its inaugural congress, chose the people it chose. Maybe because of the role we had played in AZAPO, people kept very close with us. Particularly Ishmael Mkhabela and myself. We went through that whole process, we helped in the formation. I remember the meeting that led to the formation of COSAS was in my house in Chiawelo. And I was banned. And people were willing to take the risk. It meant two things. If the police had found people there, they would ask them to testify against me. If they refused, they would be charged, I would go free. But people were willing.

We used to spend quite a lot of time when students came from Turfloop and Ngoye; they all arrived at my place and they would be picked up. And they went to hold the congress where AZASO was formed. The same with COSAS. So it was that type of situation, and of course it's historical. It's historical that, after some time, COSAS adopted the Freedom Charter. There were differences with AZAPO. And AZASO also did the same thing.

WHEN COSAS WAS FORMED, THESE WERE IN FACT NOT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO FORMED IT, BUT OLDER GUYS?

It was started by people — I mean who were not students at that time. We were organizing students for this conference. And of course, when it was formed, the people who came into the positions of leadership were students.

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS.

Yes, high school students. Maybe the one disadvantage — this is just speculation — it's not based on anything. I'm not sure if all of us were available, because we were working together, things would have gone maybe the way they did. But unfortunately, our comrades, when we were working together, when they left, they were not saying the same things we were saying when we were together. Which, normally, it happens time and again. So COSAS adopted the Freedom Charter.

SO YOU'RE SAYING YOU THINK IT'S POSSIBLE THAT FROM THE VERY INITIATION STAGE OF COSAS, THAT THERE WAS AN ANC EFFORT TO CAPTURE—

No, no, there was. I think at that time there was. But we were naive. I think we, in the BC movement, and particularly those who were in AZAPO, we were naive in that we didn't think that those type of things posed a particular danger to the BC movement. It had never really occurred to us that this is a particular danger or a particular threat. We had worked with the comrades in the BC movement, and I don't remember any particular forum where we stood up to fight and fought vigorously. The only time the BC movement has had to fight vigorously amongst itself it's in 1973, the black Renaissance Convention.

1974.

Yes, 1974, in Hammanskraal. And we were fighting in defense of our non-collaborationist, on the one hand, stance. Because Smangaliso Mkhathshwa and Maurice Ngakane had brought all sorts of people who, politically we thought they didn't vibrate in the same wave length as us. Like my father-in-law, S. J. Lesolang, who was in the Bophuthatswana legislature, and all those type of things. And I think that was the only time when members of the BC even walked out. And we called it a liberal approach. But it's the only time I know. And even the press knew why we had that. And nobody said "he is doing this in the name of the ANC" or — people were doing it because they said they wanted to bring much broader cooperation between people who fight apartheid.

DO YOU THINK IN RETROSPECT THAT MKHATHSWA WAS IN FACT FOLLOWING AN ANC MANDATE?

We think basically the seeds of a UDF-type thinking probably in retrospect comes back from there. Though when the UDF finally came up, people like Mkhathshwa knew that to bring openly contentious people, it would cause problems. But probably, the very first attempt could have come there. Because it was strongly church on the one hand. People like Ngakane came from the SACC [SA Council of Churches]. They were very church people. And the question was of bringing people to fight apartheid. And do you remember that the issue that made [Themba] Sono to be expelled in SASO was the issue of homeland leaders.

GATSHA.

Yes, Gatsha saying we should be like the reeds, able to bend with the wind and so on.

WHEN YOU SAID THE UDF APPROACH, YOU MEAN THE IDEA THAT LET'S GET EVERYBODY INTO A COMMON FRONT, AND SO ON?

Yes, everybody in. No, I am saying retrospectively, because probably some of the strongest components at the time when the UDF came in were people like Smangaliso Mkhathshwa. But what I am saying, the UDF came with a much clearer approach than that. They were not going to bring homeland leaders.

IT'S PRETTY CLEAR ON HOMELANDS. THAT WAS ALL POST THE FALLING OUT WITH GATSHA BY EVERYBODY.

So it's probably those type of things. But I don't think we ever really thought there is a situation where enmity should be developed in terms of somebody belonging to ANC, PAC, or the BC movement.

WAS THIS BECAUSE, HAVING GROWN UP IN THE BC MOVEMENT, IT WAS INCONCEIVABLE TO YOU THAT AN EXTERNALLY BASED MOVEMENT COULD ACTUALLY BECOME MORE POWERFUL THAN THIS TRADITION OF WHICH YOU WERE A PART? IS IT THAT YOU UNDERESTIMATED THEIR STRENGTH?

No, you only underestimate when you know you are in open rivalry. We never thought we were in open rivalry. And therefore if that is an underestimation, that is a mistake we made. We never really thought we were in open rivalry. We never really complained when ANC people invited us for instance. I mean you take a person like Sheila Weinberg. She used to organize various meetings in Johannesburg. Especially during the time when people were detained and so on. And we would go and address these meetings. We were students at the time.

YOU MEAN TO SPEAK TO WHITES?

It wasn't whites in particular; lots of people would come. But white people would come also. We would address these meetings. And later, in '83, when I went overseas, then I would read in *Sechaba* that I was referred to as a member of the ANC Youth League. So we never knew these things. I think the BC movement was not sophisticated in the manner of manouvering. We never really knew— . We have suffered both ways. For those meetings, I looked at two copies of *Sechaba*. They had published poems I had written.

WHEN WAS THAT? WHAT ISSUES WERE THEY IN?

That was around '74, '75. All of them were to ANC. It's really no issue. I heard of them for the first time when I was detained after the uprising in '76. As a young teacher and an activist, I was among the first teachers to get picked up in '76. And then I heard that "you work with the ANC", and I wanted to swear by all I know that I don't work with the ANC. And ultimately, I came to see these documents in 1983. Then I just thought, well the police were lying and so on. Then I saw this document and saw that it was so. But also, after we buried Sobukwe, we also became the PAC youth in the country.

TELL ME MORE ABOUT THAT.

When Sobukwe died in the beginning of 1978, there were no PAC people. Absolutely none. And at that time, the police had been looking for me, I don't know how many times they had beaten my younger brother and all sorts of things. And we were caught with a situation that a leader has died. To us, he was a political leader. And we wanted him to have a decent funeral. I remember we debated the issue. Ultimately Zakes Mofokeng agreed that we would hire a car. But they didn't have the car to go to Kimberley.

Ish [Mkhabela] and I went to Kimberley, I remember I was wearing a clerical collar like a priest and a bible, in the car. And we drove to Kimberley. And when we came, we didn't see the police. We spoke to Veronica Sobukwe, Sobukwe's wife, and promised that we would bring people and organize this funeral. And we did everything. And subsequently, we came back and we saw the

police and we had to dodge and dodge. And we came back to Johannesburg. We didn't sleep that day. And later we sent people who were working with the Soweto Action Committee to go and arrange for the body to be transferred to Graaff-Reinet. We organized the whole funeral, we organized everything, we went and Ishmael was the key speaker. We had organized the whole program.

WERE THERE OTHER GROUPS THAT WERE TRYING TO MANAGE THINGS?

No, there was nobody.

SO YOU PHONED MRS. SOBUKWE?

We went, organized transport, fetched her, fetched the corpse, went to Graaff-Reinet, buried Sobukwe; and we organized everything, chucked Gatsha [Buthelezi], [Allan] Hendrickse, all controversial people out of that funeral.

WHO INVITED THEM?

Well, they just came, I suppose. They knew that other people who they knew as leaders were not there. And they thought they could then take advantage of the situation. We got them off. And later, we were told by those who went to Dar es Salaam and other places that we appear as the PAC youth in the country. So that's the politics the external organizations were—

SO IN 1976, WHEN IT CAME AS A SURPRISE TO YOU THAT THE POLICE WERE SAYING YOU WERE ANC, WAS IT THAT YOUR FAMILY HAD NO PARTICULAR POLITICAL HISTORY?

They were just nice church people, and they still are.

SO YOU WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ABLE AT THAT STAGE TO EXPLAIN TO SOMEONE WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ANC AND PAC?

No, I probably— . I had already been chucked out of university. I would probably know— . I had already read several times "No Easy Walk to Freedom", already read Mary Benson's "Struggle for a Birthright". So I would know what the ANC stood for, I would know what the PAC stood for.

But the reality of that time— . And it's not the fault of the ANC, and it's not a fault of the PAC. Particularly after the Poqo uprising, where whites were being killed simply because they were white, repression became complete in South Africa. It became a complete process, and it wasn't normal to talk politics in South Africa. People didn't complain when they were made to buy through shop-windows, they didn't complain when they were standing in a queue to pay and someone paid over their head, they just kept quiet. And the people who took us out of that situation was the black consciousness movement. In experience, I knew nothing else but the black consciousness movement. Because the PAC and the ANC were forced to go underground. Not a fault of their own, but by what the government did.

WITHIN THE BC MOVEMENT, CAN YOU IDENTIFY THE POINT AT WHICH PEOPLE BEGAN TO STUDY THE EARLIER HISTORY? YOU SAID YOU READ BENSON, AND YOU READ MANDELA'S BOOK. WAS THIS PART OF A STUDY EFFORT WITHIN THE BC MOVEMENT?

I think people were encouraged to read. You remember the BC movement came into the scene before the ANC was, as you call it, a nonracial organization. Because the ANC only took the nonracial position in 1969 at Morogoro, and up til that time it was a black nationalist organization. If you read "No Easy Walk to Freedom", or you read Sobukwe's speeches in court, they would sound like what people were saying about white racism and the structure of white superiority in the country. Nothing would suggest anything other than what we are seeing.

And if you read Mary Benson, there's a statement I can't forget; it keeps on ringing in my head: and the white jury gave their verdict—not guilty. If you read that book, everywhere you will find "and the white jury gave their verdict—not guilty, and the white jury gave their verdict—not guilty."

DO YOU MEAN JURY IN A FIGURATIVE SENSE ?

No, not in a figurative sense. South Africa, until late, was using a jury system. The Sharpeville shootings were not the first shootings. A lot of people had been killed, and every time the people went to court, the white jury would give their verdict—not guilty, on the cops. That's a running strain throughout that book.

So there was nothing in these books that would contradict the position as put by the BC movement. The BC movement recognized the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the struggle in the country, that there was white racism on the one hand, and there was a class issue, and all these things need to be intermarried. You can't deal with class and not recognize the fact that racism plays a part, and you can't deal with racism without realizing that racism has been tied up with industrialization and the creation of class, the destruction of the peasantry. All these things are closely tied up.

WHAT ABOUT THE ANC'S POLICY OF AN ALLIANCE WITH THE RADICAL WHITE LEFT AND THE FREEDOM CHARTER'S "SOUTH AFRICA BELONGS TO ALL"? WERE THOSE NOT AN IDEOLOGICAL STICKING POINT FOR YOU?

No, those— . There was nobody who was using any public platform to say for instance that NUSAS was correct. Be they in the ANC tradition, or— . They looked at those structures as liberal organizations. And of course 1972, at the SASO GSC where they talked about that SASO realizes that whites and blacks will continue living together. Do you remember that resolution? But they then had an addendum to that resolution, that even if it is so, we need to point out that South Africa is a black country, a black peoples' country. Whites will choose to stay or leave South Africa on their own accord. And they said that this should not be viewed as racism in reverse, but rather that the oppressed and exploited in South Africa should not necessarily be— . It's a pro-black approach, they said. And I think they were dealing with an important concept.

WAS THERE A LOT OF DEBATE AT THAT TIME ABOUT THAT? THAT SOME WANTED TO SAY NO, THEY MUST ALL LEAVE?

No. There wasn't. When later people wanted to give the impression that BC is racist, they used the issue of whites. And every time they do that, we pull out the resolution of 1972 and say that as early as 1972 we realized that whites stay in South Africa, and that they will continue living in South Africa. However, they are not going to be bound to that because they stayed here. If they choose, if a black government comes into being, or if a nonracial government comes into being, and they feel that they are not comfortable, they will be free to leave. Our position is just pro-black.

It's in consonance with those who would call themselves Marxist in that you favor those who occupy the lowest rung of the economy. And in South Africa, those people are black. They are the social force that can bring about change. It has nothing to do with racism.

JUMPING FORWARD TO THE LATE SEVENTIES, HOW DID IT BECOME APPARENT TO YOU THAT IN FACT AZAPO HAD A DIFFERENT IDEOLOGICAL POSITION THAN THE CONGRESS TRADITION?

It wasn't us. It wasn't BC which started preaching that we were different. It's people from the ANC tradition when they recruited; because first of all they had to recruit from what was built by the BC movement. They had to say "Come work for us because we are different from this." We didn't need to do that. They did that.

In time then these differences became sharper because people were speaking about them. The BC movement at that time did not feel threatened. So it had no need to say "We are different." They had a need to say they are different because they would not have been able to create a different constituency without saying they are different. But once that is said, then our members would come to us and say "What are the differences?" Then we would have to sit down and say this is the political tradition. This is where we come from, this is where the ANC comes from, this is where the PAC comes from. This is where the Unity Movement comes from. And that's how we started dealing with the differences. But we didn't start that.

AND WHEN WOULD THAT HAVE BECOME QUITE SHARP?

I think immediately after the COSAS-AZASO situation. When COSAS and AZASO took an ideological political line that was different from the BC movement, obviously they couldn't have taken everyone. Other people said "No, we are AZAPO," despite the fact that they were students. We then had to start dealing—

WAS THIS ALMOST IMMEDIATELY FROM THE FORMING OF COSAS?

Late 1979.

SAY I WAS A MEMBER OF AZAPO, JUST JOINING UP. AND I ASKED YOU THAT QUESTION AT THE END OF 1979, "HOW ARE YOU DIFFERENT FROM THE ANC?" WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE SAID?

Probably the first issue, because the organizing document at that time was the Freedom Charter. Probably the first difference we would have pointed out would be how the Freedom Charter views South African society. How the Freedom Charter deals with the question of dispossession. The land issue in the context of the Freedom Charter would have been a question of dispossession. To say that South Africa belongs to all, blacks and whites, is a good statement. One could argue that in terms of staying or living in South Africa it is true. But in terms of the historical origins, it cannot be true.

Also, the BC movement had broken the concept of national groups. We had defined blacks as those who are by law and tradition discriminated against, socially degraded, economically exploited, and those who perceive black solidarity as a prerequisite for liberation struggles. We do not want to promote four national identities. We want to create one view. National identities is like dialects. I've noticed that people can speak languages, Welsh and so on. But you try to build one national identity with various dialects. And we didn't want to enshrine that in a constitution,

because we know that opportunists can take that as an advantage. And you don't want to suffer what the Soviet Union is suffering [today].

I suppose in the future we don't want to have the problem of the Indian nationalists, coloured nationalists, because when you enshrine them, and people look at the world differently, it might cause problems.

Obviously, much of our focus at that time came on the Freedom Charter because that was the document that people were presenting to show how different they were from AZAPO.

IN 1969 WHEN THE MOROGORO DECISION WAS MADE TO ALLOW ANYBODY TO JOIN THE ANC, WERE YOU AWARE OF THAT? WAS THERE DISCUSSION OF THAT IN SASO?

I think SASO was aware of that. But I think that approach would not have got support in the country, because it was at a time when NUSAS had really become very liberal. There were in NUSAS no serious leaders who came forward to identify strongly with the liberation movement. You deal with a problem if it confronts you. It's very difficult to deal with imaginary problems.

The ANC was doing that externally only. They didn't even enforce that in the country. That's why, up til last year, they still had black student organizations, white student organizations, because the situation in South Africa would not have allowed it. This week we are reading about whether the Indian Congress should dissolve. The practical situation was something completely different. So it didn't really create a particular problem for SASO at that time. SASO understood that it wasn't the ANC.

WHAT IF SOMEBODY CAME TO YOU IN THE LATE SEVENTIES, OR ANYTIME AFTER THE FORMATION OF AZAPO, AND SAID "DON'T YOU THINK THAT SINCE THE ANC HAS A MILITARY WING AND SASO DOESN'T HAVE ONE, YOU GUYS SHOULD JOIN THE GROUP THAT HAS THE MILITARY WING?" HOW BIG A FACTOR WAS THAT?

I don't think the ANC military wing really became effective in the seventies. That was one of the weaknesses the ANC had for a very long time, because since 1961, it was never a factor for many years. And therefore you would not be able to argue very strongly for it, because it had not got the rhythm of functioning in the country.

WASN'T IT BECOMING MORE NOTICEABLE BY '78, '79?

Very little.

THE SASOL BOMBING WAS IN 1980.

Yes, 1980. By then, it had not become a big factor, and at the same time, it would have been very difficult for people. Because people join organizations if organizations work for common ground. I think ANC is the one which launched(?) out to win BC by going into open competition with it. We could say we never went to fight ANC. They were never our enemies. But as I said, 1976 disturbed them, and in '76, they wanted to deliberately completely dislodge BC. And probably that is what caused political problems.

AT THE TIME WHEN HARRY [NENGWEKHULU] AND THOSE WENT OUT OF THE COUNTRY TO TRY TO ESTABLISH A BC MOVEMENT IN EXILE, WERE YOU GENERALLY IN FAVOR OF HAVING AN EXTERNAL WING THAT WAS BC?

No, no. Initially, it was to establish all BC people outside, I mean to bring about(?) our activists outside. That was the first mandate.

JUST AS A WELFARE MECHANISM ?

No, we had not gone seriously into that, though it was discussed that if the older movements refused to unite, it would be dangerous for us to identify with one party or the other, because that in itself would be more divisive than just leaving the situation as it is. So initially we went, and I think in the late 1980s we still are trying to talk the language of unity between the ANC and the PAC, and to bring in the resources. Initially, the ANC disrupted this, by their approach that they have nothing to say to the PAC. The PAC must just fold and come back. This was the official position from the ANC. Once the ANC had said this, you knew that the response from the PAC would be "They need their heads examined. We also have a military wing."

At the end of the day, even when we went to look for military options, the argument was that maybe, with our efforts, the comrades will realize how important unity is. That was the mandate. But when both of them were not willing, we felt we were the organization that brought some form of resonance of the struggle in the country. We were not just going to leave our people and say "Well, other people don't see things the way we see them and the struggle has ended. But I think our efforts at unity — everybody knows about them. Steve died for them. People went outside with a mandate for unity. The elder organizations have never seen unity in the way we saw it.

HOW *DID* YOU SEE IT IN ORGANIZATIONAL TERMS? DID YOU THINK IN TERMS OF A PATRIOTIC FRONT LIKE ZIMBABWE? OR DID YOU THINK OF A MERGER WITH A NEW NAME?

You see, in 1976, Aida Parker, a very rightwing news writer — I think she was editor of *The Citizen*. She got some documents where Steve and them were agreeing about the creation of a united front. And also the talk of bringing in APLA and MK and the BC people in a front for the liberation of South Africa. And she wrote a big front page article in *The Citizen* in 1976. That was probably what made the regime to get jittery and to act in the manner in which it did.

But within the BC movement, we have always thought that it would reward the struggle if the ANC and the PAC and the BC could come together and work in a united front. And presently in the country you know that is our language. We want a united front.

WITH EACH ORGANIZATION MAINTAINING ITS OWN SEPARATE EXISTENCE ? NOT NOW, BUT THEN—

Probably when you start a united front, you might start with that type of ethos. But we have seen historically, Frelimo and so many other organizations; ultimately it becomes a melting pot. And we thought those type of things are possible. Obviously, the first step of a united front, you don't say: dissolve, come in. But the more people find common ground, the more people do not find things they can do differently, at the end of the day they say why don't we elect a leadership who will represent all of us and operate as one.

It might be idealistic, but we have seen it happen in other countries, and we don't want to feel that in our case it wouldn't happen. If things continue the way they are continuing, I doubt if you would see the re-emergence of ZAPU and ZANU. I think if in four or five years things continue in the manner in which they are continuing, we will see the melting pot. What might come out might not be ZANU and it might not be ZAPU.

ZAPU AND ZANU ARE BASICALLY ETHNIC, REGIONAL PARTIES. YOU MIGHT GET A CLASS BASED DISTINCTION INSTEAD. YOU WERE BRIEFLY AT TURFLOOP, WEREN'T YOU ?

I was, for three years. '73, '74, '75.

SO YOU WERE THERE WHEN [ONGKOPOTSE] TIRO DIED.

I was.

AND DIDN'T SOME PEOPLE GO TO THE FUNERAL, OR THEY WENT TO BOTSWANA? WAS THERE ANY SORT OF TRAFFIC, OR WERE YOU AWARE OF ANY COMMUNICATION, GOING BACK AND FORTH TO THE EXILED GROUPS IN BOTSWANA?

There were quite a lot of people going to Botswana, but lots of people who were in Botswana at that time were really BC people. Very diehard BC people who would not have called ANC or PAC. You are talking about what people at the time called the Bokwe Mafuna group.

WHAT'S THAT?

Bokwe Mafuna was one of the leading figures of BC, one of the people who left around that time with Tiro. There were people like Kenny, who joined the ANC four or five years ago.

KENNY WHO?

Kenny Mokoena. He's with the ANC; he's in Washington. And there were quite a few people. All those people— Greg ; he's in London. Glen Masokoane, he's in London. All those people who were diehard BC. And people who were going to Botswana were by and large going to those comrades. Tiro had formed SASM, the other SASM [Southern African Students Movement]. He was president of that.

THAT WAS FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS.

Yes. So people were going to them; they were not actually going to the ANC. People at that time, that particular grouping, some of them even tried to go for military training. And some of them even succeeded in this. It's important to know that they didn't go to the ANC for military training.

THIS IS BEFORE THE UPRISING.

Yes, before the [1976] uprising. They didn't go for the ANC military training.

WHAT WERE THEY LOOKING FOR WHEN THEY LEFT?

They didn't leave willingly. Most of them left because they were banned at that time. Or they were going to be banned or put in prison. Just like Tiro, when they banned the NUSAS and SASO leadership, he got information that he was going to be banned and he left. And when they were caught up in that situation, and the ANC wasn't functioning very well at that time, the PAC had a lot of its internal problems. And they kept their identity with the BC movement. When Tiro was buried, a lot of people in the BC movement went and buried him.

The person who saw his corpse and passed out was Eric Molobi. Eric was very close to Tiro, and when they showed him the corpse of Tiro, he passed out. It was a whole movement; it wasn't really the ANC. Even Eric himself, when he got convicted in 1974, in Johannesburg by [Judge] Hiemstra, he went in as a BC person and he stayed for three years on the island as a BC person. He was at that time a very close friend of Mosibudi Mangena, who is the leader of the BC movement of Azania in exile. When Eric crossed floors, Mosibudi could vow and bet on his last dollar that we were making a mistake, that it's *impossible*. Because Eric is his best friend, and they were very close. So all these things happened in the fullness of time, should we say.

I HAVEN'T MET MOSIBUDI MANGENA, I'M SORRY TO SAY, BUT HOW WOULD YOU EXPLAIN SOMEONE LIKE THAT SO DETERMINED TO MAINTAIN THIS SEPARATE IDENTITY ?

I don't think it's a question of being determined to maintain a separate identity. Because he didn't go out on his own accord. The organization sat in the country and said: we are now faced with this reality. People are discrediting the BC movement. They are even discrediting the contribution it has made. Outside, the movement is falling apart because of practical problems, and we need somebody who can hold it together.

SO HE WAS MANDATED. WHEN WAS THAT ?

Yes, he was mandated, in 1981. 1980 or '81, I can't remember. And we did lots of things to help him go. I was in that community that helped to make Mosibudi Mangena go. People who know him would tell you that he is an extremely humble person. A very committed person. Those who have lived with him, they would acknowledge that he would not be called a person of personal ambitions. He is too simple to have personal ambitions. I have sat with him several times, I have traveled with him several times, and he doesn't think of things differently from how we think of things. He also believes that if we could find common ground, that we would want to throw our lots with our comrades in the liberation struggle.

But obviously we think if the struggle would lose the focus on the [nature of?] struggle in South Africa— . It's primarily for the liberation of black people. And if black people are liberated, even whites will be liberated. And every other person who says, No I am not liberated, if black people were to be liberated in South Africa, everybody else would be liberated. I suppose that has been the approach of the BC movement.

WOULD YOU FEEL THAT ONCE THE ANC IS REBASED INSIDE THE COUNTRY, THAT THIS IS SUCH AN INESCAPABLE REALITY FOR THEM, THAT WHATEVER IDEOLOGICAL LINE THEY'VE TAKEN IN EXILE, THEY'RE GOING TO HAVE TO "COME BACK HOME" TO AN ESSENTIALLY NATIONALIST POSITION ?

That would be very unfortunate. If it's nationalist simply on terms of— . The biggest problem of nationalism in Africa is that it has the tendency of acting on behalf of the people but entrenching a black bourgeoisie. And that would be very unfortunate.

We did two things as a movement: we acknowledged that the struggle is first and foremost for the liberation of black people, but at the same time to liberate their resources so that the resources are able to serve the entire population of South Africa. And that's where our class content came into the struggle. We think nationalism alone would not be enough. We have always said we want to marry the national question to the social question so that at all times the two questions should be handled side by side.

WHY ISN'T THE ANC IDEOLOGY THEN AN ACCEPTABLE IDEOLOGY TO A BC PERSON TODAY. ARE THEY FAILING TO DO WHAT YOU'VE JUST SAID?

I think as an organization they fail that. And secondly, many of their methods of struggle sometimes seem to be unscrupulous. Anybody who supports them, they let lots of things take place. So long as you say you support the ANC, your sins are forgiven. Even if you continue to do things which might be detrimental, at least in our opinion, to the struggle. For instance, at one time Ntsanwisi of Gazankulu was falling apart. All that he had to do was say he agrees with the ANC and he was given a new lease of life. And we are worried with those type of things

IT'S POWER POLITICS FIRST AND PRINCIPLES LATER ?

Yes, and we sometimes have serious problems with that because we have seen that in Africa. Most of the times where at the end of the day you no longer know who you are struggling against. Because everybody can give a commitment. And it can be very opportunistic commitment. The homeland leaders continue the homeland system, and reap lots of gains from it. But they normally run away by saying, no, we support the ANC. Like the [Nelson] Ramodikes of this world. We think they fail to do that.

And I think, on the issue of the land question, they are coming very strongly now on that question. Simply because the South African Communist Party has come out very strongly on the land question. Right from the beginning, they acknowledge that there has been land dispossession in this country. The issue that for many years the ANC didn't want to talk about was that they think there should be land redistribution. This has been the position of the ANC. And they think there will be no liberation until people have gained their land. The ANC finds themselves having to catch up with some of these positions. But by and large, the ANC approach has been: whosoever will, may come.

A WILLINGNESS TO COMPROMISE, YOU MEAN ?

Whosoever came to the ANC, they would not say "What's your commitment?" This was very clear at the meeting called by Bishop Tutu at Cape Town where AZAPO, ANC, PAC, and the homeland leaders came. Last year [before?] December. When the meeting started, AZAPO said—

WHERE YOU THERE?

No, our delegation was there. And AZAPO said the meeting can't go on until these [homeland] guys tell us what they want here and what are their particular commitments. Because we don't regard them as part of us. They are not part of the liberation movement. The apartheid system has been successful because of their ilks. And then Mr. Mandela said "no, let me explain". But we said, no, they are here, they can speak for themselves. And after some time, Mr. Mandela agreed.

And Holomisa said well, we acknowledge that what AZAPO is saying about us is true. We have been opportunists and all sorts of things, and we think we should commit ourselves. And then he said we in Transkei have committed ourselves to pull out of the homeland system. And we are calling for a referendum. And we are not allying ourselves with one political organization (of course he was lying.) And we are here because we believe that the homeland system was wrong.

So AZAPO said fine, you other guys? You know they lied their tails off; they all said what Holomisa said. But what we were trying to demonstrate here, it's the willingness of the ANC not to look deeper into these things, to create an impression of a very big organization without looking at the internal contradictions that exist.

I think that the problem they had in the [December 1990] consultative conference was that people were saying, you guys are too kind to the enemies of the struggle. The workers said you are sending us out with your particular relationships with captains of capital in this country. And they found themselves, and I suppose they are going to have the same problem in June, that people are going to say no, let things be slightly clarified. And I think those are some of the differences we have.

IF AZAPO HAS DISTINGUISHED ITSELF BY TAKING A MORE PRINCIPLED POSITION, WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT THE MEMBERSHIP OF AZAPO, OR LET'S SAY YOUR MEMBERSHIP RECRUITING STRATEGY. DO YOU TARGET PARTICULAR GROUPS WITHIN THE POPULATION, OR DO YOU JUST BROADCAST YOUR APPEAL GENERALLY AND TAKE WHOEVER COMES AND SUBSCRIBES TO IT?

IT'S TWO QUESTIONS REALLY. WHAT'S YOUR STRATEGY FOR RECRUITING MEMBERS? AND I'D LIKE TO GO BACK TO THE BEGINNING, STARTING FROM SAY '79. AND THEN THE MORE FACTUAL QUESTION: IN PRACTICE, WHAT SORT OF PEOPLE HAVE JOINED WITH AZAPO AND STAYED WITH IT AS THE GRASSROOTS MEMBERSHIP? CAN YOU DISTINGUISH THEM IN ANY WAY IN TERMS OF THEIR AGE, GEOGRAPHY, OCCUPATION, CLASS ?

AZAPO is a mass-based organization. As a mass based organization, it would necessarily have a multi-class support. It pushes for a workers' vanguard position, that is we acknowledge that at the end of the day, the working class as the most exploited in society, have to be the vanguard people in South Africa, and we have always defended that position. However, we cannot say that our organization per se is strictly a working class organization. That would not be true.

And AZAPO then draws support from all people within the black community who support their political position in terms of their constitution, policies, and principles. And those people come first and foremost from the entire black community. We have been able to draw quite a lot of people from the youth. We have drawn a good amount of people from the working class, which is people who might not necessarily be called the youth. That is from the age of 40-50. We pointed out that the best example of the old support of AZAPO could probably even have been in the Conference for a Democratic Future. Almost the entire elderly population came from AZAPO (elderly being over 40).

And because maybe we come from the SASO-BPC tradition, people forgot that we would also grow! The majority of us are above forty. I am forty. And the majority of people are about forty. But we still have a majority of student following. If we are to talk about support, the best example would be this year, AZAPO called for a March 21 stayaway, as you know. The ANC refused to support, the PAC refused to support. The labor unions said they leave it to individuals. It turns out they say it was between 80 and 90 percent turnout. In the eastern Cape, people say that in spite of the fact we are not very strong, it was 80 percent. In the Reef and PWV, the whole region, it was between 40 and 50 percent. In Natal it was between 30 and 40 percent, in the west Cape, it was between—

AND THERE WAS NO UNION ENDORSEMENT OF IT? EVEN NACTU ?

No, none of them came out. So we would say, at the end of the day, it's a lot of things that are going to determine what things people support. And they will always say we are the most disadvantaged organization, because the ANC and the PAC went into exile many years before we did. For many years, they claimed us for one thing or another. And therefore, by the time the BC

movement went into exile, other organizations were very rigidly in place in places which were important. The ANC and the PAC get lots of economic support. I don't remember one time when the AZAPO has had more than forty thousand rands in their baking account. At any time, I don't remember, and I have been in the central committee of AZAPO for the past ten years.

WAS IT THE HOPE THAT THE EXILED BC MOVEMENT WOULD RAISE FUNDS INTERNATIONALLY AND FUNNEL THEM TO THE IN-COUNTRY MOVEMENT?

No, funds at the time they were formed were not— . The struggle was not determined in terms of resources. It's an issue which was brought into being in the '80's, that money became a very serious player in South African politics. But earlier it was not an issue. So we would not have done that. We would have welcomed support if they were able to get it. But it was not *the* particular mandate.

So with all these disadvantages, it's very interesting to note that we think we are one group that proved that people can survive on the basis of their commitment. I read a research in the *Weekly Mail*, where they were saying AZAPO and the PAC — PAC has 4 percent support from the people, AZAPO 3 — and then he went on to say that they were aware that AZAPO's numbers might be much higher than what is reflected here. And I think lots of people are starting to deal with lots of reality.

At one time people had written AZAPO off completely, until we were unbanned last year, and we went to the Shareworld conference. People saw eight to ten thousand people in one congress, the AZAPO congress at Shareworld. And people saw 8-10,000 people attending a congress. And we had not brought people from the labor unions. We didn't go and organize them, they were all just members. And suddenly people were saying, is AZAPO still having a membership? And I think in a lot of things, people are starting to take AZAPO very seriously. But of course we will continue with the disadvantages we have for quite some time.

IN TERMS OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT NOW, HAS NACTU ESSENTIALLY POSITIONED ITSELF BEHIND PAC ?

I would say at a leadership level, yes. They have much of the PAC leadership. But all the NACTU offices are manned by AZAPO people. Even in the national office. Almost the entire group of people in the offices of NACTU in Durban [are] AZAPO people. In Standerton, it's manned by AZAPO people, in Welkom which is in the Free State, it's AZAPO people. In the Cape, there are AZAPO people.

It's basically because the BC movement is extremely naive. We are naive in that people who work, work open hand, and it seems nobody else does that, basically. To a point where we were fighting with Nef [Pandelani Nefolovhodwe], who is now president of AZAPO. You would remember he was the first secretary of NACTU. And he was not aware that people were working very hard to kick him out of NACTU. And we said, you guys are really naive. When people come and say "comrade", you believe them. And we were shocked at the Congress, people were literally organizing to get AZAPO out of the leadership of NACTU. But we still have member unions in it. And we have no intentions of pulling them out. We think those who play politics with the workers, they always get caught. If you play rigid organizational politics with the working class, they will catch you out.

[He is still in the AZAPO central committee.]

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