

JS: How did you first get to be involved? How were you first politicised, or start to get involved in political organisations?

NM: I would say that my first political involvement was with SASO, when I left school and went to university in 1971.

JS: Is that...?

NM: I was at the University of Natal, UND, for a year, and at the end of the year I went to Fort Hare University. It was actually in Fort Hare that I joined SASO, in 1971, I wasn't getting to, I mean I was fresh from high school and considered myself very uninformed. So I think I spent that year getting informed. I had met Steve Biko at our school. He came with Barney Pitjana to address the Standard 10s.

JS: Where was that? Where were you at school?

NM: At Inanda Seminary. Well, I would say that was the beginning for me. I was involved with SASO until, officially until '74, because after '74 I wasn't really a student at university any longer. I trained further at UNISA and they cancelled my registration, after which I went to train in Maritzburg. So from that stage I got involved with the Black People's Convention, but not for very long. Because it was banned in 1977. And in Maritzburg, we didn't really have a strong branch of the Black People's Convention. So it was really in 1979/80 that I would say that I re-entered active political work.

JS: Where were you at that point?

NM: In 1979, I had left, I had left Maritzburg. 1979 was also an introduction, I, really I think my involvement was from 1980, when I was now in Durban. I knew people like Diliza - Diliza Mji - and we had quite a lot of discussion. And there were some women that I came to know who were working in Durban and living in Durban. One of them was Naseeme Badsha, she is now in Cape Town, I don't know if you know her. And Heather Hughes who is at this University. They organised the commemoration of the women's march in 1980, and I was involved with that. But I became more involved from 1981, with the Durban Women's Group, that's what we were called, or we called ourselves. The Natal Organisation of Women was formed in 1983 and the Durban Women's Group was actually the channel [?] that NOW came from. It was people who were involved with the Durban Women's Group initially. And it drew quite a lot of people beyond those who were involved in the Durban Women's Group. So when NOW was launched, we were much bigger. We were very small at the time when we were just Durban Women's Group.

JS: When in '83 was NOW formed?

NM: Pardon?

JS: When in 1983 was NOW formed?

NM: Well, officially it was formed at the end of 1983. Although by the time the UDF was launched there was already a structure of the Natal Organisation of Women, although at that stage it wasn't really officially launched. Because some of our women went to the launch of the UDF.

JS: Did you go?

NM: No. It was launched in 198-?

JS: August 1983.

NM: 1983.

JS: In Cape Town.

NM: Ja, I am trying to think where I was. I had actually just come... I think I didn't go, because of something that I was involved in at that time. I can't remember what it was. But I would have gone if I hadn't been busy with that.

JS: What was your occupation at the time?

NM: I was working as a medical laboratory technologist at King Edward VIII [Hospital]. And in 1984, when we launched the organisation we then, I was then sent, by NOW, as a representative of the organisation to the UDF, on the UDF.

JS: So you were on the Regional Executive?

NM: Ja. I became involved now on the Regional Executive of the UDF, from the Natal Organisation of Women. And it was at that time, people like Victoria - Victoria Mxenge - and Mcebisi Xundu were in the key structures of the UDF. I didn't have a portfolio.

JS: Now, if you look at that first executive of the UDF, there were very few people who attended many meetings from the townships. As you say: Victoria Mxenge, Reverend Xundu, Archie Gumede, but that was about it. There were several other people who were nominally members of the committee but didn't usually attend very often. Is that right?

NM: You mean, your question is about African people?

JS: Ja.

NM: On the UDF structure itself? Ja, there weren't many, but there were from JORAC, Ian Mkhize, and from the Release Mandela Committee, Russell Mpanga, who used to be quite active on the Regional Executive Committee.

JS: Where is Russell Mpanga now? He left the country at one stage?

NM: He is back. He has come back. He was in exile. I don't know actually if you would like to speak to him?

JS: Would you recommend that?

NM: Well, he was quite involved with the UDF. He left actually, was it '87? He hasn't been in exile for that long.

JS: Do you know how I can get hold of him?

NM: I think through the ANC office.

JS: At the time of the formation of the UDF... Let me go back a bit further. Before the formation of the UDF, did you have much contact, were you involved in the growing Charterist networks in Durban, or were you really only involved in the women's grouping in Durban?

NM: Before the... In fact, we didn't really have much. As I say, the Natal Organisation was formed only in 1983. Before that we really were involved slightly, as a women's group with them, around the issue of commemorating Women's Day and bringing women together and bringing these issues that affected us. It was, I would say, more after we were involved with the UDF that we came into much closer contact with organisations that belonged to the Charter. Or at least had adopted the Freedom Charter.

JS: And you yourself? I mean, did you have much contact with people like Griffiths Mxenge before his death?

NM: I knew Griffiths and I would go to his office, but I didn't know him personally, I wouldn't say. I mean I didn't work closely with him, but I knew who he was.

JS: Where were you living at that time?

NM: Well, perhaps that was partly the problem, because I don't come from Durban. My home is on the South Coast, and I was living in different places. I stayed in

KwaMashu for, in fact during the first month. And in fact when I came to Durban I lived, I was living in KwaMashu with Sibongele Gubeka, whose brother I had known, he was in exile at the time, when I was living with them. I had known his, I mean her, brother Themba. At that level I was involved with the youth, because the KwaMashu Youth League was formed about that time. That would be the other contact that I had about that time.

JS: With people like Simon Ntombela?

NM: Yes. But Simon Ntombela, it was really much later that I worked closely with him. It was Mbusa Tshabalala who was quite active and Tulebona, Tulebona Mbatha. His mother was also very active. She, at one stage, was chairperson of the KwaMashu branch of NOW. She is now with, working full time for the Women's Decade, the Church Women's Decade.

JS: People like Mbusa Tshabalala...

NM: Mbusa.

JS: Mbusa? Where are they now?

M: Mbusa has disappeared. We believe that he was abducted. But we don't know where he is.

JS: And Tulebona?

NM: Tulebona, I think he was at this University. I haven't seen him recently, but I think he was at this University. He went to Phambile School. Do you know Phambile School? There is a school here which was started by Fatima Meer.

JS: And shrouded in controversy.

NM: Oh yes, theres lots of argument about that. I didn't really get involved with it.

JS: It seems you had some involvement in different areas.

NM: Ja.

JS: May I ask quite a frank question? In the period before 1983/84, in this region, most youths who were joining the Charterist politics, were drawn into, eventually, MK activities. The exception being Lamontville, where for various reasons a number of people joined the civic type activities. Outside Lamontville, he was mostly into MK related activities, or into MK and then he left the country.

NM: Ja.

S: Did you have contact with MK during this period?

NM: '83/82? I knew some of the guys that left the country, but I was not myself directly involved with that. I had joined the ANC underground in 1979, and I had my own contacts with the ANC. But in terms of these, I didn't, myself, have any direct involvement with them at that level.

JS: When you say you joined the ANC underground, were you involved in the underground with people like Griffiths Mxenge, or...?

NM: Not with Griffiths. I belonged to a different unit.

JS: Different structures?

NM: Yes.

JS: And the structures you were belonging to, were they essentially involving Africans?

NM: Yes.

JS: Were they involving non-Africans as well?

NM: The structure I was in had African people. I don't know about other structures. Because at that stage it was difficult to know, because of the nature of the work, what structures other people belonged to.

JS: The reason I ask is because it seems to me, my impression is that in that period from '79 to '84, that there were various Charterist networks in the region. There was obviously one involving people like PG and Yunus and their proteges in Lamontville and other places. And then there were separate Charterist networks, one involving MK, which was largely African - it became more broadly based during 1984, 1985 - and what you are saying is that there was also an underground unit based in the townships, primarily, other separate networks.

NM: Ja, I wouldn't be sure about what was going on outside of my own unit and involvement. In terms of the UDF itself, I feel that people who were involved and were active belonged to some structures and I didn't really get to find out what structures they belonged to.

JS: Were you aware of what kind of contacts there were, before the formation of the UDF, between, say, underground units you were involved in and people like PG, Yunus, those kinds of people?

NM: No. No, I wasn't aware of them.

S: Do you remember, at that time, what you thought of people like PG and Yunus?

NM: Well, I didn't know them closely. It was really after '84, I would say that I got to know some of them, because L... '85, he was in the same structure in a sort of a more, on a more regular basis. At the beginning, I think I was more peripheral really in... I think with Victoria getting killed in '85, and some of the people leaving the region, and some other people becoming not so active in the RLC, people like me became much more central, and much more involved. And perhaps also the organisation that I belonged to, which was an affiliate of the UDF, was in fact quite strong at that time, which I think was an important factor. At the beginning we weren't really, we were just forming ourselves, and we weren't really at that stage very strong. Lamontville was a branch that was really very strong in our organisation at, around that time, and I would think that they were very much more involved with the UDF, and had much more contact with people like Griffiths at that level than perhaps some of us were. I would say at the early, during the early days.

S: Right. When the UDF was formed, do you remember what did you think the UDF was? Do you remember? What did you think was being formed? What was it for?

NM: I understood then that the organisations were coming together to form the UDF, particularly, in the response to the constitutional announcements, the Tricameral Parliament that was being introduced at that time. But I was also, being in the UDF, I felt quite strongly that this was some kind of ANC structure. Although I mean, as I say, its focus at that stage was around the Tricameral Parliament.

JS: And the initial leadership of the UDF in this region...

NM: Pardon?

JS: The initial leadership, regional leadership was predominantly, I think it would be true to say, in fact it was predominantly drawn from NIC and related groups. Do you remember, was this commented on at the time?

NM: Was it...?

JS: ... commented on at the time?

NM: At the beginning? I don't know if it was a problem at the beginning, I do know that later on people did raise it as an issue. And that was more around, for me, I think I became aware of it in 1986/7. You see the way the UDF was structured, the

REC, the organisations would affiliate to them, to the UDF, and then each organisation would send a representative to sit on the UDF. And so some of the people would be coming through the various affiliates that were part of the UDF. And I think towards the middle 80s, the form, or the nature, of the UDF was very much determined by which organisations were strong at that time, that had representation on the UDF. And I am talking mainly from my own involvement from the Natal Organisation of Women, but the youth also, and civics.

JS: At that time, when NOW was being formed, '83/84, what other organisation was there in... Well, two questions: Firstly, what other organisation was there in African areas? And, secondly, what other organisations were there which actually were non-racial like NOW?

NM: In the African areas? I think there was JORAC.

JS: Would you say JORAC, how strong was JORAC?

NM: JORAC involved mainly three townships, and at the time JORAC was strong. JORAC was strong at one point, but its strength went down, I think quite drastically. At the time when there was the threat of incorporation into KwaZulu, I think JORAC was very strong. And then there was...

JS: You say three townships: Chesterville, Lamontville and Hambanathi?

NM: Ja. Then JCC, do you know JCC? Joint Commuter Committee. Ja. I wouldn't, I can't quite remember the strength of that particular structure but I do know that after '85 we didn't really have representation of that structure on the UDF. JORAC was weak, there was a representative, I think Ian, Ian was representing JORAC. And then there was the Save Mandela, Release Mandela Committee, which was non-racial. Its rep, as I said, was Russell Mpanga. Paul David, I think Paul David also came from that structure, although he was in the NIC as well. Pravin, have you spoken to him? Or was he representing DHAC? I can't quite remember.

JS: I think that... [?]. If we think about this... Durban's biggest townships - Clermont, Umlazi, KwaMashu - they were not, they did not have direct representatives, if you like, on the REC. What was the state of organisation in those townships at the time when NOW was beginning to organise in those places?

NM: Well, the youth was strong. I am thinking of Clermont, the youth was strong. We had difficulty getting a branch off the ground, of the Natal Organisation of Women in Clermont, and that had a long history.

JS: But the youth were strong?

NM: Ja, the youth was strong. I am just trying to think about civic. I think there were some strong, there was, I don't know if they actually had a civic in the area. I think they did.

JS: Involving Archie?

NM: Yes. Although actually Archie was more of a national figure in terms of his being on the UDF.

JS: What about Umlazi and KwaMashu? You say that you had quite a strong branch in KwaMashu, ... [?]

NM: Yes, of the Natal Organisation of Women.

JS: What other structures were there at the same time in KwaMashu?

NM: Again it was the youth. But you see it was time when with regard to the youth, there were problems. I think perhaps you might have heard about the problems. There it was divided.

JS: The whole issue of Youth Forum and...

NM: Ja. You know that history.

JS: I haven't got much of a sense of what kind of an organisation there was in areas like KwaMashu, Umlazi, Clermont.

NM: The KwaMashu Youth League was very strong.

JS: Was it?

NM: Ja, and in Clermont there was also a very strong youth organisation. But I think you are right in that there were not really, their representation on the UDF wasn't strong. Because perhaps I think you haven't spoken to Baba and Mpho. There is another person that you didn't mention, in Klaarwater [?]. I can't think of his name right now, but I will remember it. The Natal Youth Organisation was formed but there were problems with that, the Natal Youth Organisation, and then in Clermont, I think the youth organisation in Clermont and Chesterville felt that they were not really represented through the, through NAYO. And as such it affected their feelings towards the UDF in the region. I think they felt that they were not properly represented.

JS: What was the position in Umlazi?

NM: I can't, I am not too sure about the position in Umlazi. In Umlazi there was, the youth there, you will remember were quite strong around the time of the assassination of Victoria Mxenge, which was '85. And there was also a Civic in Umlazi. I think it was called URA.

JS: People like David Gaza, and George Msandu [?].

NM: Yes, but I think, I don't know what happened to URA, but in '85/86 they were no longer as strong as they had been.

JS: And NOW?

NM: There was a lot of repression and of course a lot of violence which affected a whole lot of organisations. NOW, NOW had problems, I suppose similar to the other organisations, but we remained strong. It was I think possible to keep the organisation together, we did manage it. In fact, in 1987, when the UDF was banned NOW carried a lot of the work of the UDF.

JS: Let's move back there in a moment. When you first began to attend REC, representing NOW, who was representing youth? Were there regularly people representing youth?

NM: It is difficult to remember now, but I think Baba - Baba Dlamini - was representing the youth. But I may be mistaken. I remember Baba and Mpho - Mpho Scott. I think those tended to alternate. In fact, we haven't mentioned students. Students, they were also quite strong on the UDF front, were quite vocal, I think, quite open in criticizing the REC.

JS: When you say students, you mean primarily COSAS, or AZASO, I mean?

NM: AZASO. I think at one stage we also had representation of students at high school level. But in terms of the structure of the UDF, structure in the region, we had one representative, we were supposed to have one representative of the student sector.

JS: When you say AZASO, was Joe Phaala still around at that time?

NM: Yes, Joe Phaala.

JS: Was he quite critical of the REC?

NM: Critical, I would say, in a positive way, you know. Openly raising issues, and thinking that things weren't going the way they should.

JS: Joe Phaala left fairly soon after you became active I would imagine.

NM: Yes. I think I must have worked, perhaps, for about a year with him and then he left. And he was replaced, well there were people like... I have a name in the back of my mind, I can't... He was at this university. Simpiwe. And there was another chap at Medical School. They were very active, they used to alternate and sometimes even demand to have three representatives, instead of one. Ja.

JS: It seems to me that even... During '84/85, who would be raising issues of concern in the townships on the REC? Would Victoria Mxenge, was she quite vocal in REC meetings?

NM: I actually don't remember much. Because perhaps at that stage I wasn't really very much involved, but I was, in terms of how the townships were related to Victoria, I would ...

[SHORT BREAK IN TAPE: DISCUSSION TURNED TO ISSUE OF AFRICAN LEADERSHIP WITHIN UDF, RAISED WITHIN REC BY MKHIZE, NM, MPANGA, JUMEDE]

NM: You were asking for reasons.

JS: What was it that prompted people to raise this issue, more than they had before?

NM: Ja, perhaps, I should have said it was also people outside of the REC who were raising the issue. And I think they were raising the issue on the basis that they felt that they were not adequately represented.

JS: People from what kind of backgrounds, or organisations? What areas?

NM: Mostly from the African townships.

JS: Now I know this was a problem much later, in the discussions in 1989 and so on, but in the early, '85/86, what kind of, were there individuals who were arguing it very strongly? Or were there particular individuals you would have discussions with in this area?

NM: It was individuals. But individuals who belonged, who I would say were strong activists in their organisations.

JS: But like who?

NM: Well, some of the people in Clermont for instance.

JS: Youth people from Clermont?

NM: The youth. Chesterville, to an extent. And some individuals from Umlazi.

JS: How did the UDF respond to this?

NM: Well, I don't know if I can respond on behalf of the UDF. But I think it was an issue that concerned a number of people and I think people dealt with it in different ways. I dealt with it by talking to people and persuading them to... My feeling about the situation was that people should not withdraw and become less active and sort of criticise from outside. But an organisational approach. We had an evaluation, which I thought brought together quite a lot of the different opinions. I can't remember when this evaluation was. I think in '87.

JS: Do you remember where it was?

NM: It was in Durban, in one of the church halls.

JS: Do you remember who played a leading role?

NM: In that evaluation?

JS: Ja.

NM: Well, there was a committee, pulled together by the REC: Sandy Africa, myself, and somebody from the youth were the key... Oh yes, and also some students from the Medical School. We mobilised that evaluation.

JS: And the evaluation was attended by both people on the REC and by critics?

NM: Yes.

JS: And there was quite a good exchange of ideas?

NM: Ja, I would think so.

JS: And was there agreement as to what should be done about it?

NM: There were some... I can't quite remember exactly the details, but I think that the evaluation did bring up a number of issues and suggestions of how to deal with the issues. I remember as a kind of follow up to that trying to pull together a meeting specifically to pull the youth together.

JS: How many people can you remember attending that evaluation?

NM: How many people? I can't remember the exact numbers. But I think it was somewhere in the region of 200 people. Each affiliate was given an allocation in terms of how many people they could send, and I think there was an attempt to have a good distribution, representation.

JS: Was it for one day? Or half a day? Or...

NM: It was certainly... I think we were interrupted. Yes, we had a whole day, and we were going to go into the night and continue the following day, but I remember there was an interruption, with the police, something to do with police.

JS: So you didn't hold the second day? Or what?

NM: No.

JS: And was it just all discussion or did people present like a position paper to introduce topics?

NM: There were reports. There were reports from the areas. And I think the reports were quite focussed around the issue of organisation and most of them, some of the areas were really worried about the level of organisation in their areas. I think at that stage there was quite a decline, there had been quite a decline in the strength of some of the organisations.

JS: This was under the State of Emergency?

NM: Ja.

JS: So there would be reports presented. Was there a report presented from the point of view of the REC?

NM: The REC presented a report. And I think people were quite openly critical of the REC.

JS: Who presented the REC report?

NM: I am not sure now, I can't remember exactly.

JS: It wasn't you?

NM: No. I can't remember. It might have been Yunus, I'm not sure. He was secretary. He probably presented the report.

JS: Do you remember whether a copy of the report was ever typed or was it just presented verbally?

NM: It is difficult to think, to go back to that time. I know there was a report circulated to members of the REC. But now I can't remember whether this was after the evaluation, maybe it was the evaluation report. There was some report which was circulated to members of the REC, but I can't remember whether the report to the

meeting was the written one. It probably was a written one, but I can't remember the process of reaching that report.

JS: Did people criticize the report?

NM: Yes.

JS: On what grounds? Do you remember?

NM: Well, it sounded to me like it was just a generalised... I felt, I didn't get a sense that people were focussing enough in terms of what the problem was, you know. I tended to think that it was just a general dissatisfaction and anger and people weren't really, I felt, pointing to what, perhaps, was... I don't know if they themselves were fully, were clear about what they felt was the weakness. I think that quite, for me, significantly was a feeling of not belonging, a feeling of you know, we are no longer in control. We had a meeting with the youth. I think that was probably '88, the early part of '88. And the youth was very confrontational. Ja, I found it quite ironic, in a way, because personally I had been part of the. I had tried to get, to pull them all together, but now I was sitting with the UDF REC, and the youth was sitting on the other side and then...

JS: So when you say the youth, you are talking about people like Simon or ...?

NM: I think at that stage they had formed SAYCO. I am not too sure. But there was a national structure of the youth, and this was the regional equivalent or the regional counterpart. I don't remember whether Si was there, I doubt. I have a feeling Si wasn't there, Simon Ntombela wasn't there. But I remember specifically a chap from Clermont and some young chaps from the South Coast, the upper South Coast.

JS: Right. Am I right in that the South Coast was an area which was organised by people associated with the Youth Forum, were quite critical I believe, parts of the South Coast.

NM: I don't know how far south the Youth Forum went. I don't know that history. I do know that Lamontville and the western areas like Klaarwater, but I am not too sure about the areas like Mfolweni. What do your notes say?

JS: I'll tell you. But I mean we talked to, people in the Youth Forum give the impression that parts of the South Coast were one area in which they began to have some success. It was one area they mentioned, which is why I mention it. Somebody who was later killed, a prominent youth leader.

NM: Yes, I think it was Mfolweni or... He was killed in 1980-... Was it '88? Or '89?

JS: I don't know.

NM: Anyway, I think I know the area that you are talking about.

JS: Are we talking about the same area?

NM: I think it's the same area.

JS: Okay. But from Clermont? You say that you remember youths from Clermont being very confrontational at that meeting.

NM: There were some, ja.

JS: Who? I mean, who would I talk to further?

NM: Well, there was a chap, I don't know his real name, but that chap was called 'Manabugeni', which was his nickname.

JS: Mana ...?

NM: ... bugeni. But I... Oh ja, I know his name. His name is Dumsane. I can't think what his surname is now.

JS: No idea where he would be now?

NM: He is in the unions. I am not sure which union, but if you... I actually think he's with NUMSA.

JS: Now quite a lot of the youth critics of the REC went into the unions. Is that right? Or at least quite a lot of young unionists were critical of the REC?

NM: Oh, I am thinking. They then became active in the unions?

JS: Maybe they were never youth leaders, but people like... [LEAFS THROUGH NOTES] I don't know.

NM: No, I don't know.

JS: So at this meeting with the youth in early '88...

NM: I don't know whether it was '88. I think it was after '87.

JS: Do you remember where it was?

NM: It was held at Diakonia. In Akuthula Room.

JS: In which room?

NM: Akuthula. A K U T H U L A.

JS: And do you remember who was there from the REC besides yourself?

NM: Sandy was there, I don't remember the others. But we were chosen by the REC to go to that meeting.

JS: Now you were somebody who was trying to pulling the two people together.

NM: Yes, I think so.

JS: Right. Did you have much success in pulling people together?

NM: I feel actually that I was not as successful as I had hoped to do, because somehow I think feelings had become...

[TAPE TURNED OVER - NM SAID THAT FEELINGS WERE TOO STRONG]

NM: ... that people have been very negative in not wanting to use their criticism in a positive way. Because I felt by pulling away and distancing themselves, they were actually weakening the structure and that was my major concern. Perhaps Ian will remember discussions I had with him, at the time when he was being replaced by somebody, Gutwa [?], as the JORAC rep.

JS: Right. So Ian was essentially withdrawing from the REC.

NM: Well, he resigned officially and was replaced. So it wasn't as if JORAC itself was withdrawing. But I mean I had discussions with him, because I mean, I think out of, I knew him, fairly closely.

JS: Right. I spoke to Ian briefly, yesterday, but we couldn't have very long, so we didn't get onto this topic.

NM: What did he talk about?

JS: One of the earlier topics about the origins of JORAC.

NM: I see.

JS: He was rather tired, he'd had a long day, and he had to go up to Jo'burg today as well. And during this period it seems to me, that some people leave the REC, like Ian, that some of the outsiders don't get drawn into the REC. Now, to what extent were you having a problem with other people in the REC?

NM: A problem? I actually didn't have a problem, in the sense that there were people I couldn't talk to. I don't know what problem you mean. I mean, I felt I could talk to people in the REC.

JS: Were other people on the REC doing enough to try and keep people like Ian on there, and to draw in other critics?

NM: Well, I don't... My feeling was that people weren't trying hard enough, because I don't know... My assumption was perhaps they are feeling that they are being unfairly criticised and they have done their bit. I got that sense that people were feeling - what's the word for it? - They had tried, and weren't going to try any harder.

JS: You are talking about people on the REC?

NM: Ja.

JS: Essentially, they were kind of giving up.

NM: Ja.

JS: They were saying, There are all these critics out there and lump it. That must have been very frustrating for you.

NM: It was frustrating and... Ja, but I had my, as I said, my organisation was quite strong, and they provided support. Because you see we were able to carry on with our own activities, and build the organisation. But we also felt loyalty to the UDF, and felt that we needed to strengthen it and help it.

S: Can I ask, before we continue? You were detained at some point?

NM: Yes.

JS: Can you remember when you were detained?

NM: Yes.

JS: When?

NM: I was detained in 1985. July, for a short period, it was thirty five days.

JS: In terms of the Internal Security Act?

NM: Yes, Section 29.

JS: And was that in connection with MK, or was that connected at the same time as ...
[?]

NM: UDF. I think when they declared the State of Emergency in Natal, they just rounded up, mainly UDF people.

JS: Were you held on your own? In solitary?

NM: Yes.

JS: Did they say that they were going to put you on trial?

NM: No. No, it didn't get to that.

S: Were you released before... Was Victoria Mxenge killed while you were in detention?

NM: No it was, she was killed before. When was she killed? In July?

JS: I thought she was killed in August.

NM: Then I must have been detained after that. I was around when she was killed. So probably I was detained, yes, I think I was detained later in the month, during August.

JS: And then you were detained again later?

NM: Yes, 1987. January 87.

JS: You weren't detained when the State of Emergency was declared in '86?

NM: No, no. No, I wasn't detained in '86.

JS: So January '87. For how long?

NM: Until December.

JS: For the whole year hasically?

NM: Yes.

JS: Where were you held?

NM: Where?

JS: Yes.

NM: I was at C.R.Swardt for a couple of weeks and then I was held in Port Shepstone, in the prison there, police cell. And then I was from May at Westville Prison.

JS: And were you held with other people?

NM: No, alone.

JS: The whole time? Yo!

NM: Solitary.

JS: So you were held for the whole of 1987?

NM: Yes.

JS: Before you were saying, you were talking about the evaluation being held in 87?

NM: It must have then been in 1988, because I think I had just come out.

JS: So it would have been soon after your release? Now, I have a couple of questions I would like to ask, but I am not sure which order to ask them in. You are detained for the whole of 1987, you come out early in 1988, you are clearly involved in a number of activities: the evaluation workshop, meetings with the youth, trying to pull them together. When you came out, did you have a sense that the situation was very different from when you went in?

NM: Yes, it certainly felt that.

JS: Do you remember when you came out, getting involved and trying to see what was going on? And what was your impression?

NM: My impression, I remember thinking, I spoke to people and I remember thinking, feeling quite depressed about the situation because it felt to me like the people were being very negative. At least some of the people I was speaking to. And I felt at that stage it would be quite difficult to bring people together again. It felt to me like there was anger and I felt also that people were misdirecting their anger. Misdirecting it in the sense that rather than... I think I have spoken about it before, and where I was saying I have a feeling that rather than people pulling together their strengths, and coming and leading, playing a leading role, they were withdrawing, and when I came out I felt that withdrawal quite strongly.

JS: When Ian resigned, was that whilst you were in detention?

NM: That was before.

S: That was before? That was '86.

NM: Ja. Probably '86, or early... It was before the second detention.

JS: The situation had got much worse between 1986 and when you came out?

NM: That was the feeling that I had. But I mean didn't do a scientific survey.

JS: No, right. You got that impression?

NM: Ja.

JS: When you came out of detention, I mean, who were the people really keeping the UDF going? Together, on a day-to-day, week-by-week level?

NM: In '88? The UDF was already banned at that stage.

JS: It was banned in February.

NM: '88?

JS: Ja.

NM: Well, certainly Yunus. Yunus Mohammed was secretary. Sandy Africa. Well Archie, Archie was there but not really involved out there at the day-to-day level. The students, at that stage, were quite involved, Sipiwe and... The other, I can't remember the other two, they used to alternate, there were two other people. And the youth. Baba Dlamini was there.

JS: He was an organiser at that point?

NM: Ja. And there was this other comrade from Klaarwater, I mentioned it before. Lechesa, I don't remember, '88?

JS: Lechesa was burnt out by this time, he had withdrawn.

NM: Yes, I think so.

JS: The heat had got to hot.

NM: Jean Manning had been my replacement on the REC during '87.

JS: Jean Manning? Where is she from?

NM: She lives in Durban, just around the Point here.

JS: Where is she now?

NM: She is still in Durban, but her husband has a practice now. He is a doctor in Lusikisiki. But I think you can still get hold of her in Durban, because she comes quite often. To help.

JS: You say that when the UDF was banned, NOW played quite an important role?

NM: Ja.

S: Because it was one of the few organisations which had a wide basis. Did NOW ever have an office?

NM: We had an office.

JS: Where is NOW's office?

NM: At Victoria Street. 122 ... [?] Centre. No, it was 122 Victoria Street.

JS: And did NOW have any full-time staff, or did everybody volunteer?

NM: I was a full-time from '86, as an organiser.

JS: Oh really?

NM: And we had an administrator called Phozo Zondo. She is now working for Transport and General.

JS: What's her name?

NM: Phozo, P H O Z O. Surname is Zondo, Z O N D O.

JS: And she was there for the whole time, was she?

NM: Yes.

JS: In 1988, you continued as an organiser for NOW.

NM: 'Til October.

S: What happened in October?

NM: That's when I came to the University. I think, in a way, I also burnt out.

[LAUGHS] 1988, October.

JS: So in '89, were you active?

NM: I was still very active in NOW. I remained active but I left full time work with the organisation. I was active right to the end.

JS: In '88, when you were still a NOW organiser, how much of your time was really organising for NOW and how much for UDF organising?

NM: Oh, that was becoming a problem, because I was doing quite a lot of UDF work. I felt it was a problem, not perhaps in terms of... I think the organisation understood, but when you are employed and you have a job, you want to do what the people are paying you to do.

JS: What kind of UDF work were you doing on a day-to-day, week-by-week basis?

NM: Well, sometimes there would be meetings, and there would be... I was on a number of delegations. Then there would be sort of responses to violence and issues like that. When people, sometimes people went to the UDF office, and went - I think at

that stage there was, with the banning - then they would find that there wasn't someone there to deal with their problem and they would then come to our office. So it was at the level of the servicing some of their feelings, but also at the level, sometimes as an organisation we also, some meetings of the UDF were called by us, because we were not banned.

JS: In other words they were being General Council meetings called in the name of an affiliate. NOW saying let's have a meeting of like-minded organisations?

NM: Ja.

JS: Clearly, at a certain point, a lot of the focus of activities in the region shifted to the Joint Working Committee.

NM: Yes.

JS: Now, had that already happened by the time you came out of detention? Or did that only happen during 1988?

NM: I think it happened in 1988. Because I think the violence intensified in '87. But I may be mistaken, I think it was in 1988 that the Joint Working Committee was formed. First there was the whole discussion about having a Peace Conference, I think you might remember that with Archbishop Hurley and the churches. They were going to take a leading role in terms of hosting. And then in Maritzburg, talks had started their. I don't remember actually the sequence of events.

JS: You weren't part of the delegation who went to talk, to consult with the ANC about the conference?

NM: No.

JS: When the JWC was set up, and Diliza [Mji] was involved in that, and a number of other people, and that began to pull together affiliates from other organisations, representatives from a range of organisations, from different areas. Am I right?

NM: Ja.

JS: Do you remember that happening? How did you as a UDF leader, as a NOW leader, see that process?

NM: The Joint Working Committee was I think COSATU and UDF jointly.

JS: In principle.

NM: In principle, yes. And yes I think what happened about representation of the organisations was strong on the JWC. Isn't that what you were saying?

JS: Let me ask it, perhaps, in a different way. Did you used to attend JWC meetings?

NM: No, I didn't go to the JWC meetings. I think I went to some of them but I sort of felt, personally, that the JWC was doing their job and I didn't need to get involved with it, because already I was quite heavily sort of overextended. But I think at the beginning I used to go to the meetings.

JS: Some of the people who were UDF people, in the JWC and in negotiations, people like Diliza, weren't really UDF people. They weren't coming to REC meetings.

NM: No.

JS: Now, I believe there was a certain amount of... There wasn't... Let me put it another way. I was going to say there were some tensions... But the REC was continuing to operate and meet and, but there was also a grouping of people involved in the JWC, and that the contact between the two was informal more than formal. For example, Diliza didn't come to REC meetings and give formal reports.

NM: Yes, that's right.

JS: And over time, more and more people were attending meetings of the JWC. And what you really have is the situation where there were two umbrella organisations,

for community organisations: one being the REC, UDF, and the other being the JWC. Would that be correct?

NM: Ja, but personally I wasn't aware of the tensions between the two organisations. I would perhaps agree with you that certain individuals who became active in the JWC weren't active in the UDF structures, and they were leaders in their own rights. But I don't remember being aware of tensions, as such, between the two organisations.

JS: A moment ago, you gave me the impression that really from the end of 1988, you were really more involved in NOW and not so much with the UDF. Did you attend REC meetings all the way through until the end?

NM: '88?

JS: Let's think about issues. For example, the Conference for a Democratic Future?

NM: Ja.

JS: The Unban the ANC campaign, Defiance Campaign?

NM: Yes, I was quite involved with the Defiance Campaign.

S: As a UDF executive member, or just as a representative from NOW?

NM: I was acting more as a NOW representative.

JS: My impression is that the REC really began to kind of dissolve into thin air.

NM: Anyway, I don't remember the end. [LAUGHS]

JS: Did the REC have regular meetings throughout that period?

NM: We had meetings. I can't, somehow, for some reason that period doesn't quite, is not clear in my mind. I mean I didn't go to the UDF personally, but there were delegations from here. Oh in fact, the campaign took a different form in that, I mean the structures for the campaign were more on a MDM type of level, rather than UDF.

JS: Now when the MDM began to do things, did you get involved in MDM type of activities?

NM: Now or then?

JS: Then, in '88/89.

NM: Yes, I was involved in MDM activities.

JS: As a person from NOW? Or as a UDF person?

NM: I can't quite remember.

JS: I have been told that when the MDM began to organise things, it was very exciting...

NM: Oh yes.

JS: ... That essentially what happened during this period, that it was doing something, it was exciting, it pulled together people with a different basis from the REC. And that really the REC began to just disappear, because some of its role was being done by the Joint Working Committee, some of its role was being done by MDM, what was the REC supposed to do?

NM: Yes, I think... I think that some members of the REC were themselves active in the MDM structure.

JS: Such as?

NM: Structure of the MDM, I mean they were involved with the campaign.

JS: People like Sandy?

NM: Oh, when you say 'such as', you mean... Yes, Sandy certainly. I would say Billy to an extent.

JS: Billy?

NM: Billy Nair.

JS: Right.

NM: I am not sure about Yunus. I can't remember.

JS: He was restricted.

NM: Oh, he was restricted. Ja, I think you are right, certainly MDM structures became more prominent, and as you say there was that excitement of pulling together. I think it pulled together people from various organisations and of course some of them weren't active in the UDF.

JS: Also at this time there was a series of meetings, I believe between - unless I am confusing this with earlier meetings - between some of the Regional Executives that were left and the critics, people like S'hu [Ndebele], and others, Diliza [Mji], and I believe that Mike Sutcliffe was involved in writing up reports.

NM: I think that was from September '88.

JS: Were you involved in that?

NM: Not very much involved. I went, I didn't go to the first meeting where I think the decision was taken to meet sort of regularly to try and deal with issues. I did attend a couple of, not many, I think it could be two or three meetings after that.

JS: I am surprised. I mean, here you are, you've spent a lot of 1988 trying to pull people together, and then at the end of the year, a formal series of meetings occur, and you are not essentially involved?

NM: No, I was not centrally involved. Perhaps, having come out of, I said something about being quite exhausted in '88, around October. Because as an organisation, NOW at that time was beginning to have a lot of internal problems and I think, personally, that was quite a, it took a lot of my energy, working, trying to deal with problems, now that had risen within the organisation. So I think it was on that basis that I didn't really get centrally involved with this other initiative. Perhaps, to an extent, I don't know if I had confidence that it was going to sort out the problems. I don't think that I had that type of confidence. Because I thought, I remember attending some of the meetings and thinking that people are so, people are taking sort of positions, I personally felt it would be difficult to break. Have you spoken to some people involved with it?

JS: I have spoken to Sandy.

NM: Ja, what does she think?

JS: She was a bit hazy. She thinks I should try and get hold of all the documents, which should have a lot of minutes of those meetings, and look at them and see. And then when I have looked at them, then it would be easier to have a discussion about it.

NM: But I thought, I mean, even with those documents, I had a sense that they weren't even a true record, personally, of what was going on. As I said, I think I had little confidence in that kind of structure, had the capacity to deal with issues. Not that it didn't have the capacity, but that... Ja.

JS: Well, it sounds like that by the end of 1988, you're pretty depressed about things, to put it mildly. I mean, you've tried hard for a lot of the year, and by the end of the year, not only are the problems in UDF almost insuperable, you've got problems in NOW as well?

NM: Yes, as well, I would say that was the truth.

JS: There are a couple of general questions I want to ask you. But before that, in '89/90, in the period in which UDF nominally existed, were you at all involved in UDF activities? In this region?

NM: In '89/90?

JS: Especially '90, I suppose, after the ANC was unbanned.

NM: I don't remember. I think should be able to remember if I was active at that point. But NOW, the kinds of problems that we had in NOW, were sort of more at the leadership level. The organisation itself, remained fairly strong. I would say at the last, maybe you would like to see our video, I mean the video of the last conference. The women remained fairly strong there?

JS: That would be interesting.

NM: To see the video?

JS: Ja. Maybe next time.

NM: ... [?]

JS: A couple of general questions I would like to ask, or one general question, and one particular question. In 1985, in mid-1985, consumer boycotts were taken up in many parts of the country after the death of Goniwe especially and the Cradock funeral. Durban was one area where there weren't, where consumer boycotts weren't taken up. Do you remember there being discussions around the issue of consumer boycotts around that time?

NM: I can't remember specifically. I actually find it difficult to remember especially that aspect of it. We had as NOW at that stage, started to link up with women's organisations in the other parts of the country. And through that contact I would think that we would have taken up the issue. We would at least have discussed possibilities of taking up the issue. At the UDF level I can't remember. In fact, I am thinking, talking about... Have you spoken to anyone who has talked to you about UDFWCO? The United Democratic Front Women's Congress. I think that is an important part of the history. I personally wasn't involved with UDFWCO because it happened at the time I was in detention.

JS: Yes, I need to look into that. Who were the main movers in UDFWCO at a national level? Do you know?

NM: Well, Albertina Sisulu. We had a, as I was saying, a structure which had got together to try and revive something. And UDFWCO was really part of that process. And leadership people in the various regions, from UWCO in the Western Cape, PEWO in Port Elizabeth. Well, I mentioned Ma Sisulu, but there were a lot of others.

JS: Okay, let's not go into that now. The last thing that I would like to ask specifically. Well, in fact there are two things I would like to ask. Firstly, was there a sense in NOW that the UDF leadership was very male dominated? In this region?

NM: We were aware of that.

JS: Was this an issue which was raised often within the UDF?

NM: I can't remember it being raised very often within the UDF, but I think as NOW, we felt strongly that we should be represented. I think, specifically, because there weren't many women. I mean, I remember at one stage, Sandy and I being the only women on the structure. I mean, we were quite aware of that as a problem.

JS: Do you remember if there were ever discussions saying that we need women representatives, even if it means having more than one representative from NOW?

NM: I don't remember that.

JS: The last general thing I would like to ask is, do you think that - and I am not quite sure how to put this in a way that doesn't sound very reactionary - do you think that activists from, like PG and Yunus, activists from a NIC background, who were focussed on national issues especially, were they sensitive to the kinds of political dynamics that were occurring within African areas?

NM: Were they sensitive? I find it difficult to respond to that one. Sensitive in terms of... I know, you see what makes it difficult is... Perhaps, my not... I know there were criticisms. There were criticisms from all sorts of angles, including, you know, the media. But in terms of the townships, as such, perhaps my difficulty is that I wasn't living in the townships at that stage, at the latter stage. And so I wouldn't speak with confidence, that this is what people were saying.

JS: Well, what I am trying... Well, clearly there was - well, I say clearly - my impression is that in this region there is quite a strong Africanist tradition. By Africanist, I don't mean in an AZAPO sense, I mean in a Charterist sense. But a sense in which, I mean, like a lot of people I talk to, especially older people, Archie, others and so on, Ian Mkhize, as well. Ian Mkhize was saying, he thinks his views are Africanist, not in an AZAPO sense, but in an ANC Africanist sense. It was quite a strong tradition in this region, whatever the reasons. Now, what I am trying to get a sense of, are some of the problems in this region, are they because there is this tradition which people like say, which some of the NIC activists, don't recognise the importance of it? Or is it that these activists are just concerned with, too concerned with national issues and not enough with local issues? Are there, or is there a broader sense in which some of the NIC activists actually aren't sensitive by the mid-1980s to the dynamics at the local level in, especially in African areas?

NM: I don't know. I think, perhaps to an extent, to me, it was a problem of the people who are, who were at that stage leading, leaders in the African areas, perhaps not being I feel, particularly, I don't know what word to use, but I sensed that there was a time when there was a gap between the leadership in the area and the membership. Where that was coming from I don't really know. And the criticism which I was hearing was perhaps for me more at, was being focussed more at people who are leaders in the township, who had been pulled out, or who had pulled out of the areas, and aren't really giving the areas enough attention or listening to...

JS: People like Lechesa? Or do you have, I am not quite sure who, what kind of people you have in mind.

NM: I am thinking specifically of Lamontville. There was a protest movement [?]. I suppose that's the way I could think, in terms of my perceiving.

[END OF TAPE]