



JS: [You were released] in September 1983?

CN: Ja, on the 27th September 1983.

JS: Now on the Island, you knew that the UDF was being discussed, it was being formed, what was your understanding of the UDF before you were released?

CN: We had already left, some of us. We had already left the Island in 1982, when Mandela and others were sent to Pollsmoor, so we were transferred to a place called Caledon, near Cape Town, where there is - what do you call it? - Helderstrom Prison. So we were there from 1982. So we used to, of course, we were able to buy newspapers. So we were following up the organisation towards the launch of the Front. And we were so, taken up, in fact, our morale was really boosted. At the time we were just going up and we were seeing that people were going to be mobilised. And at that time we were shocked to find that a lot of work had been done to bring about almost over fifteen thousand people to Cape Town. And, of course, through the pictures you could see some of our ex-political prisoners were outside playing very important roles. And we felt that was a very important thing, to actually have an impact. And of course we were able to read the direction of the government at the time, because they also didn't expect to have such a - what do you call it? - a mobilised force of the oppressed people at that time. So the UDF was launched, of course, and then L... Basically what the people, those who came because we were in Caledon - we used to have a batch of people who had been transferred from Robben Island and finding us there, and so we had the mood of the people who also remained behind on the Island. So that it was quite a enthusiastic issue. When I was released I was immediately welcomed, of course, by the Comrades, because the history outside has been, as far as I could assess, that they were told that their leaders were on the Island. People who actually knew about the history of the struggle and so forth. And so we had a number of young people, activists, who'd just got into the UDF, who didn't really know the history of the whole land, who had no politics as such but they understood it was important to get and engage themselves into the struggle. So the first stop was a reception was held for me. And at that reception, I was surprised to find the type of people that were present, because before we were detained and then finally convicted in the 60s, you would find that the youth, particularly among the Indian community would shy away. I mean there wasn't that free communication and association. But when I found a lot of Indians and coloureds - what do you call - comrades there, I really saw that much work had been done. In fact I was very pleased to see that combination of people. Well, it was a very warm and exciting reception, of course quite a number of young people. Even those older ones who were present, they did not know us. Because some of them were still young; others were still at school; and others were born during the time we were at the Island. And they were just rushing and trembling to see who this person is. Well, I just gave a brief background of what was happening on the Island and the life there. Particularly, because I was there with Billy Nair who remained behind. He was doing twenty years with me, but he was engaged - he had some hunger strike at Victor Verster, and whatever remission that they did give us - which was really nothing, because they gave me five months out of the twenty years - so they took away from Billy because of the

strike, and I left him behind. So, well there were meetings, sort of briefing meetings that I was called to about how the UDF was formed. How they started building up, getting a number of peace-loving democrats among the people who were really anti-apartheid, which was the task of work that they were doing. And what was really required, in fact it was quite demanding because at that time the government was coming up with this Tricameral Parliament. Of course UDF was formed as a result of the protests against that. And, well I couldn't really be placed in one place. There was a demand to give the history and the image of the Movement, and particularly to show that this was not an Indian issue against, or coloureds or Indians against, really House of Delegates and this of Representatives, so the issue was that we, as African people, were also concerned in supporting the Indian people who were opposing the Tricameral Parliament. And we were up to show, in fact, that those that did go into the so-called Tricameral Parliament, what was the perception among people particularly among the youth who were not politicised at this stage that the Indians and coloureds were actually selling out. Selling out the African people in particular, because then we find the whites, Indians, coloureds all gauging up against them now, against the Africans. So our task, among others, was to try and explain that those people did really have no mandate to go and represent Indian community. Because if you look at the percentage poll, and what they did get, it was just bulldozing because the Nats wanted that Tricameral Parliament to be there. And there was opposition amongst the Indian people. And we were always there in a number of rallies. One day I addressed three or more rallies. You find that you get to Chatsworth and there may be one speaker there, or the first speaker in Chatsworth, immediately I have finished I am taken away to Phoenix. From there I go to Meerbank. Right, so there were chains of meetings, one could address in a single day. Well you could find as I could assess in the rallies that were held in the Indian communities, there were thousands of people which those people in the House of Delegates could not really have raised. And of course in some of the meetings we used to challenge them to appear with us on the platform and justify their participation in that type of politics. And of course they would be very scared, because they had no policies, they were not in a position to justify what they were doing. But what we were trying to explain, amongst others, was that our own people from the African areas, those were nearer the places where the meetings were taking place, were encouraged to attend, so that the Indian people should not feel that it means they are supposed to go there because African people are actually isolating them, treating them as a grouping of people who are sell-outs. Then I used to say among other things, in as much as people like Mantanzima and like Mangope, like Mpipe and others went there against the will of the African people and they did not really represent us, those we could regard as sell-outs. So that we may also have sell-outs among Indian people, it is not a question of saying that the Indians as a whole are selling out. So that was basically what we were trying to educate the people about. Well so far as the organisation, as such, I don't think that we really did have organisational structures that were strong. The unfortunate part of the Front was that at the time it was mobilising the people and it did mobilise them. And the State of course as expected did not give it time to be in a position to be rooted in the communities, to be in a position to educate them to understand. So there was a lot of harrassment. And of course there was no time for us to be sitting

down and having meetings where you have to educate people because this parliament thing was going on and we had to rely now on the platforms, and to spread the gospel of opposing these delegates, House of Delegates and of Representatives. But initially the UDF as it was was to protest, of course, to fight against the Koornhof Bills, among others. But then the so-called Tricameral became a reality in the sense that although it was opposed, but it was forced and then it was there, so what next must we do now, because we can't say that you are fighting against Anti-Tricameral Parliament, it is there, and the Koornhof Bills are there and so, all those things are there. So the Front had to be broadened now, but politically. The politics would be those of the anti-apartheid politics, to look at the broad issues that are supposed to be taken by political movements. So it actually transformed and took up those issues. So they, I think, were able then to be in a position to educate people broadly now about the politics, not really fighting against those people who are going into parliament. So the issue that I was engaged in and others when we came out of prison was that there wasn't a lot of leaders outside the country, but as nationally because the Rivonia Trial people were still in, and we who knew them and who struggled with them for a long time, even before we were arrested, we were actually called upon now to move around nationally. So we used to address conferences, like those of NUSAS, of AZASO, at that time, and then of was it COSAS? - ja COSAS. So we used to travel all over the world, Cape Town, Johannesburg, Eastern Cape and here in Durban too and as far as Turfloop and all those places. So we were posed with, I mean a lot of questions were posed, we used to have workshops but at, where the audience was able to pose questions. Of course they will use us. I asked ... [?] particularly to deal with the particular type of item, like the history of the ANC, like for instance the working class, working class struggle, because we were trade unionists working in the political arena. Like the question of the alliance of the ANC, how did ... [?] fit there and so forth. So it was quite an extensive type of work, educative in a sense, because then they started getting the light of exactly what this history was all about and how the ANC had to work to call the Congress of Democrats, the South African Indian Congress, SACTU and the Coloured People's Congress and so forth, and that combination, of the history of the organisation as such.

JS: When you were released did you come back to live here in KwaMashu?

CN: Yes, I came straight here.

JS: What kind of organisation was there in KwaMashu at that point?

CN: At that point there was no organisation at all. But there was a formation of a youth organisation. There were those organisations which in fact formed part of the affiliates that formed the UDF. There was just mushrooming of various types of organisations, civic organisations, youth and women, whatnot. So here in KwaMashu it was only one that was there. Like Si Ntombela for instance was among the first that was in that youth organisation. So when I came that was the only organisation that was here.

JS: There was no civic structure?

CN: At that time there wasn't, I can't remember.

JS: Now my impression is that at that time, when in the Indian areas of Durban, you have a strong movement, you have the NIC as a political organisation, civic bodies in Phoenix, Chatsworth, also in the coloured areas in Durban. But in African areas, in the townships, organisation was relatively weak.

CN: It was relatively weak. There was what they called JORAC, that was the Joint Rent Action Committee, was here. Ja, that was the only one. But it wasn't strong here in the townships. It was strong in Lamontville and at a place where it was called Hambanathi in Tongaat...

JS: Mkhize.

CN: ... Ja, Ian Mkhize was there. It was, those were the two most important areas. I really can't remember.

JS: Why was organisation weaker in the African townships, do you think?

CN: I think in...

JS: Except for Lamontville?

CN: I should say it was because of the absence of the leadership. That was the most... Even in Lamontville for instance there were very few people who were involved, say for instance in those structures of the ANC that time. The fact that the ANC was banned, it actually made the situation very difficult for those who remained to be in a position to understand what politics... I mean there it was just a scratch from school, when they came to politics, which they don't know, they don't eavesdrop, they couldn't even have a history, I mean a book about the history of the ANC or anything about the ANC. It was illegal, they would get arrested for coming in with the posters of banned organisations. So people were scared in fact, those who remained, it doesn't mean that everybody who was in the organisation was ANC that time or SACBTU was in prison, but those who remained outside kept a very low profile. They didn't even want to talk about it because they felt that talking about it will leak to get somebody else, because we were underground at the time when we were arrested. So those who remained felt that they would be risking it. And of course there was no direction, line of direction, communication between those who remained outside and the leadership inside prison because in prison too, conditions were very difficult that time. You couldn't easily communicate with the outside world. There was, it started by, not even having visits for instance, and the question of letters and the type of censorship that they used to have. So all you could see, all your relatives just visit us and whatnot hut it was quiet outside. So I think, particularly, in the African townships, although people talk about the Indians - what do you call it? - communities, well the Indian Congress wasn't really banned and it just went down and when they did revive it, I mean it was revived by people who were experienced. So that is why you had an organisation, at that time, in the Indian communities. So they were the ones now who were supposed to have people, recruit people like, for instance, come to people like Lechesa, Baba and others. And the NIC people tried to sit down with them and they tried to organise even the civics, that JORAC thing, and even the politics now, even those of the ANC, they were able to get from those - what do you call it? - NIC leadership, who were in the Alliance, who knew who Mandela was, who Sisulu was, who Govan Mbeki was. And the youth like Baba and others, Lechesa, they did not those people. So the history of course, the NIC did really play an important role in trying to revive the structures in the townships. Because when I came out there was a very close working relationship between some of those DHAC people with JORAC. And of course even the question of training and the skills and other, people like Pravin played a very important role there. They used to have workshops. They used to have combined workshops between the old activists, Indian, coloured communities and what, and

white. They had all those workshops. I think that really did help to actually extract cream now of activists who would be able to be used by the Front to go out. So it was in that question of the making and building it up that started in smaller beginnings of the fewer people and then broadened it up. So that was the issue that was facing us at that time.

JS: Do you think that in places like KwaMashu, that the people saw the UDF in Natal as being largely an Indian thing?

CN: Not at all.

JS: Not at all?

CN: Not at all. In a sense, there will be those people who said they saw it as being an Indian thing, because particularly when it started, it started because the Indian community was calling, was engaged against the Indian sell out to parliament. Whereas with Mantanzima, and others, Mangope, there wasn't anything among African areas. So there may be that line, people actually played a very important role and who was in the forefront, of course, were the elite and those who knew what they were supposed to be doing were the Indian community who were clear politicals at that stage, they were the ones who were running the workshops. So one can say of course that it was malicious, anyway, to say that it was Indian. Because if they were not there, if Mewa and others did not revive this thing and I mean how could they reach out now, how were they going to be able to get the Africans into the Alliance. So it stopped being an Indian thing, but it was an alliance of various, I mean we had whites, we had coloured people and we had the Indians. We had us, the Africans who were present there. So one could say that it was an Indian thing, you would probably be saying that they were misleading the people, or they felt that the Indians mustn't take a leading role in this, but it was not an Indian thing, per se. It wasn't.

JS: One of the first big platforms that you had was at that Port Elizabeth conference of the UDF in September.

CN: Oh yes, that one, it was a very hot one. That one was very hot. In fact, there I was not among the people who were selected to speak. I don't what the issue... I don't remember that time because I wasn't very clear, but it was a sort of a controversy around the Indian, I don't know what Indians or voting, there was a view...

JS: The referendum.

CN: Ja, the referendum. There was a view from some quarters where, all right, say like for instance in Natal, they were saying that political boycotts have been going on for a very, very long time and people are going to be educated, you say that whatever is going to come which they oppose, they must boycott instead of challenging it. And the Indian community here felt that the time has come, because they were sure that if they stand up they were going to defeat Rajbansi and others. And then immediately they would be able to form what they called the party and then they just resign, right. Others were saying: No we must just, it a question of non-participation at all. Well, while that thing was being discussed now in, at conference there, the Africans of course, they were in majority, anyway, from all over if you take in terms of nationally. And they just spoke around any other decision saying there must be participation, because there was the question of non-participation, once you say, Now we want to change. They were saying, No we are going to confuse our own people. This time we participate, this other time we don't

participate. So, there, it was so odd that at conference, some documents, like this one, were circulated even before this issue was discussed. And some of them were very vulgar and insulting. And even calling people by names, those who were collaborating, as this and that and that. And it became very tense. And I was just asked outside by the caucus, from our delegation, which felt they, as Indians, cannot put forward this decision from the caucus at that hostile conference. So they asked me, that I must meanwhile present it. Because probably the comrades would understand, if they get a person of my calibre who they know about, who historically who I was. So that was the first platform.

JS: So you say that you were asked to deliver the Natal view...

CN: Yes.

JS: ... actually at the conference?

CN: At the conference, yes.

JS: Had there been meetings before that conference...?

CN: Yes, there were meetings.

JS: ... where this was discussed?

CN: There were meetings.

JS: Did you find that the arguments... The NIC people were saying that we should participate, not in the elections but in the referendum?

CN: Yes.

JS: And go for a no vote in the referendum

CN: Yes.

JS: As opposed to boycotting that referendum.

CN: Yes.

JS: Did you find that argument convincing?

CN: It was convincing in the sense that when they presented it during the times when we were making preparations, it was, I think the background to the whole thing was that in Natal they were quite clear that if they go for a no-vote they would actually destroy that Tricameral Parliament. But then the Comrades didn't see it that way. They just saw that it is participation, because you are getting into that structure that has been formed by the enemy. So there is no argument that you are going to get into a referendum. But basically I think it was the correct move, tactically. Because there was no way of people actually getting in there and selling out but it was motivated fully. But then looking at the climate and the politics at that time, I think people were very hostile to whatever the system was bringing in. So lack of political ambition and understanding the tactics and whatnot the strategy and tactics, they wouldn't. I think they also as far as I am concerned were justified for their own line. Because then you would come back some other time and say, No, we must do this time, but we are talking to a membership that does not understand. Just because you are saying this, they say yes. Next time you say ... [?], they say yes. And of course in the light of trying to maintain unity, at the face of that area that time was very vital. So you would never try to take any decision that you felt was unpopular, and that was going to divide us. Because all we wanted was to mobilise and to be a cohesive grouping. So it was important for us to retreat. Because, of course, we lose nothing anyway, because we are going to oppose it, we are still going to oppose it even if we didn't go for the - what you call it? - the referendum.

JS: Now, you say that you got to the conference, you went down by bus from Durban, and you got down to Port Elizabeth, you went into the conference there and the

documents circulated, you describe them as vulgar and insulting, and some of the NIC people came to you said, "Curnick, can you please present the Natal presentation, because we as Indians can't do it"?

CN: No, they felt that if they present it, they may have a hostile reaction, because they will say here are these Indians are doing this now, and going to, and though we are putting forward a decision of the caucus, but they will turn around now to say that if this is an Indian who is presenting an Indian's view. Whereas, we are here now as a body, we are not going there as NIC or anything, we are a UDF delegation. So... [?] called upon, if you felt that if it was not going to be proper for us to have an Indian presenting it, it would be targetted as these Indians who actually bulldozed us to accept what they are saying, whereas it was accepted by all, by all of us from the region. So, anyway it was a very fruitful debate, because after we had presented that, outside conference it wasn't really important to say it. It was constructive criticism. Comrades got out of conference and they were talking and challenging each other, saying what was this you were talking about? And we were trying to justify it, saying: No but this is this and that. But there was no hostility at all. It was just a sharing of views. But then of course we cannot all have the same views.

JS: You hadn't been at the National Executive meeting where this had been discussed beforehand?

CN: Which one?

JS: It was in Lenasia, before the conference.

CN: In 1983? Was it '83?

JS: Ja.

CN: Ja, I was there.

JS: Before the conference.

CN: Ja, I was there, although I wasn't in the NEC at that time. I was in the organising, coordinating the anti-, the Million Signature Campaign.

JS: This was before the Signature Campaign

CN: Before that one. No, I wasn't.

JS: Right. So at the conference, you went there and there was a lot of feelings were very strong and NIC people felt that there was a rift, that they would be accused of presenting, I think you said, an Indian position.

CN: Ja, well the delegation was not clear as to what was happening. And actually that we still had people who were not clear politically. And if you present it now, like for instance, as a white and you say we are thinking this is what should be done, they would say, "No, the whites are saying these things" because they would not look at the decision itself, but because a white delegation was there and a white delegate presented it, then it loses all its - what do you call it? - its conception of what it is, ja.

JS: How did you feel about this? Were you disappointed that there were many delegates there who were going to be swayed by the messenger, rather than the message? That if the messenger was Indian that would affect how they understood the issue?

CN: You see they were... What I would say is that initially when we were still in prison, there was what they called the South African Indian Council - is that right? - which was formed where some of the comrades were in favour of the formation of that grouping. Then I don't know what happened, I don't like the vibes of the issue, but

there were still comrades who regarded some of our comrades right in the Indian community of having participated, and they said that they were collaborators, they didn't actually look at the issue, that those comrades participated for whatever reason. But then they saw the structure within which they were operating wasn't the one, and they actually came back to the structure. But their enemies then, who would always be there, some of whom are opportunists, they will find you there and when you come for a side then you start believing to be in the leadership, they will always influence you but that fellow, he is dangerous, because he's a so and so and so and so. Like for instance we have here in the ANC, like in the UDF for instance a lot of comrades were in UDF who are in the leadership come from AZASO, it is AZASO? No not AZASO, SASO, and they have been the Black Consciousness - what you call it - background of politics, like Terror, like Valli Moosa, like Popo Molefe and others. I mean if you are going to say now because they are here, and I say: But no all those come from BC, I knew the ANC all along had been politically correct. Then they now are opportunists. They are running in front. So that was the type of issue that we were trying to run away from, of trying to blame people of their activities of the past. So I think that was still very current, ... [?] be tested around there. This is the issue which should probably be, you should see some of the people that know whereas it is typical of these Indians some of them who are saying this today were the ones who were doing this in the past, they felt, some of them felt very shaky.

JS: How did... You gave the report on the behalf of the Natal region?

CN: Yes.

JS: What was the response?

CN: The response was people started to, got neutralised. I must say they got neutralised, others didn't understand. It's weird this person coming from this side and playing this particular point of view. Although of course it wasn't my view, it was a provincial decision. But I could feel, like for instance the delegation from the Transvaal, there were accusations and counter-accusations right at conference when we were discussing. They started splitting into groups and attacking each other. Others started supporting our view. And others did not. And those that did support their view, our view, they were actually attacked at conference that you are coming here to support in the first place didn't have the mandate from the Transvaal, you can't, you didn't even have a meeting that side which mandates you to say anything here. So there was that confusion, but I think that we reached a compromise situation, because finally we decided: No, there mustn't be any referendum. You will find people from Cape Town for instance, predominantly the coloured community, and then from the Eastern Cape, for instance, hardly a single Indian there and, you see it was definitely a very difficult thing to handle.

JS: I think at the conference there was a, what they call a straw vote taken, where they just have a show of hands to gauge the support, and my understanding was that at that conference there was a small majority in favour of the participation argument, but that because of the need to maintain unity that the conference decided to refer the matter back to the next NEC meeting.

CN: Yes, that is that area, where I think what was important for us at that stage was to maximise our unity. And we didn't want to divide the people.

JS: In the end, the NEC decided that it was going to drop, that it was just going to be flexible and fudge it. But then the government said that there was going to be no

referendum anyway, so the issue was removed. But do you think was that correct, tactically correct? Do you think it would have been better had the UDF pushed more for an Indian referendum, and then squashed that affair, there would not have been the House of Delegates?

CN: It is difficult to say if there was going to be a House of Delegates. But if we talk in terms of the UDF on the Indian side, but that they would take over and form a majority which can form sort of a House like they have.

JS: No, no, surely the issue was the referendum. ... [?]

CJ: ... [?]

JS: If there had been a referendum among Indian, if there had been a majority no-vote as the NIC predicted then it would have been impossible for the government to have formed the House of Delegates.

CN: Definitely, it would have been impossible. In fact ...

JS: ... [?]

CN: ... how could it then be formed, when the people who actually won, they were the ones who now would have decided that there is no need to have the Tricameral Parliament.

JS: Was it a tactical mistake by UDF not to have been, to have accepted the Natal position?

CN: Ja, I think the issue here, which is quite problematic, is that for the first time that time for, I mean, among the Indian community here to be confronted with that type of situation. But if, had the Natal side, like for instance as they were putting it forward, I think it would very clearly have been a blow to the government. It would have been a victory on the part of the Front if they do succeed actually to go for that no-vote and then win and then just throw the whole thing back to the government, ... [?]. I think it would have been a really important victory on our side. I don't think the government would have tried that thing. Anyway, you could not tried after you have failed at that particular point in time.

JS: The second issue which was raised at the conference was the question of the Million Signatures Campaign. This was also something, I think, which was proposed by the Natal region?

CN: I am not sure then, because I was quite new for me to understand and follow all that they were doing at that time. It was just the first encounter of the conference.

JS: Now would it be true to say though amongst prisoners in Caledon or wherever, that there had been discussion of the need for something like the Million Signature Campaign, prior to your release? Just as the ANC held a campaign after the Freedom Charter, the Congress of the People?

CN: That was the feeling, although I had left the actual grouping at the Island. It was probably the issue which must have been raised at the Island, because the majority of our people were there on the Island. But the idea of testing the views of the people, it actually shows a glimpse of the leadership and organisation direction because of the mandate. And that actually also engages the people in a particular type of politics where they put forward their demands and understand why they support these demands. Like you are talking about the Freedom Charter for instance. The Charter actually guided the leadership as to what type of South Africa that the people really want. I mean it is not the leadership that decides this is what will happen. So in that Million Signature Campaign, for instance, we were

not actually pressing people to sign. We used to have meetings. First of all to educate the people of the type of government that the Nats want by bringing the Tricameral Parliament. And you would find the actual people in such a way that, particularly - I don't know, I think almost all over, but I will talk about it in Natal where the majority of Indians are situated - if you go to the streets, we used to have what ... [?] you go out on a Saturday morning throughout all the streets around the areas where you find the non-whites around. Like for instance you take ... [?] to Pretoria Street, Grey Street, into all those streets around those areas. It was useless to go to West Street, I mean there are very few people there. You would find people even before we tried to explain what it is all about, they say: No, we don't want, you are wasting our time, bring that thing and let me sign. Because they were hostile. Even the shopkeepers some of them, you stand next to a shop, people are getting inside, they tell you: Come inside, come inside and sign it. So that was the type of attitude that people were having against the Tricameral Parliament. So the Million Signature Campaign was very helpful for us to be able to assess the following of the people.

JS: But it didn't succeed in getting anywhere near a million signatures.

CN: It didn't because there was harassment. You know what usually happened in town. Sometimes you find you were deployed in the various areas. The next thing ... [?] you find that a comrade is coming and saying: Hey someone made a placard and everything, he was picked up and arrested and whatnot. Where are they now? We rushed back and ... [?], arrested, we don't know where they are arrested, they just come in, to some of the offices for instance and collect all the forms, and all the people's addresses and everything. And people said: No this is... Of course people were saying that if I sign this thing, you must make an assurance that this thing is not going to the government, it doesn't go to the police station. It is only administration work for us to be able to assess, then they sign. And when the State decided now to go on the rampage and, countrywide in fact, in lots of places. They collected all those signatures. I mean how could you be in a position now to continue with signatures, when a lot of signatures which had already been signed, all those forms had been taken away. So it was just a disorder, I think it was deliberate on the part of the government. So we couldn't be in a position to say whether we would have been a million signature campaign. But the response as it was I am sure would have collected the million signatures in the campaign. We had affiliates of the UDF, we were almost about 600 or so of them, how many of ... [?], amongst them certainly. When we had a lot of supporters who were on the street who were not participating fully politically, but there are those who didn't want to vote against the, for Rajbanshi and others although they were not affiliates of UDF or supporters or members.

JS: You were one of the coordinators of the MSC, Million Signatures Campaign?

CN: Ja, here in Natal.

JS: You were a Natal coordinator? Did you go to the national meetings at that time, where Million Signatures Campaign was discussed?

CN: I think at the time when I was brought in as a coordinator it was after the national had discussed it. So I was briefed in terms of what type of work I am supposed to be doing and with whom I am supposed to be working and so forth.

JS: Now the national coordinator was Murphy.

CN: Murphy Morobe.

JS: Did you used to liaise with him often, did you have regular meetings?

CN: Yes, we used to have. As I was able, although I was not in the NEC at that time, I used to attend some of the NI:C, UDF NI:C meetings.

JS: And, in Natal, did you have a specific Million Signatures Campaign Committee? Or, how did it work? How did the organisation work?

CN: You couldn't really be in a position to work as an individual because you must have a committee. Ja, we used to have a committee. Some of the activists, where we used to sit down and actually plan, brainstorm and of course be able to have the question of resources, and how we are going to deploy, I mean the particular place, for instance it was not something which was confined in town. So the committee was broadened, even into the townships. We used to come to the townships for instance like this one here. We zoned the entire township, we moved during the day here, in the morning, we would look at all the streets as they are here. And so that when we have a meeting we already know that certain activists would be moving in this street up to that particular street. So that they would not just run around from house to house where other people were already coming to. So it was planned in such a way that if we take people and we put them in the street across so that we make in time for us not to waste a lot of time in the streets, because we must go back to the hall, and started looking at all the results and getting the people's - what do you call it? - questions in terms of how they were looking at it, because there were questions. You came to the house, first you had to explain and all those things. And then people start questioning you, before signing, some of them. So that was in the townships too. So we went in to number of townships like here, Umlazi, Clermont, all over, particularly on the weekends like Saturday. Then also of course the Indian areas. And we didn't want it to be seen as an Indian issue thing, so we used to have coloured, some of the whites here with us in the townships. And to go to Indian areas, we had the same type of groupings of a mixture of activists. Which was very helpful, because some of those in the Indian areas were exposed to seeing whites coming in and there they were working with Indians. They felt if you go to meetings now there is no way to fear that the Africans, they are afraid in those meetings they will do anything to them. And so we found out a lot about the Indian community which used to be there at the present. Like for instance one of the meetings there, that actually made me to realise that we had done quite a number of work, I mean a tremendous amount of work. It was at Howard College, at the University of Natal, at the student's union, one evening there. We pulled up 9000, the hall was packed full and you would see this was a non-racial audience there. So UDF, as far as I can see, those days was really very, very, very strong and the State, of course, the police you find them all over the way trying to harrass them, with their two-way radios and this. But our people were not deterred. In fact it was a question of trying to intimidate, and they couldn't stop them.

JS: To take an example, can you remember doing a blitz here in KwaMashu?

CN: Yes.

JS: How many volunteers would there have been, do you think? A hundred? Twenty?

CN: From ...?

JS: Were coming for the blitz.

CN: No, hundreds. Over a hundred, you see, because we were covering like for instance this whole section here. And then you see the Zulu side of the section, the whole of that section on top, F section right, and F section started, you would go down when you were coming up, it is also F section that side and also in E section. Which means that we had almost all of the comrades that were in the township actively plus of course those that came from other townships...

[END OF SIDE ONE]

CN: ... from KwaMashu of course, because they don't have to travel, right you had fifty here. And then you had about thirty people coming from Lamontville. Lamontville of course was quite strong, it must have been about forty or so there. Then you had people coming, say about twenty from Clermont, ... [?] area that was then. And then really there were the university students. We had quite a lot of them.

JS: How many... In the blitz on KwaMashu how many people were from Indian areas, white areas? Very many?

CN: No, there weren't. I must be honest, there weren't. There were very few Indians. And those among the Indians, there were those who were really, in those groupings of people who were being politicised and of course from the whites we would have the students from NUSAS, coming in with the students, the African students.

JS: So students from African areas, so there were a lot of activists from African areas who would help out in Indian areas, but you wouldn't get so many, very understandably, Indian or white activists coming into KwaMashu or Clermont.

CN: No, no, unless, I mean those who would come, like for instance you would find the activists, I mean the students were a core group. Ja, they would be a core group. So there would be, in fact, they were activists because they belonged to those student organisations and they were also using their facilities and resources like the cars and the combis and the printing machines were all theirs. So they knew everything. They were always with us.

JS: Now the UDF documents from the time, reports from people like Popo Molefe, Murphy Morobe, they say that in fact, repression was one reason why there were problems with the MSC, that there were also... - repression was one factor - there were also organisational problems that the, that in most parts of the country there were organisational problems in the way which the campaign was conducted. Would you agree with that?

CN: Ja, I think that at the time we used to find, for instance, an element of people who were saying that there were people who were actually dominating the running of the campaign, and that they, of course, the conclusion is that if you look at any campaign, for instance, that was basically ... [?] from the fact that it was Indian, right? They were fighting against the Indians and against the coloureds? But I don't think much of this campaigning was taken seriously by the, I don't know what was happening in Cape Town anyway, but here we used to have people, particularly from Newlands East, and from Sydenham, and most importantly from Wentworth, from the coloured communities. But I think the issue, in the sense of not really properly being run here in Natal may be coming from the fact that there were people who were criticising that decisions were not really democratic. Certain issues would just come out, and say that this is what we are supposed to be doing and then

the question is: Where was this meeting that had taken place which took this particular type of decision? I think if there were problems they would not crop up from the African people because at that time they didn't have the skills, they did not know how to run this thing. So few individuals who knew, and it was important that a thing must be done anyway, I would agree that there wasn't really proper consultation. But then people turn around and say that at that time there was no time to be sitting and having conferences to decide on the issues because this was an ongoing thing, it was supposed to be challenged from today, on a day-to-day basis. So I think those who knew, who felt they should have been included were quite vocal to say that, I mean their own ideas for how this thing was supposed to be done. They would say that it was not properly done because had they been present at meetings where this thing was brainstormed, they would have thrown their suggestions. Some of the issues would have been accepted. This was something that was going to build, anything that was going to assist to create an effective campaign that was going to be successful would have been supported. So I could, I must say that I accept Murphy's saying that there were organisational problems. But those problems could have come from the Indian communities themselves, from the TIC and the NIC. Because their people in fact, though the UDF was full steam and was going on, there were problems. Some of which were called... Comrades particularly here, and I think in the Transvaal to a lesser degree, who felt that there was a clique, of course this was called the cabal, of a few individuals who were running the show and taking decisions and actually using some of the African activists whom in turn of course would use their own people in the townships. So it basically meant that a few individuals in the leadership were there, then few activists, Africans who got those skills and attended those workshops and everything then they come into the townships, then they form those structures, and pass over what is supposed to be done. In fact they relayed what comes from that grouping. And those who were outside now would try and come in and usually some of the African people who are not involved, there, who were in the townships. That is really where the whole friction started. They would come and say for instance: Okay, So and so, where was this decision, where was this particular meeting where this thing was discussed. And then so and so says: What meeting? Say: No, where this decision was taken? And he says: No I don't know anything about this. They say: There you are, you are one of the leaders, how come he doesn't know. Who are these people? So then they create a cabal group, amongst, between Africans and Indians and those coloureds who were involved there. So that was the organisational problem, I think that is quite correct. Correct.

JS: You were caught up in all those debates about the alleged cabal. You were asked to mediate on what was a number of issues. I believe, for example, that after your release from detention and after the release of the Pietermaritzburg trialists, Mewa Ramgobin had a lunch with you and Billy Nair at one point, at Diakonia, and raised the issue of the undemocratic decision-making process in the UDF. Do you recall that?

CN: I do recall. I do recall.

JS: What was your view and analysis of the situation and your recommendation as to what ought to be done?

CN: You see it was very difficult to tackle that issue. Because there I was working with Mewa, and then were working with people like Pravin, Billy, Yunus Mohamed and

others - who was it? - there was Zac Yacoob. And well I think Mewa was the one who used to come out openly, anyway to me, I don't know the others just decided to backtrack. The difficult issue with me, was I would raise the issue, right. Now you find that the question of a cabal, if it is a cabal, in fact, where the name originated from I don't know, Indian origin or whatever, but I think I used to look at this as the style of work, you can call it a cabal, and the style of work wasn't really conducive to build a strong political organisation in the sense that if we are going to have an organisation that is to be strong you need to have a united leadership that works together, a group which is a ... [?]. Not to have a grouping that will say if, after the meeting, if you do have a meeting at all, if you disagree with a particular point at the meeting, the leadership starts going and filtering the differences down to the membership, then you don't build a strong organisation, you are destroying it. But if you are going to have people who are outside, and that person, for instance, who went to say, Where was this meeting? That person is going to go around and looking for all those mistakes and spreading them through the membership, and say: Were you present at this meeting? And then what you are casting doubt now, Because the next thing even if you, that person is going to say, not going to say publically, he is going to say this decision was taken by so and so and so and so. And you were not present and I was not present, but how can... I mean it is undemocratic in the sense of the word. Then you have a membership and a grouping of activists divided into two: Others following so and so's grouping, and others following so and so's grouping. And virtually what is going to happen is that these groupings, now you have people who will act as information pickers as to who is this racketeer who is talking this, who leads this particular group? And you are actually putting them much more aside instead of bringing them closer. So that is a problem which I saw, and which was very difficult to bridge because those groupings were actually entrenched in their own decisions. But my point which I actually feel very unhappy about was that if there were those problems, like you find this question of the cabal, it is something that has been going into hostile press, coming up in Langa, and you find they are giving detailed information of what they know, so and so is doing this and this, he is having this department, he is getting this fund, these Kagiso funds, spent by so and so and these are the trustees, and what not, and all of those things. So where do these things come up? They come from within. And then they are given a hostile press to destroy the very same organisation which they claim to belong to, that they want to be loyal to. My point was that if there are differences, particularly among the leadership, those who were there, say, from the Indian community ... [?], they are seasoned leaders who are supposed to say: Okay, we understand that now, you are derailing, going off track now, going wrong and we are of the opinion that you and you and you are responsible for this. We have complaints to make, let's convene a meeting. Where this thing could actually be discussed, rather than deciding: No, I no longer want to work with that grouping. And instead of no longer wanting to work with it, just get out and keep quiet, but you spread the gospel of trying to smash that grouping. And if you are smashing the grouping, with it you are smashing the organisation in the essence.

JS: You were national chair throughout this period.

CN: Yes, I was.

JS: Surely you could have, you must have convened meetings to discuss this issue?

CN: You see we had a number of NEC meetings. We had people in the NEC itself who used to come out with these allegations and some of those people who were called, named as members of the cabal, were in the NEC itself, right. Because this thing was an ongoing issue, people complaining that there were certain decisions that had been taken and they don't know and whatnot. When we raised this and put it down as an item on the agenda of the NEC, then those people who were saying that they are cabal and whatnot right, in Natal and in Johannesburg. Because those were the places that were mentioned. We would say to the NEC: Right we want you to give us the full information, because if you are going to have this thing being thrown around and just come they might think this is a gossip, but if you have got information, spoken up as an item on the agenda, let's discuss it. And the attitude, I don't know whether people were scared to talk in the presence of those people because others would say: It's useless to discuss this issue because those people who are cabal they know themselves. And others: It's useless to discuss it because this cabal is a faceless monster and people anyway they are going to deny it, that they are not. At one stage we decided to set up a committee outside the NEC, it also involved NEC members, where we said: Okay those comrades should attend to consult with this grouping and put forward their views about the cabal. So that we would be able from the NEC side to even convene, or involve those people to be called those who were on the NEC who were members of the cabal, and even those who were outside, for instance to bring the grouping of those who were outside who had been ostracised by the so-called cabal and those who were inside who were cabal members, to account for their own activity. I remember one comrade. He even refused totally at a meeting where Ma Sisulu, myself, we wanted to have people like some of the some of the church leaders, prominent people because they were closer to the Alliance itself, but they refused. But, of course, I remember at one stage as far as the UDF was concerned, the issue was raised with the ANC outside. And then there was a commission that was set up by, I think I remember among others was Frank Chikane, there was Smangaliso, I don't remember the others but there were four of those people.

JS: Was that with Beyers Naude?

CN: Ja, Beyers Naude was one of them. But I don't know, this thing just fizzled out, it didn't take place at all. And the ANC which felt like it was going to handle it, it never handled it. It is only the delegation which was to go outside and the speculation of the names outside who were in Lusaka. But here they didn't want to raise it, probably they wanted it raised by a neutral body, and the ANC was neutral. They didn't want anybody who was in UDF to handle it. But I think the leadership outside they delegated the task to these people like Beyers and Mkhathshwa and Chikane, I don't know what happened thereafter. It didn't materialise. But it was a real thorn in the flesh of the UDF. Because then you would find that people who would want to listen to so and so rather than this one. If you are in the leadership and they say: Don't listen to that one, he is working clandestinely, or whatever.

JS: Was it ever resolved?

CN: It was never resolved.

JS: Even when people like Popo Molefe, Terror Lekota returned from jail and took up their posts?

CN: No, they... In fact the Front felt that those people were supposed to be doing it. Because they too were in a position, because they didn't, they were not involved at that, because in the time of the Cabal issue, it was during the time of the Delmas Trial and either they were in detention or then in prison. So it was not resolved. I remember here in Natal too, I don't know whether Mewa did mention it, there was a committee of about some twenty-four something comrades who tried on a number of occasions they were meeting at the Varsity but then to my own memory there was no resolution of the issue.

JS: Was, this was a committee?

CN: Ja, it was a grouping of activists and leadership, in fact it was a broad one.

JS: Were you on it?

CN: Ja. I think I attended one or two meetings, but then I don't know what happened, when it was postponed, what the problem was. Was this after the Emergency? I can't just remember now. Because those were some of the things that made it difficult for us to be able to solve some of the problems. Because then there would be this repression, and then one would scatter and run back that other way.

JS: Now another factor of tensions you were involved in, which was quite unrelated, was this problem in the youth in Natal. That during 1985/86 there were lot of tensions in the youth, especially between the Youth Forum on the one side and IYY committee, and then between the grass roots youth and some of the youth leaders. I think you were called in several times to try and mediate?

CN: You see there was that one, the IYY, I remember it and the Youth Forum. I wasn't really, very much involved in that one. If I did go in there it was at the time when tempers were so high that nobody could ever control it. I remember one day, at one stage we had a meeting with them, and our feeling was that they must come together and form one forum. But when they started it, it was completely not involving the leadership, they were quite mature fellows at that time who'd be able to handle their own issues. And then of course consult with the leadership. But I think it was not nixed at the budding moment and it was just coming out. They left that thing go on for a long time and there were calling us that they were going on. And then there were attitudes and positions that had taken place and then they got entrenched. At that stage they started calling us. So when some of the youth were saying that: Look, we could not go into this thing only. We can't compromise with that group. So one grouping was felt to be under, what led by those fellows in Diakonia, they were there and I think it was having the blessing of Paddy, or something because Paddy was working with those people, not really involved. He might have been in a position to supply some type of resources, or funding if they want to go printing, from the churches or whatnot. It was a correct thing because the churches had to support some of those things. But then there was the attitude from the grouping that was they were on our side, which they felt that those people must come under this IYY. I attended one meeting, I think I was amongst those people who ... [?] platform, but there, when they were going to have some elections. You see what we were trying to do... Ja, I think they were going to have elections at the time they started bringing us in. Now our attitude I remember was that, that was Billy and I were involved in that thing, we were invited. I think we were acceptable to both sides, because they too used to come to me from the Forum, and the fellows from the IYY. But I think the comrades from the IYY were very, very

hostile against the Forum, for whatever reason I don't know. So then we had a meeting, it was discussions, and I think Billy presented an address there, and they went to leave now and they were going to have their elections. But we were with the IYY fellows because they were on our side, not on our side, I mean they were from UDF per se, our structures, some of them, to try and be mature politically and not to go to elections with the view of putting their own people as candidates in the offices there because then those people are going to be neutralised. And in fact they didn't have resources, these IYY fellows. The Forum had everything then. And their attitude sometimes would find that some of them would say: No, no we go there and just elect and take over. Once there is only one Forum then they must submit everything this side. So, and they did exactly the same thing there when they came to elections. Once appointed someone, a person, then they just don't go. I think these fellows from our side were the majority at the conference. So they brought in all their fellows. And I think they had a flag or something, which I still recall, that they pulled down the Forum flag and burnt it. That was at the Ecumenical Centre. I still remember it was in the Justice Hall [?]. So that's what I heard the following day. So from there you could see there would definitely be no movement forward there. I mean those people wouldn't have all those things that they had worked only to find out when they come there and just to bulldoze them, and steamroll them, and the next thing says: Hand over everything. And so it couldn't work.

[END OF INTERVIEW]