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Interviewer: First of all thanks Lucien for making yourself available. I'm interviewing Lucien van der Walt. It's the 23rd March 2010. Lucien just before we get into discussion about the APF, I ask every interviewee a little bit about themselves because we want to know a little bit about where people are coming from.

Van der Walt: Alright

Interviewer: Could you tell us about where and when you were born?

Van der Walt: I was born in 1972 in Krugersdorp.

Interviewer: Krugersdorp. Okay, and places that you've lived and been in your life?

Van der Walt: Mostly in Krugersdorp! Well, I grew up in Krugersdorp which was kind of like, a declining mining town then. My father had worked on the mines, as a worker, and then he became a teacher (and he retired early); and my mum was a teacher. Her dad was a mine store manager. I went to school in Krugersdorp ... came to Wits: it was so ... a totally different sort of world. I studied here, got a job here, moved to Joburg for a bit, then moved back to Krugersdorp for a bit (just to write actually). I kind of miss the place.

Interviewer: Okay, and family; are you married, do you have any children?

Van der Walt: I've got a sister and a stepsister and I'm married and I don't have any kids yet. I've been married for about five years but my partner and I have been together for about 16 years.

Interviewer: 16 years, okay great. And schooling - what have you done in terms of your academic career?

Van der Walt: I went to government schools, and then came here [Wits]. Originally I intended to do Archaeology and English Lit but I basically switched focus on a BA doing Sociology, Politics and History. Then I've done my Honours and PhD in Industrial Sociology although my PhD, is really a labour history, a history of the early left, a history of [the] pre-Communist Party left, specifically anarchists and revolutionary syndicalists in South Africa into the early '20s.

Interviewer: And when did you get your PhD?

Van der Walt: I graduated at the end of 2007.

Interviewer: 2007 ... and other than the academic career have you had any work or jobs outside of the academy?

Van der Walt: Well, I've done one or two things. And when I was a student I worked at a factory, like [on] assembly lines, putting together electronic crap for shops. Half the job was getting the stuff back with errors, and having to put everything together again. And I did a lot of student grant jobs. I also worked as a research assistant for a while, going through archives

for people, a really, really dull job - that sort of stuff. And in the end? Basically research and academia, And I also did a lot of activist stuff.

Interviewer: And just a very brief discussion of how, in your own words, you became politicised or a political activist?

Van der Walt: Well I think it's partly when I was growing up ... you know it's that kind of ... classic old apartheid South Africa was very insular. In 1990 with all its unbannings, I'm was in Matric and that's essentially the last generation, of that whole period ... It was a very insular society, it's hard to describe. I mean in a place like Krugersdorp? Your average white person in South Africa in Krugersdorp in 1985 was maybe a bit worried about what was going on in the townships but they were equally worried about supposed Satanist activities on the mine dumps, the impending threat of the [Biblical] Apocalypse and all that. It was this extreme sort of stuff, a very strange mindset. And I think the only way people there could rebel against that was through subculture and all that. So I got involved in gothic punk, that sort of thing. But from about Matric I started to get all exposed ... to things like the *New Nation* and *Learning Nation* and I remember that the light just went on ... I was suspended in Matric for being disorderly and [during this] I was reading this thing, on "workers councils," and the light went "boom," worker's councils! I think it tied a whole lot of my ideas together and tied my kind of dislike of authority with a practical programme of class struggle - which like takes me to anarchism doesn't it? And then I came down to Wits [1991], and everything was happening here. Like [my] first days? Boom! Like protests, everything. It was a very lively student scene. NUSAS was still going then and all its various auxiliaries. There was a lively student press and all these volunteer things; there was still SANSKO, there was a very strong Worker- Student alliance on campus between NEHAWU and what became SASCO, [with] the SANSKO- NUSAS merger. And then Keep Left [then SSAC] was also around. So this was the sort of milieu. And from there I basically moved on to a range of things. Anyway that's how I became politicised.

Interviewer: And did you join any of those organisations?

Van der Walt: Oh yes.

Interviewer: Okay, we just had a little pause there. So I was going to say did you join any of these organisations?

Van der Walt: Ja, look, politically it's kind of weird. I mean I was actually very attracted to so-called Stalinism originally, that was like "communism". So I suppose there was a contradiction with the workers' councils and (this rings true) the actual Soviet Union. But I mean, you know what it was like then. The Soviet Union was *there* and if America did something against these guys they would say 'fucking imperialist pigs'. Of course, you know, we were blind to a lot of what they did. But I kind of moved from that via Trotsky to proper anarcho-syndicalism. So I kind of moved like that. In SASCO there was like a bunch of people who were into sort of actual "Stalinism," a sort of anti-revisionism or whatever; there were people who were very seriously into that politics. We also had the Keep Left [tradition at Wits], and things like state capitalism [theory]. And I kind of came full circle back to anarchism. So I was involved in those groups and when I started working, I joined NEHAWU. I was quite involved in that. And there were a number of other initiatives besides the student things, there were always campaigns ... bunches of campaigns and things like that. You know there were tons of those. We did a

Mumia Jamaal campaign [1995]. All the student protests like Operation Litter on and on [1994-1996] where we would basically mess up the campus you know where people would basically trash up the place, break the urinals, smash the windows. It's when people like Heinrich Bohmke were around.

Interviewer: What years were those?

Van der Walt: A lot of that stuff would've been about '92/93 to about '96/97. There is quite a radical phase [at Wits] with things like SASCO. And that's also when people like Prishani [Naidoo] were involved, Chris Malikane [also "TK", Kwena Mathatho...]. So it was a very odd SASCO [at Wits], doesn't gel [politically, or with national SASCO]. I remember we did a protest march on Shell House when we criticised *Mandela* (it was about '95), because he said something about student protest. You could actually pull off a protest and get a couple of hundred people to go there and protest *Mandela!* So it was always seen as a bit of a renegade branch. But I mean the thing about [this branch of] SASCO, it'd been a loosely structured thing, all these caucuses [but also] the way SASCO was always organised around this place. It's been very loose. Where there is a couple of people really organising stuff, and there is a whole bunch of people who take mandates but don't carry them out. Hopefully the next day there is a bit of a protest! When the small core started to weaken, SASCO started to weaken. There is a whole new generation that runs it now, which are sort of Floyd Shivambu types, that sort of bunch. Anyway I got involved there. But there were all sorts of types of campaigns. And I got involved in a group called Workers' Solidarity Federation, which was an anarchist group. And that's when I started putting my time. Basically what we did was like recruit people from COSATU, workers. We went up to about 36/37 members, mostly from COSATU but with all the problems of a small group. So that was from about '95 to about '99. Then there was another thing, Lesedi Socialist Study Group, which was a "Broad Left" group which was great, that brought in, you know, like people like Chris, people like Jeff Ndumo (who was then with Keep Left); we even invited the Spartacists, but they didn't come. Anyway, so that's basically it, I don't know if that all helps. I mean, it's kind of weird if you think about stuff: you don't always have organised in the mind. The thing is it all builds up to '99, because in '99 what happens is Wits starts to try to outsource its workers, which is the idea for 2000 [it was part of the Wits 2001 restructuring programme]. And by that stage a lot of us on the left are moving to a kind of broad left thing so, for example, we wound down Workers Solidarity. And something like Lesedi is focusing on ... there is a whole bunch of people. We [Workers Solidarity] got involved in that and then people like Ahmed and that reappeared and we all built this big campaign in 2000 which was called the Wits Crisis [2001p Committee, [at the] University of Wits. Because everything was a 'Crisis Committee' in those days! There were really only like five or six of us. In the meantime, I had been elected onto the committee of the Workers Library; it was a sort of a left takeover of the Workers Library in about 1999, because we had an elected committee. People like me and Michael Schmidt, [Nicole Ulrich, later Virginia Setshedi, Mondli Hlatswayo] ...we basically took over the Workers Library and that's when we set up, like, a Workers' Bookshop [plus workshops, meeting spaces]. That's was also when we set up [another] a Broad Left kind of thing [we partnered with Khanya College] which I think was a very healthy development actually.

Interviewer : So just talk us through a little bit of about how that Wits 2001 Crisis Committee and what was going on, on this campus and how that sort of led itself into what eventually became the APF?

Van der Walt: Alright well, like I say, in 1999, 1998/'99, we were all trying to engage on the Left, a lot of us, it was kind of my generation: the early '90s [crowd] who were [still] on campus. So that age. A lot of us were post-grads and ex-students, so we didn't have a lot of pull down in the lower levels [of students]. What we did was we set up this Crisis Committee, partly because we couldn't really get SASCO on board properly [and also worked well by ourselves]. NEHAWU was kind of playing a bit fast-and-loose: I was also going to NEHAWU meetings [as a I now had a job]. And we basically made contacts with people in NEHAWU at the headquarters in town, I

forget the guy's names ... [it was Tebego Phadu, David Makhura – and at Wits, the key figure was Dan Motaung]. Anyway so we made links with those guys, we made links with some unionists and we started this whole big campaign. Nicholas Dieltiens [formerly SASCO] was involved [also others: Ahmed Veriava, Daniel Hutchinson, plus Nicole Ulrich from the Postgraduate Association]. And a lot of it was doing media stuff and just trying to kind of disrupt the flow of things at Wits, and we tried to build links as well. Some of us had some contacts at the Anti-Igoli Forum as well, which was meeting (I think) at the Carlton Centre or down that side? Well somewhere down there. So some of us had contacts ... people like Rob Rees whom we knew. And as we built up this campaign, it became bigger and bigger, and the problem was, there was a bunch of us and we were doing a lot of stuff and at times we were able to pull together, like, quite big marches of students there. But it was more difficult bringing on the unions because the [Wits] union was basically banned in terms of like we [NEHAWU] can't picket on employer's premises - and they [Wits] went through all the rules and Wits made them protest on the side of the road! Which was kind of stupid. But there were a few big protests we pulled off, and a bunch of symbolic things. And I pulled a bunch of academics together like Glenn Adler, myself, Sakhela Buhlungu, Bridget Kenney [and Greg Ruiters. The 'Concerned Academics Group']. We did a whole big 150 page critique of the whole outsourcing process - so that's how we were also trying to pull together academics. So we built some links with the academics, we built links with the undergrad students; we had some goodish links with the unions. So anyway the whole thing comes to a head. All these workers got fired [and their jobs outsourced, in mid-2000; around 620 workers]; the union essentially - and I've never been to a NEHAWU meeting since, I'll be quite frank about that - the union essentially ducked and dived on the whole thing, put its faith in a procedural claim against the university, that in hadn't properly implemented Section 182 [of the LRA]. And now in the best case? It means they would fire people *later*. Eventually the union settled out of court for some undisclosed figure on some undisclosed terms. It made no effort to keep the unemployed together. So figuring that the union was probably not going to do much, and while those who had been retrenched were around, we pulled them into the protests. Because they had nothing to lose. And then Wits did this Urban Futures thing [a conference] and we were able, there to disrupt a lot of this stuff. Like, there was this meeting with Kenny Fihla who had been running the Igoli 2002 stuff [municipal restructuring] and [Wits VC] Colin Bundy who had done the Wits 2001 stuff and I mean these guys were calling for "locating Wits in the city". And this was like golden propaganda at Urban Futures: so we called it 'Disrupting whose Urban Futures?', you know putting a *neo-liberal* Wits in a *neo-liberal* city and making the links. And we disrupted their activities down at the Market Theatre, but the big one was at the Wits [Great] Hall and we disrupted that, basically kicked the doors open, we chased Bundy and Fihla off the stage – I don't know if Fihla was still there. There are some photos I can find if you really want them. And John [Appolis, unionist] gave a speech and all that and then I got called by Ahmed. He said "We have met with the guys from the Igoli Forum and we can merge, would we like to join?" We were very keen. So that's where it came into [being, the APF]. So the APF theoretically had NEHAWU Wits involved, and theoretically had SACSO Wits involved, as far as I remember, and it also (because the Anti-Igoli Forum had a bigger [SACP sort of presence], Clive Swan used to come. It was very different [at the time, to later] and over time it kind of shifted. The whole Wits thing [radical protest scene] shifted and disappeared entirely. And a whole lot of Wits activists also dropped out. Ja, so I don't know whether that covers it.

Interviewer: ... absolutely.

Van der Walt: But basically you see these two big struggles [anti-Wits 2001 and anti-Igoli 2000] converged, and it was in the context when people were very keen on unity. What was exciting about that period, is that a lot of people that were [involved were] on the kind of, the far left. were operating on the margins of the Congress [ANC] movement. Sometimes you would get a Congress thing like SASCO Wits which was much more radical and that created a space for

people like Prishani and Heinrich and that. But generally speaking that was the thing, the far left, the “ultra-left” was on the margins. And in this context, we suddenly found ourselves with a movement and with institutions! De facto we had the Workers Library, de facto we had played the leading role at Wits where the Congress people really hadn’t played a role, de facto we linked to a whole lot of community movements, and all under the banner of “against neo-liberalism” which allowed us to also pose questions around the ANC which the Congress people generally wouldn’t, or would sort of fumble. So it was very exciting.

Interviewer: And how did you understand the specific issues around privatisation, and why the APF called itself the APF or came to be that?

Van der Walt: My understanding of it was partly signalled by the name “*Anti* Privatisation Forum”. Because I think it’s partly, it’s just around that time was the rise of the anti- globalisation movement (because 1999 is also Seattle); so that was for a lot of us, at least here, in our minds. But very much like that “anti globalisation” movement, “anti privatisation” galvanised a whole range of resistance but without necessarily a clear programme of what that would *mean*. You know it was more, what we are *against* than what we are *for*. We are against something [Wits 2001, Igoli 2002 and so on], and this creates possibilities for a new future but less certitude about what the big answers are - coalition building with a wide range of people. And that’s my understanding of a lot of it. Although a socialist programme did get adopted [later in the APF], the “anti” was a key thing, and also signalling privatisation as the issue, as opposed to forming it as a rival party to the ANC, or as a form of another “mass worker party” kind of fiasco [referring to failed attempts at forming ANC rivals]. That’s my understanding but I don’t recall exactly.

Interviewer: Just as much as you can recall what led up to the actual formal constitution of the APF? As far as you remember who was involved in that?

Van der Walt: As far as I remember the APF got [formed], that decision was done in about mid-2000, somewhere around there. There was a further meeting 2 months later: I think it was about September or something? Well, [before] then the APF was proceeding with its Monday night meetings, which was de facto executive. Also kind of very much based on that kind of “suburban left”, all kind of intellectual types. Which was all fine and that’s where a lot of work happened. But then there was a second layer of work which was going on, which was organising work with people like Trevor [Ngwane] making the networks, making the connections. So a lot of people rocked up at the [September] “founding”, which ... people had already seen their names on paper, or met this comrade here and there [but not usually on Mondays]. Cause this ... things were like 7 at [Monday] night in COSATU house in Joburg [so they couldn’t easily attend from townships]. So there was a hell of a lot of township comrades, and certainly people coming further afield in the Vaal and the East Rand [at the September event]. One of the issues I remember was the creation of just how strict the thing should be. Does APF have individual membership? You know as I recall a lot of that. The [winning] idea was you would rather grow it by affiliation. These communities would rather affiliate to the Forum, and they would have a certain amount of autonomy. So there was quite a lot of variation in structures, different political structures coming in. But you would join the APF as an organisation. And I think financially as well, but I don’t know whether there were as well, but then I’m pretty sure, there was no membership fee, there was no formal signing of members. It was very loose. But posts were created, the constitution was sort of set up and we set up these [regular, expanded] Consultative Committees. Which was like expanded every couple of months. Each organisation would bring their representatives in. [And there were also present], those were the office bearer types like Treasurer. I was one of the Media Officers. I think Nicholas Dieltiens was in? Ja, we were the two Media Officers at the time. I was also meant to be the head of the Research Committee, Research Information Committee so I was doing those. This is where we would meet all the leadership of the different community organisations, and they were very varied. These guys from the Vaal Working Class Committee, which had their roots in MAWU and NUMSA and... their whole thing they came in a bloc and they had, like, a caucus. And this

whole bunch kept breaking off to discuss and then come back! And compared to some of the others who were much more based in big figure politics? Like the East Rand brought the Kathorus Concerned Residents which was much more based (I forget the comrades' name the one, he is late, he got murdered for a cell phone) ... really they were based in old school populist politics. You know there was the kind of workerism and populism [split here]! The big leader, he has got "it" and the organisation has like a weird crazy platform, and you can't quite get what they're coming with ... and then [people] like Trevor who was a bit of a mix. But I mean he was the big guy there, so that's what I remember. We set up a fairly loose structure, and once the structure was starting to take place we started ... we were doing media statements and press releases, and with that we [also] were trying to reach out to COSATU because those guys were pulling out. And this was the thing. Because when we set up I think the [SA]CP stayed until the end of the year on paper but it was basically Clive Swan and they never really came in. NEHAWU never really came in and SAMWU was sort of luke warm and somewhere IMATU came in and (of all people!) FEDUSA came in a little bit. And then of course all of our Left groups popped up, and by then I was in another one, called Bikisha Media. But it was more of a Broad Left thing, anarchist-based, [but] theoretically open ... so all those Left groups rocked up. Anyway once we got the media going on, we were trying to reach out to COSATU. So we kept trying to go to COSATU events which kind of worked. They were trying to amend the LRA and we all rocked up for a march but COSATU didn't! I think ... it [the march] was where NEDLAC used to meet. We were trying to keep those links with the unions going but it was unclear. We eventually got pushed out of COSATU House because we were meeting at the AIDC office, I think, and the AIDC got pushed out there ... we couldn't bring them on board. And all the Wits constituency disappeared partly because NEHAWU here [Wits] failed to keep its unemployed workers together; they just disintegrated ... you know a whole lot of bunch of unemployed people... desperate. NEHAWU never built a campaign. And NEHAWU leadership here was Dan Motaung who was sort of involved (he seemed to be involved in the legal case) and it was Vusi Nhlapho (who was a Wits shop steward but he was the head of the union and was a full time shop steward, he was basically President of the union): they never got involved at all and we had no direct connection [to the retrenched Wits members]. We fucked up there. We didn't manage to keep up that connection with the unemployed [from Wits]. There were some very good comrades, but we never managed to get them on board. By that stage Lesedi Socialist Study Group (which had gone from being a study group to trying to be an activist group within the Wits Crisis Committee) basically dissolved into the Wits Crisis Committee and that really never recovered. So we lost the Wits connection, and for those of us who had been involved from the start - like Nicholas and me - we had put all our time into that. So the Wits side disappeared [when we shifted to the APF]. So, we didn't get the union support, we had kind of lost the Wits connection. *But* we had brought in all these communities. And then we decided we needed money to start doing regular workshops. So I think me and Melanie Samson came up with the first financial proposal. And we needed to get out some information so I produced (I think) two of them ... the *Anti Privatisation Monitor* ... which a certain professor at the P&DM was printing on the side there, and another professor on this [East] campus was printing on the side here. So we were doing those sort of things as well. And then we started holding regular workshops as well. And at some point along that this created a process where a more formal set of objectives around socialism was adopted. An election platform was adopted, the possibility of using elections tactically was bought in, but whether that involved a "mass worker party" or anything was left very vague.

Interviewer: So in your experience of those formative years, what was what I call the ideological heterogeneity: would you have considered that a strength, given the kind of posing it against as you where working people are coming from, being marginalised?

Van der Walt: Yeah, I liked it. I mean you know the problem is I think that a lot of people on the far left come out of small groups, and small groups are kind of in a Catch 22 situation: because

it's small it is not serious enough to get more members but because it can't get more members it stays small, so around and around you go. So people who came in ... you know it was a whole bunch of us from Wits, and people like Weizman Hamilton from the DSM which had formed from Tendency – MWT I think. Keep Left of course came in and Trevor's group and all the supposedly non-existent groups were all there. Nina Benjamin and them too [the Khanya people; Nina was also in the Workers Library]. So I quite liked that. I think it was quite nice. I do think in that early period, at least, say, the influence of people like John or Trevor wielded wasn't something that was artificial or manipulated. I mean they had the experience, the skill and the standing to get, for example, the election programme thing on (you know back when they were still getting on a bit better). So I think that early thing was a good thing, I think it was like very much in sync with where a lot of us were. Like, okay, you are going out and there is this "An Alternative World is Possible" [mood], this kind of World Social Forum with many kinds of voices, everybody is in and unity ... this very much followed on from what like Lesedi had done and what we had done at the Worker's Library in creating a space, but creating a space there. And even the successor of the Workers Solidarity Federation, was Bikisha Media where the idea wasn't to build another small group but to build a left wing publishing-workshop sort of group which theoretically would be open to libertarians, socialists, autonomists, anarchists and Left Marxists. So this was very much in those lines, it was great. I think the bigger problem wasn't heterogeneity; we cooperated, although we debated lots. [It was the loose APF structure]. I'm not a fan of things that aren't too structured because when you've got something that is *formally* unstructured [or open] and when these guys are like "we mustn't do this" and "you don't have to have any leaders" or whatever, what happens is that you get a tyranny, you get a whole lot of networks emerging de facto. And I think over time power did tend to shift more and more to people like Trevor, especially once they became full time organisers and we had a budget for that sort of thing, to sustain that. You know I think over time that was part of the problem. I don't think heterogeneity was the problem, I think a lack of a structure which could allow a lot of these things to happen, that was the one problem. The other thing I felt – and bear in mind that I left in about 2002 - the other thing I felt for myself was we were building *at the top*. We had our all various intellectuals, ideologues and skilled organisers and all that ... to the extent that we were trying to push like a more radical consciousness, how far was it going down to the bottom? I think a lot of us were spending our time – and I do feel for you as the treasurer, Dale! ... but as media officer I was spending all my time doing press statements which is fine. but I mean I felt personally I could spend my time better, engaging with people in the base organisations directly through another format, for example, through the Bikisha format, that's what I felt and that's where I put my time [from 2002]. So the structurelessness was *one* problem. I guess what I'm saying is that the other problem was that we had that whole [far left] core which was all clear and everything, could give you like detailed views on what happened in Kronstadt in 1921 but a bit of a disconnect between that layer and the [leading] people that we're interacting with the organisations, and ordinary people in the organisations. And we saw it the evening before we went to the World Conference against Racism [WCAR, 2001], [saw it] where we were having a workshop at the Worker's Library. There was a comrade from Kathorus Concerned Residents and he said, "Yes comrades! Racism is a very big issue because the amaXhosa are like taking all our houses". And we all like did the damn thing of interventions [to smooth it over]. But it just made me wonder: some of these comrades had been in the organisation for like a year, and its basic stuff that was not being addressed you know. I think it was also a problem in the format of the workshops where, by focusing so much on neo-liberalism and the political economy of neo-liberalism, these sort of things, we often didn't interrogate deeper assumptions that comrades might have had about how the world works. So I think it was an incomplete job that we were doing at the time.

Interviewer: And much of that did over time change, in later years when there were more structures and a lot of other things ...

Van der Walt: It sounds like it from what've heard ... but certainly in that early thing, I think heterogeneity was good but the structure was a problem, the education was a problem and that gap...

Interviewer: And just speak a little bit to ... as you said the vast majority of people who came together at least initially, either came from organised political groupings, some were from the Alliance ... and yet within a very short period of time, within 2 years, it was predominately community based organisations outside of all these structures. Why do you think that happened at that particular conjuncture and was able to happen like that?

Van der Walt: Look, I think one of the things that looked quite hopeful about that early thing was precisely that we brought in left Congress people (I suppose like these CDL people are trying to do), trying to engage that layer. And I think a large part of it [their exit] was just the politics of the Alliance, I think it's a huge part of that precisely because the APF brought in people who had been kicked out of the Congress structures, John Appolis, yourself, Trevor. And because it was a home for people with you know, dissident views, strong views and Left views, they [Alliance people] were reluctant to engage us. And I think from our side we were reluctant to tone down the politics of the APF – seeing that we had finally got the space - to accommodate them. I mean to accommodate what? I mean, people who had expelled Trevor from the ANC for voting against Igoli2002, you know! It wasn't so much a failing of us, but it was the withdrawal of a large part of the people in the Alliance and a lot of pressure on people in the Alliance to step away from us as “ultra lefts”. And that's tied to a lot of the politics of COSATU, of “saving the soul” of the ANC at all costs. The real alliance [for COSATU] was to build, like, a neo-liberal party [the ANC]! As opposed to real alliances built with the other sections of the working class ... and you know exactly what I'm talking about here. So COSATU was still tied into that ... This was also that Mbeki period of COSATU. Later on everyone was so rebellious against Mbeki, but then he very much set the tone as authoritarian, paranoid, “there is a third force here”, “there is a third force there” and people were like [“okay”]. Well let me give you an example, I won't mention names. They would say, it's so funny with the APF there are a lot of Americans involved there, like the Patrick Bonds and Dale. What the fuck, Dale is a Zimbabwean, man! You know, originally. So that sort of bad politics in the Alliance was a big part of it. I think also where the APF would have headed is somewhere that would have taken it into (and did) direct confrontation with the structures of state power manned by the ANC, staffed by the ANC, and that's exactly what it did. I mean the campaigns that the APF was doing? We weren't fighting against some arbitrary capitalist, white monopoly capital in some, like, factory district you know. These were campaigns in some shit poor black community *against the ANC*. Who else was it against? So that was too much for COSATU to stomach I think. And definitely for the [SA]CP, even the Jo'burg Central, which was one of the better of the CP branches. I mean, cause, as you know the [SA]CP campaigns tended to be into anything that *wouldn't* bring any conflict into the ANC Alliance, like Red October [campaigns], where you do a whole campaign against the banks because not getting a loan in Soweto is your immediate problem?! That's the biggest burning problem it's the most obvious problem, not even a job!? I suppose the seeds of it were even here at Wits. I think one of the very last of the NEHAWU meetings I went to here was in 2000 - 2000 was the local government elections, am I right? - so NEHAWU here, the shop steward committee brings in an ANC speaker. “Comrades must vote for the ANC!” I was like, “what the hell is this? You know, comrades had just been hammered by this neo liberal stuff!” “Okay comrade, that's a good point” [says the chair, Dan Motaung]. And the next speaker gets closed down. And then he says “Yes comrades, as comrade Lucien has said, the problem is the neo-liberals, you must vote to keep them out. We mean people like Tony Leon, you must vote to keep the neo-liberals out because its Tony Leon, comrades and the DA, which is privatising at Wits not the ANC, we must Vote ANC to defend transformation”! So that bad politics, that paranoia and the irrationality of it. But I do think the last thing is maybe that so many people in key parts of the organisation [APF] had come from the so-called “ultra-left”. But outside of

Congress I do think there is a sectarianism on the side of many of those comrades, on our side, I don't think it's blameless. I think some of those comrades were too quick to make arguments that wrote off COSATU, too quick to make arguments like using Buhlungu's books. I think you actually did a review? It could have been read as saying COSATU is more of a labour aristocracy. I think there was a bit of sectarianism on our side towards that [COSATU]. I mean it's not an easy thing to resolve. Like I say, if we had had a proper *toenadering* with these guys we might have had to compromise more than we were willing. I do think for some people there was a tendency to too easily write off COSATU. Never mind the ANC. But COSATU, COSATU to the extent where the APF eventually did a separate May Day. Now how do we explain that? We can blame COSATU a bit, but is the APF not also a bit to blame there? As far I can see - but like I say I was exiting - as far as I see, [some] effort was to actually reach out to COSATU and they declined: we did send out invitations a couple of times). But [often] people just found it easier to deal with community organisations and bypass that. I don't know if it all makes sense but that's my general impression. Another example would be the way the Khanya College people like Oupa Lehulere and them, essentially wrote off unions ... this whole debate [in *Khanya* magazine], totally wrote them off and totally uncritically praised everything in the new social movements as the "new proletarian vanguard". Reality is more complicated. There are lots of problems in the new social movements and lots of good things in COSATU. So this was my impression. I don't know if I characterised your review correctly but I think it did read a little ...

Interviewer: It could have, well I mean it could have been read like that but I mean as the trajectory of the APF there at times has been a little bit of a short-sighted reading of what the APF has tried to do with COSATU because over the years every single picket, every single strike we've been there, sent comrades, we've tried to build at the grassroots level ...

Van der Walt: So it *has* continued ...

Interviewer: But you see it's mostly at the rank and file level [of COSATU] ... you realise that the people up there are not interested.

Van der Walt: Why would they be interested when they kicked us out of COSATU House?

Interviewer: We tried to build community-worker linkages ...

Van der Walt: No that's fine ... like I'm saying when I'm talking about the APF I'm talking about that first 2 or 3 years.

Interviewer: No, absolutely, and that's exactly what I wanted to hear because I mean as you say we are not trying to create this sort of lovely picture ... there are a whole range of problems, a whole range of contradictions as well...

Van der Walt: But I mean although the APF in many cases would have done that, there were people linked into that structure who were quite [anti-COSATU]...if you look at Oupa and them and their positions, that would presumably include people like Nina ... and then John splitting off to set up GIWUSA. All of these things which essentially, they do reflect a withdrawal from systematic engagement, I think, with COSATU. There may be initiatives of various things, but I think overall the distance is huge, and I think the approaches to me, they still sound like they were a bit ad-hoc. I suppose the question was the priority at the time ...

Interviewer: Yes at a certain level because you're building, trying to build a movement based on community structures and that links to the next question I was going to ask you ... the degree to which the base constituency of what came to dominate the APF; non-worker, predominantly unemployed, predominantly in classical Marxist terms what would be considered a *lumpen* of some sort. How did you experience that in terms of the kind of politics as well as the kind of organisation that arose out of that?

Van der Walt: I mean in some ways there is a weird gulf in the working class right, and that's the actual layer we'd got. I mean how many workers, actual factory workers who were *from those neighbourhoods* were actually coming to our things? I think the one thing about working with the "lumpen proletariat" is the absolute desperation of a lot of people and that does create a

lot of pressures on organisations. I remember one of our early [APF] Treasurers did run away with money ... ran away with quite a bit of money. But, you see, that is partly the desperation of that layer, absolute desperation, absolute poverty; surviving long-term, unemployed, can often generate an individualised sort of thing. You can come to protests and when there is a big event you'll come, but in terms of that consistent disciplined political work that you often get in a union, regular structured meetings and that sort of discipline, is often not there and that is the situation that ... doesn't *inevitably* have to, but often lends itself to, [a] sort of big man politics, where there's one or two very sincere comrades who are holding it together and then they've got this sort of mass there who rock up at things but are not really involved: they are there for the protests. I think their desperation and that sort of fragmented nature of that [layer]. I think the other thing about it is, as with many struggles, people *are* being mobilised but people are being mobilised around quite a *short-term* issue. Like say you've got like a union, where people are fighting in that factory for like 40 years and they get a wage increase: that doesn't pull the teeth of the movement at all, you know people are structurally positioned in a way that they will fight again, they are actually given more money, [and still]: "I want more money!" But a lot of these movements, because there are so many people who are desperate and who are coming up against [the system], the shoe is pinching. And the state like writes off a huge debt! It's very, very destabilising. As it takes that immediate pressure off, a lot of people disappear. And there is nothing really to organise them other than the grievance, as opposed to a factory where a lot of people are organised by the very experience of being put together in a constant process. But I think these are the difficulties of community organisations: it is not an argument *against* community organisations, but to me it is definitely an argument around a tactical thing, about [the consequences of our] structurelessness. I mean we should have possibly considered being a bit more emphatic about building more democratic structures in those communities, more of a street committee /block committee sort of model [to set down deep roots]. Something like that, rather than relying on say Trevor to deliver the SECC [Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee] to a rally on buses we've paid for, with food provided afterwards. I think we should have built clearer, deeper structures, rather than knowing a couple of people, there's this whole mass that are not necessarily being structurally, systematically and carefully, democratically, being drawn in. So I think that's the way you'd have to resolve it. I'm not making a kind of argument around dismissing that layer but an argument more consciously built on the best stuff of the 1980s like street committees, whatever the problems might have been. But something like [Matthew] Goniwe was doing in the Eastern Cape, street committees, block committees and ward committees. I think that would have made us more resilient and less reliant on a few personalities. Because when there's this reliance on personalities, and when these personalities have a fall out, see what happens. You have a fall-out in the SECC, a split, people leave, Trevor gets pushed out [referring to a split in the SECC]. So I think we could have been more reflective. But then again, we were working under a lot of pressure trying to do a lot of stuff, It is very easy in hindsight, always 20/20 ...

Interviewer: But that's also things to learn as well ...

Van der Walt: Absolutely, but I would definitely say the structurelessness was a big problem: this is a concrete example of it and it is particularly pertinent with a layer like this.

Interviewer: ... there were two very big mobilisations in 2001 and 2002 - WCAR and WSSD - and many people have described WSSD as sort of the coming out of the APF in some ways . How did you at that time because you were still there, how did you see those two events help structure or formulate that early APF? And also its involvement with a whole range of other movements that were coming on board outside Gauteng and Johannesburg?

Van der Walt: Well I was starting moving out by the time of the WSSD, and I wasn't involved in a lot of the run up on that. With the World Conference against Racism, I was very involved with that, I went down and we took over the trains, and basically hijacked about 3 or 4 carriages with about 400 people [twice those with actual tickets]. It was all great fun. We went down there and

slept in a tent together. And things like that. That was all good 'cause we linked up and at the World Conference, there was *everybody*, partly because when the ruling class sets up these forums everybody gets there to get a bit of press time. So the biggest constituency there was probably like the Palestinian lot, because in Durban there's a big Muslim community. Some of those groups [at WCAR] were very uneven: I mean you had the Landless People's Movement [LPM] then that was when Andile [Mngxitama] was still involved, a complicated character I must say, But it was great, and it made us feel part of something. It was important. Very much a kind of Seattle-meets- South Africa kind of moment. It was very inspiring and I enjoyed it. I was quite inspired by that. I think the problem with the WSSD is that comrades' evaluations weren't hard-nosed enough. I think we were too quick to count our numbers there compared to how much the Congress people mobilised for the WSSD and, from that, read-off a larger shift in the balance of forces that wasn't necessarily there because we were able to get more people than COSATU [at WSSD]. And that I think we got an exaggerated sense of our strength, whereas COSATU doesn't *need* that demonstration to prove *anything*, it's *irrelevant* to COSATU actually whether it attends or not, because its power isn't lying there. It's this huge structured organisation with billions of rands and millions of members ... and I think that we deluded ourselves a bit too much on that [march]. I know there were various things around building larger initiatives and networks around the country linking up with the Anti Eviction Campaign people, linking up with the LPM and then eventually the Social Movement Indaba got set up. When I was around, I don't think Abahlali had really emerged in Durban and I know the complications of Abahlali [baseMjondolo] and its relationship with the Social Movement Indaba [in Durban] and all that, which I will not get into. But yeah, I suppose it was good for the coalition building. I think it was good for that, but I really do think that looking back at some of that now it is like "wow, a bit of hubris there". I think many thought there was a much bigger breakthrough going than there was.

Interviewer: How do you think ... you were talking about how at a political level, the Alliance - particularly the ANC - responded to first formation; but once some of the campaigns and actual practical physical activities got underway the way in which the state and the ANC responded: how do you think that affected the APF politics and its approach?

Van der Walt: Well its partly the question of what we wanted to achieve relative to the state, and this is the part where the "anti" comes up. It is partly where the problems of framing things as "anti" come up. When the state is simply repressing people (and you know in those early times say like in Pimville it was very crude, like cutting off electricity for the entire block even if you've paid, and [officials] saying "sort your fucking neighbour out, [and the power comes back in]"), then it was quite simple and all that. When the state, when Jeff Radebe [Minister of Public Enterprises] was calling us a "bunch of criminals" and all that - it was quite easy to do that to polarise the things. But when the state got quite a bit more sophisticated then, I think we struggled a bit to deal with that. And then some people drew conclusions which took the APF, in my mind, down a problematic road. When the state wrote off a lot of debts - in particular Soweto's huge electricity arrears - and then brought in the Free Basic Water and Free Basic Electricity, I think that really disoriented people. First because it did not fit that neatly with the argument that the ANC was simply neo-liberal; obviously in my view it [these changes] was a victory of the working class: we basically forcibly de-commodified a whole range of things that the state had been trying to commodify. But it could, for a lot of people, be construed as, "you know the problem is not the state as such or the ANC as such, it is just a bad policy, not really well thought out, so let's engage them more". So that was the one thing. The second thing is that it also deflated a lot of the struggles, because I mean those were immediate things ... because when we started you'd get like long bills from Eskom which some poor old grandmother in Phiri was getting, where she owed like R15 000, she will go to the Eskom office, the Eskom office will basically dick her around and [[she comes to us]... then a lot of the stuff was just gone. You know it was sort of like, "what we do now?" We've actually kind of won something! The threat of victory! We didn't know really where to go from there. So I think one of

the things there, one of the problems was that for some people this suggested an opening in the state. And this I think was the road to the APF taking up court cases. Because that's a very different thing; if you're trying to build a movement what is its relationship with the state? Is it another yet social movement which will engage with the state, and slowly get involved in its institutions, or is it more oppositional, in some way forming an alternative pole of power for the working class *outside* of the state? I think going into these court cases is a very good example of a very big shift in the APF from fighting the neo-liberal ANC state – [to] accepting its courts and its grants and all these ... but otherwise we can still use them and their laws. I think there is a big shift there, a softening in relation to state and the ANC.

Interviewer: Just to follow on that ... how much do you think the impetus for that came from the politicians, the intellectuals or the grassroots?

Van der Walt: I'd imagine it came from both. But this is a perfect case where the politicians needed to have a stronger argument and a stronger engagement: what the hell is the state? I mean we spoke all the time about capitalism and we spoke all the time about neo-liberalism, I mean, what the hell is the state [in all this]? We spoke about the election tactic and that sort of thing but [not about] *what is the state?* What is the role of the state? Because that determines the positions one must take. You know this thing came up several times in the APF - I always wasn't there - but the question of whether the APF would field candidates. It was? Yeah, the second local government elections? I think it came up there: what is the state? I think this whole unresolved thing, with this whole theoretical backdrop that wasn't really being tackled. And then if it came from the base, it was a question of whether the politicians just go with the flow, or if it came from the politicians, then it's a question of why these issues weren't debated more clearly? I'm not convinced by the argument to go for these things at all. But I think it's a shift in the APF, it's a shift [rightwards] in that it sets it down the road to replicating some of the mistakes that COSATU has made which is getting involved in all the policy processes along with the bureaucratisation, cooptation and patronage with the state that that involves.

Interviewer: You were around when the APF - right at the beginning - when the APF got its first substantial resources from outside. How do you think that accessing that?

Van der Walt: On reflection, on reflection, I would not have done it a second time simply because this is one of the mess-ups we made. No membership, no clear membership criteria, no clear structures beyond like the kind of Monday night office bearer/ "suburban left" kind of thing and these Consultative Committees, and community activities. Okay, so no membership, no clear structure and on top of that we had no dues to pay. Now I understand that's the constituency, but I mean if you could build the unions here in the '70s where people had to pay dues I think we should have done that as well; because ultimately it made us increasingly dependent on outside funding. Who did we get the first money from - I think it was Oxfam or something?

Interviewer: Oxfam and then War On Want ...

Van der Walt: I think that was a mistake as well. I was involved: I think me and Melanie wrote that first proposal. It was mistake, I think, in terms of reducing the autonomy of the organisation, and in terms of creating tensions around money, inevitable in that sort of constituency. This is part and parcel of the problem, I understand with Trevor and the SECC, was that you know he's got a few resources in an incredibly poor community and who gets the resources? His buds [some said]. There's the recipe for huge clashes. You know I had this friend in Motsoaledi [squatter camp] behind Bara hospital and he is walking along, him and two of his friends, and he drops 5 bucks and his friends say: "what the fuck man! You didn't tell us you had 5 bucks!" And there was a huge argument. Now that's the desperation of the layer, right? So I think if you start talking about serious money, and you start tying this to, like Trevor going over to New York and stuff, Virginia starting to do trips, a few comrades starting to get access to universities? There is a bit of a problem. So in retrospect it might have been better [not to] ... And where all my things go, is to have a structured organisation based on the most democratically possible,

decentralised. clear structures, [with solid radical education], but outside the state and clearly independent of the state. Not one which is, on the one hand, very critical of the state but, on the other hand, extremely glad to use the state's machinery and grants in the hopes that the same cops that are walloping people will now ensure that the water is turned on.

Interviewer: If you were just to look at ... I mean as you said you left from late 2002 ... if you looked at that period that we have just talked about what would you say would have been at that point, the key achievements of the APF and also - you've already mentioned some of them but maybe you would want to add - the key failures?

Van der Walt: Well, look the achievements were many. The one is that these post-apartheid social movements had been emerging ... like I think it there was a big thing in Tembisa in '97 [massive protest against ANC electricity policy; Phadu was involved]. ... and these were, like, sporadic and would disappear... this [APF] actually brought together and consolidated a whole lot of these organisations. and it's no small achievement when working with community organisations - besides churches and that kind of thing. Actually built the stuff and consolidated a movement around that. Secondly it linked up a whole layer, rather let me say the independent Left with a constituency. That was great, I mean I don't think that sort of access had been there since the early '80s, and with the rise of the ANC in the '80s, a lot of that space was just gone. And third, uniting a whole range of people on the Left and in the communities - just the very fact of unity, never mind the access for the left - but just the fact that we were able to start building coalitions and eventually start taking this country-wide and start building international networks. Fourth, I think the struggles mattered. I think you know: people won a lot, getting those debts written off, getting free basic water was bloody brilliant! That was a hell of an achievement. I mean we *stopped the state*, we stopped the state commodifying basic things -in a limited way true -but a decommodification *from below*, basically through those struggles helped. Not solely the APF but the APF was an important part of the struggle. Helped de facto to prevent the commodification of those resources, and the state had to accommodate to that. I mean what it did when they wrote off those debts? They were essentially recognising a fact on the ground that we had already helped create. When the state started giving free water, it was recognising the fact that they couldn't actually enforce their policies all right, then and there. So it had big victories in that sense. I think the last thing was, although this did not last throughout this entire period, but the last thing was also managing to get a link initially to some people in the Congress unions which I think is very important and even FEDUSA [the conservative Federation of Unions of SA]- was IMATU [Independent Municipal and Allied Trade Union] part of FEDUSA then?

Interviewer: Yes

Van der Walt: I mean that was a hell of a thing, I mean it's not exactly the layer [FEDUSA] that is going to storm the Winter Palace! But that was important stuff. That union- community link was great So, I think those would be the main strengths. And oh, the last thing, I think, would be in terms of building institutions. You know the thing got linked to the Workers' Library and later got linked to Khanya. The Workers' Library has been revived and there was like a certain amount of media capacity. At one stage Trevor and them had a radio going [in Pimville]. A significant amount of material was produced, like quite an effective media apparatus. So you know actually building counter-institutions I think it was great. Weaknesses? I think I've gone through most of those: the loose structure, maybe a bit unreflective on the layers we were working in, the failure to maintain a sort of systematic engagement with COSATU et al. But I should say the thing is that by 2002 I was pretty much burnt out, so any of my judgements will be coloured a bit by that. Because I come out of 4-5 years [militancy]; I'd been in a situation where I'd been like Vice-Chair of the Worker's Library, active in the Wits Crisis Committee, in Bikisha; I was running these things called Red and Black Forums, got involved as the APF's Media Officer and as Chair of its research committee. On top of that I was teaching full time and, ja, so I was going through a bit of a difficult time. So my judgment for 2002 is probably not to be relied upon too

much. Because a lot of what I remember then was trying to get the fuck out of all those commitments. This is also why my PHD took until 2007. I registered - originally it was a Masters which then converted into PhD - so I registered in about 1997. So all this. And also I was in Lesedi! So you know I'm not totally reliable for that last bit.

Interviewer: That's the important thing - all views are equal in this context. It's amazing actually - I mean I have already conducted about 15-20 interviews and I started with the core comrades who were there at the beginning and the different interpretations and memories and understandings is fascinating, it absolutely fascinating. Depending upon where people are coming from and their own personal circumstances ... in a particular period of time you will get different perspectives, a totally different understanding and totally different perspectives on what was going on. Some quite common stuff you know the basic stuff ... and that's make it interesting in a lot of ways.

Van der Walt: I suppose the other thing is that I wasn't the only one who started leaving at the time, a lot of the Wits people left?

Interviewer: Yes, by 2002 a lot of, as you said ... from Wits, the unions and a certain number of individual activists were already on their way out if not already there.

Van der Walt: Prishani and them couldn't have been around for too much longer ...?

Interviewer: Prishani was around until about 2006 ... for another 3 or 4 years.

Van der Walt: I mean, there were all these other projects that people were involved in. I suppose that's the other thing, we did a lot and we really didn't prioritise. I mean not as an organisation, as in the APF but key militants, we didn't prioritise. I was one of those who just did more and more [stuff, rather than prioritise]. But like Prishani and them started running IndyMedia. And then when we stepped down at the Workers Library they actually got elected: Prishani, Ahmed and Nic[olas], and I don't think they were really able to do much there. So ja, I think a lot of that layer sort of left then.

Interviewer: And there are a couple of other questions; you were the Media Officer - first, what kind of things were you saying about the APF, what was the message that was going out? What was being covered and how was the reception?

Van der Walt. Okay. In terms of reception, I mean we got picked up basically I suppose by the traditionally black press. So there was like no problem with the *Sowetan*; *City Press* would always pick up our stuff even if they just stuck it in a letter column, the whole thing, so we had no real problem getting access there. I would also say in Durban [WCAR], if anything, I was spending a lot of time talking with [media] people and we got picked up quite easily: access wasn't a problem, of course, garbled like the media always does. We did a lot of press statements and there was a lot of work. We did press statements; (a) about activities here and (b) in response to things that the state did. You know, like if the state ... I think at around that time the state was talking about acceleration of the privatisation, so I mean we could respond quickly to those things but we also responded on things that didn't directly affect the APF but which were about solidarity with other movements and helped to build links. So we made statements. Well I made statements on / for COSATU and the changes in the LRA and some of the repression that was happening down in the Western Cape. I can remember a couple of times getting a phone call in the middle of the night like, "comrade can you get a statement done?" So that was a lot of the press side. The other part of it was material for activities, you know. So like this is where Nic [Nicolas] was really, really good. I mean I did the press statements and this stuff, and what he would mainly do was a lot of banners and stuff like that. I remember one or two marches ... there was this one march where there was a wonderful banner, and the poor bugger left it in the APF office and people were running up and down! That was a great banner but it never actually made it to the march! But that sort of stuff [I also did] leaflets, hand-bills. And a big emphasis was always on translation. For instance, I think Trevor translated a bit, Andile translated a bit. In terms of *internal* media proper, there were things like the *Anti- Privatisation Monitor*. I think the original idea was that it would be like one of those '80s

sort of Struggle Barometer things (which was ludicrously beyond our capacity), so it ended up being – the two that got produced – like reports from communities which would be translated into a few languages, plus an analysis or two. So the second one, which was really the best, there was an analysis of free basic water thing, there was a report from East Rand, there was a thing on Wits (you know I would have to dig them up [to check]). But that was being distributed internally [to APF affiliates and activists], and it was also a multi-lingual thing: that was key. I think we were quite consciously trying to avoid a situation where the whole language of the organisation was English, but the membership wasn't. So, ja, I mean it was a lot of stuff. Oh, and we also started an early website and I worked on-and-off a lot with Anna Weekes. I made a link with her during the Wits 2001 thing, and she was SAMWU's media officer for a lot of that time, so we would also share information. She would try and get SAMWU to do statements supporting us, and I would try and do statements supporting SAMWU. So that was a lot of the work in the end. Did I answer your question?

Interviewer: Absolutely. A couple of other things. You talked earlier on about how in the long term you thought there might have been, tactically, a mistake in regards to responding to some of the things that the state did. But as far as the APF's early tactics of engagement what were those as far as you remember ...?

Van der Walt: I think it was a much more confrontational thing. I mean for instance one of the early activities was when people [like Virginia] did a sit-in at the Eskom offices in Jo'burg, And I think a lot of it was more in the mode of demanding, *demanding* this and trying to *enforce* that. Now that's a good way of doing things, to my mind, because it forces people to get involved, and it develops confidence in their own abilities. So I don't think that we were "engaging" much at a policy level. We were trying to track what the state was doing in terms of policy, but we kept quite a distance. For example, this was this guy Graham Gotz, (who I think had studied at Wits) but then, I think, he was hired by Fihla or [Amos] Masondo [Executive mayor of Johannesburg] – one of those guys - to do a study on the APF. And I mean, I took it to our Committee and people said "No, we can't cooperate with this guy". So we were, in that period at least, we were sceptical of the state, and the idea was really to force things you know, like Operation Khanyisa [reconnections], the early versions of that sort of thing: we would just reconnect you, that's what we would do. But I think it was also because the state didn't show much willingness to be open, maybe when the state showed willingness... It [confrontation] was more of a default position for many people than a principled position. And this political diversity [mattered here]. I mean I'm an anarchist- communist, so I'm very much keen on not being involved with the state, and trying to build some sort of counter power, some sort of alternative popular power outside of-and-against the state, whether that's in unions or communities. But other people you know? I think Eddie Cottle once said to me, like, "maybe we could win seats in municipal governments and we could use the resources to build the movement". You know, that sort of thing. Obviously there was a lot of diversity, but the questions weren't really posed partly because the state was just there [aggressively], and partly like I said earlier, we never really discussed things like the state: it was like the elephant in the room. When the state changed, those contradictions came to the fore, I guess.

Interviewer: They certainly have. And just a wider macro question, you've done a lot of work on communities' struggles, people's struggles, unions and other things ... how would you place the formation in that period, of the APF, as one of the key of what was called one of the new social movements that arose within the overall trajectory of that sort of transitional politics of South Africa, you know, its importance, its significance?

Van der Walt: Look I think it was, I could be wrong, but I think it was like the trendsetter of the whole process. This was like the first big one as far as I remember. We did somewhat precede any of the others like the Anti Eviction Campaign...

Interviewer: The only one that preceded us was the CCF in Durban.

Van der Walt: ... the CCF, which was Fatima Meer and them, okay. But I think we also got

profiled [more] in a way, maybe, because, I think our name captured concerns in a better way. Yeah, I think we captured the mood a lot better. But I think we were very much [the big one]. When people talk about the “new” South African social movements, the APF is the one that stands out. So I think it was a key moment in that development, and very much a trendsetter. And as far as I recall, we were also the organisation that took a lot of the initiatives to reach out, to build coalitions [with other community movements]. The Social Movements Indaba and that sort of thing: a lot of impetus came from us. We also had the National Exploratory Workshop, the NEW; I think Mondli Hlatwayo was involved in a lot of the [NEW] documents. A lot of these initiatives came from us in terms of launching these movements, and in trying to build them. I think we were absolutely critical. In terms of those “new” social movements we played a key role. And, like I said, there were many of, like, ephemeral struggles. Like right now, there are tons and tons of ephemeral ones. And probably most of them didn’t go through the APF, or the CCF) or whatever it is right now, the AEC or Abahlali or whatever). But we actually pulled something solid together and that was no



small achievement. So I think we were absolutely critical, and we certainly caught a huge amount of attention. Stuff got picked up in the left press internationally whether it was in *Green Left Weekly* or whether it was in the *Monthly Review*, Ben Cashden's stuff [documentaries]... I mean "boom," We got this huge attention. I mean if you picked up one of these films like the *Fourth World War*, they have the Zapatistas, they have the South Korean Hyundai guys striking ...and then you have the APF! So it was huge, and I think we fitted into a mental vision for a lot of people around the globe; absolutely, absolutely crucial.

Interviewer: And just a follow up on that. There has been a lot written about the APF, a lot of Masters, PhD students, researchers, book chapters, everything else. As an intellectual, as an academic, do you think the stories of the APF have been captured?

Van der Walt: Well, look, when I was in the APF, I specifically stayed away from a lot of those projects. I think a lot of us, who were feeling the strain, who were like left academics or left students or people coming out of that milieu, felt quite a lot of resentment to a lot of those academics who had suddenly found out about the APF and were writing chapters and that sort of thing. What we really wanted was for them to write press statements [for us]! So, you know, I was a bit ambivalent about a lot of that. I think a lot of it is okay [as research]. But I mean the difference between the commentary on the APF (leaving aside Ashwin's stuff) and the stuff on the unions in the 1980s? What strikes me is a *distance* between those writing about it, and the actual movement. The stuff in the '80s? You know a lot of the people like Phil Bonner were also involved in the movement, Dave Hemson ... and it gives a different texture, a different feel, and also a more organic link. And they were also trying to draw political lessons, rather than just look at these things as a policy problem for a new democracy. So I think a lot of the stuff is accurate but it tends to – like Adam Habib's stuff – tends to frame it as, you know, "let a thousand flowers bloom, another interest group in the great democracy", and the, like, disconnect between what the movement actually says and wants and how these academics pose the problems for the movement [s striking]. Now that's a bit schematic, but I would say it captures that trend. I'm not saying things are inaccurate, but there is something missing there. There are no *political* lessons being drawn. The issues are being posed too tidily, and just as a policy problem for the new democracy, "how do we roll out the Constitutional rights, they are very, very nice you know?" So it's like that.

Interviewer: As someone who was initially involved but hasn't been in the APF for quite a number of years ... although I'm sure has followed at least to a certain extent some of the struggles... where - and this if from where you are right now and how you have looked at some of that - what would you say about the APF now, its 10 years old?

Van der Walt: I think it seems to have plateaued. My sense is that since it grew rapidly in that early period, it plateaued about 4 or 5 years ago. Now it's really a different type of organisation. The problem it's facing is reproducing itself and continuing. I could be wrong, as I'm not involved, but my sense is that it has plateaued. One would have thought it would be a hell of a lot bigger for one thing, and that we would have moved beyond having very, like, regional kind of structures. We might have had kind of a serious - and I don't mean an *indaba* of a few leaders – but a serious functional kind of national community social movement. But we stalled. That my big thing: it just seems to have just stopped in its tracks -it's sort of there and it's part of the landscape.

Interviewer: And you have any particular reasons why you think that's the case?

Van der Walt: Well, my sense is ...for instance has it expanded beyond the Gauteng core very much? Has it expanded beyond those original core areas very much? Maybe a bit here and there? Has it continued to get new affiliates very often? I mean how many affiliates does it have, about 20?

Interviewer: On paper its 32 ... but in reality maybe 20-something

Van der Walt: Is that much different to what it was 5 years ago?

Interviewer: ... it's grown somewhat.

Van der Walt: That's great, I'm glad to hear it. But I guess we expected, let me say, exponential growth. I mean, even if you gain some, some of those original organisations got weakened, the SECC has had the split and there's the Soweto Concerned Residents [as a result]. But it's not just them. I mean like the LPM has just fallen apart. There are a few sections like the one in Protea [South, Soweto]. I mean there are a few here and there. It just seems to me to have plateaued a bit really.

Interviewer: And this is not necessarily a theoretical question but more of a strategic-tactical question ... but that social movements per se, or whatever else one wants to call them - community based forums etc. - such as the APF are products of a particular historical period? In other words is it possible for an APF to actually move in a more permanent, larger, constantly growing direction. You know, from where it comes from, how it was conceptualised and that it was responding to very particular set of problems for the existing communities?

Van der Walt: I don't know. I'll have to think about it. I mean, I don't think the basic kind of social conditions from which it emerged have changed, I mean, if anything, a lot of that immiseration has worsened. And I think the potential is there for it to grow. I mean it goes back to that thing I said about [the power of] Congress: why did so much of that discontent not get captured by us, why did it get channelled into electing Zuma, you know? What is it about the constituency that a guy like [Julius] Malema [ANCYL] can attract? Why can't we attract those people more? So, I think it has got the potential but without being involved, without knowing the actual options, contradictions, it would just be like whistling for me. But I certainly don't think it's fulfilled its historical role, if that's what you're getting at: I think it's got a hell of a lot of potential.

Interviewer: I'll agree with you there ...

Van der Walt: I think it's fantastic that it has kept going, and that it wasn't a flash in the pan. It's this big flipping thing! I mean, just think, it's this big movement outside of control of Congress with a left programme, fighting neo-liberalism in Gauteng. How do you count its constituency, its membership [varies]. But it is a substantial thing. So I think it's great.

Interviewer: Ten years on, that is amazing.

Van der Walt: Yes, I mean at Wits we have a different "crisis committee" every year, a different campaign, just moving beyond the campaign to a formal structure ...

Interviewer: Look I've asked all the kind of questions from that period that I wanted to ask but I always ask at the end ... is there anything in terms of the APF that you think we haven't touched upon, that you think is important? Because what we are doing here is trying to capture a history and its richness, and all the people who were involved at different points in time. So is there anything you want to add to what we have already mentioned and discussed? Please feel free.

Van der Walt: I'll probably think of something as soon as you leave! But no, I think I've said my main things. Like I said, it had a lot of achievements, it had a lot of weaknesses, and it was a very exciting thing for me when I in it. Maybe it's just a problem with all these organisations, but I suppose my last thing is: it's a problem we all face in these organisations, and it's how do we develop the [cadre] layer, a kind of skills base, in a lot of the constituency? Because it is this perpetual thing, and obviously is unavoidable in some ways, given the society we come out of, but how do we generate a larger layer, because often with these organisations it is just a few people keeping it together? How do we actually develop more organisers? As you say, we've lost these organisers but you know, that's 3 or 4 people, who come out of an organisation which presumably could claim a constituency of tens of thousands. How do we build that core? I mean, I don't think it is anything specific to the APF, but how do we actually do it? Develop and implant, develop multi-level leadership deep into those working class communities, how do we do that? I think it is something we are not good at. I mean certainly while I was there ... I mean I'm part of that layer, so [this concern], it's not to dismiss that layer [that exists]. I don't go for all that *New Frank Talk* stuff of Andile, or Heinrich's new kind of guilt complex. But you essentially had a layer of fairly educated people, often not working class people, running a lot of stuff [in the

APF]. And it's great that people would do that, and put in the time. But how do we develop those lower layers, how do we move beyond that sort of dependence on a few intellectuals, and actually develop more working class "intellectuals", organic intellectuals, how do we do that? It's something we are not thinking about, we do need cadre training. I don't mean listening to the ramblings of a Blade Nzimande at a Chris Hani School. I mean serious training in critical thought, in how to do speeches, in how to write in a very systematic way. Is there something we can learn from earlier left movement like night schools for cadre? Something like that ... I think that's my main reflection, that gap. It's not specific but maybe it needs systematic addressing.

Interviewer: All right, Thanks Lucien

