Cronin-Sheehan Interviews 2001 and 2002

The two interviews I did with Jeremy Cronin in 2001 and 2002 met with a storm of controversy and were much discussed in the mass media and at political meetings as well as much cited in academic texts. Due to the re-organisation of the DCU website, they have been inaccessible for an interval, but I am reposting them, because it is important that they be accessible for the historical record. I have merged them here as a single document.

Jeremy Cronin in his office in the South African Parliament in January 2002. Photo by Helena Sheehan

First Interview with Jeremy Cronin MP
by Dr Helena Sheehan
on 17 April 2001 at University of Cape Town

HS: Jeremy, can you outline the basic trajectory of your intellectual development? How would you describe it?

JC: It is undeveloped.

HS: Well to the extent that any of us are developed …

JC: Ok. Grew up in a middle class white English-speaking South African family. All of those things are significant in a South African context, not least for intellectual development.

My father was a Catholic and that was also important from an intellectual developmental point of view. He died when I was 10 years old and we moved to very close to where we're sitting now in Rondebosch. I went to a Marist brothers

school and I would guess that that was an early influence in terms of an interest in philosophy. A sort of intellectually serious, probably pretentiously serious, approach to things came at that stage when I was 13 or 14 from some extremely eccentric defrocked priests who were then teaching at the Marist brothers. But it taught us Augustine and Aquinas and so on, so there was an early fascination for philosophy. I think that was important.

The other important influence, which wasn't seemingly intellectual, but I think important, was that we were this household of 3. I had a younger brother and a mother. I think that growing up as 10 or 11 year old, then adolescent, boy in close relationship with the mother and being told often by my mother's friends and so on, that I had to play the fatherly role and so forth, which I tried to do, but without too many role models available. I think my mother was quite a significant role model. She was very keen that I should be intellectually serious.

We were now relatively poor for whites. My mother was living on a pension, my father's naval pension, and then eventually she went to work as a sort of administrative clerk at the local hospital. So we weren't destitute at all. It was a sort of white welfare dispensation that enabled us to live ok. Nonetheless, in white terms, we were sort of marginal in terms of resources. My mother encouraged me to be quite serious about school and about going to university, about the possibility of some kind of secure profession. That was quite important for me as well, that my role model person was a female rather than a male figure. I think, looking back, that was important. It was a dimension which was different

The next was a school influence which was Catholic. There was a time in early adolescence when I thought I might want to become a Catholic priest. That didn't last too long, but it was a sign, I suppose, of confusion and wanting some kind of security. Those who might think that my continued commitment to the SACP is Stalinist would also maybe recognise something in it.

HS: I know. I know this so well… this argument about Catholicism and communism.

JC: It's an international structure.

HS: But basically it's an orientation towards a world view.

JC: Yes, exactly. Precisely. It was definitely that … and a seeking after values and a lifestyle that corresponded to those values.

HS: Yes. I understand this very well.

JC: The intellectual interest then was philosophical, but it was also aesthetic. I became very interested in poetry in particular. I suppose I was about 15 or 16 years old when I started to write quite a bit. It was also an attempt to deal with adolescence and the few remaining lines that survive from that period show that it was a very confused attempt, but nonetheless, it was grappling with that. I was also studying outside of school. I was studying French. My mother was encouraging me to do well academically. So in addition to the Latin, Afrikaans and English and the normal school subjects, I was also doing French, which wasn't really available in schools here, and fell in love with Rimbaud and Baudelaire and the French poets.

I then spent a year when I was called up as a conscript. I managed to get into the navy, using my father's contacts. That was just before the border wars took off. So I was lucky enough not to have to go into that. I was not looking forward to going into that situation, but it wasn't quite yet into a war situation. It was also before resistance to conscription. There was no tradition of it at that point. I think some years later that is what I would obviously have done.

So I started university in 1968. I was lucky to get a bursary. Otherwise I wouldn't have been able to afford to go to university. I started with those things that had shaped the intellectual and emotional side of my adolescence. I was studying French and English and philosophy basically. The university at that stage was also quite conservative … now looking back, I mean I didn't have that perspective very strongly at the time. Some of the leading left intellectuals had been purged out of the university by 1968.

HS: Who?

JC: Well in particular Jack Simons, who had been a leading left intellectual person here at the University of Cape Town, who was a very important figure.

HS: The local party branch is named after him.

JC: Yes, named after Jack Simons …and Raymond Suttner (someone who later on, when I was in prison, became a close friend) who had started UCT some 3 or 4 years before me. Jack Simons had been a seminal influence on him. There weren't strong left lecturers around by my time, but there were some interesting intellectual figures and one in particular was someone called Martin Versfeld, who was an eccentric Afrikaans intellectual, who had converted to Catholicism and who was professor of ethics at the University of Cape Town. He taught Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas and Descartes. Those were his areas of particular interest and fascination. He was quite old at that stage and even more eccentric, I think, than he had been. He was also writing books about cooking and cuisine, but trying to integrate. I think this was the interesting thing about Martin Versfeld, that he was trying to integrate different dimensions of life, and to think intellectually about that kind of integration, which was very different from what was increasingly becoming the dominant tradition in UCT. In my years that I spent there, and particularly when I came back as a lecturer, Anglo-Saxon philosophy was becoming increasingly dominant. The narrowing of subjects into smaller areas and technical topics and so forth, that was starting to become the future, but lingering on were some different intellectual traditions. The influential person on the university in this sense probably was this Martin Versfeld. He connected things.

I was no longer a practising Catholic at all. In my year in the navy as a conscript, I had just sort of given that up.

HS: How did that happen?

JC: Not traumatically at all, I think. My mother wasn't Catholic, but my mother had sort of kept the Catholic tradition going in honour of my father. It was she who sent us, for instance, to the Catholic school. I think that is where we were headed when my father was still alive. We were living down in Simonstown, whereas the closest Catholic school was up here in Rondebosch. We were still too young to make it up to Rondebosch. When my father died, we moved up here precisely to be close to the Catholic school. That was really the principal reason for the choice of location. So she herself never went to church, but insisted that we should go to sort of keep a Cronin family tradition alive. The church was a white suburban Catholic church and the contradictions of what I was learning about, in terms of ethical perspectives and so on at school and from my own reading, and the reality of the parish church, were so in contradiction with each other that one sort of grew out of it. That's how I experienced it and I couldn't abide what seemed to me like a deep hypocrisy.

HS: But what about the question of the existence of God? Did you think about that?

JC: Not very profoundly. I don't remember having any deep angst about it at all. I came to be fairly spontaneously atheist, as an 18 or 19 year old without, without …

HS: Without all my trauma …

JC: Yes, it wasn't really traumatic at all. It was connected, I think, to the kind of family background that I had, experiencing myself as being in a variety of ways somewhat on the margins of, but linked nonetheless to, the mainstream of white South Africa.

My father's death was an important personal subjective reality, because, if he'd lived, my subsequent choices would have been much more complicated. First of all, he was a very devout Catholic, so I think that it would have been, not just a challenge to God's existence, but to my father's authority. The slipping out of Catholicism, but more obviously my political choices, would have been more complicated ones if my father had been alive. They would have been direct challenges to his authority, whereas my mother had beliefs, but not authority, in those of areas and never sought to

exercise any kind of authority. So she had values about, but no theory, or position, of authority. So in a way I was able to slip out of it without heavy traumas.

That's why I think the female headed reality was important, partly as a role model, but also as a different relationship to structures of authority and to power. I think of the presence of a father would have made it different. I don't know, as a 10 year old one doesn't really have a very objective understanding of a father. I don't think he was very authoritarian particularly, but he was a naval officer. He was a devout institutional person, both in the navy and in the church. I guess the existence of God had just disappeared like my father.

HS: That's interesting.

JC: It coincided with the querying of all of those structures of authority.

JC: Quite early on in my university career in 1968, there was obviously a significant youth culture moment.

HS: I remember it.

JC: Just across the road here, around July of 1968, there were strong rumblings on the campus here at UCT, many of them mimicking what was happening in Paris and Berlin and Prague and Mexico City. There was an occupation of the administration building by students in protest basically.

HS: Was it Bremner at that time?

JC: Yes, it was Bremner. A black intellectual South African Archie Mafeje, had been appointed basically as Jack Simons replacement and the government had intervened and had refused to allow him back into the country and put pressure on the UCT council not to go ahead with the appointment and they'd crumbled basically. The University of Cape Town council had crumbled in the face of government pressure and the story had leaked out to students, so it was around that issue. It was a good issue, but it was as much a useful excuse for expressing some kind of solidarity with global student events of 1968 as the actual cause of the occupation.

UCT was almost entirely white at that point. I remember 3 or 4 coloured students, but there were no African students on campus at that time. There was an active NUSAS presence, the National Union of South African Students, as it was then called. It was a white organisation. It had emerged out of liberal student politics at that time, and by this stage it was still fairly liberal, but even as liberal, considerably to the left of the student body. To the left of the NUSAS / SRC structures were a grouping of students who later formed themselves into the Radical Students Society and they were the core that led this occupation of the admin buildings.

I was getting on with Aquinas and Augustine and Descartes and so forth. Part of my handling of the reality of South Africa and my own existential reality was to stay right out of politics. I was an intellectual by choice. I thought vaguely that I wanted to be either a poet or a university lecturer, or perhaps a mixture of both, at that stage, but didn't want to get sucked into politics. I had no understanding of politics really. Then a close friend, whom I'd known at the marist brothers, whose brother ended up in jail with me, whose name was Bernard Holiday …. We were both studying philosophy together and he was my closest university friend at that stage, and his brother, whom I'd known, had been expelled from the Marist brothers for painting GOD IS DEAD on the door of the chapel, amongst other things.

HS: That would definitely be an expellable offence!

JC: I hadn't known him at school, but he was now a journalist, a sort of vague presence, up in Johannesburg, this eccentric older brother of Bernard. Bernard therefore had more political reference points than I did. His brother actually was an underground SACP operative at the time, which I didn't know then, but he had been one of the few survivors of the massive crackdowns that had happened early in the 1960s. He probably survived, one because he'd been slightly younger, but he was a very eccentric character, he had physical disabilities.

HS: What was his name, his first name?

JC: Tony Holiday.

HS: Oh yes. I know of him.

JC: He had a traumatic birth and as a result was slightly spastic. He was possibly dismissed as weird and strange and not really a very serious person and perhaps had escaped as a result of it. Anyway, it was Bernard who said that the lectures were much more interesting down at the alternative university, because the students occupying the Bremner building then invited interesting lecturers to come, who were on the margins of things.

In particular, the leading star of the piece was Rick Turner, who had been at the University of Cape Town. He must have been about 8 years older that me. He had then studied at Nanterre under Henri Lefevre, I think, and worked on Sartre. He'd just finished his doctorate on Sartre and Marxism. He was interested in Marxism, but that particular brand of Marxism, a kind of French existential Marxism. Anyway, he was a brilliant lecturer as well, a very, very interesting intellectual. He was assassinated in the late 1970s by the apartheid regime, an assassination that has never been quite clarified. It was clear that it had to do with the security forces, but it's one of the unfinished pieces of business from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

That really marked my entry into political intellectual activity and, quite quickly after that, organizational political activity as well. So I became an active member of the Radical Student Society. I began to edit the journal, in fact Bernard and I were given the honours, while we were young students (we were first and second year students), to edit the journal, which we were very proud of. The intellectual forces were quite diverse.

Bernard's brother's underground structure quickly spotted this ferment and began recruiting a couple of us. It was in 1968 that I was recruited into the underground SACP and began to do some work, mainly on the campus, supplying addresses and names of students, because at this stage the underground had virtually disappeared, but there were rudimentary attempts to sort of reconnect, and one of the key things was to mail pamphlets, books and resources, and the history of the SACP to targeted people, and my job in early 1968 was to supply some of these names and contacts and generally to brief people, well not really people, Tony Holiday, sometimes via his brother, but sometimes directly, on developments.

HS: It was a big decision to join a communist party, even aside from the fact that it was underground.

JC: I didn't see it like that.

HS: No?

JC: I never remember going home and weighing up this large question. I remember going into this fairly spontaneously and feeling it was the obvious and right thing to do. You know I was pretty much intellectually seduced into it, not by some manipulation, but just that I was now beginning to move quite rapidly away from .. I was now wanting to… I was becoming more interested in the sort of political and social thought. It was very difficult to get anything in South Africa at the time. I remember battling for a year to get Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man*.

HS: So easy for the rest of us.

JC: Or to get some Sartre, for instance, let alone Marxist texts, things like that. So one of the great battles, organisational, intellectual, logistical battles was just actually to get reading material. It was very difficult to pursue things. If you read Sartre and he would refer to the *Eighteenth Brumiere*, then you couldn't get hold of the *Eighteenth Brumiere*. So a lot of our energies and resources and skills were in that early period devoted to hunting down texts. That was something that lasted for quite a long time. Also in prison it was a major activity to get hold of texts. We often used to copy them like medieval monks, once we'd got some key text and on Robben Island they were doing the same thing. Then you'd get to hear of someone, an older comrade who had kind of escaped the net of arrest, who had a small

library somewhere. We would hatch complicated plots to track the person down and to win their confidence, so that we could get access to some key texts. A bit medieval in fact.

HS: Wonderful.

JC: I spent a frustrating 5 or 6 months sort of flirting with a Trotskyist group on campus. One of the other strong left traditions, less strong now in the Western Cape, but historically through the 20s, 30s, 40s and 50s, was Trotskyism, very much anchored in the coloured school teaching intelligentsia and artisanal people, you know, printers, people like that, who didn't feel spontaneously part of the old African National Congress traditions. Being coloured, having different intellectual roots and traditions, they were excluded then also from the Congress of Democrats and, I suppose, to some extent from the Communist Party of South Africa. But also reflecting the ambivalent situation of coloured intellectuals, which deepened obviously with the deepening of apartheid. My first wife Anne Marie, her mother, after the death of her father, had married a white Trotskyist, who was a principal at a coloured school. He was quite a well-known Trotskyist and then one of his acolytes or rivals (because they were always joining or fracturing) was Hassan B. He hung around campus and we weren't sure if he was working for the police or which faction of the 4th International. He, by rumour, had a large stock of interesting left-wing books, so we spent, my friend and I, spent months trying to get access to them. We never succeeded. We never signed the 12 point programme and accepted the discipline of whatever.

Rick Turner by this stage was lecturing at Stellenbosch University. He had come back from France and was battling to get work as an academic and, quite interestingly, it was the Afrikaans-speaking and very conservative Stellenbosch University which offered him some temporary work. That reflected something that was happening there, and again it had some influence on me. The Anglo-Saxon linguistic philosophy trend had deepened on the English-speaking campuses like UCT. There was a different tradition, a continental tradition, sometimes of the neo-fascist kind, but sometimes with a more left wing spin to it, which still clung on to a number of the Afrikaans campuses. Part of their way of thinking through their situation was to identify with phenomenology. Merleau Ponty and Heidegger were leading figures. The notion of life world was a very important concept.

HS: I know.

JC: The idea was to develop phenomenology beyond individual subjective phenomenology toward group phenomenology. The subject was the group. That clearly had, on the one hand, an apartheid version: there was a black life world and an Afrikaans life world and an English-speaking white life world and so forth and obviously you shouldn't try to mix these things up, you should respect their individuality and so on. But also, as I said, there was a slightly more left wing approach to it: the ability to understand groups, therefore classes, national aspirations and so forth, which the intellectual tradition, liberal intellectual traditions, which would become neo liberal, at UCT, didn't.

HS: Liberal traditions are individualist.

JC: Yes individualist, rights-based. The rejection of apartheid was: there are some very talented young black people who have been squashed by apartheid, that kind of liberal individualist version, rather than a much more structured understanding of the realities. So there was a kind of seminar, a fortnightly seminar, held down in Stellenbosch. Key people were Andre Du Toit and then Rick Turner, who was the particular fascination for me, but then a couple of interesting Stellenbosch students as well. So we struck some links in that direction as well, which didn't really go much further for me at that point. Is this is all getting…?

HS: It's grand. Go on.

JC: So, intellectual interests? Bernard and I and a couple of our other friends now at UCT had a sort of political mode of operations, which was still very intellectual. It was very hard to do practical things, or so we thought. There was university politics, but they were dominated by a fairly liberal, relatively progressive, but liberal, NUSAS / SRC type politics, and we sort of eschewed that, maybe rightly, maybe wrongly. We formed a little communist cell within the Radical Student Society on campus. It had a weekly radical lecture on Friday. We sustained that kind of intellectual

activity on campus publications and we worked with a broad range of people, such as Adrian Guelke, who is now professor of politics at …

HS: Queens University in Belfast.

JC: He was 2 or 3 years older than us and he was also part of that Radical Student Society, distinctly not part of the communist cell within it. So we had a sort of more radical student grouping, which related uncomfortably to the NUSAS and SRC politics. We maintained links, but we had a more left orientation. Within that radical society, we had a small communist cell. We did some work: distribute some literature illegally, supply names and addresses, very rudimentary things at that stage. I remember we got very fascinated by Althusser…

HS: Why?

JC: Well, yeah, I actually still retain a deep fascination for Althusser.

HS: But it seems so unlikely to me.

JC: Yes, I know, but what, I remember, the word that we loved was 'rigour'. It was certainly that.

HS: You can have rigour without Althusser.

JC: Yes, of course you can. I learned to have rigour without Althusser, but

HS: You don't show any signs of Althusserianism.

JC: No? You'll see it in some of my writing. So we managed to get Althusser into the country. I think *New Left Review* was another source of ideas and exposure to things. It was via Tony Holiday, Bernard's brother and journalist up in Johannesburg, who became a political reporter on the *Rand Daily Mail*, and it was the most progressive newspaper by far at the time in South Africa. He would come down and bring us some underground literature, but then also some references. He obviously had some SACP units in Johannesburg and some connections elsewhere as well Then we worked our way through what were translated versions of Althusser. I think for me what was of interest: one, it was Marxism and it was philosophy and it was philosophy that then took the traditions I had been working through, Hegel and so forth, very seriously and trying to… It made philosophers kings. With all the illusions of that, it empowered one.

I was a philosophy student, but trying to be a political activist. The space for political activism was very limited and my experience of political activism was zero at that point in time. So, apart from being intellectually fascinating, it was also an existential answer to the predicament of a young white intellectual in Cape Town in the early 1970s. I was left wing. I was Marxist. I was a philosopher. Althusser appeared to say: “That's ok. It's probably the most important thing you can be as a Marxist is to be a philosopher and to be rigourous and serious.” But it was also, perhaps only looking back, fairly Stalinist, but Althusser was quite interesting, because it was a critique, of a very intellectualistic kind, of the Stalinism that was stifling, beginning to stifle, the French Communist Party. I think it had been exposed by 1968.

It was a mass political party. When I arrived in 1973-74, it really was that. One was bowled over by the depth and size and scope and pluralism, notwithstanding its Stalinism, the diversity of something that's a mass party. I think what influenced me about Althusser was the seriousness of the political project, but also the attempt to encourage critical thought and that within the context of a political organisation, to be an intellectual in an organisation and not as a lone individual outside of it, but at the same time to be critical within that organisation. I hope those are the influences I retain, instead of some of the other incredibly overly theoretical ….

HS: Theoreticist, I would say.

JC: Theoreticist inaccessibility and the Parisian character of some of that….

HS: Did you ever read Caudwell?

JC: No.

HS: Lukacs?
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JC: Yes, I read Lukacs.

HS: Gramsci?

JC: Yes, mainly in prison.

HS: Especially in prison…

JC: Well yes. At that point a lot depended on what you could get hold of and what you couldn't. In the early 70s we still had this Catholic thing: that some reading was ok and some was not. So Althusser told us that Lukacs was deviationist. So I didn't read the Frankfurt School and treated it with contempt. There was this authentic line and Althusser told us what the authentic line was. We were quite rigourous in our orthodoxy as to who was in and who was out at that stage.

I'd always wanted to go and study in France and it was Althusser who continued the love affair with things French. I'd read Rimbaud and Baudelaire and so on. Then seduced by Rick Turner, who'd been to France and was the leading intellectual force of the occupation of the university, fresh with cobblestones and Parisian teargas in his head and so on. Then also I'd married and some of the family was in Paris and her mother was French and had grown up in Paris and had married a British soldier and come out to South Africa. We stayed with a French Parisian family.

By this stage I was very serious also about my political commitments and it was an opportunity to connect up with the party. Now was the opportunity to deepen the contact and to formalise it and also to get some training in underground techniques and so forth. So going out was also very much and self consciously about that.

Therefore, I had to select quite carefully what I worked on by way of a masters thesis and things like that, because I wanted to go away, but I wanted to come back. I was trying to be relatively careful, but not careful enough, about my Marxism and so on, so I did a thesis on Rousseau, which was interesting and I'm not sorry I did it. It was on the concept of nature in Rousseau. I was interested in the thesis, and remain interested, on the notion of the state of nature and the noble savage, which has a whole lot of resonance right now in South Africa. My principal studies were in that direction, but half of my work was done with Pierre Macheray, who was a close collaborator with Althusser, but one who had a particular interest in literature, and Etienne Balibar, both of whom were very good teachers actually.

Again, it was a very useful experience, but I suppose intellectually what I also found useful was just to be exposed to the French left and particularly to the French Communist Party. I broadened my horizons. I'd had a very narrow concept of politics and of political organisation inevitably. I was told not to get active in the French Communist Party, so I was obviously a marginal observer. There were public lectures and so on and I'd drift in and I went to all kinds of other lectures. I went to the Foucault series on prisons, which was interesting. It was hardly a preparation for what was to come for me, but it was an interesting series nonetheless.

I returned to South Africa and lectured in the philosophy department.

HS: What sort of lectures did you give?

JC: I was quite influenced by Althusser, so I was asked to do a history of political philosophy. I think some of the best Althusser writing was the stuff on Rousseau and Montesque and so on and so I went through some of that, but I did some Marx as well, which I was trying to avoid. By this stage, there was a slightly wider group of young students who were white and my present wife Gemma was one of those students then.

So I was lecturing, but my main involvement was in the underground. I was in the propaganda unit, producing, writing and distributing literature, pamphlets basically, and within a year or two I was put in touch with … Initially I was working on my own, but then I was put in touch with another unit. It was a couple. They'd been working in the underground for a couple of years. I didn't know their real names until, not quite when, we went on trial, but not long before then. It was Dave and Sue Ratkin. Then David became a very important intellectual influence on me, more in prison when we ended up there.

David had also grown up, as it happened, in Rondebosch, from obviously a Jewish family and the family were kind of left liberal family, with family roots in Jewish socialism, which is a very important influence on South Africa and on culture in South Africa, on Nadine Gordimer or Joe Slovo or Ruth First, but particularly on the communist party. I think a lot of communist party culture comes out of African traditions, but quite a lot of it comes out of the east European Jewish socialist traditions. David was not very much like that tradition, but the family background was that. He had left, I think after Sharpeville. The family had left South Africa and gone to Britain and David had studied South African literature in Warwick, no at Leeds. He had written a doctorate on black South African writers and had become active in student politics there much at the same time. He was a year older than me. Much at the same time and in a similar context, but a different context, he had decided that he wanted to come back to South Africa to work in the underground, and Sue, who was British, had come back with him.

Ok so, got arrested in 1976 and ended up in prison, in Pretoria and that was intellectually important for many South African male prisoners. I think female prisoners were fewer and scattered and there seems to have been, for whatever reasons, but I think mainly for those reasons, fewer intellectual discussions. But definitely in Robben Island and in a smaller way in Pretoria in maximum security, most people, but particularly those with some kind of intellectual background, see that as having been quite formative for their own intellectual development in one way or another. Certainly, it was for me.

There the key person was probably David Ratkin himself, but then others. There was a very nice intellectual vibrancy happening in the prison, with all the disadvantages and frustrations that of course also occur in prison, which was sustained collectively by many people. The other intellectual person was Raymond Suttner, who'd been here at UCT, a person who had been influenced by Jack Simons and ended up as a lecturer in Durban. He'd gone out and studied in Oxford and come back and formed a unit doing the same kind of propaganda that I'd been doing with the Ratkins. He'd been arrested the year before in 75, but you know all of the prisoners, just about all of the prisoners, and there were sometimes 8 or 9, during the 70s during the 7 year period when I was there, we kept ourselves intellectually busy as best as possible.

One of the things I was doing, and so was David in particular, was writing, the writing of poetry. You know we'd have workshops and intense discussions with Raymond about it, but I was really interested in the literature. Others would comment and help and engage and take an interest in what we were doing. We'd swop essays and we'd have little lecture classes and read novels in tandem together and discuss them and things like that, so it was quite important. Often it was eclectic, because it was dependent on what you could get hold of into prison.

By the stage I'd got to prison, many battles had been won. I think that in the early years, as recorded in the memoirs of prisoners like Hugh Lewin, prison was very, very tough through the 60s and early 70s. By the mid-70s, the regime had been pushed back so there was some kind of liberated space in prison, certainly in Pretoria, where prisoners were running a lot of the routine things, so warders were guarding the perimeters and would from time to time enforce regulations on us, but there was quite a degree of space in which to manoeuvre, quite a lot of intellectual space. At that stage we'd won the right to study, so those of us who had degrees were able to register with UNISA, which is the correspondence university, and therefore get in academic books and so forth, and that therefore became an important source of …we'd often copy things. I've still got large collections of poetry which I copied out.

HS: How did your thought develop during that period?

JC: Well, I read more widely, certainly, into areas that Althusser designated as beyond the pale. I read more about South Africa than I'd read. The colonial condition is complicated and people have written interestingly about it.

Certainly, English-speaking white South Africans peculiarly grow up in a very colonial and provincial kind of culture. Althusser was just my left wing version of the same thing, worshiping at the altar of the metropole.

That realisation had dawned on me when I was studying in France and also going over to London to connect up with the structures running the underground. I began to realise that I was South African and not English. I know, if asked, of course, I would have said I'm South African, but deep down my reference points, my understanding, made many metropolitan assumptions, about myself and my time, particularly in Britain, but also in France. The reference point wasn't really France, although it was intellectually to some extent, but the texture of culture and of reality. It was exposed to me in London when I was there. The texture of culture and reality exposed to me in London exposed to me my South Africanness. I realised that this was actually a foreign place. It wasn't home.

It was then that I began to take South African novels more seriously, South African writing more seriously, than I had until then. I followed that through then when I was in prison. I quite self-consciously read Olive Schreiner for the first time. I looked at events which were on the margins of my consciousness. I read South African poets, black poets. I had begun to do that, having come back from overseas. Those were very intense years of underground work and then getting caught. So it was really only two and a half years. So I was able to consolidate intellectually quite a bit in prison. I was able to read much more South African work, to read anthropology, which was the route in to try to understand cultural ethnic South African realities better than I had, to meet South African reality in literature.

It was also to engage an older generation of political activists who were in prison with me, because that was the other repression: the expunging of texts, the exiling in prison, the killing of activists and so on, which meant that there were huge generational gaps in knowledge and reference points and understanding and I was very strongly inspired in my understanding of South Africa.

So I ended up in prison as an ANC / SACP prisoner, but I'd never been to an ANC meeting in my life. I'd never seen an ANC flag. I'd never sung an ANC song, not that I can sing …

HS: It's astonishing, you know.

JC: You know, there was *Nkosi Sikela Afrika* and so on. So it had been a very intellectual, moral commitment, but not born out of the lived reality at all. But the older generation of prisoners, who'd gone to prison, who'd been active in the late 40s and 50s and then gone to prison had an experience of organisation other than the 3 person underground unit, these little operations, and had a non-racial experience, which I had not.

In fact, when I was being trained in counter-surveillance techniques and communications techniques and secret inks and all that sort of stuff, one of the things that was impressed on me was to stay out of the townships, don't go into them, don't form friendships with black people, you'll stand out, which was very true in the 70s in South Africa. So, you know, I became more white rather than less white in the period of heightened activity in my overt lifestyle.

So again it had to be an intellectual and reading effort, just in that short period of return and activism and then in the slightly more prolonged period in prison, but there was some first hand contact with other white male political prisoners, but who had a depth of understanding and experience. They weren't necessarily intellectuals in the traditional sense of the word, but they talked, they had anecdotes about individuals and personalities and they were experienced and that was a very valuable input as well.

I read Gramsci in prison as well. One of the advantages of Gramsci was, because he was in prison, he wrote in this obscure style to get past the censors, which enabled us to get the same texts past the apartheid prison censors. So we read and discussed Gramsci. He then, of course, resonated with other things as well, national culture, Marxism, not in some other reality, but in one's own reality and that became useful to the intellectual project that I was involved in at that time, which was poetry, literary criticism, and trying to understand South Africa politically in Marxist terms.

As I said, a very strong influence for me was a contemporary of mine, David Ratkin, who was a very talented person. A few years after he was released from prison, he died in Angola in a MK camp, probably as a result of a booby-trapped

land mine. He went for military training and was blown up in assembling a land mine. A couple of people were imprisoned, but it seems that they had probably not booby-trapped the mine, but had just been lax in checking the equipment. Some of the security forces had managed to infiltrate some of the logistics networks and there were a lot of cases, particularly here in the country, of cases of hand grenades and things like that which went off when they were trying to train them. Anyway, David was one of the victims.

HS: How did your wife die, Jeremy?

JC: My wife died of a brain tumour. I was sentenced in September o 76, so I was entitled to a half-hour visit once a month, and I saw Anne Marie for about 4 or 5 months and then… apparently she thought she was having a nervous breakdown, so she became quite disorientated and was having splitting headaches and so forth and was diagnosed as having a brain tumour, which I didn't know about, because we hadn't met, and the first I knew was when her mother came in to say she was going in for an operation and she basically didn't survive the operation. So that was in March of 77, so it was very early on into the sentence. It was obviously very traumatic.

Part of the training in conspiratorial techniques is known as weeding. So when we were recruited back in 68, but in quite rudimentary structures still and then reconnected when I went out. Albie Sachs, who is now a Constitutional Court judge, was my first point of contact. I think there was a sort of up-front address for him at his university, but he was just the go between to link me up with someone else and he then arranged it. I would obviously then see someone else. I met this guy Frank.

HS: Oh yeah.

JC: You know who Frank was?

HS: Frank was Ronnie Kasrils.

JC: Frank turned out to be Ronnie Kasrils. Anyway, the first step was to supply me with a pile of books. I remember the pile of books still. He said: read these and I'll see you in 2 months time, if you still want to … It was Henri Alleg, his experiences in Algeria, torture. It was Ruth First. It was stories from Eastern Europe about nazi torture. The books were all about detention and torture and interrogation. It was very much a hurdle that I had to clear to see if I was really serious about this. It turned out to be very useful, because the techniques get passed on, as we know, and in the early 60s, there were security police who went to Algeria to learn interrogation techniques from the French.

Sorry, I can't remember where I was trying to go with that, but anyway my wife died in 1977. So I expected to go to prison, that's what I was trying to say, so obviously it was awful and so on, but it was not unexpected and therefore, the security policeman who arrested me, who was a very notorious killer, his name was Spyker (which means nail) van Wyk, and he said to me, "Ha, you thought you would never get caught" and I said "Actually I thought you'd catch me a lot sooner", because the average life expectancy of those underground units was about 6 months at the time.

Where there's a mass movement and where there's a lot of political activism and so forth, it's much easier, as I discovered when I came out of prison into the era of the United Democratic Front and mass mobilisation and so forth. It was much easier to elude the cops: one, because they are much busier, running off in a thousand directions, but also because struggle throws up a thousand networks, someone who's a skilled printer and someone else who's a doctor that you can go to if you've got a problem, another activist who's got cars or knows about…whatever.

Whereas in the early 70s, we didn't know who we could trust. We had few resources, so we were very, very isolated and self-reliant, which had its own advantages, but it was very lonely being active in the early 70s in the deep underground and hard and dangerous and one knew that the possibilities of not getting caught were very slim indeed, so that one was busy writing up speeches …

HS: Was your wife involved?

JC: She was actually. She wasn't formally, so she wasn't a recruited member of the party, but I wouldn't have been able to survive if, one, she hadn't known what I was doing and two, if she hadn't been the person who could fix the car and so on. So, yeah, she was involved, but not arrested, although they threatened to do that, and they were watching her. Of course, there was nothing formally she could give them, there was no proof. OK, where to now? Came out and … maybe if you ask me a question…

HS: The tape is nearly finished. Jeremy, if you could sum up your life up until you came out of prison.

JC: I think I was … I came out of prison early in 1983, which was an exciting moment to come out into, but very frightening as well. I think that the books that I read about prison experience said that anything longer than about 10 years and major changes set in. I think I was lucky. I went in as a 26 year old and came out as a 34 year old. Prisoners who had been with us who were much younger, there was one who had come in at 18 years old. He had 5 years, which was not that long, but coming out, he was quite a young 18 year old, and I think he found it quite difficult coming out. Others who had gone in as 35 year olds and had done 20, 30, 40 years, I think that was very tough. So I saw my prison sentence, once beyond the interrogation stage, and obviously with the exception of my wife's death, as not a particularly traumatic experience. It was a frustration, but it was not a deeply traumatic experience.

HS: You came out into a different way of life.

JC: Let's pause.

HS: Of course.

JC: I was thinking now as you were out. Just a little bit of background on the intellectual front, because I think that in my period in prison, and just before it, but consolidating during my time in prison, there were interesting intellectual developments happening in South Africa, one of which had been very much around in the early 70s, late 60s/early 70s, coming to a head in 1976, was the black power, black consciousness intellectual tradition, dominant among black political activists of the 70s.

The old ANC congress traditions had been badly broken, marginalised, suppressed, in the 60s, and although they never died out entirely, and there were enough veterans or people returning from Robben Island or whatever to revitalise them later in the late 70s and through the early 80s. Certainly, the dominant intellectual tradition of young black activists of the 70s was this black consciousness, black power. The philosophy and politics, the intellectual reference points, were not that different, ironically, from the reading that I'd been doing or were related to it, because the 76 of South Africa was very much part of the 60s. 76 was 68. South Africa was quite often behind global time or ahead of it. This time there was a kind of 8 year delay. The reasons for 68, of youth culture, of young people not feeling part of the institutions and structures, feeling slightly contemptuous or dismissive of earlier progressive traditions and so forth, all of those were strongly inscribed in the black consciousness movement here in South Africa. It was very much a youth thing.

It was also influenced by, not so directly, but in some cases directly, here in South Africa, that continental phenomenology that I was speaking about earlier. Many of the leading intellectuals of the movement, Steve Biko and Barney Pityana, were students at these black so-called bush campuses, the Bantustan universities. The teaching staff at these universities were white Afrikaaners coming out of Stellenbosch and Potchefstroom and Pretoria, those universities, often poor, very poor academics and intellectuals, who were going to those campuses as a fallback, because they'd not been able to find jobs at Stellenbosch or Pretoria, but what they carried with them was this language of phenomenology, of life worlds, of collective experience, of group experience, of consciousness precisely. Although the most obvious sources of influence were Eldridge Cleaver and so forth from black power in the United States, if you read what Steve Biko and Barney Pityana were writing in the mid-1970s, you'll see that they were drawing a lot of their concepts from this Afrikaans university tradition as well and that the things marry quite well. Politically they were going in very different directions, but the phenomenological language, group experience, group consciousness, and the need to affirm group consciousness linked up, connected up, here in South Africa, strangely, ironically, with the black power discourse.

I think that its great achievements were: 1) revitalising radical politics in South Africa and 2) revitalising radical politics, therefore creating a whole new generation of political activists, black political activists and 3) it was a very significant literature moment in South Africa: black poetry. The politics was about consciousness and self-affirmation and therefore it provided the philosophical and theoretical underpinning for a particular kind of political struggle, of political / poetic practice, which was the poetry of self-affirmation, of shouting down, of swearing at, white culture, white …anything that had to do with Europe and the unfurling of something else. It was usually in English ironically. English became the medium, because it was after all a university-based intelligentsia, rather than working class people who were involved. I think one of the great literature moments in South Africa in the 20th century was black consciousness, black power poetry of the 70s, which in a strange second-hand kind of way also influenced me, more in literature terms than in intellectual terms, but that too.

The other development was more closely related to my peer group of left leaning white intellectuals. With one or two exceptions, most of them continued on in academic work and became quite influential in the late 70s and early 80s, to some extent in Britain, but especially back here in South Africa.

HS: Who do you mean?

JC: They mostly had studied in Britain. I'm thinking of people like Ray Kapinsky, who then went on to have a chair of development studies in Sussex, and now works for the World Bank. He had been a key radical student. He had been the chair of the Radical Students Society back in 68. Someone like Adrian Guelke and so on, but back here in South Africa: Mike Morris, Dave Kaplan, David Lewis and Alec Erwin. That was a generation of intellectuals in my peer group, who had been influenced, like me, by the 68 events, who had all become Marxists of one kind or another, who mostly studied in Britain in places Warwick and Leeds and especially Sussex. Most of them returned to South Africa and, when I came out of prison in the early 80s, they were senior lecturers or professors even at Wits University, at University of Cape Town, at Durban, Natal and so on.

There was a kind of left, and even perhaps Marxist, hegemony in the social sciences in the English-speaking universities in the 80s, as a result of this peer group of mine, who had not got involved in the underground structures, but whom we called, dismissively quoting from Lenin, the 'legal Marxists'. They had a very important intellectual impact on South Africa, insofar as linked up then with activism, political activism, organisational activism. A number of them moved, I reckon, to the trade union movement, which began to emerge in 1973 around the Durban strikes. That was when the first people like Alec Erwin, who never really went on strongly to the academic track, moved quite early on into the trade union movement. They sustained links and there were quite strong links between the university-based intellectuals of my generation who were Marxists and the early cadre of the resurgent trade union movement.

When I came out of prison in 1983-84, it was a slightly fraught situation, intellectually fraught situation, stimulating, but fraught. Following on the 1976 student uprising, which became quite quickly more than a student uprising, but became township uprisings. There were many more than Soweto, but in virtually every urban township in South Africa. There were a host of localised organisations that began to pop up: civic organisations, student and youth organisations, progressive radical church organisations of one kind or another and women's organisations, quite strong particularly here in the Western Cape.

So there were those and then the trade union movement, which was becoming stronger and stronger, and there were powerful political contests for the allegiance of these ongoing structures. Some, in the early struggles in the 70s, had been between the ANC congress tradition and the black consciousness tradition. If South Africa had been liberated in 1975-76, the ANC wouldn't have been in power in all likelihood. It would have been some kind of black power organisation, insofar as the ANC hasn't become that by the 1990s and 2000s.

That battle was won considerably in two places. One in exile: thousands of youths left the country looking for arms and the only organisation capable of providing arms and organising them, providing them with the education and the logistical support and getting them back into South Africa, was the ANC. The latter was a risk, not a greatly successful dimension of the ANC, but the ANC certainly was a coherent reality in exile. So that generation basically, although it looked for alternatives, found itself in exile inside of the ANC. The other key place where there were strong ideological

debates and contest was on Robben Island and again the congress tradition, which had a depth and intellectual comprehensiveness, which the black consciousness movement didn't have, was able to prevail by and large and so the overwhelming majority of convicts who went on to the island, like Terror Lekota for instance, who went in black consciousness, came out ANC.

So that battle, where there was still a black consciousness strand of South African politics in the early 80s, it was not particularly the most challenging one from that point of view. The more serious challenge come from the trade union movement and the key intellectuals at that point in the trade union movement were sceptical of the ANC and extremely sceptical of the South African Communist Party.

HS: From what angle?

JC: From two angles. One was a sort of practical angle. I remember right in 83, on my release from prison, I was pulled into these debates. It was rather something very innocent and rather naïve. I was asked to write a short simple history of SACTU, the South African Congress of Trade Unions, which had been an ANC-SACP aligned trade union movement formed in 1955 and still existing weakly in exile as part of the tripartite alliance. The idea was for worker education: to write a little booklet and the NGO which asked me to do it was itself riven by those who were pro-ANC and those who were anti-ANC, including Brenda Cooper and her relatives and friends and they were part-time members or part of that particular NGO.

The reading of what had gone wrong with the trade union movement was that the ANC-SACP had treated the trade union movement as a simple adjunct to the political struggle in the early 1960s and, when the arms struggle was launched, the trade union movement was seen simply as a recruitment terrain for guerrillas, and in this way the trade union movement and its cadreship had been recklessly exposed to security police action. Although SACTU hadn't been banned as such, in the course of the confusion and conflation of the trade union movement with the political movement, the banning and crushing of the political movement, had resulted also in the crushing of the trade union movement.

Now though, I think, looking back retrospectively, there were elements of truth in that. I think that there was certainly some, and someone as key to the process as Joe Slovo himself was saying that by the late 80s, that insufficient attention had been paid to the trade union movement and went too easily and not thinking it through, moved people from the trade union organisation to the guerrilla struggle. Largely because we thought that the guerrilla struggle was going to be a short quick sharp blow in 5 years, and therefore we weren't looking to 20 years, 30 years. So there was that kind of critique, but then it also justified that particular strategic and political positioning to stay out of politics and to maintain the autonomy, a strict isolationist autonomy, of the worker movement. There were then influences at the time by Solidarity in Poland and by also the worker's movement in Brazil.

The idea was that these old political formations like communist parties and so on were bad news for the trade union movement. Insofar as it wanted to move into politics, it wanted to do so on the basis of a strong trade union movement, so that working class ideas, ideology, wouldn't be captured by the sort of petty bourgeois nationalism of national liberation movements. That was the kind of point, but it also justified an existential choice, which was that they didn't want to go to prison, understandably. Some were quite brave, but, you know, some of us suspected that some of it was, not in all cases but in some cases, was to justify not taking some of the risks that sometimes we felt were necessary to take the struggle forward.

Nonetheless a strong trade union was built and the key intellectual forces were very often these white intellectuals, but now increasingly challenged by a different sort of idea when former trade unionists, who had spent 5 years or 10 years in Robben Island, were now coming out after completing their terms in Robben Island and were based in townships, were often banned or under house arrest, but able then to influence this new generation, one of black consciousness intellectuals, but also emerging shop stewards and so forth in the trade union movement.

So there were sharp contests over the political orientation of the trade union movement. We were called populists and there were certain populists in our ranks at that time. I always regarded myself not as a populist. We called the other

lot workerists and there were certainly strong syndicalists. Sometimes they were progressive in orientation, sometimes they were less progressive in orientation, but these intellectual traditions still play themselves out in the ANC of today.

Most of the key intellectuals came in, if you want to be cynical, when it became safe. If you want not to be cynical, when they appreciated that the ANC was the principal terrain on which the direction of the liberation had to be contested, that it couldn't be contested from outside, that it made more sense to move in. They then moved into the ANC after it was unbanned basically. Some of them now are very important intellectual influences, not least someone like Alec Erwin, who was probably the principal economic influence, connecting some other traditions in the ANC and we can talk about that another time, some other time. OK, end it. I'm now getting lost in the detail

HS: So there was a mass movement when you came out of prison, which I think was a big factor.

JC: It was a novelty for me

HS: Yes.

JC: Certainly in South Africa a novelty. I'd been an observer of something of a mass movement in France, but had never been an active participant. I was deployed intellectually basically by the United Democratic Front, which came into existence in 1983, some months after my release. I was described as political education officer in the Western Cape of the United Democratic Front and editor of the UDF national theoretical journal which was called *Isizwe* (The Nation). We were called nationalists as opposed to being workerists and I was involved in lots and lots of popular education work in the 80s.

I was also involved, but I saw the things as being linked rather than different, in poetry performances. I had written the poetry as a survival activity in prison without much sense of an audience, but then had the privilege in this period of heightened mobilisation of being asked to perform the poetry. I quite quickly discovered that some of the poems didn't work in noisy church halls and rallies and soccer stadiums and so on, but some to my surprise did. They became a way of communicating ideas and experiences and resistance and defiance and the history of our struggle. So it was a fantastic experience for me to be able to have this privilege of doing this and to get very nice and positive feedback from that.

I suppose most of what I was doing was writing little discussion papers, preparing resource materials, education materials and so on, about the history of the struggle and actually actively doing it to worker's groups, to civics groups, to women's groups and so on.

HS: Was much of the political education directly about Marxism?

JC: Yes, it was, but it was no longer to a university audience. I no longer had the excuse of encryption to justify theoreticism. It was about communicating with young students and workers.

HS: Did that develop your own thinking, that exercise?

JC: Yes, absolutely. I mean it forced one first of all to think about ... not that it just began there and then … I can't easily put a date on it, but it connected very much with my understanding of the need to move away from a very Eurocentric version of Marxism. One was self-consciously teaching Marxism: theories about class, theories about dialectic, about historical developments and transformation and so on. I realised it had to be grounded in some African examples, not least of things like dialectics, had to be indigenous examples or indigenous wisdom. The point had to be to show that, although these ideas were European in origin, it didn't have to be the point, because it didn't have to particularly mention Marx. I began to realise that the dialectic sounded like a strange Germanic thing, whereas in fact it was people in their indigenous proverbs and sayings and so on. In the philosophy of the Nguni, there were profoundly dialectical understandings of reality. So in order to connect with people, link it to their lived experience, both their cultural reference points, but also to their contemporary reference points, one had to link all of those things to that. So I was teaching Marxism, but I realised that I had to indigenise the Marxism.

I also had to encourage much more participation from people, something that still is not what I would like it to be even now. So we perpetuated it in the 90s in the party after I came back again from exile. I began the experience of what was in the 80s of getting people in Cape Town, because that's where I was mainly active, to talk about their grandparents and what they knew about their grandparents. Cape Town is very nice to talk about grandparents, of course, and what they knew about ancestors further back. Because South Africa is, Cape Town is, a real melting pot of diversity of experiences, of slavery, of migrant labour on the mines, of very recent experience of communal African tribal life, of iron age resistance to colonial occupation and so on. So I would try to get people to talk about family experiences and then on that basis collectively develop a Marxist explanation for all of that. I enjoyed doing that work. It was fantastic.

I was learning from people and from their experiences. So I was trying those kind of things and obviously their intellectual influences were also some of the liberation theology experiments, particularly coming from Brazil, Latin America and of popular education, popular participation and so on. There were some very interesting religious groupings. There was a Muslim grouping here in Cape Town that Ebrahim Rasool, who was a young student of philosophy at that time, was associated with. There were also some Christian groupings, who were Marxist and very self-consciously Marxist, but were also trying to apply the sort of Latin American experience of popular education and so forth into the South Africa. I didn't particularly, I must admit, I don't particularly remember reading much of that, but I was being influenced by a younger generation of activists who were. There was also a kind of convergence with my other personal concerns and interests and often in this period the kind of work we were doing.

HS: And how was the party developed? I mean how did the party interface with the mass movement?

JC: The party was a remote reality, a bit like a Protestant god. It was there, you know, but remote. I remained a communist obviously in prison. Not all the prisoners that I was with were, about 8 or 9, 6 or 7, as the numbers shrunk or grew, but the great majority of them were communists in Pretoria in maximum security. So we had a kind of communist organisation there as well and a set of reference points. When I came out in 83, I didn't … I knew of fellow communists who now had come out of prison. There were contacts between people, but I was not immediately re-integrated into it. I think obviously there was a need for a kind of cooling off period. I was obviously under close scrutiny by the security police, so I didn't all at once immediately re-connect with the party, but saw myself as a communist activist.

It was about a year and a half later that there was a formal re-integration into an underground SACP structure. It was grimly called the Western Cape command structure, but most of my activism was in the United Democratic Front and its related structures. The SACP contact then was also a contact to the ANC and the attempt to get the guerrillas back into Cape Town and offer logistic support in safe houses and so on. I got pulled a little bit in for that. I stuck out a little bit like a sore thumb, so people had to be careful of me.

HS: Why? Because you had been in prison? JC: In prison and it was known I was in the leadership of the UDF and so on, but by late 84, I was attending the regular fortnightly deep underground meeting.

HS: Here in Cape Town?

JC: Yes.

HS: Who was in that?

JC: Jenny Schreiner, Tony Yengeni (in the news now), Desi Angelis and some others.

HS: In the present branch?

JC: Desi Angelis. Did you meet her?

HS: Yes, I did. I was curious to know whom I have met.

HS: But you went abroad then again in the late 80s, did you?

JC: Yes, I managed to evade the police. Twice there were states of emergency during this UDF period and on both occasions what would happen, I suppose, is universal practice of authoritarian regimes. They would have a swoop of all sort of known activists and put them into detention and then 6 hours later announce that there was a state of emergency in terms of which all the people had been detained. They came for me twice and, precisely because there was now an extensive network of people, I was able to get warning and evaded them twice, but had to then go into hiding and operate under a false name and grew beards and all the usual, but they were looking for me because of my UDF activity and were trying basically to disrupt the United Democratic Front.

HS: So you went abroad.

JC: No, carried on and it was doing UDF work. It was useful being, sometimes it's not particularly useful, being a white male, but in this case it was quite easy, because with most of the Western Cape UDF leadership in detention and just a few of us having evaded the net, we regrouped and then drew in a next layer of leadership, which was what happened and was happening all the time. The Western Cape internal structure of UDF … we needed to connect nationally and there were roadblocks all over the country and so on, so the easiest way actually to connect nationally actually was to fly. Although now catching a plane there are quite a lot of black people, at that stage as recently as the mid-80s, there wasn't much except white business people catching planes. I was used quite a lot as the Western Cape connection link.

Then in September of 87, the underground structure that I was also a part of was captured. Tony Yengeni and Jenny Schreiner were arrested along with a number of others. I was ordered to get out as fast as possible, because that was… In the earlier states of emergency, we were just held in detention and kept parked away for a year or two, but this was detention much more serious, so I got out very quickly. I borrowed someone's passport and managed to pass it off as my own. So I flew to London and then I spent a year in London and then went to Lusaka. I worked with the ANC in what was called the internal political entity, which was the one not dealing with the arms side of the struggle but with the political co-ordination of the internal structures.

HS: So this period in London and Lusaka, how did that contribute to your intellectual development?

JC: They exposed me to the ANC in all its… because I had only ever been seen one or two people training me in exile, in the sort of internal structures of one kind or another. I made assumptions about numbers of other people, but the living… The ANC in London was fraught with exile politics and I think a lot of the problems we've got now relate to that reality.

The same with Lusaka, a little less, but that too. It was a hard experience, and I appreciated the fortitude of people who had survived long stretches in exile. I think you heard me say the other day the underground and prison were somewhat easier to handle than the prolonged period in exile. There were some advantages in exile. There were politically, organisationally, hard realities to survive. So it was a bit sobering frankly to encounter that reality, to realise that there was strong bureaucratism and there were levels of factionalism and there was patronage that operated and so on, which has to do with large organisations, distance from the mass base, which can in good times raise sharp questions and give perspective, but has its problems and they were there definitely.

From the intellectual point of view the nice thing was an exposure to Slovo, who kind of linked up with quite early. He was in London, travelling back and forth between London and Lusaka and I spent quite a lot of time with him. When I got to London, one of the most disappointing things was that I was fresh out of the battle front as it were and had quite a lot of experience now from 4,5,6,7 years of working with trainees and civics and moving up and down nationally and also connecting up with the underground, so I was very anxious to get a very detailed debriefing from the sort of senior structures in London.

Two-thirds of the people told me, from their 20 years of exiled experience, what was going on in South Africa. They did sometimes have an interesting and a bird's eye view, which I didn't have, and so forth. But I could see it was people who were, I think, were demoralised, understandably, whose sense of self-worth was diminished and therefore saw me as an opportunity to justify their life's existence. I had a psychological understanding for their reality, but was deeply frustrated with the political significance of how they were acting. But Slovo was quite different. He was very engaged.

He was very interested in hearing the detail of what I had to say and quite challenging as well and would produce a different reading and engage me in quarrel and argument and so forth. So that was very nice and for me that was perhaps the best part of the London experience, which was fairly good for me.

Of course, this was also the moment of perestroika, of glasnost, and the deepening crisis in Eastern Europe and so on. So I was engaging with Slovo around that too. So he was writing *Has socialism failed?* It wasn't quite called that yet, but that's what he was busy working with. He was also coming to terms with his bereavement, intellectual bereavement, and tense relationship with Ruth First, who had said many of these things long before and had been critical, where he hadn't been critical, long before he had been. I think there was also something on his chest that he was grappling with.

HS: Helena (Dolny) told me he was reading something of mine when he was writing that.

JC: OK. That's lovely, very nice. So it was lovely to have someone with that experience and depth of intellectual method and seniority within the movement, who was now trying to grapple with the legacy of socialism and beginning to ask questions.

The big debate that was going on in exile was what kind of struggle we were trying to fight in South Africa. What exile had produced was a kind of tendency, an accumulation tendency: to accumulate an armed force in exile, which was more and more like a conventional army, and was more and more diverging from the realities and struggle in South Africa and was more and more about building a bureaucratic and military apparatus that would then give you some kind of standing in the future after liberation happened, rather than an instrument for waging that liberation struggle. Slovo had, through the 80s, the late 70s really, been fighting that battle inside of the ANC and inside of the party. His way of fighting it was characteristic of Joe Slovo, which was not really to solve the organisational problem, but to bypass it. So he had been involved in special ops and then Vula and the party and he was increasingly using the party in that way.

There was this ANC, which was bureaucratic and less and less capable of actually waging a struggle, and stuck in exile and in guerrilla camps. Well he couldn't do much about that, so he thought, and therefore what he did was set up a special operations team, which carried out the most spectacular military operations. He set up Vula, which was a special underground structure. He also was now much more focused on the party than he had been, I think, in the late 70s and early 80s, primarily because of the challenge, well not primarily, but one of the spiriting factors was that there was now inside of the country a socialist, mass socialist organisation, which was not necessarily aligned to the SACP at all. It was the trade union movement and the ideological hegemony of the other ideological influences on the trade union movement, Solidarity, Brazil and so forth.

So there had been a very focused attempt from the mid-80s of revitalising the party and of realising the party had become little more than a kind of network inside of the ANC in exile and not really asserting strongly enough its own profile and vision, class politics, not in opposition to the ANC, but with its own organisational apparatus. So Brian and Sonia and others had kept the *African Communist* ticking over, but organisationally and so forth, there was a sense that African communists had not been talking into the debates in the 80s, which was true in fact. We had underground copies here in the 80s. It seemed like an exiled publication and not one that was engaged deeply with events here. Slovo was behind *Umsebenzi,* which again was, instead of them transforming the *AC,* it bypassed the *AC,* bypassed it and launched *Umsebenzi*, which was smaller, more educational, but also theoretical.

HS: I used to get it.

JC: It was a great publication and it had a huge influence. So when I was organising underground here, but then quickly when I was in exile, I got pulled into that by Slovo and so quite a lot of my journalistic writing and theoretical activities went into sustaining *Umsebenzi,* working very much with Slovo, who got people to write and watched very carefully and shaped it through its processes. That was a lovely intellectual experience.

HS: So now, back in South Africa in the 1990s?

JC: I came back into South Africa early in the 1990s. In 1990 very luckily I got deployed to help set up the legal SACP. I was based in what became the Johannesburg office of the South African Communist Party. I stayed right through the 1990s. I was SACP delegate at the negotiations process, which was a very exciting reality. Intellectually there were several paradoxical preoccupations, which had to do with the paradoxes of the South African Communist Party, in the early 1990s.

The Communist Party was more popular than it probably had ever been in its history in South Africa in the 1990s, at the very moment when the communist legacy, of which it had been so much a part, was in steep decline and crisis, and that became an organisational challenge. The huge popularity of the party was an organisational challenge, which we couldn't meet. I remember we had a launch rally at the huge FMB soccer stadium in Johannesburg, which was just packed to capacity with something like 100,000 people at the rally. We handed out, unwisely, application forms to join the party. We had something like 100,000 applications to join the party, which we just couldn't process. We didn't have the organisation to reach to these people and to actually bring them in meaningfully into the organisation.

Those realities were happening at the same time as the collapse. Unfortunately, I think some of the key people like Slovo had only begun to think late, but nonetheless a few years ahead of the actual physical collapse of the Soviet Union and of the soviet bloc. He began to think critically about that tradition, of which we were so much a part, and therefore there were some internal organisational reference points and the beginning of an intellectual process, which helped. If it had been left a few years, if it happened afterwards, then there would have been so much more difficult, but obviously what also helped was that we were forging ahead rather than going backwards. So there was high morale in debates in the party at the time.

The sociology of the debates was quite interesting. Half of the party leadership quietly resigned. Half the central committee membership resigned quietly from the party in 1990 and they constitute basically the core of the ANC leadership at present. Their reasons for resigning at the time were, I was at that central committee meeting in Johannesburg when they announced, and they had clearly had discussed it among themselves as a faction, that they were going to leave the party. They said that they had remained broadly committed to what the party stood for, but they thought that, now that the party was no longer an underground organisation, they would need to announce publicly who its leadership was and they were not prepared publicly to do so. They thought that it would compromise the ANC, if so much of the key leadership of the ANC was also being shown publicly to be the party. Those of us who were of a different view also had a different view on that, but we agreed that we couldn't stop them. So there would be in any case an agreement that that would happen and we wouldn't say who it was. It wasn't supposed to be said at that time.

So that was the first kind of reality, which was many things. There was an organisational reality. There was an intersubjective reality between leadership. The division occurred along lines, which had been somewhat factional lines in exile, and so there was a distinctly a Hani and Slovo grouping in the party, but also in the ANC, and then another grouping which gravitated around Thabo Mbeki. There had been some sharp rivalry between Mbeki and the other two. There was a struggle about the SACP and the ANC. I think also the reaction of Mbeki was that the party would not last very long, that the party would not be able to survive much beyond the heroic struggle aura, that like other parties that had been involved in resistance struggle in Europe and so forth, it wouldn't really survive as powerfully and as strongly, especially now under the circumstances of collapse of Soviet Union and so forth.

So the scepticism about the party and its future came particularly from exile ranks, not all exile ranks, but particularly from those who had been in the party, although obviously there was a lot of being sceptical about the party by those who had not joined the party in exile. Two notable exceptions being Hani and Slovo, but there also a generation of 40 or 50 year olds, who remained on in the party and were more inclined to think critically about the legacy. They had been to the party school in Moscow. They had benefited enormously from the solidarity. Many of them had intellectual formations running precisely through that kind of solidarity experience, but they had also seen that socialism was far from perfect, that rat bag socialism called actually existing socialism had been far from perfect, and there were many difficulties and problems, so there was a capacity to think sympathetically but critically about the legacy from those quarters.

Ironically, it was often new members coming into the party who were least prepared to be critical of the past and of the legacy.

HS: Why?

JC: 1) I think many of the new members had been SACP supporters, but had simply not been able to find it in the underground. They wanted to join the party in the 80s, but couldn't quite connect with it, but were influenced by the party, by reading *Umsebenzi, AC*, reading Marxism and so forth.

2) I think the Soviet Union played a symbolic role in the struggle, not just for communists, so there were netball teams in Soweto called Kremlin and Kalashnikov and so forth. The Soviet Union was this sort of powerful force out there and, although we were bleeding here and the apartheid regime was supported by Washington and London, we also had out there somewhere our superpower supporting us and so forth. So it was that, it was a kind of external reality that was powerful, although the realities were dark and bitter here. There was an outside force that would help us and stood behind us and people really didn't want to believe that that external reality was a complicated and compromised reality. I think there was that. Then there was some hardliners and Harry Gwala who was…

HS: I remember hearing of him.

JC: Who argued in respect of that what went wrong out there was not that there were massive internal problems there that had something to do with that kind of Stalinism, bureaucratism, but that Gorbachev basically had sold out. Slovo had, and I suppose myself as well, under the influence of Slovo, but not to blame him for it, we had been rather naively too supportive of Gorbachev in the late 80s and 90s. So there was sharp internal SACP debate, whether it was a debate with those who had left the party, who were now influencing the ANC and particularly the elections, but there was a strong debate inside of the party, about the meaning of what had gone wrong, indeed if anything had gone wrong, outside in the former socialist countries.

All of that then also co-incided with the sharp, huge debates about the way forward here in South Africa in this complicated new terrain, about what kind of party we were trying to build. Maybe I could focus on that. It relates to many things, including what kind of intellectual realities the communist party should try to be building.

HS: Yes.

JC: One version of what the party should be was that it should continue to be a very tight vanguard party with probation periods of 6 months or longer, which have been justified in the underground period on security grounds, although it had often been implemented bureaucratically as it were excluding certain elements from the party and so on. Again, we still live with that legacy in the party. There were a number of people who got excluded from the party, who I think were left wingers who were Marxists, who were communists in some broad general sense of that word, but who had been hurt when exiled by and excluded by, in rather Stalinist ways, by elements within SACP.

The Gwala grouping argued for a tight vanguard party. Some elements close to Mbeki, who remained on in the party, perhaps in order to watch over the party, basically I think that's the case, also argued for a tight vanguard party, partly so that we would simply be a little museum keeping alive the memory of Moses Kotane and so forth, but would wither into relative insignificance. That bureaucratic control over membership and participation in the party, I think, suited that agenda. It corresponded also to particular instincts about what it is to be a communist. Others of us argued for a very open approach to, amongst other things, to party membership and to debate and to discussion and so forth within the party. I think the sheer realities of the situation favoured this, because the existing membership that carried over membership from the past were divided themselves as to whether they should have a vanguard Stalinist party or not, so there was a division. So who was going to monitor or supervise the probation period?

Everything was so much in debate and so much in flux that precisely which hurdles they had to cross in order to become members were themselves contested and uncertain. Also above all what was apparent was that there were thousands and thousands of working class cadres, shop stewards, experienced revolutionaries, who had a lot more experience of

organising on the ground in South Africa, who wanted to be members, who were members or whatever, whose exiled leadership couldn't exclude from SACP membership. So the party then in the 90s became quite a fluid party. We were uncertain about how large our membership was, what the coherent ideology was, who we were and that was fine and I think that was absolutely conjunctural for the circumstances.

The SACP was in that period less an organisational but more an intellectual force. It made key intellectual contributions into that complicated and throbbing reality. One issue was how to conduct negotiations. I think that there was a tendency to pursue an elite pact negotiated outcome and to see the mass movement, the trade union movement, the civics, that UDF pluralistic reality, as having played its role. Now that the struggle was basically over, the idea was that things needed to be stabilised and kept quiet, so that the negotiations could get on with it. Any mass mobilisation could upset the apple cart and could play into the hands of reactionary forces and so.

The party, and the party were not alone, there was this tradition coming out of the 80s, which found its place inside the ANC, where large numbers of the key leadership came into the party or the ANC, who agreed with the perspective that mass protest, mass organisations, mass mobilisations were essential for the negotiations to succeed. It was our critical weapon, so the party made a lot of inputs into the ANC and into trade union movement in this direction, around this particular conception of negotiations. This was opposed to Harry Gwala, who was saying that negotiations were finally finishing the sell-out and that insurrection was what we should be headed for. To oppose that, to say negotiations were serious, it was a key strategic path we needed to pursue, but it was not … It could become a sell-out, but what would prevent it, was that we sustain and maintain popular involvement, mobilisation and so forth right through. The record and what the party was doing at that time…

One of the frightening things of our reality in the early 90s was that we became the darling of the left internationally and so there were lots of pilgrimages to South Africa. But it was very useful, because people came instinctively to learn, but actually providing us with lots of … We met Nicaraguans, we met Salvadorians and we met Filipinos and we met people who were going through or had just gone through negotiated settlements of one kind or another themselves. Often coming into the SACP office were people who had been burned in the process or who had lost the strategic high ground and initiative in those processes. I remember Ed de la Torre, who was a Catholic Filipino priest.

I think that these left influences in the early 90s, international influences, were again very important, not least for me intellectually. They were pluralistic influences. I think that was important. I think that the SACP had historically in its international stance had been very one-dimensional in linking up with fraternal communist parties in other countries. That was important and it certainly helped the ANC as well. I think it established an international network of support mechanisms, but the communists within it were exposed to something much broader and more pluralistic in exile, namely the broad anti-apartheid movement, but that was not directly part of their communist experience, but I think we learnt something from that.

Both outside and inside the country, there was mass mobilisation and we learned the importance of autonomous organisation, pluralistic organisation, that the left needs to be a dynamic pluralistic reality. I think that was the experience that I carried from the 80s, but it was also the early 90s experience that I had got from international visits. People coming to South Africa to learn from South Africa, but then us learning from them. They were very often from communist parties, but they were very often not from that, and brought a variety of different left experiences, which were very valuable to try to chart a way forward in South Africa, not least in regard to the kind of Washington theory about 3rd world negotiated pacts and negotiated transitions in Latin America and Eastern Europe.

Ok, moving to the 1994 thing, the South African Communist Party, it's hard to put it in 10 minutes. I think that again we have tried to be primarily an intellectual and strategic force in the South African reality. We have realised that to be that you can't be a handful of intellectuals and the publication of something or two. You've actually got to try to develop something of a mass organisation. So we are a fairly small party. We think we have got about 18,000 active members who are more or less …

HS: 18,000?

JC: 18,000, that is about the number of people who are on a fairly regular basis going to branch meetings and are organisationally structured. Our influences are obviously much greater. On our books, we've some 80,000 people who one way or another align themselves with the communist party, but our active cadreship is around 18,000. Many are in the trade union movement and the next largest grouping would be youth, African youth especially. But the influence of the party, I think, is much greater than its membership and we are advisedly a communist party in the context of an alliance with the ANC and COSATU and a lot of our work is conducted inside of the ANC and inside of the trade union movement: political education work, ideological work of one kind or another.

I think the huge challenge of the post-1994 period has been to keep socialist aspirations, culture, morality, alive and resonant within the South African reality. I think we've somewhat succeeded, but it's an uphill struggle, for a variety of reasons. Obvious reasons being, first of all, external reality, which is not just the collapse of the old soviet bloc, but the rolling back of the social democratic left project and, dramatically for us here in South Africa, the rolling back, the falling apart really, of the radical 3rd world project in Mozambique and Zimbabwe and Angola and arguably in Vietnam. Those have impacted heavily on morale and orientation here in the South African liberation movement, that external reality.

There is also then the reality of an undefeated capital, a powerful capitalism inside of our country, which has managed to come through literally unscathed inside of its own defeat really, relatively unscathed, linked then to quite a rapid emergence within the ANC of a new capitalist class, not a new capitalist class, as part of the South African capitalist class. It's not a separate black bourgeoisie. There's one bourgeoisie in South Africa, but a small but significant component of that South African bourgeoisie is now a black stratum, the majority of whom are deeply linked into the ANC. That has created a complicated terrain on which the SACP is trying to carry through a left project agenda here.

I think that the success of that project is uncertain at the present time. I think that the reality of South Africa is still somewhat fluid and therefore outcomes over the medium term are still in play. But I am probably now, speaking now in April of 2001, less optimistic than I was, even 2 or 3 years ago, about the outcome. I think what keeps it relatively fluid is the continued existence of a strong militant trade union movement.

Second Interview with Jeremy Cronin MP
by Dr Helena Sheehan
in the South African Parliament on 24 January 2002

HS: We're taking up this interview from where we left off some months ago. So, Jeremy, I'd like to just take up the story from the 1990s, the period before the 1994 election, but I'd like to concentrate particularly on the period since 1994. So the story …

JC: think that the period before 1994 is important, because it begins to show what's going to be at play through the latter part of the 1990s into the 2000s. What's at play includes the confusions and uncertainties and weaknesses of the liberation movement itself, which were beginning to show themselves already at the beginning of the 1990s. So it's not as though there's some kind of huge dramatic watershed in 1994.

The 1994 breakthrough is the result obviously of both external and internal South African realities. In both cases, from a left perspective, both the domestic as well as the external realities are of a mixed kind. It's not as though it's an entirely favourable set of circumstances, which permits finally some kind of democratic breakthrough in South Africa.

Externally, through the latter part of the 1980s, the soviet bloc, which had been one very important material support base for the ANC and indeed for other 3rd world national liberation movements, not least in southern Africa, were clearly in full decline. I mean, long before they actually collapsed, it was quite apparent that the levels of support had melted. Even strategic understanding of national liberation struggles in the south, these things were diminishing quite considerably. When I was in Lusaka between 1987 and early 1990, somewhere in the middle of that, I remember comrades from the SACP being called into the soviet embassy and told that we could no longer expect the same levels of support. We needed to move rapidly towards some kind of negotiation. The ability of the Soviet Union to sustain that kind of cold war position was diminishing quite rapidly.

So there was that and then in the endgame, in the run-up to the negotiations, there was quite a lot of activity. I was located in the internal political committee as it was called in the ANC headquarters in Lusaka and we were beginning to do brainstorming exercises and strategic planning around negotiations in 1988–89. We were being briefed quite a bit by Oliver Tambo, who was then the ANC president. The Soviets were saying and the ANC led by Tambo was saying that it's very important to be quite pro-active in the negotiations process. The comparison with what had happened in Zimbabwe where ZANU and ZAPU had, out of the blue, found themselves pitched into the Lancaster House negotiations was underlined very firmly to us.

The anecdote which Tambo told, I don't know if it was true, but it was pointed and it was that on a given day, it must have been in 1979 or early 1980, Mugabe was pulled in by Samora Machel and given a one-way air ticket to London and told: "You go and negotiate with the brits. If you fail to reach a settlement, well that's fine, but you're not coming back to Mozambique." And Joshua Nkomo head of ZAPU, on the same day was given exactly the same message by Kenneth Kaunda in Lusaka. So Tambo was saying that we must be in command as much as possible of the process ourselves and set the agenda. So, although it was fairly late in the day, nonetheless, the ANC poised itself, positioned itself, quite well in terms of the negotiation process. Tambo described it as an inverted pyramid and said that the opposition must be at the apex of this inverted pyramid and behind that would assemble a whole range of our own people, the UDF and COSATU and so forth, the southern African region, the OAU, the UN and so on. By and large, that succeeded. So there was from a negotiations point of view, a fairly clear strategic direction led by the ANC and the other forces, like the apartheid regime, were always off balance from a strategic point of view.

All in the midst of it the people who were giving us the worst advice often was advice not to be tough. For instance, one of the key demands was that there needed to be some arrangements before going into elections, that we could not allow the first democratic elections to be run by the apartheid regime, that there had to be some kind of interim government arrangement. They said that it's impossible; it's unprecedented internationally, and so forth. This was what the soviet embassy was telling the ANC/SACP in the late 80s and clearly they were just desperate to remove the burden of solidarity and support, which had been very substantial though the later 60s, 70s and 80s.

So there were those pressures, the beginnings of the collapse of the soviet bloc, which were obviously fundamentally unfavourable circumstances for us. Equally unfavourable was the decline of the region. The progressive or relatively progressive regimes in Zimbabwe and Mozambique, in particular Angola, were really beginning to feel the brunt of the destabilisation programmes launched from the south, but also the consequences of their own errors, structural adjustment programmes and so forth, so that levels of support were also beginning to dwindle quite considerably.

On the flip side, positively, in terms of the international situation, one: the broad anti-apartheid movement had grown to considerable strength. I mean, I don't think that when looks at other oppressed peoples, the Chileans early on in the 70s, the Palestinians currently, or the Kurds currently, then I think the levels of global support the anti-apartheid movement received in South Africa were unprecedented and was one of the high points perhaps of the of post-1968 ferment of social movements and one of the great achievements of that post-68 movement. It was this global anti-apartheid movement, which had produced then by the mid-80s, from 1976 onwards, a growing movement of sanctions imposed reluctantly by northern governments, but increasingly imposed, and the early 90s became the crunch period, because the financial sanctions in particular meant that the South African government and business in South Africa were very exposed and were going into a cul-de-sac.

HS: It also meant that the people who were engaged in that internationally had a lot of hope about what would happen in South Africa.

JC: I'll come to that in a moment, because that became its own burden, a responsibility and a burden on the movement in South Africa.

HS: I'll give you just a small anecdote, which is very recent. You know the anti-apartheid strike at Dunnes Stores in Dublin in the 1980s? You know the song that Ewan Mac Coll wrote and my daughter sang on that CD I produced? Just since I've arrived back here in South Africa, there's been a picket on the SA embassy in Dublin by the same trade union. Do you know about it?

JC: Around what?

HS: Around trade union recognition and national wage agreements. It's the Irish workers who work at the SA embassy in Dublin. The embassy is claiming diplomatic immunity and not recognising the union or paying nationally negotiated wage increases since 1998. The irony of it being the same union is playing badly for SA. The 1980s strike was an almost unprecedented thing. These were just girls on the checkout in Dunnes Stores who wouldn't process outspan oranges and lost their jobs. I am told in my e-mail that there was a big photo in *The Irish Times* of the picket on the SA embassy from that union. It's just a small anecdote, but …

JC: It captures something.

HS: Anyway, we want to discuss the expectations and events in larger terms. However, this is how it is playing in Ireland at the moment. People in the trade union movement, who were active in the anti-apartheid movement, ask: how can this be the ANC?

JC: I'm glad to hear that they're not just keeping quiet, that they actually are picketing and mounting actions. I've not been aware of it in South Africa.

HS: There was a tiny item in *The Cape Times* one day saying that there was a strike threatened and that the department of foreign affairs said they were confident it would be settled soon, but it wasn't settled. Anyway, back to the early 90s.

JC: Clearly there were the domestically popular forces. The guerrilla struggle had never really got going and its principal impact was at a propaganda and mobilisational level rather than as a guerrilla struggle that was particularly liberating areas, for instance. I think the ANC liberation movement was slow really to understand the reality of the SA terrain. They spent a lot of time through the 60s, 70s and 80s trying to be something like Vietnam or Cuba, or the example that we had in our region, the struggle in Zimbabwe or Angola or Mozambique.

There was a kind of disjuncture between a principal focus of the ANC liberation movement through the 80s, which was very much on assembling an army that was going to fight a guerrilla struggle, and the actual reality that was propelling the struggle here at home, which was largely a struggle of mobilised popular forces on the terrain of an unevenly but relatively developed capitalist economy.

So the principal sites of struggle were in factory workplaces, mine compounds, consumer boycotts, civic struggles, struggles in churches, struggles in the media, in the schools and so forth. So it was within the texture of a relatively developed capitalist economy that the struggle took place and it was characteristically the struggle of a people that was the majority black population, but was included into the texture of a capitalist economy as consumers, as students, as workers, as commuters, who were deeply included in it, but also then excluded racially. A lot of the struggle took place in that disjuncture between the exclusion and inclusion. Exclusion into a township was used then as a weapon, so that the township became a kind of semi-liberated zone. The black campuses stuck away far away in a Bantustan became zones to challenge the ways in which they were being integrated at the same time as students, as consumers, as users of buses or whatever. I think that that reality remains very resonant now in the present.

HS: In what way?

JC: Because I think that if you look at the evolution of 3rd world national liberation movements, by and large they did a lot better than we did and liberated themselves a lot sooner. Inspiring examples are of a Vietnam or Zimbabwe or a Mozambique. The beginnings of independence happened before independence in liberated zones, which were often of a considerable extent, and eventually the countryside surrounded the capital city and the colonial power departed hastily.

But they then arrived in a post-independence situation, essentially with the popular mobilisation that had been largely of a peasant army recruited, fed, equipped in a remote countryside, where the writ of the colonial or neo-colonial power was shaky. So what liberated the city was often some kind of peasant army, usually led by urban working class,

intellectuals or professionals of one kind or another. But the mass base was this peasant army. So what you see, say in Zimbabwe, what is now playing itself out in Zimbabwe, is that the liberating force post-independence, the very upper echelons become the government, the next layer become the generals and senior officers in the security forces. Others get integrated into either parastatal functions or the security forces and then the rest are demobilised back into often a very remote countryside.

You see then written into that is the tendency for the bureaucratisation of the struggle, there being real popular energies and real heroic struggle inspired by liberatory ideals but continued, very often with good intentions by the new bureaucracy, but the institutionalisation that it assumes and then the remoteness of the mobilised mass base, there's a great disjuncture between them. A geographical and social distance opens up.

HS: Was there much of an atmosphere of analysing this, what had happened in the rest of Africa, and reading Fanon and so on? Was there much of an atmosphere of that in the movement?

JC: In South Africa? Well I think that the leading cadres of the ANC, not all of it, but the bulk of it, was in exile through this complicated period in southern Africa and in Africa of the 70s and 80s. So there's an experience of high expectations and expectations even beginning to be fulfilled, for instance in Mozambique there were outstanding advances made in the second half of the 70s after independence, in health care, education, democratisation of many things, but it lost its impetus.

HS: Why?

JC: Mainly because of brutal destabilisation through RENAMO, armed and equipped by Rhodesians and then taken over by the apartheid regime, but also because of mistakes made by the liberation movement, but also because of the socio-economic reality that the liberation movement was essentially a peasant people's army. It was hard then to sustain a popular dynamism and a popular energy through the 80s and I think that has been another reality.

The fact that our liberation was different, slower, less successful, the model we were using probably was inappropriate to the reality of who was fighting the struggle and the way in which they were fighting the struggle. It's a very important asset now in the present. I think there are tendencies now of what some of us refer to as the Zanufication of the ANC. You can see features of that, of a bureaucratisation of the struggle: Thanks very much. It was important that you were mobilised then, but now we are in power, in power on your behalf. Relax and we'll deliver. The struggle now is counter-productive. Mass mobilisation gets in the way. Don't worry. We've got a plan. Yes, it'll be slow, but be patient and so on. That kind of message has come through.

HS: Then in Zimbabwe there's been the Maoist remobilisation of the movement for specific purposes.

JC: I'll come to that. Post-independence, probably you have to demobilise and incorporate in some way a peasant army, but it's not that easy to do the same to a trade union movement, even if that's what you want to do, stupidly perhaps you might want to do that for whatever reason, or to demobilise a student movement or civics or women's organisations or whatever or the press, traditions of progressive campaigning journalism and so forth.

So those energies are still present. They've been dispersed. They're confused. Often, they get suppressed by the very forces that they aligned themselves with originally, the broad ANC and so on, but it bubbles through a great deal. I think therefore there's a lot of fluidity still in the situation, which should be neither underrated nor exaggerated. There are levels of disorganisation, demobilisation, disappointment, demoralisation. I personally don't think it's all played out at all.

There were already the signs of all of what I'm talking about present prior to 1994, in the multi-party negotiations period and I wrote about it at the time in a piece which John Saul refers to, which I think I called "The boat, the tap and the Leipzig way". I was trying to typify/characterise what I thought were three different views about the mass mobilisation, popular involvement in this period of negotiations.

The position in the ANC, which I characterised as the boat position, was: don't rock the boat. Basically, the royal road to democracy, to achieving our strategic objectives, was negotiations and nothing should be done to rock the boat in that process and, if we mobilised people in the midst of the negotiations, the apartheid regime would walk away or unleash its own mobilisation of one kind or another, the dirty war and so forth. So don't rock the boat. That was coming through from very senior quarters in the ANC, some of those elements in the ANC who were taking that position in the early 1990s, are very powerful inside the ANC at present.

The second position, which I characterised as the tap, was the attitude of: mass mobilisation is important, at particular moments, so it has to be turned on and off. In my view, Mandela typified that perspective. He had an understanding and an experience from the 50s, his own experience from the 1950s, of mass mobilisation being very much at the heart of the revitalisation of the ANC. As a youth leader in the late 1940s, it led a revolt of the activists against a rather moribund, middle-class ANC leadership at the time and that had spearheaded a decade on ANC revitalisation, of strikes, of stay-aways, of boycotts, many of the tactics of mobilisation which became so central in the 1980s again. So you had a feel and an understanding of that, but tended in my view to have a somewhat mechanical attitude to popular participation.

The third position at the time we called the Leipzig way, in the light of events in Leipzig, was that sustained and continued popular pressure was critical for the negotiations itself. Far from undermining the negotiations, it would serve two purposes. It was critical in exchanging the balance of forces in the negotiations process itself. We used to say at the time, obviously I was a Leipziger, that what transpires in the negotiations was as the result of the balances of forces outside of the negotiating chamber.

And that wasn't a static reality. The regime, the apartheid regime at the time, understood that very well and was unleashing a very brutal, low-intensity warfare strategy against us, the assassination of key cadres, including Chris Hani But that was just one of the thousands of key cadres. It wasn't the negotiators, I was one of them, we weren't particularly targeted, it was the critical organisational link between the organisers and the massed ranks, which was our one strength at the time, but were being targeted for assassination. Then also the general unleashing of violence: random, terrorist violence against trains, taxi-ranks, schools, townships and so forth, to sow confusion and demoralisation and so on and basically to knock away the link between the ANC leadership and its one strength. We needed to mount, not our own counter-terror, but we needed to mobilise mass forces partly to defend ourselves in the face of this so that, and this was critical, so that they were themselves part and parcel of the negotiation process.

I would say that none of those 3 schools of thought within the ANC had a clear-cut hegemony over the process within the ANC itself. It was a contested perspective and there was mutual suspicion. The don't-rock-the-boaters thought that many of us were endangering the negotiations process and delaying it with some of those strategies. We really felt that they were not understanding what we were up against. So there were waves of significant mobilisation in that period. I think that those waves were critical in actually bringing about eventually the negotiations and the relatively favourable outcome to those negotiations.

After the Hani assassination, there was a major mobilisation wave that occurred then in a response. That was clearly critical. Within three weeks of his assassination, the final outcome to the negotiations was then settled and the elections then happened in exactly one year and three weeks after his assassination. It was mass mobilisation that did it. What was interesting was that in the course of the mobilisation, the response to Hani's assassination was: we must go and kill whites and what are we negotiating for? The ANC was able to inject political leadership into that to say: no, the assassins want you to say that. We have got to now demand the immediate implementation of the process leading up to elections. We were well able to do that.

In doing that and also getting mobilised massed forces to take up the national negotiating demands, we began to find they were also taking up their own local negotiating demands. So they would take up the demand for one-person, one-vote elections and so forth, for a unitary dispensation and so on, but at the same time in their mobilisation they would raise issues around non-access to the local town hall for meetings or the treatment that the white police were meting out to the people in the township in this particular police station and so on. They began to find that for once, their counterparts, the white mayor or the white police commander or local white business (for example, there were boycotts of shops in this process) began to negotiate with them, something that they hadn't particularly found before.

So in my opinion it's very important to understand what happened in the 1990s, but to hold onto that as an understanding for the future: that the negotiations themselves were mass-based and there were local-level negotiations happening. The transformation of South Africa wasn't just the product of two wise men, a De Klerk and a Mandela, shaking hands on a deal and having the farsightedness to understand that South Africa…

HS: That's important to explain to the rest of the world.

JC: It is very important, yes indeed. There is this kind of elite-pacting, which is of course the desired outcome in US think-tanks and so on, and the view of how negotiations have to be if they are going to be successful, and indeed the model that was imposed on Nicaragua and the Philippines and so on, with some success and those countries from an imperialist perspective, whereas the negotiations and the outcomes were different here. But you can forget that, even the participants themselves can forget that, and begin to imagine that South Africa was delivered into freedom by two great men. It helped, that there was a degree of strategic maturity from De Klerk and a great deal of strategic intelligence from someone like Mandela, but the outcome would have been quite different if we had simply folded our arms and allowed two gentlemen from two different sides to do it.

There is a retrospective attempt, including from within quarters of the ANC itself, to portray the outcome like that: you see, we delivered, and now from on high again, we will continue to deliver transformation and change and so forth. So it's good to remember what happened in the negotiations and to draw the right lessons rather that the wrong ones. Just as prior to 1994 it was at play, that continues in its different ways now to be at play.

HS: So, Jeremy, what was the thinking about the whole traditional left demand for expropriating the expropriators? I mean, one of the things that is said is that basically they have got away with it. They had to give over state power, but they got to keep all of the wealth. What was the thinking about that?

JC: I think that first of all that it was not just some of the left critics saying it, but we were saying it ourselves at the time. However, I'm not wrong in saying that, as a liberation movement, we were not so well-positioned, intellectually, theoretically, in terms of policy formation, in terms of socio-economic transformation. It was understandable, but not strong enough to forgive ourselves too easily. We had been very focused on the political tasks, democratisation, mobilisation, fighting a guerrilla struggle and so forth. I think the ANC and broader liberation movement proved itself quite adept, quite smart on the broader political terrain in terms of building a global consensus on what we were trying to do in terms of out-manoeuvring the apartheid regime, exposing what it was still doing in the midst of the negotiations and so on.

So the political terrain was one that I think we were quite good at. The socio-economic terrain…I don't think we were very literate, all of us. We'd not profoundly thought about that. We began to spot that as the SACP and key comrades from the ANC late in 1992-93 and began to say that we've really actually got to put a lot more effort into that. While we are busy dealing with a low-intensity conflict, the terrible violence, assassination and the complicated negotiations, we've actually got to prepare for governance in terms of socio-economic policy as well.

There continued to be some parallel processes, but there was a beginning of momentum. It didn't come from nowhere. Obviously, many of the struggles of the 80s were on the terrain of the socio-economic: education struggles, trade union struggles, civic struggles and so forth. They had begun to advance, but they tended to be sort of bottom-up, grass-roots type solutions, not wrong ones and very progressive ones, but they would often be about a developmental issue in a particular township or in a remote rural area, or changing the syllabus in a school or whatever.

So there were popular demands, which were not just of a political kind, but of a social and economic and transformational kind. The unions had obviously also advanced largely trade union kinds of demands around labour market reforms and so on. So the important components of socio-economic policy were relatively in place. Those energies then got taken up by the reconstruction and development programme process, driven often by those forces and then more by the social movements within the ANC fold. They were taken up by some of us who were policy-makers in the ANC, often university graduates returning from exile, who were part of the middle-ranking ANC leadership at the time, but the senior ANC leadership was not very focused on that.

So that was one relative shortcoming as we moved towards 1994. The other perhaps more important one was just the confusing global time in which South Africa came to independence. The models were down by 1994. I suppose in the SACP by and large we imagined that what we would do after independence would be not quite what they had been able to do in the Soviet Union or Eastern Europe or Cuba, because perhaps the balance of forces wouldn't be quite that favourable, but it would be something aspirationally moving in that direction. That simply had come tumbling down by the time we got to 1991. It wasn't a plausible argument because things had gone terribly wrong. The first who needed to admit it was the SACP itself. Otherwise we would be condemned to repeating history, which was no longer such a good instructor.

HS: So you were left with a kind of abyss…

JC: Everyone points that out, that collapse, but there were other collapses as well. The radical 3rd world project which had looked quite promising in the late post-Vietnam victory period, certainly in Southern Africa, as I said earlier. In Zimbabwe remarkable gains had been scored at the level of land…the beginning of land reform, health, education…very, very important progressive social and economic transformation.

HS: Also all the 1st world ferment had collapsed.

JC: Yes. So there were examples that looked inspiring, but the experience of the leading cadres of the ANC in exile was of all of it turning terribly sour, of venal corruption and of bureaucratisation setting in in many other countries.

HS: And the ferment in the 1st world dying down too…

JC: Well exactly. The post-68 ferment. So the social movement ferment was not at its pinnacle in the early 1990s. Neither was the more progressive social democratic project, that had been punctured by globalisation. So where it had been at its most inspiring, in Sweden, in the Netherlands or whatever, it had become rather venal, rather uncertain, often out of government, now at this stage.

HS: In the early 80s in the European social democratic parties, when the Mitterand government first took power in France and PASSOK in Greece, there was a lot of hope about what the left could do with state power vis-a-vis the global economy. That died very quickly. There was also a stronger left in the British Labour Party then than later in the decade.

JC: Yes and that had been marginalised and so forth. As you said earlier, the ANC and its alliance found in government with an overwhelming majority in 1994 with the hopes and expectations and huge investment of solidarity and support of progressive forces around the world, so carrying a huge responsibility and flying the flag.

HS: A lot of it was reacting to the fact that everything else was at such a low ebb and then there was this, which was on the upgrade, and that was immensely important to the rest of us.

JC: And we knew it was important and we knew and know still that we have a huge indebtedness also to all of those progressive forces. Not just as a trade-off or payback or whatever…

HS: I know.

JC: It was more the investment of moral energy, of hopes, of denting the triumphalism of neo-liberalism, which was at its zenith in the early 1990s. So there was an imbalance between our capacities, the balance of force realities, the availability of models and the duty and responsibility we had as a left in South Africa. I think that now in 2002 we need, in discussion with comrades all around the world and in our own discussions here in South Africa, to pick through all of that in ways that are honest, sober, not demoralised, nor overburdening ourselves or anyone else with undue expectations. I think we are in the midst of that.

What for me, then, moving now beyond 1994, what would be the main points of reference? I think that we managed belatedly but significantly to fight the elections of 1994 with a very progressive and quite comprehensive election

programme. It was actually a 100 page reconstruction and development programme/election manifesto, which is interesting, because normally parties that become more and more just electorally focused like election manifestos that are third-wayish, which are as vague as possible and have a feel-good character about them, but which are not terribly specific about anything.

The ANC, perhaps in its naivety, went into that 1994 election with a fairly complex, fairly extensive, but as I quickly discovered, not really extensive, detailed enough, programme which was called the reconstruction and development programme (RDP). At the heart of it was a commitment to understanding that the way forward in South Africa had to be connecting economic growth with development and development with growth. The problems in South Africa, the economic problems, had to do, not with the absence of infrastructure. Certainly in our region, certainly in our continent, there was considerable infrastructure. They were not with the absence of resources, although there are never enough resources in a 3rd world country, but that wasn't the particular problem in our situation.

We were a relatively resource-rich country, but with the huge inequalities and structural disjunctures in the system. That was the problem. There were inequalities and disjunctures of all kinds. First of all, there would be the skills disjuncture. So for a country with our relative levels of development, a large part of the population was relatively unskilled. There is the domestic market, so for a country with our level of GDP, our levels of productivity and so forth, we've actually got a tiny domestic market because of the massive apartheid inequalities, which continue to this day. The infrastructure is very uneven. There is a sophisticated financial sector infrastructure. There is a quite sophisticated transport infrastructure. But all of it is infrastructure that has developed and under-developed simultaneously in the country and the region.

So the reconstruction and development programme was that we needed to invest very substantially and to mobilise energy and resources into major programmes of redistribution towards the poor, towards the marginalised, towards rural areas, towards townships within the urban landscape. That was the only sustainable way of actually getting the growth that we undoubtedly needed. This effort at major growth through development would require an active public sector, which we also inherited. We inherited a very distorted, but very substantial, public sector from the apartheid past, which had been run as a kind of white welfare state. The big parastatals had been used to provide electricity, transport and so forth to the white minority and also to the white capitalist economy. So we had huge parastatal assets, but on the wrong mission.

There was going to be a major need then to restructure, but to restructure them to play an active and strategic role in redistribution and development for growth. Also clearly there were, alas, considerable private sector resources and capacities inside of our economy. Therefore the emphasis in the RDP, and I think probably it was the right emphasis, to get back to your question, was less about confiscation, but about coaxing, disciplining and persuading the significant private sector in our economy to be part and parcel of a major restructuring of their economy, in their own interests, otherwise there was no sustainable future for capitalism in South Africa. There might be short-term quick profits out of some kind of short-term export-led perspective, but that unless lots of effort went into infrastructural development, addressing the socio-economic backlogs, the marginalised, the uneven domestic market and so on, South African capitalism itself would never be competitive globally.

HS: It puts me in mind of the discussion of alternative paths, the whole debate around the new economic policy, in the Soviet Union in the 1920s. I have been thinking about it again in connection with the work I am doing on Bukharin at the moment [writing an introduction to the English edition of *Philosophical Arabesques*, a manuscript written by Bukharin in his last year, the time between his arrest and execution, which has only come to light in recent years] Bukharin is the personification of the path not taken.

JC: Indeed. I personally think that still has to be the strategic direction that we pursue. I don't think that there are too many alternatives. I think there are real possibilities down that line. But that perspective has suffered some setbacks. I think the critique from the left that you refer to, with the John Sauls and so on, would portray the setbacks as definitive defeats of this kind of perspective.

HS: You can understand how they see it that way sometimes.

JC: I can understand. If we come to be sitting here and talking in 20 years hence, they may prove to have been right, that the trajectories that we can see setting in 1996 in South Africa have now produced 20 hence a total outcome. But I do think that even empirically one can show that it's not unchallenged. There hasn't been unilateral reversing of that kind of growth and development perspective, but certainly there have been setbacks to that perspective. But the alternative agenda itself is not a secure perspective and has often failed to deliver on its own expectations and projections. So there is a considerable ferment and that comes and goes according to global realities, according to what's happening out there, but also according to realities here at home. I'd like to talk about those as we go along. But just to get back to the unfolding of the history…

The RDP also put a premium on popular mobilisation so that it described itself not only as a people-centred but also as a people-driven programme. Those in the ANC ranks who were those of the don't-rock-the-boat persuasion or of the we'll turn the forces on-and-off like a tap persuasion, would always talk about the people-centred character of our policies. I think quite genuinely as well. I don't suspect that Mandela or Mbeki are careless about popular suffering, poverty, unemployment and so on, but their emphasis tends to be on the people-centredness of the policies to be delivered from governmental positions rather than the other important dimension which is the people-driven character of it.

The new economic policy parallel that you're taking about, really it's a kind of multi-class project. We have popular working-class forces at play, but you're also trying to work somewhat co-operatively with capitalist forces. Just as in the negotiations, which were by definition partly a co-operative process, you had to bring to bear popular energies, popular aspirations, popular power, so too now in this complicated thing we are trying to do, which is against the logic of capitalism, in order to reconstruct and develop our economy. You can't just arrange that through elite-pacting. You've got to ensure that trade unions are mobilised and energetic and powerful and watching every move, that poor communities are able to articulate their concerns and frustrations, that they're able to add power to the process. Otherwise it gets deflected off into the short-termism of profit taking and so forth, which is inevitably where capitalism steers you, if you give them a monopoly of political and strategic direction, but I think that's what's happened a little bit.

So for a combination of reasons, one would be the sheer power, the ideological power and hegemonic power of the neo-liberal model and the weaknesses of the left, which include policy weaknesses, which may have been with us through the 20th century, but had become more apparent in the 1990s, the failure of the paradigms, the ANC itself or significant parts of the ANC got seduced. Whether from panic or deep concern, laden with the responsibilities of governing, they were seduced or persuaded of certain aspects, not necessarily the whole package, but core aspects of the neo-liberal paradigm became very influential in government circles and in leading parts of the ANC.

HS: Or even just had the sense that there was no alternative.

JC: Yes. Sometimes the left critique uses the language of betrayal and sell-out, the venality of corruption and so on. You find cases of that, but I think that's too easy actually. It's simplistic. It's a neat, easy left critique. Not that I'm saying you should give those who implemented wrong policies an easy run for it, but it's too easy on ourselves, because betrayal too easily excuses the left.

Why was neo-liberalism able to come up with proposals around restructuring South African Railways? Was it because they were powerful and because there was a sell-out and betrayal? Was the left that articulate and clear-cut about how we wanted to go? It's a mixture of those things. I think very often we've been weak in the policy process, in the institutional process, right through the 20th century. I think that with issues of management for instance, public management more than private sector management, the left has not really thought about those things. There are huge gaps in the left discourse. We don't really have a powerful Marxist tradition about power.

HS: Yes and there's a strong sense out there that the left just can't handle power.

JC: Yes. So we are left with the Prussian state and as Lenin perhaps …

HS: There is also the whole question of the authoritarian way in which GEAR came to be policy. Who was consulted? Was it the position of the majority of members of the ANC, let alone the people who vote for the ANC?

JC: We are about to go into bilateral with the ANC. We ought to talk about this. COSATU is putting a lot of emphasis on the policy process, correctly, because there have been huge problems. The RDP was informed by popular aspirational struggles. Increasingly policy is formed by directors-general of government departments and their senior management, or even worse still, by external and very often private sector consultants from the EU or North America or whatever. So lots of policy is formed in that way.

Therefore, the ANC and its cadreship, never mind the broader alliance, are very often distant from key policy formation, partly reflecting our own weaknesses, but also partly reflecting the capacities and energy and the sense in key places that there aren't alternatives and the Americans know best or the World Bank know best. You can be suspicious about it, but frankly, if you ask a programme for water delivery, they come up with something and we're not very sure. The policy process: I think that's important and it's a question of strengthening the ANC to begin with, but another factor is that…

HS: There is still the problem of how GEAR came to be policy is the first place and how policy is formed, a sort of authoritarianism and even the intimidation of anyone who even raises questions about it. There's a really bad atmosphere.

JC: That is a problem about GEAR. That's a definitive moment, I think. When you go into government armed with a progressive policy perspective and I think one that remains broadly the right one. There's a major offensive against the RDP from the private sector in South Africa, an attempt to portray it simply as a kind of wish list and an impossible wish list, a kind of letter to Father Christmas, and the reducing of it to a set of delivery targets. The ANC in government fell into this. So the heart of the RDP is: x number of houses will be built within a few years, x number of water tap connections will be made and so on. So it's translated into this kind of bureaucratic management by performance objectives.

Then the ANC is judged, and judges itself, against these targets, which is a massive reduction of what it was about, which for me was much more the strategic understanding of what we were trying to do: linking growth and development, understanding that it was a multi-class project that involved certain compromises and concessions to capitalism, but at the same time working against the logic of capitalism as best as one was able, focused on an export-orientation but on a domestic infrastructural development and so on. That was and I think remains the essence of that programme.

The other component was the illusions, which were probably left illusions, about state power, a kind of tap notion about state power, that you remove control over the lever and you take over the lever yourself and then it's a kind of neutral instrument that you can turn on and off. Of course, state power isn't like that. It's a highly contested terrain. All the sort of Leninist stuff about it's either one thing or another, it's either a dictatorship of the proletariat or of the bourgeoisie, it's not helpful, certainly not helpful in the South African circumstance, and encourages illusions of all kinds.

HS: A lot of younger party members are still reading that and thinking that way.

JC: Yes. So if it's not then the dictatorship of the proletariat, which it clearly isn't at present, and hopefully it never will be that, dictatorship itself is not a happy word. If you're saying that it's one or the other of these alternatives, then you're encouraging the right wing of the ANC to say that clearly we're not going to get away with having dictatorship of the proletariat, then your own theory says what we've got to implement now is some kind of dictatorship of the bourgeoisie until some later 2nd or 3rd stage, or whatever.

You've got to understand the huge complexity and contested character of this thing. Another component in the difficulties of implementing this RDP, which needed to be led by the public and parastatal sector, but the ability of the public and parastatal sector with a parlous budget, which the apartheid regime had deliberately indebted through pension funds and so forth. They hobbled the key parastatals, turned them into basically pension-paying institutions, paying, obviously the white bureaucrats and state workers and so on. So the capacity to use them from that new position of apparent power to drive the socio-economic programme was impaired massively by such realities.

HS: What about the argument that some people (AIDC, Jubilee 2000, etc) in the last years have made about the decision to pay the debt of the previous government? There is the whole argument about paying twice for apartheid.

JC: Yes. That was one of the complexities that we get post-1994. The ANC government's argument, which I think has some merit in it, is that the apartheid debt is not overwhelmingly an external debt. It's a very small component of the debt. The debt is actually a domestic debt and that's the ironic product of the financial sanctions imposed in the latter part of the 1980s. We therefore have to address it with considerable care. A major default on the pension fund for instance would impact upon working people.

HS: Some of them were the people who interrogated and tortured…

JC: We need to think that through. The moral position of the apartheid debt: it was run up in order to arm and equip the apartheid army, to destabilise the townships and to assassinate people and interrogate people and so on. That moral argument needs to be looked at seriously, but weighed against the likely impact of a refusal to handle this thing intelligently and strategically from an economic point of view. For me, the priorities are less about moral punishment of those guilty and more about how sensibly can we shepherd our resources in ways that deepen trust. For me, that's the argument.

HS: But the argument is that the money that was being used to pay off that debt should have been used to implement the RDP. That's the argument that's being made, as I understand it.

JC: I think the RDP problems are less resource problems. The resources are there. It's the ability to use and marshal those resources intelligently and effectively with a kind of unified strategic perspective. I think that's it's less that we have continued to pay off apartheid debt that has impeded our ability to move ahead … (end of tape 1)

HS: Jeremy, I wonder if you could address the article written by John Saul in *Monthly Review* a year ago called "Cry for the Beloved Country", which set out a somewhat bleak picture of contemporary South Africa, which has been influential among the left abroad. It has also been discussed, with much assent, by the left here.

JC: I read it once quickly and found it sort of irritating, perhaps threatening, because it was written out of a perspective not dissimilar from my own, and obviously reflects a grave disappointment in what was happening in South Africa. He talks in the opening paragraph, I think, about a tragedy being played out here in South Africa. Existentially, subjectively, that kind of reading of the situation, is a hard one to accept, personally, because I'm clearly a middle ranking player in this tragedy, if that's what it is. The other thing about is that it's elusive where it's headed, so that was part of my irritation. There weren't many things that I found myself disagreeing with on a first quick reading. He was saying things that we were saying, indeed, as ANC members inside of ANC structures, as ANC MPs, as the SACP formally, in regard to many aspects of government policy, the trajectory of events. Yet there was something elusive about it, which was extremely threatening perhaps, but also irritating and demoralising and demobilising.

So spurred on by the prospect of this engagement with you now this morning, I had a 2nd and 3rd and 4th reading of it. What I'm coming to conclude is that I think it almost needs a kind of textual or literary criticism to unpack what I was finding unsatisfying about it, which now I think I can characterise a little bit better. By and large I agree with what he's saying. There were prospects in the SA situation at 1994. He's very careful to say that those prospects shouldn't be exaggerated, that it was a complicated global situation. Clearly the conservative forces in our country were not defeated. It was a strategic and tactical setback that they were not eliminated from the scenery. He's careful to make all of those qualifications.

It's also not wrong in my view to say that there are key moments in which there were alternative policies, which were not pursued for whatever reason. He puts a lot of emphasis on the point that we were about to get to on the previous tape, mainly mid-1996, with the unfolding, with the announcement of GEAR (growth, employment and redistribution programme) as the key macro-economic policy. I agree with him it was a key moment and I agree with him that it was a wrong choice. It was not a choice that had to be made.

So what's my problem with him? The organisational challenges say facing something like the South African Communist Party are complicated. He in the end appears to favour a going it alone. He thinks that for there to be a left in South Africa of any significance, it's going to have to be a left that defines itself in opposition to the ANC. He detects some evidence of the emerging possibilities of such a project in NGOs and a little bit in COSATU. It starts to look a little bit depressingly like the left in North America, the left that he sees emerging here.

HS: Oh no. It couldn't be as bad as that.

JC: Not to belittle the challenges and difficulties that comrades there are confronted with, but you know … If it doesn't end up there, then so much the better, but that's where his hopes, which are now somewhat dashed hopes, are now manifested.

HS: There are people in South Africa who agree with all of that….

JC: Yes. Many people in South Africa. That could be the choice that the left in South Africa is left with. The alternatives are uncertain. So at one level there's not much I disagree with, but I think, and that's where the literary criticism becomes important, I think of the way in which it's all weighted, in the rhetoric, in the tropes of the argument. That's the crux of the problem. That's where I think that it's quite problematic in what he's doing. He's actually shutting down thoughtfulness about some possibilities.

So going all the way back to the thing we discussed, actually I'd forgotten even about the article, but this article that I wrote about "the boat, the tap and the Leipzig way", he generously quotes it, and what he says is: as Jeremy Cronin, SACP figure, said at the time was that there was a tendency to treat popular mobilisation during the negotiations as something that you could turn off and on. That's how he characterises this article. I suddenly realised that the first time I read it I was quite pleased to see myself being quoted and then I suddenly now on re-reading it realise that isn't what I said. What I said was that there was a contest inside of the ANC around popular mobilisation: on one side condemnation and on the other side a rather mechanical use of it and then a third position, which was an important position and which to some extent at certain moments became the hegemonic perspective within the ANC, was that it was integral to the entire process of transformation, leading up to the elections and beyond it. That was and remains an important position.

So there's a tendency to acknowledge things, but then to suppress the dialectical, uncertain and contested nature of positions. So at one moment there's a fairly subtle understanding from him, that it's a process and that it's contested somehow and then a the next moment there's a language of closure and foreclosure. So you're talking of a tragedy playing itself out and tragedies have inevitable endings, which are written into the first act at some bad mistake that's made, some kind of flaw in a personality, one of a movement in this case.

So there is a tragic trope that informs the thing. You see that all the time. He says it's very complicated, but against what do we measure the unfolding SA process? Well we don't know, but let's look at an earlier *Monthly Review* for instance, where he saw, and Magdoff and Sweezy argued that a revolution was on the cards in South Africa, but the worse that could happen would be a stabilisation of the capitalist project. He's now saying: let's face it, that is what is happening now, the stabilisation of the capitalist project.

But how stable is capitalism in South Africa? In the third world context GEAR was an attempt in my view to put a capitalist hegemony over the transformation process, but in order to do that, it needed to deliver. As it itself said, it stands for growth, employment, and distribution, and it said that, if we privatise, if we consolidate a black bourgeoisie, if we create an investor friendly economy, we will produce, through direct massive flows of funds, direct investment. This capitalist path will assure us of levels of growth of employment and redistribution, which are the answer to the challenges facing South Africa. Well that actually lies in ruins.

HS: Yes. Even in its own terms, it hasn't.

JC: Even in the leading financial press this week, it is secretly agreeing with the critique of GEAR, because some of the macroeconomic constraints are now proving to be constraints on capitalist growth. So the neo-liberal paradigm is not as stable. It is a paradigm that is unable to stabilise the situation. So I'm in agreement with that. It was a bad choice. It may well have set in motion certain accumulation trends and so forth, which are going to prove difficult to reverse, and will lay down a trajectory which makes it more complicated for a left agenda, but there's no definitiveness about it. The portrayal is one sided. So the left project had a moment of hope in the RDP. He's rather sceptical about the RDP, but sees it as the best thing on offer in South Africa with all its weaknesses, versus the neo-liberal project, and the neo-liberal project has won.

I think it's far from clear. On the balance of things, I think that between 1996 and now, the right within the ANC, the neo-liberal agenda, has probably won more rounds than the left agenda, but that it's not the end. It's not uncontested. Nor has it been a straight line, a tragic unfolding of the inevitable. It is quite wrong to portray it like that.

He talks for instance, and it is close to my heart, he talks in passing at one point about Saki Macozoma, who at that point was the chairperson of Transnet, which was the big transport parastatal. He was making some other point, but he referred to Saki Macozoma as the chief executive of the soon to be privatised Transnet. Now it was published in January of last year 2001 and I presume he wrote it some months before that. Now it's interesting to note that the soon to be privatised Transnet hasn't been privatised.

In fact, there's been a major reversal on that front. In the areas in which the soon to be privatised process was to happen, there's been some partial privatisation. So the South African Airways had been 20% privatised to Swiss Air and the next big move was going to be in terms of concessioning out some of the freight lines in South Africa. Now that has been completely reversed, as a result of protracted period of negotiation, internal ANC in turmoil, COSATU, government debate, negotiations, engagement with the parastatal management and so forth. They've abandoned that perspective, and ironically, but more or less as a result of the challenges that we mounted from within, and also as a result of the post- September 11th fallout, the 20% having been privatised to Swiss Air from South African Airlines has been renationalised. Swiss Air has gone bankrupt virtually and has had to sell its 20% stake.

So that makes two points: 1) there's an internal challenge to this tragedy and we are not playing a solo as the left within the ANC or as the alliance partners of the ANC. Clearly, we're up against tough challenges, but we're not without successes in this period. 2) the very neo-liberal agenda itself is losing wheels and losing direction globally, not just in terms of moral high ground, but also just in terms of the practicality, of the programmes, even in the north, but especially in the south.

So I think about the whole other dynamism than the way he rhetorically argues. I think it comes down to reflecting... I don't want to subjectivise too quickly or too easily with that argument, but I think that knocking around in it are two emotional things, the one is a sense of investment and then disappointment, which in someone like John Saul's case would be a disappointment that played itself out twice: in Southern Africa, first with Mozambique, where he'd invested huge energies and expectations, and then now. Then there is perhaps also a kind of northern scepticism, a northern left scepticism, about the left project in general, not least the left project in the south. You know, I don't want too easily get into that, but I suspect that there's something there. I think he sells the left short in South Africa and doesn't therefore equip us.

What the left in South Africa needs is a sense of programmatic perspective, help with that programmatic perspective, that policy perspective, not scepticism. Yes, we might be selling out. Yes, we might find it difficult to disagree with the ANC, because my MP's pay or whatever is dependent on being an ANC member. Those might be factors, but the key challenges are to engage with the transformation in South Africa with confidence and competence and with a capacity to argue things through in detail. I think that's where we've lost out.

For me some of the problems have been that we've been able to lead a generic critique of globalisation and neo-liberalism, but then have not been able, when it comes to looking at the proposed concessioning out of freight rail lines, to be able to carry the argument at that level. I think that's where people with intellectual capacity like John Saul and so on, who are sympathetic to the South African left project, I would hope could help us. I would hope that it's in areas of

that kind that he would be even more useful to us, rather than… By all means be cynical or sceptical about us, to keep us on our toes, and to be critical, but in ways that don't end up by assuming that there is inevitable betrayal of the revolution. That's the trope finally I think that organises it. A lot of left or pseudo-left criticism, typical say in the *Mail & Guardian* in South Africa, in my view, that governments per se are inevitably bureaucratic, that liberation movements, black liberation movements, inevitably move off in these directions.

HS: But within the alliance, Jeremy, there is a bullying of the left.

JC: There is a bullying of the left, yes.

HS: There are some people saying that people like yourself and Blade (Nzimande) in the SACP and Zwelinzima Vavi and Willie Modisha in COSATU are doing a kind of dance. You know, you come forward with this critique and then there's a reaction and you back down and everything is left as it is. Dale McKinley was arguing this recently and it was circulating in the SACP and COSATU and people were agreeing with it, saying that it gives the illusion, even the legitimacy, of contestation and some kind of power for the left, while actually disempowering the left I'm putting my own words what various people are saying, but I think that it captures what various people are thinking and saying, people on the left, both inside and just outside the alliance, and in the SACP itself. You know what I mean. Am I right?

JC: Yes. I think that question, put another way, is: should the left be in the ANC? or should it launch a project outside of it?

HS: Yes. For many now that is the question. For others there is still a question of how the left should be in it, if it is in it.

JC: Ok, let's start with that. How it should be inside of the ANC?

HS: Because a lot of the people who are saying this haven't decided that it should it be outside the alliance. They are still struggling to find a way to be left inside it. That is what gives them so much anxiety when they see it unfolding in this way.

JC: All of those questions must be confronted, must be debated in the party and indeed inside of the ANC …

HS: *You* think that, but..

JC: I mean, there are no taboo questions, ok…

HS: But there's an attitude with some that … you know that …

JC: Well, of course, we shouldn't be surprised. Let's step back. We're involved in a multi-class process. The SACP all the way back in 1928 made this strategic choice. The fact that it made it in 1928 doesn't mean that, because we've stuck to it for this long, it's right now, but we may have made it and stuck by it for good reasons. Part of what we said was that there would be considerable turbulence in the post-independence situation, that the unity of the whole national liberation movement would be difficult to build, because of sheer oppression and persecution and so forth.

Those would be the organisational challenges of the post-independence, post-democracy breakthrough period. The challenges would be much more to maintain the dialectic and to struggle for popular working class dominance, over a complicated multi-class front, a front to which nonetheless we were committed, we said at the time, and that's what we're living through.

So if there's marginalisation, shouting down, suppression of views and perspectives, it might have to do with individuals who are nasty, with Stalinist tendencies. It might have to do with a lack of imagination or any number of factors. But finally for me, a class analysis is also an important tool for understanding what we're living through. I think it is almost characteristic of a lot of left people, including comrades inside of the SACP and COSATU, is that there's the assumption

that we're living through a kind of tragedy, the sort of Stalin era is a version of it, or what's happened in Africa with ZANU and so forth, is another.

All of these are elements of precedents of what is assumed to be playing itself out inevitably here. It's the inevitability, the closure, the frozen penultimate. Everything is read as a sign of it. We told you so. There you are. They are selling out. They are betraying us. I think that one has to guard against that emotional, intellectual, conceptual tendency. Not to ask the questions that it asks, but not to assume that everything is a sign of this inevitable tragedy playing itself out. I think there is a tendency to do that. In a way it can be a lazy tendency and a tendency that lets us off as a left.

Yes, perhaps we are talking about the soon to be privatised Transnet, but I think it's my responsibility as a Communist Party person who is an ANC MP involved with transport, to engage with it, and not to assume that it will be privatised. It may well get privatised. I'm not going to be happy about that. It'll be a setback for the left. But if I work hard, and work hard with other comrades and colleagues, and challenge it, and also not assume that the ANC ministers responsible for it, who in this case happen to be also SACP members, are doing it out of some kind of bad faith or because they've decided all along to betray and this is the inevitable thing, but that they're doing it because they think it's the best thing and that we share some broad strategic and moral commitment to change in South Africa, so there is space for dialogue and they are not by definition the enemy, Stalin or Mugabe, but they might become that and that part of the responsibility is also to prevent them from becoming that.

That's the nature, for me, of what the left project has to be here and now in South Africa. It's not running away from state power, as complicated as it is, as fraught with dangers as it certainly is, but to engage it and to use what positions of power we have. The left is not out of power. It's not exactly entirely in power in South Africa. Far from it. But to use whatever positions of power we have to really give it a run for our money, to see whether we can't ensure that everything isn't reversed and that we have to get out of power to challenge power from the outside, from trenches outside of the positions of power.

Now it exposes us obviously to McKinley type allegations: you're only there, because you're enjoying your MP's salary or the power or whatever. I think it's the kind of criticism that gets thrown at us all the time, so that we examine ourselves to make sure. But I think the left in South Africa mustn't be shy of power. It's not just institutional power. It's also a certain mode of bringing popular power to bear on these processes as much as possible. I think the Saul-McKinley direction in effect can easily result in the evacuation of positions of power. It's not because that's what they intend, but is in effect, to fall short of the possibilities.

But I don't want to be over sure that we'll succeed. But I think it would be a renunciation of the possibilities of the situation, which remain in the situation, to abandon the ANC to the neo-liberals, which is really where that option carries us. It's a powerful force inside of the ANC, but it has its own weakness and I think we need to draw heart from that. It's the triumphalism of the 90s that has come somewhat unstuck. It has stalled as the dominant ideology. We have concepts to tell us why. We shouldn't be shocked at that. Its hegemony is ever more tenuous. It's become less triumphalist than it was globally.

Its possibilities of being unchallenged in South Africa, less perhaps than in other situations, its prospects of success and of consolidation behind the GEAR type project, are not that great. It is proving to be disappointing to a range of thinking, including to an emerging black bourgeoisie, who are less and less satisfied that this is the answer, also including the established white bourgeoisie, who are less and less sure, as a bourgeoisie in a 3rd world country, even though this may well be the World's Bank's view of how things go, that neo-liberalism doesn't result in underdevelopment and further marginalisation.

So I think that would be my response, but naturally I'm going to be one of the last to notice that the ANC has absolutely and effectively sold out and that what we should have done is to move out long ago and broken the alliance.

The other thing that Saul and McKinley talk about: that opposition is theatrical, that it's smoke and mirrors, that, apart from the little occasional bounce of criticism, that basically we're cheerleaders for the ANC, it's insulting. There is robust criticism and it's not theatre. The strike against privatisation at the end of August last year has resulted in incredible

fallout. We've not said we're sorry. We're open to listen to ANC criticism around the timing of the strike, coinciding with the World Conference Against Racism and so on, but we're not apologising for having supported the strike. I think it was raising the principle of privatisation. We didn't pretend to be criticising it and then back down or fill up the space so other left forces couldn't get in.

We shared and continue to share deep concern about certain agendas for privatisation in our country. That's resulted in a massive fallout and a very nasty attempt from key quarters in the ANC to expel the left, as you know. But in order to do that the ANC had to …We've been through an interesting few months, which I want to discuss with you. I don't know your reading of it is, but my personal reading and living through it has been that there was deep anger from quarters, presidential quarters, within the ANC, about the strike and the timing of the strike and so on. It was seen as an opportunity, as a sort of fallout from it, to maybe deal a very decisive blow of the kind that, for instance, the Labour Party in Britain had dealt at the time of the miners strike. It was seen as an opportunity to use fallout from the work in action to act to turn it around and to marginalise the influence of the trade unions and communists within the ANC.

I don't know if you've seen the so-called ANC briefing document, which had never came from the NEC, because it was never approved. It basically alleged that there was a left conspiracy.

HS: Yes. I saw it.

JC: Now anyone who understands the history of Indonesia or Sudan or Iraq or Syria, where there were broad national liberation fronts post-independence, you see the right, national bourgeois section, rounding literally on the left and butchering it. I don't think that we are there. I think that we're a different kind of society, but there are elements of that kind of project, of a brutal dealing with the left. It's not an impossible scenario. It's certainly been, I don't say masochist, but a very dictatorial dealing with the left. It's something that is being encouraged all the time in the media in South Africa by leading think-tanks associated with big business and so on. That prospect, that agenda, was explored in the months after the August strike within the ANC and I think it's fallen flat.

What happened essentially was that the issues raised by the strike are issues importantly that are been raised not just by COSATU and SACP, but by thousands of ANC cadres themselves. The ANC still has some democratic instincts, so what it did with this discussion paper, a reactionary and worrying analysis in the name of the NEC, but never brought to the NEC, it then took it to 52 regional conferences right around the country. NEC members were deployed to it. Interestingly also COSATU and SACP delegates were invited to attend. This paper was presented. Sometimes it wasn't presented, depending on who the presenter was meant to be. Sometimes people embarrassingly read through it and other times they read it with passion and conviction. It was very hard to get a consensus on very nasty allegations about a left plot.

The feedback that came back to the ANC from its own base was diverse, but people said: we want the alliance. That was overwhelming. They don't want to get rid of COSATU or SACP. They see the ANC that we're building, as being an ANC that is in the midst of an alliance. So many people had comments about the SACP in the ANC, seeing it in a moral sense, as some kind of guarantor that the revolutionary radical democratic credentials of the ANC haven't disappeared. They said that that it's an ANC that is not uncomfortable in an alliance with the SACP and with COSATU. Also the mass base said: you're mismanaging the alliance, collectively, so some people said it's the communist leadership or the COSATU leadership or the ANC leadership. There were diverse views, but the leadership was blamed for mismanagement of the alliance.

Also they said: well we're glad that you raised these issues with us, but you know what COSATU has been raising about GEAR, what the SACP has been raising about privatisaton, we're not sure if they're not right or wrong. Obviously, some ANC were saying that and some weren't, but overwhelmingly what they were saying was: we don't really understand your arguments from government about these things, maybe it's just that you've not talked to us often and we're sure if you come back perhaps we will be persuaded. So the feedback the ANC got was: don't break the alliance, don't play games with it, and you don't have solid well-informed and convinced support for the very issues around the kind of policy.

So I think that that's why the press is reporting a climate that is better. There's a co-operative relationship and there is a preparedness, grudging in some cases, to listen to some of the concerns being raised, but we've been here before. As we're going to say on the weekend, when we're going into a bilateral, that we welcome it, because what we want as the party is an honest rational discussion and debate about key policy issues. We think that some of the stuff, allegations about plots and conspiracies and raising the temperature and the decline and so forth, are being used particularly from the right of the ANC, but perhaps sometimes by an ultra-left in COSATU, to make it impossible actually to have that kind of alliance discussion around evaluating the policy and the restructuring of parastatals: Is GEAR working? What needs to be changed? We may not reach agreement, but we want to influence those policies and create the situation wherein in an ongoing way, we evaluate policies.

We think precisely because some of those policies are encountering serious problems, not only mass rejection, but failure to deliver on them, the temptation is to distract with emotion and allegations of plots and so on. It's very important that we don't play into that, which is what McKinley wants us to do. So we are going to keep solidly criticising what we think is wrong about the policies. We are trying to do so in ways that compel a proper policy evaluation, a proper policy debating processes, which involve the majority of ANC members, not just COSATU and SACP, so that where we've made mistakes, we can correct them. That's what we were trying to do really. Whether we succeed in the long term, that's what we're trying to do….

HS: But, Jeremy, I also read the SACP response to the briefing document and it didn't really defend the left. At first, I read it and I thought: that's true, that's true. Then I thought about what wasn't in it. I thought it was quite weak.

JC: Ok. Why?

HS: I didn't really feel that it defended the left critique, the left position, in the alliance. It just said: Oh it's not a conspiracy, but it didn't sort of defend the ideological position of the left.

JC: I need to look at it again. It was some months ago now.

HS: It was also published to the public. It was in the Mail & Guardian.

JC: Yes. I suppose because the priority was to try to reverse the quite nasty agenda, the conjunctural priority was that. It's not as though that particular paper was all. I'd like to look at it again. Then maybe I could defend or not. You may very well be right. But the SACP position wasn't just that intervention written very quickly, into the full situation, where frankly some of the worst elements in the ANC were being unleashed into a kind of space within the ANC, to heighten things and to allege that it was a hard nose conspiracy to overthrow the ANC leadership, the kinds of things that preceded right wing coups in Iraq, Syria and Sudan and so on.

I don't think that we were there, but I think that those behind it, controlling it, were, cynically giving it some space in order to create a particular kind of ambience to frighten the left. So the response was perhaps a stopgap one. But it's not as if we've stopped thinking about the critique and stopped defending the left perspective, in opposition to the dominant view, which we are.

HS: Yes. That's fair enough.

JC: So I wouldn't want the paper to be the total expression of what we're thinking about or have to say about that. Our priority was less to say something about restructuring of state assets and our critique of that, but more to say stop. We were appealing to SACP members, but also to ANC members, going into these regional general councils and saying don't be deluded by that.

HS: Ok. I understand that. Jeremy, I want to ask you about your own transition, from being a full-time deputy general secretary of the SACP being based in the party office in Johannesburg and being a member of the NEC of the ANC, to moving back here to Cape Town and being a MP. That has been a big change in your whole modus operandi. Why did you decide to do that? How do you feel about that now that you have done that for a few years now?

JC: Ok. There are layers of explanation. You'd be the first to appreciate that. There was coming back to the town where I'm from and there is the physical beauty of Cape Town and so on.

HS: I remember your poem on how unlovely Johannesburg was.

JC: I enjoyed being in Johannesburg. It was a privilege to be there through the complicated 1990s. But at a political programmatic way I began to touch on why I individually wanted to locate myself as an ANC MP. The relationships within the alliance had got to be more complicated.

Previously there was quite a lot of space as a deputy general secretary in the SACP head office to spend quite a bit of time in the ANC as well, doing political education and so forth. Then I was increasingly marginalised by an emerging leadership, the Mbeki leadership, within the ANC itself. So my ability, my positioning inside the ANC, as a full-time SACP official, but as an active ANC member, my Joburg position, where during the time of Cyril Ramaphosa and Cheryl Carolus as secretary general and deputy secretary general, there was quite a lot of integrated work around key programme, around the RDP and so on.

That increasingly diminished with GEAR and the onset of the party's critique of GEAR. It was, I think, the weakening of the ANC itself. It was a very hard to continue. Our alliance as the SACP was not with the government but with the ANC. The ANC as a political movement began increasingly to disappear. So that was one level of frustration. It was difficult to find my feet as a communist intellectual in the ANC without a formal position in the ANC apart from the NEC level, which I had been through in the 1990s.

HS: It was still an important position, being on the NEC

JC: Yes, but then you're 1 of 80 people and you meet very infrequently. The power of the NEC has diminished considerably over the last period. The most recent result has been the *NEC Bulletin* describing this ultra-left conspiracy, a bulletin which was never presented to or discussed in the NEC. So it's a struggle, fighting to make the NEC be what it should be, the main policy forum between conferences of the ANC. So it's a battle where one loses some and gains a little but overall the trajectory has been a diminishing of the significance of the NEC. We've always had many of us, Blade and others and myself, trying to use it, but we've been through a tough several years in the NEC. We've been marginalised, shouted down, subjected to heavy presidential attacks on us, beginning with Mandela and so forth. We've stood our ground, but it's been hard. Those are some of the factors.

But perhaps to the more important one. One thing that I've tried to insist upon quite a bit in the course of this morning's interview and that is that we have been losing at the level of policy formation. It certainly applies to me. I think that, being of a philosophical bent, my aptitudes are of a generalising kind. I've increasingly felt that is where as a left we're losing it a bit. It's not that we don't have very good critiques, which turn out to be accurate all the time, of GEAR as a macro-economic policy, of globalisation, of illusions about how South Africa might relate to the global reality and so on. I think we've been pretty good, pretty accurate on all of that, but those in the policy of governing, in the process of developing actual policies we've not been specific enough. We've not been able to connect those analyses to specific sectors effectively enough. It was certainly a shortcoming in my own case. I'm not a trained economist and that's been used a lot against me in intra-ANC debates. They say, yes, it's all very well, but you don't really understand.

So I thought that the being an MP would be a useful way of being an ANC person rather than being marginalised as just the SACP, but to actually be part of ANC machinery in a place where one has some possibility of engaging with the policy formulation process, but also some possibility of focusing on a particular sector. I angled at it successfully and got to be allocated within the transport sector, because I thought it was quite a key one, interfacing between development and growth, social issues and economic issues, infrastructural issues, questions relating to the restructuring of the state and so forth. I've found it very useful and I've learnt a lot in the process. I think in limited ways, linking up with unions and with comrades in parastatals, in government, in the ANC, I think that we've been able to advance a left project on the front of transport, with uneven results, with many difficulties and problems, but I'm quite engaged and quite convinced that there is space for a left project in general, but also specifically in centres like the one where I'm engaged.

HS: But, Jeremy, not everyone does have a good philosophical mind and you know it is important to connect philosophy with economics and with the concrete, but there's also the danger of you now getting too engaged in too much detail and even just getting your life so busy where you must have to be at this place at this time and the other place at that time.

JC: Yes.

HS: So many people can't see the woods for the trees, but then when those who can are kept too busy with particulars to address the shape of the whole, that can be a problem too. Not everyone can see the whole and communicate what is at stake effectively. Your diary must be very full and that can be a problem for thinking philosophically. You can just have your life too cluttered and too tightly timetabled. You can have too many things to do, too many places to be.

JC: Sure.

HS: I worry about that with you. Am I right or …?

JC: No. You're not wrong. But I think that..

HS: It's a problem just having the time.

JC: Sure. I don't have the time, as much time I would like to have: 1) for poetry, 2) for journalistic writing (I'm doing less of that than I was) and 3) yes, for stepping back and trying to develop, for reading and writing.

HS: And answering e-mails.

JC: And answering e-mails and so on, absolutely, a few years ago I would have in principle. But I think it's again a question of now wanting to be more hands on. I do want to learn and develop, and it frustrates me sometimes, because I want to read a book or write poetry or whatever. But again, it's not the end of it.

I think one's got to inform aspects of one's life of intellectual activity and so on with a variety of influences, and certainly for me I've felt over the last couple of years that the time had come for me to try to acquire a better understanding of institutional power and how it works and how you might change it. I've been getting a better understanding of parastatals, a better grasp of how you intervene in the policy process, rather than just complaining that GEAR was formulated without any input. How do you get to be part of a collective that's involved in that and to be useful to that collective? So it's a choice I've made.

HS: But it mightn't necessarily be what you do forever.

JC: No. Or I might do it in different ways that make it possible to be less 90% preoccupied with transport policy, but still be active in the transport front. At the moment I'm on such a learning curve: about being a parliamentarian, about being a chair of a committee, and about transport, that it's both exciting and absorbing and time consuming. It makes little time for other things.

HS: Yes. That's fair enough. I wonder if I could ask you about my own agenda, my own research agenda in South Africa. I know you've been so busy with all these other things and you haven't had much time to really look at what's going on in the universities, but you do have some idea of what's going on. I'm just reaching very tentative conclusions, but I've felt that intellectual transformation was somewhat underwhelming.

JC: Yes.

HS: And much of what's going on is the same as what's going on in universities anywhere in the world, which is very disappointing, because I've seen a lot of ferment in my time in universities in questioning the foundation of knowledge

the whole impact of the new left in the universities of the 1960s also being part of the political education structures of the communist movement. I used to go over to the Communist University of London in the 1970s, and it was really rich and powerful. I didn't expect exactly this to happen here, but I'm just finding very little of it, and when I do engage with anybody who is thinking about these topics, there's a sense that it was in the past, that it was actually before 1994 when there was all this intellectual ferment, and that it's kind of died. So is that right? What's your analysis of that?

JC: I'm not sure that I've got a neat analysis, but I think it's right. Perhaps my own trajectory is part of a trajectory that many people have had, so that I think a lot of left intellectuals, if were talking about left intellectuals…

HS: I am.

JC: Of course, intellectualism isn't just about left intellectuals.

HS: I know.

JC: The new generations of left, semi-left or potentially left intellectuals, I think, have been drawn into institutional, government related, policy making processes. I think that's happened a lot. So the younger generations, particularly of young black intellectuals, there are lots of alert and exciting young black intellectuals, but they're overwhelmingly in parastatals, in government departments and so forth

HS: So why not in the universities?

JC: That universities don't pay enough, would be the cynical answer. The romantic answer would be that there is a job to be done, transformation to be led from positions of government, and that's where they can be more effective than on a campus. The further obvious explanation is that it's not just the public sector, but the private sector is desperately looking for a fig-leaf of bright black people that it deploys as its public face. So if you're a young bright black intellectual currently, there's a lot of space, a lot of upward mobility, often into the private sector, which has all sorts of corrupting influences on lots of young people. So people who 15 years ago would have been leading activists and intellectuals, who would have taken part in debates of the left and reading Gramsci and debating Althusser and so on, are now in business.

HS: It's a bit sad.

JC: Yes, and reflects class dynamics, the new realities and so forth…

HS: There is also the global reality. Universities are changing dramatically and degrees are being more and more narrowly conceived to serve the exact needs of the market place. The place where I work is very like that. On a global level, I see all the debates, and even disciplines, that have occupied me most of my life, being marginalised beyond anything I could have imagined. The whole of the humanities seem in a precarious position. I see that playing itself out here. It makes me even sadder to see it here.

JC: Absolutely and I think the underwhelming features aren't just in universities. The whole moral and aesthetic domain as well is much less exciting, less interesting, much less dynamic than it was. Again, all of those things we're talking about apply to the global realities. Some bohemianism or social movement ferment is often the weapon of the marginalised. If you have a possibility of mainstream employment, it's different. You know the post-68 social movements happened at a time when the post-ww2 social core was beginning to run into structural problems. That was my university experience. Employment wasn't guaranteed for university students. It was conscription into the wars in Vietnam and so. It was partly linked to that.

If you're a young black graduate now here in South Africa, it's not just the university that's changed, but your prospects. If people have been put on to a conveyor belt, because that's how institutions are being restructured. There's something at the end if you're a black graduate by and large. Not all of them, we know, because the promise of that neo-liberal model is failing there too. As you know, members of the branch that we're members of, aren't moving ahead, but….

I think that there are there's layers and layers of explanation, but I think that at the level of inspiring ideas, moral perspective, the liberation movement has been very disappointing. Mandela's big idea was rainbowism and reconciliation, which was an important ingredient of what needed to be a bigger idea, something less superficial. It could easily be handled. I think Andrew Nash's article gives a very interesting insight into the genuineness of that project from Mandela's side, where it came from in the 19th century, but its inappropriateness to the progressive project. Mbeki been reaching for an idea.

HS: African renaissance

JC: African renaissance which …

HS: What is it ?

JC: It's a kind of fluffy feel good 3rd wayism for the African continent. It's an escape from a South African renaissance. The left in South Africa gets accused of voluntarism by Mbeki, but what could be more voluntaristic than the promise that this is the African century or the African decade and so on. It's a kind of escape from the contradictions and difficulties of the present. It's partly a playing with death wish on the global stage, being the shop steward for Africa, shop steward and conduit, a bridge between north and south, a kind of swollen-headedness frankly about South Africa, that old bad South African habit of exceptionalism. You know, that we're not really the 3rd world, that we mightn't be 1st world either, that we're a bridge between them.

HS: There's something to that though.

JC: Something to that, but it has an easy it has a sort of sound of white colonials in South Africa, of Anglo-Indians or whatever. Then that's often reduced to trying to pitch for the Olympic Games or hosting World Cup soccer. It becomes a commercial tendering process on a global stage. That's frankly what GEAR is as well. At a moral and aesthetic level it's saying: come to us, we're market friendly, we are reliable, we imposed upon ourselves a capitalist discipline.

We were both at the Hout Bay celebration of the 90th anniversary of the ANC. There was Pallo Jordan's keynote address. He said many nice things and he was reaching his audiences in a rather intellectual manner. Pallo is a good solid left, deeply committed ANC comrade. The area where he was least reaching the audience, where he was really leaving them absolutely befuddled and disinterested, was when he went on about the African renaissance. They didn't know what he was talking about in Hout Bay. It's hard as a white member of the ANC to come in too robustly on African renaissance. It sounds like you're an afro-pessimist. But frankly it's a threadbare notion, but it's one of the things the ANC is trying to mobilise and motivate people, but it's clearly not

HS: I thought that it had possibilities as an idea of how to combine the best of global culture with the best of indigenous African culture.

JC: There are good things, but it's never going to be, I don't think, in any foreseeable future, the key to unlocking mass creativity, participation, involvement, belief. I mean the year of the volunteer, which has many more possibilities. It's a realisation from the ANC side that the gap is growing between it and its own mass base. It's part of the lesson learnt from the August strikes: 1) that COSATU could mount successful strikes against the ANC government policy and 2) that it was the ANC's own mass base that was on strike, that it's not really sure what the ANC government is saying and that there's a concern. So some of the things we've been trying to push come into play. We ask: what is the ANC's popular programme of action outside of election periods? Silence, you know..

HS: Yes. (end of tape)

HS: So we were talking about the African renaissance: what it is and what it could be. I am still wondering if the idea has possibilities or would you rather just go with something else?

JC: I think in so far as it's being used to underline the fact that, notwithstanding global progress and global village that we are supposed to be living in, whole continents, not least the African continent, are being cut out…

HS: More than ever.

JC: More than ever over the last decade. To bring that into the global debate about where are we going and what are the right policies and for South Africa to be playing a leading role, I think all of that is appropriate. But I'm not sure about the actual concept African renaissance. If I was talking about the marginalisation, the injustice of the marginalisation of Africa, I think that's how I would like to word it, rather than the notion of the inevitable African renaissance . That's how it is presented. This is Africa's century. There is the inevitability of the renaissance, because why? Every other continent has had its turn, as if there is some kind of divine justice, some kind of divine eye that is seeing a queue. Europe had its turn. North America had its turn. I am not so sure that Asia or Latin America had their turn. That's another problem with it. I think its better to talk about the south than Africa. We can easily forget that it's a structural issue, not a continental issue. There are continental dimensions to it clearly. Africa is the worst of continents.

Renaissance is a peculiarly Eurocentric notion. I don't know if the Chinese talk of renaissance. It comes from a particular Greco-Roman history, which is disrupted and then there is the notion that it has to be reborn. I am not sure that it may be appropriate to Africa. Obviously, there is a disruption of a civilisation by colonialism. One does not want to nit-pick on this.

For me, the main concern has been the inevitability with which this has been presented as if there is some kind of evolutionary process, which is the wrong emphasis. There is also the centrality that it enjoys within the ANC government discourse. Currently in South Africa, I think, that there are more pressing points of focus like job creation, development. The African renaissance, because it's vague and general and continental, can too easily become short on detail and rather fuzzy in content and can become an escape mechanism from dealing with the hard issues, the complicated issues here in South Africa. It's a way of applauding the performance of our state's persons at the UN, rather than something that mobilises people in relation to jobs, poverty, crime, violence against women. Those are the issues that concern South Africans. An African renaissance sounds like it's quite a nice thing, but it's a rather passive, political issue, so what we have are African chapters and it obviously very quickly becomes…

HS: Have what? I don't understand the last thing?

JC: Let me give you an anecdote. It struck me we were sitting in a central committee discussion and I was slightly more politely raising some of these concerns about African renaissance and one member of the central committee, who is a minister in government said: How can the party have had a discussion on the African renaissance without coming first to me? I am the minister charged with the African renaissance in the president's office. I sent the individual a note saying: Did the Italian renaissance have someone in charge? Which of the two obvious personalities was charged with the responsibility? Was it Leonardo or Machiavelli? Which one do you think you are?

HS: You have to laugh.

JC: One doesn't want to be over cynical, especially as a white person, but in any case it can be given a content. The main problem, I think, at the moment is it takes us away from our key national priorities. It's also used in a lazy way. It has something to do with Cyril Ramaphosa becoming a big capitalist and that's part of an African renaissance. It's a catch all.

HS: What about people who were leading members the movement who have become big capitalists? People abroad find it a bit mysterious and think there must be something they don't understand, some piece of the puzzle they haven't got in place. Or is it really just what it seems? You know what I'm saying and what I'm asking?

JC: A lot of it is just what it seems. Let's be honest. I think that it's not that there aren't some interesting features. Stephen Friedman, who heads the Centre for Policy Studies (where Raymond is now), writes an irregular column, which is mainly in *Business Day.* He always has something interesting and thoughtful to say and one of his observations was that in terms of the intra-ANC dynamics, one of the interesting things is that, given the earlier point that we were

making about South Africa, it's not the same as Zimbabwe or Mozambique or Angola. It is not that there is any inherent merit on our behalf, South Africa's, but just that the capitalist process of development has gone so much further. So this emerging elite, which is partly an element of the capitalist class in our country, but aligned in various ways to the ANC, is not like the black bourgeoisie in Zimbabwe, where it is completely bound to the state apparatus. Here Cyril Ramaphosa doesn't depend on being a businessman by being a completely loyal Mbekiite. That's a feature of other things as well, because you can't demobilise the trade union movement quite as easily as you can demobilise a peasant army. You can't just switch off a quite vibrant, if complicated, media sector in our country.

HS: Not that they're not trying that sometimes too.

JC: Well they try it, but it doesn't work.

HS: In fact, it backfires badly.

JC: Indeed, it does. Whatever the shortcomings and irritations of my experiences with the press, it is quite feisty. It is the same with the churches. There's a clearly an advanced civil society, which includes a capitalist class, which now is partly black and partly ANC. Friedman was making the point that the ability for someone to emerge as a Mugabe or a Sadam Hussein, whatever the inclinations in that direction and there are signs of that, it is challenged in complicated ways, even inside of the ANC. One of the things he said was that there are people in the ANC who are alleged to be involved in some kind of conspiracy, which they weren't but what was irritating to certain powerful forces in the ANC is that they obviously had an independence, including a financial independence, from a univocal centre within the ANC. Not quite the case in Zimbabwe. So on the whole I am not singing in the rain about Cyril Ramaphosa being a great capitalist. He is a terrible role model, not that he is a nasty person. I think he is quite intelligent and he is a broadly progressive and democratic person, but there is another side to it that creates multiplicity of centres of influence and power within the broad ANC movement.

HS: I'd like to know what you think about cultural transformation. That there were a lot of complicated separate cultures of South Africa. From the early 90s and especially since 1994, how much have they interacted and merged and developed? I know that there is a lot of separateness still, but how would you see the development of culture in a broad sense, everything from literature and theatre to the texture of everyday life, including how people mix and interact and talk to each other?

JC: I think class is the key thing to an understanding of that. The cultural divides were obviously engineered on the basis of pre-existing realties but institutionalised by the apartheid system. What keeps those divides in place still are the socio-economic and class legacy, which is quite entrenched still. I think that where there are changes, where it's eroding in the context of everyday life, is where there is a upward mobility of black people. In varying degrees and in different places, there is some interesting ferment, usually of an interesting and of a progressive kind. For example, there is parliament. That is my everyday life. It wouldn't be other people's everyday life. There is a degree of cultural ferment, a hybridisation, a melting pot type of thing, whatever you want to call it, which is quite interesting. That's happening also, because working together shoulder to shoulder, it cuts across racial divides. You see racial divides happening around issues, but in the workings of parliament something else happens. I went on a trip last week with my portfolio committee to visit ports in Durban and Richards Bay. I was just watching on the bus all the way up to Richards Bay, which is a 3 hour trip and the African women comrades were putting down and teasing the white male Afrikaaner members, NNP and IFP members. The IFP member was a white male. The two of them were taking it very well and engaging in the spirit of it. The IFP member speaks Zulu better than I can and the NNP guy also speaks seSotho better. In surprising ways, these are new realities, outside the front page news stories of the white parties, NNP and DA, which they are by and large, and the ANC, which is black by and large. Because you asked me about the texture of other people's lives, there is this shared reality and talk of the food being lousy and the bus not working very well

That kind of reality, which didn't exist before, is actually bringing out cross-cultural shared nationalisms, including linguistic abilities. The Inkatha guy would have learned Zulu to give commands to the farm labourers on the farm, but now it's a resource that he has got with which he jokes. He's the butt of most of the jokes, but he is able to give almost

as good as he gets. There is sexual innuendo and it's almost fraught with racial tension even. It was the African women who were the most feisty and teasing. These are small things maybe, but these are the things that are happening

HS: These are the kinds of things I want to know.

JC: For me, what's most important about the breaking of the DA alliance. Some on the left will say: well there you see it, mark it down, again the inevitable sell-out of the ANC, getting into bed with the former oppressors, what do you expect? Yes, maybe. There is the danger of that. But at another level I think it's the defeat of a particular project which was the most racial, subliminal mobilisation of minority communities in a pessimistic project about majority rule and democracy in our country. That's the Leon project. The ANC is smart enough and has broken that and is saying: Look, the NNP is the NNP. We don't agree with it. Our policies are different and so on, but we want to relate to it in a different way.

This creates the space to do that and I think that's a cultural reality. It's politics, but it's more profound. It's about developing multiparty democracy. We have parties like the NNP, which represents a kind of mixture of neo-liberalism and minority concerns and interests, but you try to enter into a multiparty relationship with them, which is competitive but not just intransigence on every issue, which is where the Leon thing was going.

I'll be anecdotal.

HS: Do. I like that.

JC: I might have told you this before. It was in our caucus meeting downstairs in our caucus room. I can't remember what it was about, but there was an older African woman from a rural area, an ANC MP. She lives in one of the parliamentary villages. What happens in these circumstances, because she is the one resourced person now in her extended family, all the grandchildren get sent to stay with her in the parliamentary village and they get sent to school in and around Cape Town. So it's not just her that has tenuously joined the new elite, but it ripples down to the grandchildren, who now have an option of escaping the marginalisation of some ex-Bantustan area and schooling for at least a few years in a Cape Town school. This little girl was in grade 1 or 2 and her grandmother said to her: "You keep talking about this other little girl. Is she white or black?" Her grandchild thought about it and said to her "I don't know: I'll ask her tomorrow."

HS: Really!

JC: She told it with pride, this MP, and with some bemusement. She was saying that there is a new generation that's coming up who are quite different from us. Obviously, you want to look quickly at the class issue, because those girls in Khayelitsha that you were talking about yesterday in Stellenbosch, *they* are going to know if someone's white or black. They're not even going to know anyone who is white, unless their granny takes them to work one day in the suburbs where she works as a domestic worker.

There is the coincidence of class, poverty, marginalisation, access to culture, the possibility of access to more equalised exchange. I mean everyone in South Africa experiences the white world and white culture, but usually as an employee. So white culture, English language, all of those are still experienced as remote, repressive, things to aspire to, but remote. So there is ferment, but it is both impeded and facilitated by the process underway. South Africa is not Burundi or Rwanda. It is a melting pot of capitalism. It has been melting away in multicultural places like Soweto for decades and decades and decades. That process continues, but there is this simultaneous incorporation and marginalisation, one where there are massive inequalities. These are points you were making.

But for me that's what's interesting and again that's where I have a quarrel with African renaissance. I see that you are taking it up in your paper here. It is posing this idea of resurrecting some mystical past, some pure African past. What else is a renaissance? Either the Greco-Roman or the timeless African culture. Whereas what is most interesting is what is happening now. The people that are put in charge by the ANC, the intellectuals, are people like Wally Serote, a poet I used to admire very much. He is a leading proponent of African renaissance and he has gone off, unfortunately in my view, into the mists of African pre-history, rather than what I think is most interesting potentially in South Africa. It's less

the white/black melting pot, that's something, but more the telescoping of time in the lived experience of African people. It's a point that Nash is worried about in the persona of Mandela. The vulgate version of that are the songs at ANC or COSATU rallies, which are old warrior songs, church songs, which had previously been old ritualistic songs transmuted into Christianity, then into protest songs, then into workers songs and so on.

HS: I think they are wonderful!

JC: Fantastic. Marvellous. It's a huge cultural reservoir, which is not static. It got a little bit static in the 1990s. There is a lovely article, you must look at it, in the *Labour Bulletin* in December 2001 on worker songs and what's happening there. The party is doing well and Blade in particular is very high in the hit parade. Some ANC leaders are not doing well at all.

HS: I'd like to see that. So there are new songs

JC: Oh yes, all the time. There are anti-GEAR songs, anti-privatisation songs, pro-Nzimande songs. There are lovely songs. There are songs that go:

"Thabo, we went and fetched you from the bush,
We brought you back, we elected you.
Look at the mess you are making."

HS: This is so interesting. I'd love to hear them. Are they mostly in African languages?

JC: Yes. What is captured in these songs is a critique. The critique is real. It is not just circular and for show, as McKinley asserts. The critique, it's profound, it's quite sharp, it's not uncomradely. It's in the family, but it's the forefathers. It's not just a paper by Jeremy Cronin. It's cultural ferment. It's ideological and moral ferment. The songs are probably a much better indicator.

HS: So this is what people abroad don't know. Nobody is writing about this, are they?

JC: These songs represent regeneration, dynamism, a sense of creativity, of cheekiness. They are saying: you are about to privatise, but we don't want it, we are strong in our songs. It is very profound.

HS: This is what I want to know.

JC: One of the key factors, unstated factors, behind the nastiness of the NEC bulletin, came out at the Govan Mbeki funeral. Someone should do a whole cultural study of the songs on that day. They were directed against the son, against government policy. The control of the microphone was firmly in the hands of the Mbeki family and the ANC leadership. Messages of support and condolences to the family excluded the SACP and COSATU.

HS: He died a party member, didn't he?

JC: Yes, but they excluded the party. They excluded the SACP message, but included the Cuban Communist Party and the Chinese Communist Party messages. When the Chinese Communist Party message was read by Terror, it had come through the party head office, so the covering fax sheet had SACP written on it. Then Terror, who didn't quite didn't quite understand the plot, was given it and the job of reading it. It was considered to be a task that he could manage, to read with dignity, the messages that had been edited and censored and given to him. He thought it was the SACP message and began by reading it as an SACP message. Then there was an overwhelming shout of approval and the song "Speak, Nzimande, speak" came from this huge ANC gathering and then he read the message and then someone tapped him on the shoulder and said "Sorry it was the Chinese Communist Party"

HS: That's fascinating.

JC: So it is not just the policy papers. One has got to read the movement and the alliance and these dynamics as well.

HS: Absolutely.

JC: There is some exaggeration in them. I mean songs have poetic licence, so people will say things that are exaggerated with a sense of cheekiness and empowerment

HS: But that's real. That's as real as the policy papers.

JC: Yes. I wasn't at the Mbeki funeral, but Blade was there. He came out and said: "We're in trouble." All of that was noted and seen as a huge left conspiracy and there were allegations that the party was orchestrating all that (as if we had the capacity).

HS: So there is this ferment from below.

JC: The most vibrant source of songs is COSATU, which is also an indication that, as songs go, so goes mobilisation.

HS: So what about culture on other fronts?

JC: There is some multiculturalism. Some of the divides are still there. Some are lessening. There is a long way to go.

HS: What's your sense of transformation in an institution like the SABC?

JC: It's not one thing. It's all over the place. It's fraught, contested. You have to pinch yourself when you're watching it and remind yourself of what it used to be like, all the way up until 1993. It is light years away from what it was, but so should it be, so let's not be complacent. I think that again it's the layers of things. One thing is that it's been submitted to all of the same commercial inheritance that most other institutions have, so that has been a problem. It has lost lots of good staff, good reporters and so on. There are the same problems that you see in many media institutions in South Africa and I believe in many other parts of the world as well. Journalists get promoted into managerial functions as journalists are poorly paid and managers are well paid, which is a mindless kind of application of business principles. I think that the moral confusions, the aesthetic confusions, of our transition are echoed strongly in the SABC. Sometimes it is trying to just express the voice of America, of American culture, sometimes black American culture, that's one concession it makes to South Africa. Sometimes we see glimmers of it trying to do something more imaginative and then it loses the plot.

HS: What are the best things that you have seen / heard on SABC?

JC: I think of talk radio, I think of someone like Tim Modise, if you're talking of cultural phenomena.

HS: Oh yes, I listen to that in the morning as often as I can.

JC: He's amazing. I don't know whether it has parallels elsewhere.

HS: In Ireland radio is like that

JC: Is it?

HS: It is. In the morning especially radio is really important. It is the nation talking to itself. I like the Tim Modise programme and learn a lot about contemporary South Africa from it.

JC: He has a moral centredness, a sharpness and a progressiveness about him. He has a gentle empathetic understanding, creating space for people. For me that's one of the high points of the transition: that it produced

someone like Tim Modise, that there is an institutional space for him and that he is loved, loved by whites and blacks. He irritates the government often, although they're crazy to be irritated by him. He is deeply sympathetic to the ANC project, but understands that it doesn't go without raising concerns. By and large I think he is mild critic even there. He is such a brilliant role model as someone who is unashamedly African, even with his English accent. He has none of those hang-ups that usually come from that.

HS: What about television drama: the indigenous soapies and the rest?

JC: I think there are some attempts…

HS: *Isidingo*?

JC: Yes and *Backstage.* I don't know if you watch that.

HS: Sometimes.

JC: There are some soapies that are trying to be thoughtful, quite a few actually. I don't watch *Isidingo* that closely, but my kids watch it. *Backstage* though, I think there are attempts to introduce value issues, to portray a multiculturalism, to allow characters to talk a variety of languages. English becomes the dominant language, but it's surrounded by a variety of accents and languages.

HS: What did you think about the *Yizo Yizo* debate?

JC: I thought that the condemnation of what they were trying to do was very stupid and backward and morally uninformed.

HS: I was here during *Yizo Yizo 2* and all that furour about it. I was really struck by it. Teachers told me that kids in schools passionately defended it and said: this is how it is, this is how we live.

JC: You see that's another cultural phenomenon happening. There is danger that a new elite, a black elite, will act as a moral policeman, which will reflect values that are theirs. They will speak on behalf of the majority, but really will be about consolidating a new set of class values, of sophistication, of a conservative morality, where the racial issues, and sometimes gender issues, are the transformative issues, but class issues are side-lined. I think that is very marked in advertising. In a lot of advertising, there's a sensitivity to race. So you get flunkies, but they're always white flunkies, Jeeve's type characters, always white and male. There's less sensitivity to sexism. Quite a lot of the advertising I see is sexist. Class is just ----------. The ideal types are black and white sharing the same country club tastes, in their BMWs, …De Beers

It marks the ANC as well. In some of the leading sectors of the ANC you can see the creation of a new class that is proud to be black and is quite affirming and assertive and aggressive even about its blackness, but not self-conscious, well self-conscious, but not critically self-conscious, of its class position. It is played out quite a lot in the popular culture.

HS: What other examples would you give of how it plays itself out in popular culture?

JC: Advertising.

HS: What about *Generations?* It seems very yuppified.

JC: I don't really see it.

HS: What about contemporary SA literature. What about new novels? Would you say that there is a flourishing of literature?

JC: It is a problem about being a parliamentary bureaucrat. I don’t get to read novels. I don't want to engage in niceties and generalities.

HS: Of what you know, what do you think is interesting?

JC: I think that the most interesting writing is of a journalistic kind, rather than shaped into novels or poetry.

HS: Where to find it?

JC: The writing?

HS: Yes, the really revealing writing.

JC: It is in newspapers and magazines. I think that John Matshikiza's column in the *Mail & Guardian* is interesting. Things like that. I think that there's not much evidence of flourishing of literature. Perhaps this might reveal an ignorance. There are bits of poetry. I think it's interesting, but it hasn't quite found its post-1994 feet yet.

HS: What else is going on culturally?

JC: There are some lyrical, musical voices.

HS: For example?

JC: Vusi Mahlasela is a very fine singer. There is a very nice lyricism, although it is often not so accessible to us because it is seSotho.

HS: I have a CD.

JC: some people say that the most dynamic end of things is dance. I don't know much about that. Maybe it doesn't run into the same paradigm difficulties, because it's not verbal.

HS: What else?

JC: There has been some flourishing in graphic art, which has been powerful. There have been energies of white women graphic artists using the white female body as an undigested reality of the new rainbowism. This produced an earlier *Yizo Yizo* debate about semi-pornographic images and a linking of that to black oppression. The ANC elite, the new ANC female elite, expressed horror and a rather bourgeois conservative critique of it.

HS: I must find out about that. I didn't see *Yizo Yizo* 1, but it has just come out on DVD and I have ordered it.

JC: There is also interesting black art coming out with African graphic elements and a social realist flavour.

HS: What about all the ferment surrounding museums?

JC: Yes, that has been important. There was also a san bushmen exhibition that took place here. Some of the images seem a bit displaced again.

HS: In what way?

JC: I think that there has been again a loss of direction. Also financial space has not been given. That's another failure of the transition.

HS: What about new forms of political organisation? What about political education in the ANC and SACP? Do you think that there has been sufficient experimentation?

JC: No. The ANC is revitalising its political education, which is great. It kind of went dormant. It was neglected. I think that there are individuals picking it up now who are coming out of the liberation theology background, which I think is a very positive thing, because they come out of Latin American peoples education. So and there is a reaching for that and an awareness that there are quite serious problems of corruption in the ANC, a sense that the ANC's character is quite seriously threatened.

There are within the ANC the two inclinations. There is the one that reproduces the somewhat Stalinist party school education from the exiles who were exposed to that and replicated in the guerilla camps, not without some success. Then there is an alternative version, which is the more social movement alternative to the education process. That it fermented very nicely in the 1980s. I think there is a bit of marriage of those traditions and an attempt to revitalise those in the ANC.

It is much the same in the party. It's not as dynamic as it should be.

HS: What would you like to see happen for example in political education in the party?

JC: I would like to see it much more integrated into everything else. There is a tendency to see branch meetings as bureaucratic and business type things where you give a boring report back on the minutes of the last meeting and meetings that you have attended on behalf of the branch and so forth. Then political education, when it happens, tends to be seen as theory, as the classics, as what Marx said about this and Lenin said about that. At least there are some traditions that political education is important. That ideological seriousness that the party cultivates, that's why many people join the party. There is some sense that maybe this is a place where that kind of discussion can happen and it does, unevenly, but I think there is not enough imaginative integration of mobilisational work and mobilisational self-education and collective education. That is the main challenge.