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Interviewee: Francis Wilson Session #2

Interviewer: Mary Marshall Clark Cape Town, South Africa

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Q: Thank you for being here.

Wilson: It's a pleasure.

Q: I wanted to ask you a little bit about your background, your early life, the influences that were brought to bear on you by your family, their education. Tell me a little bit about that.

Wilson: Well, I guess I would start by saying that my roots are in the Eastern Cape province of this country, which is very much rural South Africa, in what is called the Ciskei, this side of the Kei River, near East London. It's inland, and it's a place in which black and white have lived in for a century or more. People go back many, many, many years in that area. Of course, Africans were living there way back in fifteenth, fourteenth century and so on. It's an area where in the nineteenth century British missionaries came in. Of course, there were all kinds of other British influences with what were called the settlers or the invaders, depending on the terminology one's going to use.

But I grew up in the Eastern Cape, very close to a place called Lovedale, and Lovedale was one of the early mission stations, a Presbyterian mission station founded by Scots

missionaries, which became, during the nineteenth century, became one of the great centers of education in Southern Africa. Lovedale itself was a -- they had schools, girls' school, boys' school, industrial training in carpentry and so on, a big hospital developed there. My grandfather came out in the 1890s from Scotland. I suppose my grandfather could be seen as one of the young men of James Stewart who, in turn, was a young man of Livingstone. So that's the kind of origins of all of that.

My grandfather came out in the 1890s and settled at Lovedale, and, in due course, married my grandmother, whom he brought back from Edinburgh. He came from Glasgow. He was the administrator and fundraiser, essentially. Development requires fundraising, always has. He was involved with people like Dr. [Neil] Macvicar in building the Lovedale Hospital, and particularly one of their great contributions, I think, was in training African nurses, because they realized at a very early stage that it was enormously important that if there was education happening, it shouldn't just be for men, but for women as well. So I come out of that kind of family background, with a real consciousness of importance of that. There's a Cecilia Makiwane Hospital in East London. She was the first African qualified nurse, and she came from Lovedale, and so on.

My mother was born there, in Lovedale, in 1908, and she grew up at Lovedale and went to school at Lovedale, and went to school with people like Frieda Bokwe who subsequently married Z.K. [Zachariah Keodirelang] Matthews and was herself a wonderful person and very well known, a great musician, musical teacher until well into her nineties. She only died last year. She, in turn, was the daughter of John Knox Bokwe, who had been a Presbyterian missionary -- minister, not a missionary -- a minister in the 1880s already, I

think, one of the great musicians, very well known, and he himself had founded a school for destitute whites in Ugie, I think it was, in the 1880s or 1890s, a long time ago. So Monica [Wilson], as a child, as a girl growing up in Lovedale, was at school with somebody like Frieda Bokwe, who herself came from a long tradition of education, and at school with a granddaughter, I think it was, of Chief Maqoma. Maqoma was one of the great heroes of the resistance, of African resistance against white invasion in the land battles of the nineteenth century and so on. She always said that she was learning from people like Janet, who became Janet Mali, granddaughter of Maqoma. She was learning a history that she certainly wasn't hearing anything about in the textbooks.

So Monica herself wanted to be a historian and grew up learning, studying as a historian, but realized fairly soon, after she went to Cambridge, that if she was going to get to the real history, she was going to have to find a way of moving beyond the documents, because the documents came from the settler side and were very one-sided in their interpretation. And that is why, having done Part One of the History Tripos in Cambridge, she then moved into anthropology and decided that really the only way was to go in and learn the language properly, which was Xhosa, which she did, and she moved into what is an area of the Eastern Cape called Pondoland, which is roughly between Umtata and the sea.

There she worked as a very young Ph.D. student, and the interesting thing is that her parents were very advanced in those days in the sense of letting this young woman go off all by herself and move around, and she stayed in a trading station and so on, and learned the language and learned an enormous amount about black South African society. The book

was called *Reaction to Conquest* [*: Effects of Contact with Europeans on the Pondo of South Africa*], which gives you an idea of the context in which she was writing that.

So I come out of that sort of background and grew up in the Eastern Cape. My father himself was also an anthropologist. He was an Englishman. Monica and Godfrey [Wilson] met when they were students at, I think, in Geneva at one of these summer schools, before the United Nations. They met in -- the League of Nations. They met in Geneva at a summer school about peace. He was at Oxford, reading Greats. He was a classicist. And nobody in the family's quite sure whether he became an anthropologist before or after meeting Monica, but anyway, he decided also to be an anthropologist, and they were both trained very much at Malinowski's seminars in London.

He came out to Africa really to join her, and they got married in the Eastern Cape, went off into what was then Tanganyika, now Tanzania, Southern Tanzania, at the north end of what is now Lake Malawi, against the Livingstone mountains, where they worked in BuNyakyusa, which is roughly where Mbeya and Tukuyu now are.

Then he became the first director -- I'm now going back to the 1930s. He became the first director in 1938, I think it was, of the Rhodes Livingstone Institute, which was being set up in what was then Northern Rhodesia, and was really the first -- I think the first kind of intellectual research institute -- there was no university there in those days -- in a place called Livingstone, just across the Zambezi River by the Victoria Falls. And that's where I was born in 1939.

And then we came south as a family in 1941. He resigned from the Rhodes Livingstone Institute because he was a pacifist and didn't feel it right to go to war, which, of course, was very unpopular in colonial Africa, particularly when he was a person who was seen as being far too friendly. He was accused of offering African friends cigarettes and sitting down and just chatting with them, and people thought this was very bad behavior, people being whites, the white colonialists. I'm not sure that he would have ever been able to live long term in South Africa. My mother always said that he just found the racism too intolerable.

But they came down to South Africa in 1941 and came to Hogsback, which is where my grandfather had some land up in the mountains which he had bought way back in 1910, I think, just around the time my mother was born. We lived there in a little iron hut, iron house with no running water, outside toilet, and so on. I can remember as a child having water boiled on a wooden stove and poured into a tub on what was then a mud floor in the kitchen. But absolutely no sense of deprivation. I mean, it was a warm, loving home, and I had everything I could desire, and spent my life out of doors, barefoot, just running around talking with my friends.

My friends, because Hogsback was an isolated rural area, were all in those days black African. So I grew up speaking Xhosa, which was probably in those days as good as my English, because I was speaking English to my parents, my mother only, because my father then subsequently then joined the Red Cross and went off up north during the war. So I would be speaking English at home and I was speaking Xhosa most of the day with my friends, which meant at least that I got a very good accent.

The difficulty was, and this was one of the deprivations of being white in South Africa -- there weren't many, but there were some -- was that when I was sent to school, first in Alice -- and I'll come to the reasons behind that -- first in Alice and then in Grahamstown, and I went to good schools in my childhood, the Xhosa that I had when I entered school was systematically knocked out of me in the sense that I just was never taught it, never learned it, and the teachers tried to teach me Latin, which I still regard as relatively useless in terms of priorities and learning in Africa. But I could never persuade my headmaster, even in the eighties, before he died, never persuaded him that he really made a mistake in spending all that time trying to teach me Latin. He maintained it was necessary for good English, which, of course, a lot of people maintained. But that language issue was actually very important, because what it did mean was that when I left school, my Xhosa was not -- my vocabulary was terrible, and I had lost the language that I'd had as a child, and I had to do a lot to try and recapture it, which I never did adequately at all.

But what I'm really trying to sketch here for you is that I had a childhood which was -- let me not say completely nonracial, because, you know, many white South African children grew up on farms and in their pre-school years would play, as white children, with black children, and learn the language, but that wasn't necessarily nonracial at all, in the sense that when they went to school, as I was, you went off to a white school and you separated from your friends. What was unusual in my family was that Monica herself and Godfrey, although he died when I was four, during the war, was that they were really nonracial in their whole attitudes, their approach, their friends, and so on. And so it was never an

issue. People were people. There were class distinctions, of course. Monica was very conscious of class.

Q: In what sense?

Wilson: Well, in the sense that she would have a due sense of sort of, I don't know, order in society. She would be aware that people came from upper class. An English consciousness of class in a way that perhaps Americans are not conscious of class, although there's plenty of class in America, but Americans are less conscious or aware of it, whereas, you know, British breathe it in. So she was conscious of class, although she was a very open, warm person as a human being. But I'm really trying to make the point that if she made distinctions in terms of attitudes and so on, it wasn't on a basis of race, it would be much more on a basis of class. I mean, we had a cook in our house when I was small. The cook wouldn't come and eat at our table. That would be a class distinction. But you would have many friends, African friends, who would come and obviously share meals and so on, people like Frieda Bokwa, who became Frieda Matthews.

So I grew up, in that sense, in a very nonracial household, so that although I subsequently went at the age of six to Alice primary school, which was for whites only, and then in Grahamstown to a very good private school, a prep school, and to a college where I was extremely happy, which was a boys' school, a boarding school and all of that, and there was certainly racism in that some of these boys were -- I can tell you stories about some of the racism that I would encounter there, the attitudes -- they didn't have that much effect on me, although my mother would laugh subsequently and say that in my teenage years I was

pretty conservative, which I can well believe, because boys do tend to believe what their peers are talking about. But I think it was always a bit more than that.

So that my background is rural South African, and gave me a sense, a feel and ease, I suppose, that I never had a sort of urban view of South Africa or of black South Africans or a segregated view. I don't want to over-stress the uniqueness of it, but it was a very open home. Let me put it that way. And it was rooted in the Eastern Cape, and mountains where we live are very, very beautiful, and I still go back there. My [brother, Timothy Wilson] and I still have land there. So that's a very important taproot.

I then went on to school, which was, as I say, a good school, and we had good teachers, and some of them very open people and they taught us well. From there I went on to the university in Cape Town. My mother, as I say, she started teaching at Fort Hare when my father died in 1944, and she had two years at Fort Hare. Then she went to Rhodes in the Eastern Cape, which is in Grahamstown, and was professor of social anthropology, which she left after about five years because she was offered the chair in Cape Town.

One of the reasons she left was that at Rhodes in those days, although the vice chancellor was very opposed to it, but it was the reality, was that women professor[s] would be paid much less than men professors for the same job, and, of course, all the way down the line. So there was enormous discrimination against women. Monica, although she wasn't what I would call a militant feminist, was an extremely strong feminist, and she wasn't having any of this, and all her life just outshone very often her peers, who happened to be almost all men.

Q: What was the focus of her work?

Wilson: The focus of her work was, first of all, what she'd done in Pondoland in the 1930s, which was *Reaction to Conquest*, but that had been published before I was born. Then the field work that she and my father collected in BuNyakyua in Southern Tanganyika in the late thirties, that hadn't been written up. One little book had been written up, which they'd written while he was in the army, and they were sort of corresponding back and forth. But most of that material had not been written up, so when he died, she really took the decision, I think, to make it her life's work to make sure that all that stuff was published. So she was working extremely hard at Rhodes in Grahamstown during those late forties, early fifties, writing. It was obviously a way of dealing also with the pain of his death. She published three books on the Nyakyusa at that stage and was lecturing in social anthropology, and she knew Africa from the inside. And that was unusual about her. I mean, she was a very remarkable woman, very, and she had this deep understanding of African society, both in terms of history, but in terms of how the society clicked, worked, and also from a woman's perspective. She was very deep and understanding about all that.

I can remember A.C. [Archibald Campbell] Jordan, who is the father of Pallo Jordan, who was in President [Nelson] Mandela's first cabinet, and A.C. Jordan was one of the great Xhosa writers. He wrote a book called *Ingqumbo Yeminyana* and was very famous and taught at UCT, at Cape Town University. In fact, I studied Xhosa under him for a while. He said to me one day, he said, "You know, when we Xhosa need to understand more about some of our customs which are lost in the mist of antiquity and so on, we often go and

consult Monica, because she knows, because she heard it from the elders way back in the thirties, and she took these detailed notes and it was published in *Reaction to Conquest*," and so on. So Monica had that deep insight, and she was hugely respected because of that. So she was working on that.

Then she moved from Rhodes to Cape Town to take up the chair of social anthropology at the University of Cape Town. I became a boarder at school at St. Andrews, and my brother, who's four years younger than me, was still very young when she moved to Cape Town, so he went with her and came to another school, again a private school, one of the Anglican-founded private schools in Cape Town. He subsequently became a doctor and is now working as a doctor in South Africa in the Department of Health.

I then came, after my boarding school years, at St. Andrews College, came down to the University of Cape Town to do a degree in physics and math, the argument being -- and, as always, enormously influenced by my mother -- that if I could manage mathematics and so on, it was the sensible thing to do to study that. A book, one could always read the history. This was her approach, which I agree with entirely. It seems to me to make eminent sense, because there's no way you're going to learn physics by yourself, just reading it, or mathematics. So I did a three-year degree in physics, majoring in physics, which was tremendous because it's a wonderful analytical training. Wonderful. In fact, a large number of economists were once physicists.

At the end of that period, I decided that I really didn't want to spend my life counting electrons, that it didn't seem to have deep significant meaning for me, but I'd like to use the

analytical, mathematical, scientific training I'd been given much more in terms of society. And that's how I kind of edged into economics, I suppose much influenced by my uncle, who was not a brother, but a cousin once or twice removed of Monica's, but lived in Grahamstown, was a professor of economics there.

So I come out of an intellectual family. My father's father was J. [John] Dover Wilson, who was a Shakespearian scholar in Britain, an Englishman who'd then moved to Edinburgh and worked at the University of Edinburgh, then lived the rest of his days in Edinburgh. So there was that background as well. That, I suppose, are the influences: rural South Africa and an intellectual family and a Christian family, because those moral issues were very important. And for Monica, the importance of a society which was somehow consistent with the Gospels was very important. So it was from her and from hearing about my father, whom I remember, but obviously I was very small when he died, and from those sort of wider family influences that my moral outlook, my moral training comes. So there was always this attempt to make sure that there is consistency about everything in terms of one's intellectual training and one's moral training and how the politics all hangs together, that it should all fuse.

So I grew up with a very great sense of the injustice. When I say "grew up," I'm not sure that I was conscious of that until I was about fifteen or sixteen, emerging from school, but I'm not sure that small boys worry too much about these things. But certainly by the time I got to the university, I became very active in politics, in student politics, and we were then battling in those days against the Extension of Universities Act, which was essentially trying to segregate the universities, and did segregate the universities. Although let me not

overstress how open they were. I mean, they weren't that open. But even when I got to UCT in 1957, there were a few African students at the university one way or another who had managed to wangle themselves in, one of whom you met yesterday, Fikile Bam, who is now Mr. Justice Bam, and he's been a lifelong friend of mine ever since we met, I guess in 1957.

Q: How did you meet?

Wilson: You know, I don't know exactly how we met, but presumably, as we were students on the campus we would have met in some society or another. He was always, as he is now, a very open, warm, friendly person, and I guess we gravitated naturally towards each other because we come from a very similar kind of background. I mean, he comes from a family, his mother was a nurse who'd worked in Polela Health Clinic, which is also in the Transkei and so on. So her background and her value system is not that different from Monica's background and value system in that sense. So we've always got on extremely well. So that one was able to have, even as a student, as a white student, in those days it was possible to begin to have friends who weren't white; black friends.

Q: Let me ask you what's maybe a very difficult question. Looking back, I'm trying to analyze when did you first realize, and how did you first realize, how divided the society was in terms of race?

Wilson: That's very difficult to know. I would love to go back and read some of the stuff I wrote as a schoolboy, because I can remember trying to -- one goes in for these open prizes

and you write an essay about this, that, or the other thing. I would imagine that I was conscious then about it, because our teachers were certainly against apartheid. That's not to say that they were always opposed to all forms of segregation. Let me stress that. So that I would have imbibed from my teachers something of that, and I would have imbibed obviously from my mother some ideas of the injustices in the society. So I would imagine that I was conscious of a lot of this during my school years. Certainly by the time I got to the university, it was very much a part of my consciousness and developed intellectually as a student.

But it seems to me I was a late bloomer in many ways, and I doubt that I was that politically analytical -- let's put it that way -- until I became a student, although I can remember very, very clearly when Trevor Huddleston's book *Naught for Your Comfort* came out, and we could check that date, because I can remember very clearly saying to Monica I wondered what she thought of the book. One of our teachers at school had talked about it and thought it was very good. And Monica just replied in one word, she said, "I think he's a saint." And I just remember that.

So that I had all that tradition, and it's difficult, without going back through my notes and talking to friends and so on, to think exactly when that consciousness came, but certainly by the time I was a young student at seventeen I was very clear.

Q: A related and equally difficult question, being once you realized the divide, you must have also come to some kind of subjective consciousness about being white and what that meant.

Wilson: Yes, yes.

Q: Could you describe a little bit in that time period and what follows, your own moral development as a person and decision about how to live your life, given that you were white in South Africa?

Wilson: Yes, that's a difficult question. And, of course, it's very difficult to separate the overlay from the perspective now with how one was seeing it at the time. I'm very conscious of the tricks of memory and so on, very. But let me have a shot and see how we get there.

I guess that I would start with the value system that I grew up with, which was a Christian value system, but Christianity, one needs to just pause for a moment. It was the kind of value system that is incorporated into the World Council on Churches, in somebody like Archbishop William Temple, who was the great Anglican archbishop in England during the Second World War, who wrote a number of books, but two which I want to talk about particularly. One was *The Readings in St. John's Gospel*, which was a very great devotional book, and the other was *Christianity and the Social Order*, in which he spelled out, with the clarity for which he's famous, he spelled out something about the social implications of the Gospel, in a non-party political way, but Temple himself joined the Labour Party as a bishop. He was a socialist.

I come out of that tradition. I mean, people like R.H. Tawney and Tawney's book on equality and on the acquisitive society. I come out of, which in British terms, and because Monica was in Cambridge and my father was at Oxford and so on, those were the intellectual influences on me, and the American intellectual influences came much later. That Christian socialist tradition, if I can put it that way, in the writings of people like Tawney and Temple, those were the books that I was reading as a student and finding enormously exciting, and they were consistent and not pushed, because Monica was much more discreet than that, but I would have become conscious of them through her.

You add that to the kind of politics going on at the University of Cape Town, where there was a very strong liberal -- with a small "l." And "liberal" in those days didn't have the same sort of connotations as it has today in terms of free market, sometimes pretty conservative.

Q: Describe what it did mean. [Interruption.]

[END TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE; BEGIN TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO]

Q: I think you were just about to describe what exactly you meant by being a liberal at the time that you were at UCT, what that meant. You were talking about --

Wilson: Yes. Well, I think in those days, you know, we were dealing with the apartheid juggernaut, which was very ferocious, very ferocious, and apartheid was cast very firmly in racial terms, color terms. So our battle was about that. But, of course, the university was a

very lively place, and we had a grass patch, known as Freedom Square, where there would be these enormous discussions at lunchtime.

We had a very considerable number -- well, I'm not sure how many, but it seemed considerable, a reasonable number, of so-called colored students there then, many of whom from the Western Cape, many of whom in the tradition of what was then called the Teachers League of South Africa, and also the Non-European Unity Movement, and there was a strong Trotskyist influence there as well. So we had plenty of -- how shall I say -- class discussions as well. It wasn't just an issue of race relations, not at all. There was ferocious discussion and very lively, extremely good.

Q: Can you give us some examples?

Wilson: It's difficult. Simply to say that one would have students on the campus who you would have the NUSAS students, the National Union of South African Students, who would be mainly white students, not entirely, mainly white students, liberal in the sense of being very open and battling for a nonracial society, and that could take them to different degrees of radicalism. Some of them would be in favor of a qualified franchise, other of them would want a nonracial complete universal franchise immediately. Still others moved to take that into economic terms, in terms of a more socialist redistribution of wealth and so on. And you could find all of them in one particular grouping, but then if you moved, let's say, into some of the other student bodies, and, of course, if you were not white and your experience had been growing up in South Africa nonwhite, you'd likely to be more radical than if you'd grown up as white. I mean, that's just different experiences.

So you would find a lot of the colored students arguing much more in analytical class terms, and, you know, they would pat me on the head and sort of say, "Listen, Francis, you really don't understand properly how this society works. It's not about race; it's about exploitation."

Those were very important influences, and we all influenced each other. Let me jump ahead to give an example, is that I at one stage, many years later, had to write a history for the Cambridge Press. It was just a chapter in a book. I was doing the history of Southern Africa from 1936 to 1976, I think it was, and I was trying to think about the significance of the 1948 election. I thought, well, let me go and talk to some of my friends and relations and find out how people assess the 1948 election, which was the election in which the apartheid got established, when the National Party came to power.

I expected that, by and large, the older generation, my mother's generation, would tell me that the 1948 election was -- no, what I expected was that the Marxists would tell me that the 1948 election was unimportant, that it was just one more turn of the screw, as it were, in an exploitative, capitalist society. That's what I expected the Marxists to tell me. And I expected the liberals all to tell me that South Africa, that that was an incredibly important election because we'd moved from a more open General [Jan Christiaan] Smuts to a much tougher racist, which would have been, I expected to be the liberal position.

In fact, what happened was that it was not a Marxist-liberal dichotomy that emerged, but it was a generational dichotomy, that when I talked to the older generation, both liberals, like

my mother or Desmond Hobart Houghton, who was an economist, or Marxists like Jack Simons, would say, "No, no, no. The 1948 election was incredibly important for this, this, and this reason." And all my younger generation, both Marxist and liberal, would say, "Well, the '48 election, yes, it did a few things, but it wasn't that important in the long march of history."

So what I'm really trying to illustrate with that is that our generation were enormously influenced intellectually by what I would call the more radical left, to try and understand society much more beyond race, in class terms as well, and that was important. And that's been an ongoing debate in South Africa, and that's a debate that will continue, you know, once we move beyond this 1990s what I would call -- it's a very strange period we're living in at the moment intellectually. One has kind of American ideology rampant. And I think we're going to move beyond that, because the divides in society, in global terms, are so enormous that they're going to have to be analyzed and understood much better than they are at the moment. And one's going to come back to class analysis and exploitation and so on. I'm sure we are. Once one gets over the ending of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union and so on, it doesn't necessarily imply the collapse of all the insights that came from Marx and everybody else. Not for a second. But this is not the moment for that intellectual debate. It's not happening very much in the 1990s, but I expect that it will reemerge.

So that's really what I was trying to sketch, what came out of that very lively discussion going on in South Africa in the 1950s, because it was a period before Sharpeville in 1960, before the Rivonia trial in 1964, and, if you like, before the National Party had taken its

iron grip on the place in the 1950s, when there was a good deal of political discussion, a great deal of political discussion. Not everything had been banned. I mean, the Communist Party was banned from the early 1950s onwards, but one could still talk a great deal.

Q: Was there a sense that apartheid could be dismantled, or was it just a sense of making a more liveable society?

Wilson: Well, I think all of us, as students, were looking forward to a -- when I say "all of us," let me be careful. There were plenty of conservative students around. But in my circles, NUSAS or further left and so on, friends like Fiks and other friends who were white and so on, we were all looking for the revolution, not necessarily a kind of 1917 revolution -- there were some students looking for that -- but for a fundamental change. I think the divide was between those who thought that this was likely to come quite soon, maybe wish being father to the thought, as it were, and those who felt it was going to be a long way off and take time.

I was always, I think -- and I think I'm being honest about this -- I was always one of those who thought it was going to take a long time, that it didn't seem to me that this was a system that was going to change in a hurry, but I did want to understand it better, which is why I went into economics. But as students, we were battling a system that was incredibly powerful and was making its mark. I mean, in the teeth of all kinds of opposition, you know, terrible laws were being put on the statute books and so on, and students were very involved in battling those laws.

Students would vary in their commitment. All of us varied in our commitment in the sense that when it came to the battling against the closure of UCT and the throwing out of black students and so on, we managed to get a pretty wide consensus of student and academic staff, and that was a pretty universal opposition on the grounds that this was impinging on the autonomy of the university, that this was bad for education and was just not right to be doing that. But you wouldn't have got nearly such a wide consensus, let's say, on the franchise. There weren't many whites in those days who thought there should be a universal franchise. There were some, both communist and liberal, but to the right of the liberals, not many.

Q: In terms of your own political development regarding socialism, communism, and liberalism, who were some of the people around at that time at UCT in terms of the communist perspective, and how did you react to that? And also looking broader in the world, what was happening, were there models that you were thinking through as you were thinking through what your --

Wilson: Well, you know, in those days I was still -- at an intellectual level, I was still a physicist. That's what I was studying. Insofar as politics was concerned, we were working on things like the Extension of Universities Education Act. In terms of the wider society, my understanding was being very much shaped by people like William Temple and *Christianity and the Social Order*. So I was working in that sort of paradigm which came very much from my family.

In terms of the wider Marxist tradition, it never captured me. It certainly did some of my friends. When I say "captured," I didn't become a party member or a follower. Certainly some of my friends did. But there were people like [Harold] Jack Simons, who was one of the great, great teachers in South Africa, and he was lecturing at UCT, but he was lecturing in -- it was then comparative African government and law, I think, and I wasn't going to his lectures because I was on the science side of the campus. So I wasn't intimately involved in the intellectual life of the political scientists, if I can put it that way, although I would participate in the discussions about the university, and I would also think very hard about the wider society. But that wider aspect tended to be what I was learning from my theology.

Q: Let me then ask you what your theology taught you about what a just society would be in South Africa. What was your vision?

Wilson: Yes. I think that my vision -- and again one would be careful that I'm not interpreting from now, but I go back to the writers like R.H. Tawney, the great socialist writers in England sort of before the Labour government came to power in 1945, but I think I came, if I look back on it, I came out of that intellectual tradition that really looked forward to and fought for the victory of the Labour Party in the elections of 1945, and who rejoiced in all of that and who completely accepted and understood the necessity for that, which was essentially a non-Marxist liberal radical, and that's where I come from. So that my understanding was that one needed -- a just society was a nonracial society; it was a

society in which you didn't have terrible inequality; it was a society in which you didn't have poverty. All of these were the things that one had to struggle against.

I joined, for example, at UCT we had an organization called SHAWCO, the Students' Health and Welfare Centres Organisation, which was actually a very impressive body -- still is -- where the students run the annual rag to collect money, which they collected in thousands of rands, huge amounts of money, which were then used for health clinics for welfare work and for education. So we would be involved with students in night schools. We'd go out and teach at night schools in a place called Windermere and Factreton, which were largely, in those days, mixed colored and African, and a shantytown, essentially, self-built shacks and so on, very poor.

I was involved in running a rugby club, being the coach of a rugby club out there, an African rugby club, and we all built a field, a rugby field. So that would give me a kind of hands-on sense of what it meant to endure poverty. So one was -- I was, and friends like David Russell, who's now the bishop of Grahamstown, we were very close and still are, trying to struggle for a more just society without being Marxist in our analysis, although I think all of us of that generation were, and still are, obviously influenced by the importance of the Marxist analysis and class analysis. It's enormously important to understand how "haves" can design the rules to keep themselves as "haves" and keep other people out.

I think the importance of understanding the structures of society is something that I became much more aware of, although I was not yet trained as an economist, and so it's kind of pretty nebulous thinking. But the recognition that poverty was not the fault of the

poor, that one could actually reshape society, and we were, all of us, believed in those days, I think, a fairly uncritical view that the state could make things much better and always would. Now, I have not become one of those people who think the state should evaporate, but I think we all take a much more analytical critical view about the strengths and weaknesses of the state, that it has potential, but for good and bad.

Q: Let me jump out of the intellectual realm for a moment and just ask you, as a human being and observer of the life in Cape Town at that time, could you describe to us a little bit about the conditions of poverty in Cape Town at the time you were there? Were the migrant labor systems in place, etc., etc.?

Wilson: Yes. Well, that was something I was very conscious of and became more conscious of, and I think that came from Monica. I'm trying to distinguish between when I was a student and my early research work.

Q: Start wherever you want.

Wilson: But put it this way, that the way in which the pass laws operated was something that I was conscious of from a very early age. I mean, I can remember in Grahamstown as a small boy of maybe fifteen, teaching at a night school, which the school ran, and there was a lovely woman who used to come, older than me. I think she was not literate in those days, but she was highly intelligent, a marvelous person, but, I would guess, probably in her thirties. She worked as a domestic at the prep school where I had been, so I knew her. She would come to this night school, and I can remember having to sign her pass one

evening, because there was a curfew, and she couldn't be found out at night in Grahamstown, which is a tiny little town, as an African woman, without permission. And I, as a schoolboy, was having to sign her pass. I can remember at the time thinking, "This is so wrong that little me can be giving her permission to be in town."

So one's early sense of injustice goes back quite a long way. So that consciousness of the ramifications of control is something that I became aware of quite young in my own terms and obviously would have learned a lot about from my mother, because it was something that she felt extremely strongly about, the whole migrant labor system.

That migrant labor system -- well, I could go on and on about it, and I will -- I mean, I didn't know all of this as a student, I don't think, although maybe some of it I did, but I subsequently did research in the sixties on this. A place like Langa in Cape Town, which had started life as a small area set up under the Group Areas Act, where Africans were supposed to live, and there were families living there, families who had come to Cape Town in the early twenties and even before that, and many of them, of course, come from the last century. You had Africans in the Western Cape in the 1830s already.

But Langa became the locus of the what were called hostels or compounds, what I tend to refer to as labor batteries, because they were buildings built for men only, who were coming down from rural South Africa, where I come from, the Eastern Cape, who were coming down as migrants, as oscillating migrants. They were allowed in to work and then they must go back again. Wives weren't allowed to come, children weren't allowed to come, and

they were brought in on a single basis to work in the docks and on the roads and in industry and so on.

So Langa was the center of a lot of hostels or compounds or labor batteries, if you like, and by the 1960s, the ratio of men to women was, I think, something like eleven to one. It was an awful place in that sense. It was like an army camp, I guess is the best way to describe it, an army camp with some family housing around it, so it had this kind of combination of settled families, educated families who'd been around for a long time in the Cape, and men who were living in dreadful conditions. So that was one part of Cape Town.

The other part was a place like Factreton or Windermere, as it then was, which has now got reasonable housing and so on, but in those days was very much a shantytown with wood and corrugated iron and bits and pieces put together, and it was fairly mixed. It was both African and colored in those days, as I recollect it. Certainly a lot of Africans, although it now tends to be largely a colored part of town.

So I had a real feeling of poverty there, because SHAWCO had a clinic right in the middle of that, and people would come in. I was going off to meet friends in the rugby club. I would go to their homes and know where they came out of. Now, those kind of conditions still exist in Cape Town, those kind of very bad cheek-by-jowl shantytowns. I mean, there are more Africans living in Cape Town now who have better housing, but there are still all over South Africa huge numbers of Africans living in urban areas in those kind of shanties. And then, of course, one has to remember that poverty in the urban areas is not as acute as the poverty in the rural areas, but that takes us into another story.

So I would have become conscious of all of that. As a student, one has an enormous amount of energy as a student, enormous amount of idealism, enormous amount of arrogance as well. I think you sort of feel you can go out and do things and organize this, that, and the other thing. So the form which that took for me was both political involvement in organizing protest marches and protests, just one of many students doing this, against the legislation that was being passed, particularly the university legislation, and then involved in a place like Windermere, as it was called, with the rugby club, trying to -- well, work with people to create a better life. That was a lot of fun, and obviously I learned much more from them than they learned from me, but it was a very important part of my education, and that came from the University of Cape Town.

Q: But this was a period generally when blacks were coming into the cities in larger numbers, is that correct?

Wilson: Well, the whole process of urbanization in South Africa is an interesting one. I mean, if you go back to the turn of the century, by that time roughly fifty percent of whites were already urbanized, if I remember my statistics correctly, and only about ten percent of Africans, and coloreds sort of more than ten percent, but less than fifty. And over the next two generations, whites and coloreds moved almost entirely to towns so that ninety percent or more are now urbanized, very like the United States.

Black South Africans, on the other hand, there was a policy really which got stronger as the years went on, to prevent black urbanization, and there was a notorious local government

commission in 1922-'23, the Stallard Commission, which had a phrase in it somewhere to this effect -- and I'm quoting more or less verbatim -- that "The cities are the white man's creation, and the black man" -- not woman -- "the black man may enter them in order to minister to the needs of the white man, and must depart therefrom when he ceases so to minister." Now, that was a very important strand of white South African policy way back to almost the turn of the century, that the cities should be kept white and not be overrun by blacks.

At the same time, of course, as you know, the economic growth implies urbanization for reasons that I can explain in first-year Economics 1 terms. But it has to do with the elasticity of demand for agricultural goods and for industrial goods, but you have built into the process of economic growth, you have built in pressures toward urbanization. And that has been a worldwide phenomenon. Those pressures, of course, operated in South Africa.

But the pass laws, which themselves go back really to slavery, that you -- well, let me stand back for a moment. There are two aspects of South Africa that need to be understood historically. One is that when whites came in, in 1652, the Dutch arrived, and in the 1820s, large numbers of British arrived, that began a process of conquest in which whites took over black land, just to be very brief about it. So that by the time of the Land Act of 1913, that was simply tying up with a little pink ribbon a distribution of land which basically puts most land and the minerals under the land and the water which ran through the land into the control and ownership of whites, who were then twenty percent of the population. So that's the one economic reality underlying the substructure of South African foundations.

The other is that slavery was introduced in the Cape within ten years of Van Riebeek arriving, not enslaving local people, but bringing slaves in from the East, from Java and what is now Indonesia and so on, and then from places like Mozambique and then South from Angola. Slavery has been a very important component of the South African political structure, because when slavery was abolished in 1836, it then got succeeded, if you like, by a thicket of what one can call pass laws, vagrancy laws, to control not so much the former slaves who tended to be then merged with the Khoisan, who used to be known as the Hottentot, and became the so-called colored people. In terms of an ordinance in 1826 or '28, they were freed from pass laws, so that particular group of South Africans didn't have the same legal controls over them as black South Africans that would be Xhosa-speaking, Bantu-speaking, whether they were Xhosa or Zulu or whatever, Sotho speakers.

Those pass laws and vagrancy laws to control the movement of labor really date back to slavery and kind of, as it were, grew out of slavery, and they then got stronger and stronger with the discovery of diamonds in 1867, gold in 1886, and you then developed a whole system in South Africa, labor system, which controlled the movement of black labor, so that first Kimberly diamond mines and then the Johannesburg Witwatersrand gold mines essentially housed all their workers who didn't live around there, but came in from rural areas from other places, because that part of South Africa was not densely populated, so there weren't many people living around there at the time. Housed them in these big single-sex compounds. In Kimberly, they were closed compounds. You would come in, you couldn't leave until you'd finished your diamond-digging, and then you were checked for

diamonds, and then you were allowed out, if you were black, not if you were white. And similarly on the gold mines.

So that you had this extraordinary pattern of oscillating migration built into the whole process of industrialization in South Africa, and our century of industrialization really runs from the gold mine discoveries in the 1880s to the 1980s. You take the hundred years before 1990, that's our century of industrialization.

Now, at the heart of that industrial process was an enforced oscillating migratory labor system, which we could talk about for another two hours if you want to, which essentially meant that a very high proportion of those urbanizing, who had normally been urbanizing, were not allowed to urbanize. They would come in, stay for six months, nine months, a year, even two years in the hostels or the labor compounds, and then go back to the rural areas whence they came. Now, that pattern or that process put a whole distortion into the way in which the Southern African economy developed, which we can talk about later if you want to.

But what it meant was that we had enforced labor controls, of which I became aware, as I say, when I signed that pass, that curfew thing in 1955, I guess, '56, and which I became much more aware of, of course, as a student, because there was the Liberal Party just getting going, and I joined the Liberal Party and so on. These were the kind of awful aspects of apartheid, racist, I mean pure racist, where laws would be applying to blacks, but not to whites, and so on.

So I grew in that political tradition that one became very aware of all those discriminatory laws, in whatever form they operated, whether it was education or labor or so on, and the need to change all of those.

Q: So as you -- [Interruption.]

[END TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO; BEGIN TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE]

Q: In addition to the other barriers that you've described and the laws that were being set up, I wanted to ask you about the many different languages that were spoken in Southern Africa and the laws that were then passed to restrict the speaking of language. You talk about it any way you want.

Wilson: No, there were never laws to restrict learning languages. As I say, if one grew up in rural South Africa, and the paradox is that some of the most conservative South Africans grew up in rural areas and spoke extremely good Xhosa, Sotho, Zulu, whatever it may be, so there was no correlation between learning languages and one's political position. Well, you could often say that a lot of the left didn't really speak more than one language, and that often happened.

But I think that, of course, black South Africans, as a matter of course, will speak two, three, four languages because many of them will have a mother tongue and another language spoken in the family or nearby, with wider connections, and then they will learn

English or Afrikaans or both, would have learned that as matters of necessity. So black South Africans, if one can generalize, tend to be much more skillful linguistically than white South Africans.

As I say, one of the things that I happened to grow up conscious of, and I'm sure this was again family influences and so on, was that language was an awful -- if you didn't speak a language, it was a terrible barrier, and it used to bug me like crazy that I couldn't communicate. I was always sad about having lost so much Xhosa and so on. So that as a student, I tried very hard to learn more Xhosa. I went to lectures by A.C. Jordan, as I say, and he took us off on a wonderful holiday once when I was a student. He took four of his students off to his own home town in Mbokothwana, home village, near Qumbu in the Transkei, north of Umtata, about which he's written in this famous novel and so on. So that was an unusual experience and a very generous gift from our professor, who took us off home. It was an enormously important experience for me in my second or third year at university.

At the same time, I was conscious of the need to learn Afrikaans. Now, I went to one of these English-speaking English-medium schools which, frankly, were very prejudiced against Afrikaners, so I must have grown up with a sense of the injustice of prejudice. I did have a sense that I needed to do more to learn Afrikaans, because although I was taught it for years and years and years in classroom, I was never fluent. So as a child I'd been sent to an Afrikaans farm, which didn't do much good. When I say an Afrikaans farm, to a family living on a farm, who spoke Afrikaans, and I went with my cousins and we spent

most of the time speaking English and didn't do very much about our Afrikaans, but we learned a lot about farm life.

Then later, as a schoolboy, as an older schoolboy, I can remember organizing myself to get to an Afrikaans farm to try and improve my Afrikaans, and then subsequently as a university student, going off into what was then the Orange Free State, north of Lesotho, what is now the Free State, to stay with a family, conservative. He was a National Party MP, very kind, generous people, and for me that was a very important experience, because not only was I learning Afrikaans, which I certainly improved a lot, never became great, but it did improve a lot, but I was also getting an insight into a part of South Africa that I actually knew nothing about, because I'd grown up to some extent within black South Africa, so I knew something about black South Africa. I certainly knew about white South Africa, English-speaking South Africa, but I knew very, very little from the inside of Afrikaans-speaking South Africa. And that was important for me in sort of growing as a South African.

So I'm very grateful that the kind of family ethos was that this was something that was a good thing to do. Language, for me, has always been enormously important, and I was lucky subsequently to be able to learn some French, none of which is very good, but it's conversational, and even a little bit of a language makes an enormous difference in terms of human communication, which for me has always been important.

Q: Let's move back to UCT before we get to Cambridge, and talk about some of the particular kinds of things you did there as a student in terms of organizing.

Wilson: Well, I mean, you know, I was just one more little student amongst lots of others, but I think that one of the things one needs to reflect on is that UCT at that time -- and I'm now talking about the late fifties -- was an open university in the sense that it was possible for African or colored students to come and study, some of them, not a huge number, in a way that was simply not possible, was not acceptable at a place like the University of Stellenbosch, which was an Afrikaans-medium university, much more in the ideology of the National Party Government.

But one wants to be careful before one claims too much for UCT, because there was social segregation. The residences were for whites only. It was essentially one could be integrated in the classroom and walking around the campus and in things like the debating society, but you didn't have mixed dances, and black students were not really participating in sport.

I can remember, as a student, being involved in the organization of, with other students, of both a mixed rugby match in which we -- in fact, we persuaded some of the cleaners at UCT to join us, and we had this great rugby match one day which we were very worried about. We thought it was going to get all kinds of political wrath was going to descend on us from maybe *Die Burger*, the Afrikaans newspaper, or whatever. But we felt it was important to try and break that barrier. That was a one time event, but it was a thing we were very pleased as students to do.

Similarly, we organized -- and I don't remember the details right now, but we did organize

a mixed dance. Now, this was getting much more risky. When I say "a mixed dance," I don't mean just men and women dancing, but mixed in the sense of black and white. That was also the beginnings of something that we felt important. I don't even remember the details of it now, except that I think we pulled it off all right. But it was highly risky.

So I think we need to recognize that even a place like UCT, which likes to pride itself on its great open liberal tradition -- I'm part of that tradition -- was in a society that was deeply racist, which racism affected, infected us all in our attitudes and in what was done and not done. So we need to be very conscious of that. I mean, the embedding of racism, the unconscious embedding of racism is staggering, and it's something that we all have to examine in ourselves, each of us.

Q: How many black women were there at the university at that time?

Wilson: I don't remember any. I don't remember any. There may well have been, but my friends, like Fiks or Archie [Mafeje] or Tulani [Gcabashe], all men, and I don't actually remember at UCT at the time. The women, African women who became friends of mine were subsequent to that, people like Hlope Bam, who is Fik's sister, who is a dear friend of mine, we met subsequently.

Q: How did you decide to go to Cambridge?

Wilson: Well, again this is family. My mother had been at Cambridge. She was at Girton [College] and it had meant an enormous amount to her. And my grandfather, my father's

father, not her father, my father's father had been -- was, I think, an honorary fellow of Caius College, had gone to Caius College at Cambridge. And his father had been the engraver for the Cambridge Press and had grown up near Cambridge. So that there was a long Cambridge tradition in the family, if I can put it that way.

And in those days, there were two rands to the pound, which we were still pounds, I guess, in those days. Yes. So the exchange rate was nothing like it is now. It's now ten to one. It's five times as bad as it was. So it was easier financially in those days to do it. I guess my mother felt it would be a good thing for me to study further, and it seemed almost natural in those days. I mean, I was incredibly fortunate. So that was when I decided that I wanted to move into economics and to understand the structures of the society. That, I guess, was what UCT gave me, a realization of how much I didn't know and didn't understand, and I was really going to have to get to grips with some of this. Economics was probably the best place to start, which was, I think, a good decision.

Q: What were some of your first impressions at Cambridge, and what was it like to be a colony person?

Wilson: Well, of course I was terrified. I mean, you know, Cambridge. Cambridge. You're going up and you're some little boy from the backwoods, and I hadn't study any economics and I hadn't studied any history, and I was going into Part Two of the Economics Tripos, which is the second year, because they said they would let my science degree count for the first year. And you had all these very bright British children who'd done the Eleven Plus and all with a huge reputation for brains coming to Cambridge.

I, frankly, thought I was going to drown when I arrived there. So I worked very hard, but I can remember day one, more or less, going in to see my tutor, and he sent me out to buy a book by Kenneth [E.] Boulding, called *Economic Analysis*, which is now two volumes. In those days it was just one volume. I mean, it's slightly apocryphal, but not that apocryphal, where he said to me, "Wilson, well, just go and buy that book and read it through, and on page 563 you'll find a question set there in the list of questions, question number three, I want you to write an essay and bring it back next week." So I thought, God Almighty. I went off and I bought this book, and I went back into my study and I put a towel around my head, and I just read for a week. Well, you know, most of it I didn't understand at all, but one was just thrown into the deep end, put it that way. I did my best to write my essay for my tutor.

So there was that sense of really having to work very hard and being worried about it. At the same time, I mean, Cambridge is a wonderful place, and once you got into the swing of writing essays, which was hard, I mean, we wrote three essays every two weeks, which -- yes, three essays every two weeks, doesn't sound like a huge amount, but you have to work hard to produce that. Reading a lot and then, of course, which is something I didn't understand or know or was conscious of at the time, Cambridge was, in economics terms, an extraordinary place just then. I mean, it had its huge reputation for science and Lord Rutherford and all that, but -- I mean, he was no longer there, of course, but it had the Cavendish Laboratory I'd heard all about.

But Cambridge, I mean, [John] Maynard Keynes himself, of course, had died by then. He

died in 1946, I think, but most of his colleagues were still alive and very much there. When I think back on the names of people who were in Cambridge lecturing in economics, who my tutor would say, "Go listen to him," or don't, or, "If you must, you must, go listen." But we were very much on our -- he would give me some advice as to whose lectures I should go listen to, but then one was free to wander around and listen to others.

I got an extraordinary set of lectures from all kinds of people. I mean, James [Edward] Meade or Lord Kahn, who'd thought about the multiplier, would wander into class and sort of sit there, looking very solemn, or stand there looking very solemn and sort of talk to himself about the multiplier. You had the sense of really getting it from the source, as it were.

So it was a wonderful intellectual experience for me, Cambridge, as it began, and I was into a subject that I really believed in now because I was trying to understand how society worked. I became an economist not because I wanted to do economics, but because I wanted to understand how South African society really worked. What were these exploitative situations? What were the relations between black and white in economic terms? What was actually going on?

And looking back on it, Cambridge was -- I couldn't have gone to a better place. It was also very exciting at all kinds of levels. It was the first time I'd really lived any long time away from home, although I'd been at boarding school and so on, so it wasn't as though I was just a home boy. But, you know, I was on my own, so that was exciting, and there was very

interesting theology in Cambridge, very lively place, very lively place in theological terms. I joined a lot of that, the societies like the Student Christian Movement and so on.

And then met all kinds of friends, I mean, my staircase was an extraordinary staircase, looking back on it. I mean, people there, now one of them was a crazy Australian, for example, who was there doing engineering, micro-engineering and so on, who is now Sir Alec Broers, the vice chancellor of Cambridge, or somebody else who's a very hard-working historian, worked very, very hard, an Englishman, who's now -- I think he's the pro vice chancellor at Cambridge. So one was thrown into an amazing group of peers, as it were, put it that way. And that was all very exciting.

Q: In terms of the theories around of the day, were they mostly reflective of Keynes, and which particular people did you study with that had an influence on you?

Wilson: Yes, I think it was a very Keynesian place at the time. I think a real sense that economics -- one is studying economics because one wants to understand society and make it better, issues like unemployment, issues like the trade cycle, and the damages that a downturn in the trade cycle can do, issues of poverty, indeed. So that economics was a serious business with a purpose to it.

At the same time, there was this strong -- how shall I put it? And I'm not trying to juxtapose them, but analytical tradition. Michael Farrell, who was my tutor, a wonderful man, quite, you know, tough, and I can remember going in with one of my essays which I thought was really a rather good essay, I was quite pleased with myself, and he listened to

it in stony silence for half an hour while I read my essay to him, as I did once a week with another guy. We would go in together and read essays. I read my essay, and he said, "Yes, Wilson," he said, "if I'd asked for a political tract, I would have asked for a political tract. I want you to write economic analysis." And that was a very important lesson to me, because, you know, I was trying to put forward some idea that I thought was wonderful. And he was wanting, you know, analysis.

I think that what Cambridge taught me was to try and combine, if I can put it this way, the clear analysis, real understanding, getting to grips with the way that forces operate in society, and yet not to ignore -- how shall I say it -- the social implications in the wider society. You had all different kinds of people there. You had Nicky [Nicholas] Kaldor, who was going off here, there, and everywhere, giving advice in different countries about how to organize the macro economy. You had James Meade giving lectures and also advising the British government and so on.

So there was this real sense of economics as an important player in society, let's put it that way, so that the whole range of people -- Joan Robinson was giving lectures, E.A.G. [Edward Austin Gossage] Robinson was giving lectures. A subsequent supervisor for my thesis was Malcolm Fisher, who's a New Zealander labor economist and so on. All of them were -- one was sharpening one's mind, or trying to, and then you would meet these small groups, they were little societies, to talk about this, that, and the other thing. There were some wonderful people of my generation, like Christopher Bliss, who's a professor at Oxford and so on. John Knight is another professor at Oxford. All doing economics at the same time as I was, and we were learning from each other.

Q: In terms of issues of development and the way in which economics as a discipline related to a growing interest in matters of development in the developing world, there's also by this time the World Bank has been there for about ten years or more. What was the sense? Were there tensions and strains between pure economics, as it were, pure analysis, as it were, and applied development theories in terms of seeing human capital as resource and that sort of thing?

Wilson: I would need to go back to my notes, because it's difficult to know exactly when the timing comes in, but I don't remember development economics as such being at the center of the Cambridge training. That really entered my consciousness later. You had the Institute of Development Studies at Sussex, and I went there in 1973, I think '74, to teach just for a brief period. People like Hans Singer and Richard Jolly, and Paul Streeten wasn't there at the time, but those economists. Now, somebody like Richard Jolly, of course, was in Cambridge just coming back from Zambia at the time, and he read my thesis or helped criticize my thesis as it was forming. So those development economists were around, but Cambridge was very much, I guess, at a macroeconomic level. They were trying to understand the big issues of unemployment.

I'm not sure that I want to juxtapose that too much, because, you know, the issues were similar kinds of issues. I mean, why is there so much unemployment? Why is there so much poverty? What is the impact of trade relations? All of that was in Cambridge, and I found myself being driven, going back from and moving away from the kind of analysis that I got in Cambridge.

Q: How did you come to choose your thesis?

Wilson: Fast forward a bit. Well, by the time I got back to Cambridge, I was away for a year and so on, I had been thinking about getting ordained. It was sort of another side of me. But I went back to Cambridge. I'd been away and came back, and as I started thinking about my thesis and whether this would be a good idea in economics, I thought, yes, I would really like to try and understand the economics of discrimination in South Africa. It's a big topic. So I thought, well, let me try and write a thesis on the economics of discrimination, I thought grandly to myself. And Cambridge was very good. They said, "Go and talk to Malcolm Fisher," who said to me, "Well, go away and read and come back when you're ready," kind of thing, you know.

Along the way, I went off to the United States, and I was very fortunate. Michael Farrell helped me get to the University of Virginia. Gary [Stanley] Becker's book on *The Economics of Discrimination* had just come out, and so I went out to Columbia [University]. I was able to meet him, and that was wonderful, because I was able to try and understand a really first-rate economist getting to grips with discrimination.

I spent the first eighteen months or so of my thesis really working up what was my question, and in broad terms it was about discrimination. But that's not a question. I mean, that's just a broad fuzzy field. And what I guess the time in the United States helped me to recognize was that I couldn't use the American analysis, that that was very particular, and it wasn't going to be of direct benefit in South Africa, where largely blacks

and whites were doing different jobs, not the same job and being paid differently for the same job.

And I realized, as I came back to South Africa to do my field work, that the question that I needed to ask was, why were the earnings on the gold mines, the average earnings for whites, so different, so much higher than the average earnings for blacks. So my field work involved trying to unpack what was going on, first of all just to find out what was going on. I mean, I hadn't yet formulated the question, because I didn't know the facts, but find out what were wages in the gold mines. And that required, you know, kind of hyper detective work in those days to garner that information.

Once I got that information, then it just jumped out of the pages that you found that from 1911 to 1936 or thereabouts, the average white earnings on the mines, if you take the total wage bill divided by the number of whites, was about eleven times higher than the average bill, the average wages of blacks. But after 1936, that gap of eleven to one widened to about seventeen, eighteen, nineteen. By the 1970s, it was about twenty-one to one.

Now, that poses all kinds of questions. What is going on and how is that happening? And so that was a wonderful question, because it was narrow enough to get to grips with analytically, but if you could understand that, you were really getting to the heart of how the South African system operated. So for me, I was very fortunate to have a field like that, which was just wide open. I mean, when I was in Cambridge, there were fourteen people writing theses on Henry James, and I had this whole mining industry wide open, on which

you could have written twenty-five theses, and still there would have been lots of room to move. So it was a wonderful area to work in.

Q: We skipped the portion of your life that has to do with your time in Geneva, your exposure to the World Council of Churches, and that side of your biography.

Wilson: Yes. Well, let's just be very quick about that, because on my way from UCT to Cambridge, I finished in Cape Town in 1959, I then went off into the Transkei to learn, work more at Xhosa. I think that was the occasion when I stayed with a trader. I can't remember.

Anyway, I went off to try and learn some more Xhosa, and then went off to Geneva, because my godfather was there, Francis House, who had been a friend of my father's, and I had never met him, a mythical figure in my life. He'd written me letters and so on. But he was working at the World Council of Churches, and this is the tradition out of which my father came and so on, very much the William Temple tradition.

My mother had said to me, in her very gentle way, that maybe it would be a good idea if I learned some French. And I had actually studied a bit of French as an extra at school, so I knew a bit of grammar. And the idea of going to Geneva for four or five months in between UCT and Cambridge seemed like an excellent idea, so off I went to stay with my godfather. He and his wife Margaret then found me a family to stay with, a family that they found quite by chance, by putting up a card on the notice board at the World Council, as it were.

This family -- I can still remember it, in February 1960, walking into this flat in the center of Geneva, on about the fourth or fifth floor, and meeting this family seated around a small kitchen table, father, mother, and four children. One of the daughters wasn't there at the time, I don't think. I just fell instantly in love with this family, lock, stock, and barrel, and they've remained as close to me as my own family ever since that time. Diane [Perrot] became effectively a second mother, Alain [Perrot] very close, and they're all friends.

So that that became a very important part of my consciousness, let's put it this way, because I had to learn French very fast. There were such interesting conversations going on at the table. He was a priest, a Calvinist, a minister, and he was one of the senior ministers in Geneva and, of course, had a Calvinism that was diametrically opposed to the Calvinism of apartheid, and he was incensed that the Calvinist theology could be used to justify apartheid.

He came from the same sort of tradition as people like André Biéler who wrote *Les Pensées Economiques et Sociales de Calvin*, *The Social and Economic Thought of Calvin*, and this was a group of theologians and ministers who were working very, very strongly to interpret Calvin in very humane, human, non-racist, non-sexist terms, and that was an important influence in terms of my theological understanding of Calvinism and so on, and the critique, the theological critique, of the Dutch Reform Church Calvinism, and, besides, it was just a wonderfully warm family. I now acquired two sisters. I'd never had sisters before. And I learned reasonable French in a very short space of time, because it was just necessary in that environment.

Through that and through the connections with my godfather at the World Council, I then got to know far more of the Christian movement, Student Christian Movements operating in Europe at the time, which in those days were extremely lively, well informed, political in the best sense of the word, with a small "p," but dealing with the issues of injustice and so on. These were all, as it were, born, in a sense, or the children of the resistance movement in France and, indeed, in Germany. I mean, [Dietrich] Bonhoeffer and all that during the war. And so that I, as it were, had the good fortune to come into the European church of that kind of engaged faith, as it were. Alain and Diane Perrot themselves had been in Lyon right through the war, in occupied Lyon, part of the resistance and so on.

So that was all a very important influence on me, and then through that I got into -- there was a famous student conference in Strasbourg in 1960, where I heard Karl Barth talk, and I came down to breakfast and found myself sitting next to Joseph Hromodka , who was a famous theologian from Eastern Europe struggling with how to make theology credible and alive in a communist society, and both the strengths and weaknesses of that society. So it was just opening my eyes all around.

So, Geneva was a very important part of my upbringing, let's put it that way, and it's remained so. I've remained very close to the Perrot family, and I have many friends in Geneva, and I go back and forth a lot.

Q: And in a certain kind of sense, religion became -- [Interruption]

[END TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE; BEGIN TAPE TWO, SIDE TWO]

Q: I wanted to ask you about the overall impact of religion then on your decision to come back to South Africa.

Wilson: Yes, that's an interesting question. I think that obviously by 1966, when we were thinking of coming back to South Africa, I'd got married to Lindy [Wilson] in 1964, and we'd then gone off to the States for nine months, then back to South Africa for nine months to do field work, then back to Cambridge to write up my thesis.

Now, this was a time which was extremely tough in South Africa. I mean, half our friends were either in jail or in exile. In fact, most of our friends were either in jail or in exile, people like Fikile Bam or Hugh Lewin, both great friends of ours, were in jail ten years, seven years, whatever, and many others had gone into exile. This was after the Rivonia trial. Many people had got implicated in some form of active resistance involving the use of force and so on.

A lot of people were saying to me, "Listen. You can't go back to South Africa. It's immoral to live in South Africa. As a white South African, you're going to be privileged, you're going to have all the privileges of a white South African, and you just mustn't do it. You must stay out."

And I never accepted that theology. I said, "No, no, you're crazy." I said, "It seems to me that there are two ways of operating. Either you can become part of the armed resistance,

and you are a guerrilla operator going backwards and forwards and doing that," and I didn't have the courage to do that, frankly, point number one. Point number two, I couldn't see myself doing it, and that's slightly different from the issue of courage, but courage was very much lacking in me in that sense.

But I also felt -- and this is the positive side of it -- I also felt that it was feasible to operate in South Africa, to be part of apartheid resistance, an effective part of apartheid resistance within the country. What I was quite clear about was that you couldn't mix the two. You had to choose. You had to be one or the other.

Now, I chose not to go the option of violence, not because I didn't believe in it. It seemed to me I never had any trouble with those who felt that this was going to be part of the campaign. I mean, I could understand the rationale, but I said, "For me that's not the way. I can't go that route myself. But I don't want to bail out of this country. I don't want to just go and sit in exile and live a life in Australia," or whatever, which a number of my friends did. In those days, I was much more critical of them than I am now. I thought that that was not a good idea. In the end, I think that doing what I did was certainly much more satisfying to me, which was to come back and try and work within the country in a very low-key manner, to try and do what one could do. And the theology behind that, if you like, or the philosophy, was that it mattered to be in a place.

There's a wonderful article written by a Dutch theologian -- you sort of see my continental World Council of Churches influence -- a chap called Albert van den Heuwel who wrote an article on patriotism and presence, and writing about the importance of presence in a place.

I guess this came out of the experience of the resistance movement in Europe, that it actually could matter profoundly to be in a place, even at one level you couldn't do very much, but at another level what you were doing could be significant, not necessarily. So that was the rationale, if you like. Besides, which I loved South Africa. I love South Africa. I wanted to live back here. I didn't want to be in exile. I wasn't being booted out. I was privileged as a white.

The issue of guilt, which plagued all kinds of people of my generation, particularly whites, I won't say never bothered me, because I had to deal with a lot of guilt as I was growing up as a student, you know, how could I be rich when others were poor, and did God want me to give away everything to the poor and just be a Franciscan? I was terrified that I would have to do that, and I didn't have the courage to do that either.

But bit by bit -- and maybe this is all rationalization -- there's a wonderful Punch cartoon once which said -- there's an elder man, sort of corpulent executive talking to a young, earnest student, and saying to him, "My boy, as you get older, you'll realize that evil is not all wrong." And one does tend to rationalize as one gets older, so I've got to be very careful about that.

But I came to a view, let's put it that way, that what really mattered -- and this does come to some extent from my theology -- what really mattered was to use the gifts you've been given. The parable of the talents, if you like. So it seemed to me that in the context of South Africa, given my particular circumstances -- and I'm not talking for anybody else -- but what for me was the right thing to do was to come back to South Africa. I was a

privileged young man. I'd had an amazing education. We owned some land. I had a wonderful family. I had all kinds of openings my way. And I could operate. So I said, "Yes, I'm going to do that."

I was very lucky to be able to come into a university base, and universities were, during the sixties and seventies, for a white male -- let's make that point -- fairly protected places. One had a good deal of room to maneuver. One could teach students, one could -- I edited a little monthly magazine which was a theological and ecumenical journal, and you could say, in theological terms, all kinds of political truths that you couldn't say if I was writing in a Marxist journal. The same truths, you could say them. So form was also part of the strategy. So I guess what I worked hard at, and this was, I guess, learning from people like the Perrots of living in Lyon during the war, and certainly subsequently talking to people in Eastern Europe about how to operate in that type of society, one learns the art of feasible attack. Let's put it that way. Feasible resistance.

So I worked very hard at that and thought very hard about that down the years, as to how could one be effectively struggling against the system, given one's own particular position, skills, training, contacts, all the rest of it. And I hold to that view. I think that that is important.

Q: You came back in '65?

Wilson: In '67. End of '66.

Q: How had this society changed visibly since you left?

Wilson: Well, it was like a desert. Politically it was like a desert. I mean, in the fifties there was all kinds of debate going on. In the mid fifties there's been the Freedom Charter. You had the African National Congress. You had the Pan-African Congress. You had the -- well, after South African Communist Party had been banned a bit before that in the early fifties. But there was a great deal of political activity. It wasn't wide open. People were being banned and trade unions weren't allowed. I mean, it wasn't easy going, but there was a good deal of political activity.

But after Sharpeville, the banning of the Congress movements, ANC, PAC, and all the rest of it, and after Rivonia and the jailing of all the political top brass, before that, the jailing of [Robert] Sobukwe, Mandela had been jailed in '62, I think, originally, by '66, the place was politically like a desert, because there was nothing happening. Really, nothing happening. I mean everybody, all significant black opposition was either in jail or dead or in exile. And there were no black trade unions. The churches were little voices. The Christian Institute had just -- yes, it had been founded. This was Beyers Naudé, which was a kind of very important focus.

So that some of the feeble little voices were students. There were some *very* courageous students, white students, who were speaking in NUSAS and so on, a few university people, but, I mean, making a political impact out of all proportion to their significance, really, because they were the only people around. I mean, they were sort of matchsticks where all the trees had been cut down. So it was a pretty desolate place politically, and it was in

those kind of circumstances that one had to think incredibly carefully about how to operate and what one could do.

Q: What were the constraints in terms of what you could do as a white person?

Wilson: Well, I mean, the way that I would describe it is that it's rather like sailing in a pretty stormy sea, and if you choose your direction carefully and learn how to trim your sail just right, you can move quite a long way without blowing over into the water. If you are careless for an instant or try to be too ambitious, you simply get -- you know, your ship turns upside down.

Now, I remember reading -- I think it was *Catcher in the Rye*, and I think it was Holden Caulfield made the point that the sign of an immature man is that he wants to die nobly for a great cause, the sign of a mature man is that he wants to live humbly for it. And I took that as a kind of helpful little motto that trying to live in a society and to survive was important, but not at all costs. But you wanted to choose your battleground yourself and not have the system knock you out for some ridiculous reason.

So survival was very much a part of the game -- or not the game, the life strategy. But you then had to be able to say, "Well, it's not survival at any cost, it's not survival at the sake of compromising everything," but you had to decide what were the compromises you would make. What's that great prayer of Reinhold Niebuhr's? "Give me the courage to change the things that can be changed, the patience to accept the things that cannot be changed, and

the wisdom to know the difference." Something like that. And that seems to me part of what it's about, because it was a long haul.

I mean, all of us reckoned this was going to be a lifelong struggle, and if you were going to live and work inside South Africa, and it was getting tougher -- I mean, you know, you'd had Sharpeville, you'd have Rivonia, everybody was in jail or in exile, and this was no longer play-play politics, so you had to think very carefully.

Q: In terms of how other people were feeling and thinking at that time, there must have been many different kinds of fear in the society. We heard Judge Bam yesterday talking about that there was present fear in white society, pretty much pervasively, of black power. Was that true at that time, that blacks would eventually win, that the majority would eventually take over, and was there a fear of that in addition to fear of being pinned as a white liberal?

Wilson: Yes. I think that there was a fairly general hysteria amongst whites about blacks rising up, sort of the Mau Mau vision, if I can put it that way, blacks rising up in a tumultuous burst of violence and hacking everybody to death and driving them into the sea, if I can mix all my metaphors in one go-bang. I think that there was that kind of subconscious fear within a significant proportion of whites, and that was the fear to which the white politicians played. That was absolutely the fear to which they played, same as in the United States, the "yellow peril" argument, that kind of thing, going back into the twenties.

So that there was that fear, but I think we also need to recognize that there was also very basic class concerns by the rich and the secure, those with lands and assets, but they didn't want anybody coming to take them away from them, thank you very much, and if it meant running a very tough society to do that, then so be it. So it's not just that kind of rather inchoate fear; there's that other what I would call the fear that you see in British history and American history, of the conservatives and the wealthy trying to keep all their gains themselves and not wanting to share.

Q: In terms of your own research you were beginning to conduct, what issues pragmatically were you working on, and how difficult was it to get actual information about the issues?

Wilson: Well, this is the very fascinating thing, because people always used to say -- well, not always, but a lot of people said that it's impossible in South Africa to live and work, and certainly you can't do decent research. Well, I disagree fundamentally, that actually it was possible to do work on -- I did a lot of work on gold mine wages and so on, published a book. But one had to think very carefully about how to publish it and how to bring that stuff out.

Maybe just to illustrate that when that material was ready, or I thought it was ready, I wanted to be sure that it was correct, and so I published an -- I persuaded the *Financial Mail* to publish an article, I think about 1968 or so, and they came out with a great big cover on *Gold's Forgotten Men*, where I gave the basic facts about wages in the mining industry. In a sense, what I was trying to do there was to make sure that it was correct,

because if I'd got something badly screwed up, I could always say, "Well, I'm really, really sorry, but it's only a newspaper article." But if it was going to come out in a serious book from the Cambridge Press, I've got to be sure that it's right.

Anyway, it passed that test. Nobody came back at me with proof that it was wrong. The book then came out in 1972, I think, and two things I know happened, which I was told subsequently. One was that one of the big mining houses, I think they got two people in the mining house full time to check every single statistic in the book. You can be quite sure that if there had been something wrong, that would have been the end of Francis Wilson's -- you know, they would have just taken me to the cleaners and sort of said, "This is totally unreliable stuff. You can't trust anything." So that taught me the importance of meticulous research. I mean, you really had to work hard and double check and treble check your figures.

There was also an attack by an unsavory character called General van den Bergh who was head of BOSS [the Bureau of State Security]in those days, who had some trenchant things to say about the appalling use of the universities to come out with this kind of information, that this was clearly subversive information. But it was okay. One could survive. So that was the use of information, if you like, which had its own political ramification.

Subsequently, at the same time, the churches asked me to do work on migrant labor, to do research on that, and, I mean, I'm now talking 1971, '72, early seventies, which was still quite a tough time politically. I simply went around the country and I talked to everybody. I'd talk to administrators about how the system was working. They were building these

appalling hostels in Alexandria township and Johannesburg, huge places that were housing hundreds of men on one side, and then on the other side hundreds of women. They had great big steel doors which led down electronically, so they could seal everybody off. I can remember talking to the officials about this thing, and I said, "But, guys, this is absolute madness, what you're doing."

One of them, in very colloquial Afrikaans, said to me -- I translate -- he said, "Well, yes, but somebody just talked a great big hole in the head of the minister about this one." In other words, I was picking up a sense that even the officials were beginning to see that the system couldn't work. I mean, the migrant system was at the heart of what was implicit in apartheid. It was the great divide, that it was dividing people in half, that they were supposed to be citizens in rural South Africa, like the Transkei, and at the same time they were needed as workers in town.

So that work on migrant labor was another of those issues which was at the heart of the apartheid system, and yet it was quite possible in those years to just trundle around the country and find out everything that I needed to find out, and to publish a book, which came out under the auspices of the churches, so it was protected a little bit in that way, because the churches, even the Dutch Reform Church had been disquieted by the migrant findings.

And then a number of us participated in an eight-hundred-mile march to try and bring that to the attention of the public in the form of a pilgrimage of penitence of white males talking at Christmastime about the impact of the migrant labor system. It was a publicity stunt, if

you like. So one could do those things in South Africa if you thought carefully about the base on which they were, and coming from a theological perspective, you could get away with things that you couldn't if you'd come from just party political perspective.

Q: What were your experiences like in terms of traveling to other places? I know you went to Sussex in 1973. Did you travel around Africa? Were you aware of other kinds of developments?

Wilson: Yes. I was very fortunate, very, very, very fortunate, because as a student I'd had this year off from Cambridge. I'd fallen -- I'd gotten very ill and so on, and I came back home and had a year off in 1961-'62. And during that period, '62-'63, during that period I had made a number of trips up Africa. I'd been to a big youth conference, Christian Youth Conference, in Nairobi, and from there Hlope Bam, that is Fikile Bam's sister, and I were chosen as the two South African delegates, I think, to go to the All Africa Conference of Churches' first meeting in Kampala, which was at a different time a couple of months later. Then I made a third trip with David Russell, a great friend of mine, up Africa. As we went back to Europe together, he was going off to study to be ordained, and I was going back to Cambridge to do my doctoral work.

So that in that year I traveled overland through Africa, through central, that is, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, and east, that is, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Africa, three different occasions, mainly overland by bus and car and so on. That was at a period when it was still just possible, I mean Africa had become independent and yet white South Africans were still able to travel. So I can remember going on Saba Saba day , this was 1963, the seventh

of July, which is Tanzanian Independence, going with David Russell, walking into the big stadium where Julius Nyerere was talking to a mass meeting of his people about poverty, ignorance, and disease, all in Swahili, but people were helping us to understand what was going on. That had a huge influence, obviously. I was able to see something of Africa myself. Of course, as a student, also traveling in Europe, Geneva, France, learning French and so on, yes.

Q: In terms of being able to travel around and watching Tanzania and other places, did that bring to consciousness certain models of development? And building on that, going to Sussex and working on development issues concretely, how did that influence you?

Wilson: Oh, yes. Well, you see, of course people like Nyerere was the gurus for us youngsters, black and white, I think. So we were doing lots and lots of thinking about Israeli kibbutz and about Yugoslav workers' participation, so we were looking for models. Indeed, I can remember writing a whole series of articles at just that time about different models of society. We were all socialists, with a small "s," in the sense that we were really trying to see how society as a whole could operate.

I can remember going as a student to Poland in 1964, to see how Polish agriculture was working, because I really wanted to understand that, and what could I learn from Polish agriculture that would be useful in the Transkei. So we were all on the march, if I can put it that way, looking for models about how we can reconstruct our society.

Q: Which of whose models had influenced you the most, would you say?

Wilson: Gosh. Well, I think models that I learned subsequently, I mean I heard about enough subsequently, been to see in a place like the AMUL dairy in India, which is a wonderful cooperative started by an amazing man, [Verghese] Kurien, which is using the resources that people themselves have there, one and a half buffalos per house or whatever it may be, and helping them to bring all those resources together to form what is now the second largest dairy in the world.

I guess the model that for me makes most sense comes from things like the AMUL dairy or the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, which you can think of conceptually really as rather like trying to build an institution which is like a hydroelectric dam, which if you place it right and design it right, can collect all those rivulets of water, and you push them through a turbine and it generates real power. Now, my sense of development is that the water, if you like, are the people, and their participation in development is absolutely fundamental. So you have to find ways of creating institutions which empower people in the way that a hydroelectric dam empowers the water, if I can use the analogy, without getting too involved about the environmental consequences, because I know about that, too. [Laughter]

But I think I have moved from a much more top-down statist view of development, not that I want to eliminate the state at all. I think that those who want to say, "Let's get rid of the state," are crazy. They don't understand the importance of organizing society and the rule of law and all of that. But I've moved from a much more state-down development to ask myself how can you empower people at the grass roots. And that is a, the big development challenge. Dealing with unemployment and poverty in the end is not going to be solved just

by the state dropping little pieces of money on people. That's not going to solve problems, although the state can create the enabling environment and it's got all kinds of things it can do. So it's an interactive process.

So I think that, just to be very short about this, it's a recognition that has emerged over the years, and visiting Israeli kibbutz was part of the process of learning, or going to Poland, part of the process of learning, and going to India, that you need a combination of an intelligent state thinking about development, thinking about the economy, thinking about issues of inflation and money and all of that, and how the law operates, combined with finding ways of releasing the energies of the poor, of those who are enduring poverty. And that's the tough issue. That is the tough issue.

Q: Taking for granted that you have a view of the poor that almost is theological in a certain kind of sense and it was developed that way, at that time in the international world of finance, how did the rest of the world see South Africa? Were institutions like the World Bank reluctant to commit any real source of funding to a country that was so divided and whose economy was so inefficient in the long range?

Wilson: Yes, I think that -- I mean, South Africa was the pariah. It was the country that was beyond the pale, and rightly so. Rightly so. I mean, it had legalized racism of the worst possible form. And so increasingly countries -- well, individuals and countries were refusing to have to do with it, and it was politically beyond the pale. Of course there were all kinds of linkages that happened, that many of us took a pretty dim view of, but being part of the developmental family of United Nations and UNICEF and UNDP and all that,

we just weren't in that at all. And insofar, for example, South Africa participated in the United Nations, that was just the white clique that was running the National Party. This was not a participatory process. Because this was a -- I mean, it's terribly obvious, but one must repeat, this was so much not a democracy, this was being run by a bunch of whites for their own interests.

Q: Meanwhile, back at Cape Town you were developing your own SALDRU [Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit]. Could you talk about that?

Wilson: Yes. Well, what happened there was that I came back to UCT. In fact, it was my third choice. I was trying a number of different universities inside South Africa, but this is where I got my job, which was a wonderful place to land up. It was an extremely good department and a very good university. I was teaching hard, which I enjoyed, and a very understanding and generous head of department, teaching first-year students in large lecture classes, which I enjoyed, and I've always enjoyed teaching enormously. But I was also trying to do research, and I was writing up my Cambridge Ph.D. into a book, which is the book on the gold mines. I was then getting involved in the research on migrant labor. I was writing some history because I'd been asked to write the history of farming and so on. So I was busy, and I was editing this little monthly journal.

Then through the seventies, yes, the book on the mines and the book on migrant labor both came out in 1972, '73. I then went on sabbatical leave and I went to work on an assembly line in France, because I wanted to understand what it was being a migrant on an assembly line in a situation where I wasn't white and a boss and in a situation where I wasn't

English-speaking, where my accent wouldn't give me away as not working-class. So France was perfect, because I had a marvelous experience, very brief. I mean, it was only a couple of months, I think, on the actual assembly line.

Then went to Sussex in that same year and did a bit of teaching in developmental issues. It was in that period that I began to think about setting up a little research unit, but there was always the problem of academics and, I'm sure, everybody else trying to do things. Where do you get your money? And I wasn't free to go out and collect money because I was just little me, a lecturer at the university. I can remember talking to Alex Boraine, who is a friend of mine in Sussex, and he in those days was working in Anglo-American. Anyway, cutting a long story short, when I got back to South Africa at the end of '73, Michael O'Dowd, who ran the Chairman's Fund for Anglo-American, called me in one day and he said -- or we met in Johannesburg, and he said, "Francis, I hear that you would like to start a research unit or something like that. Well, if it should start, I'd like you to know that we could let you have some money." Well, that solved my chicken-and-egg problem.

So I went back to the university and said, "I want to start a research unit, and if it does start, I think there might be some money." And it was a very little unit, but it was an attempt within a teaching department, because I think it has to be part of a teaching department. I mean, students are the lifeblood of a university, one must never forget. It was a research unit to try and focus on labor and development issues.

Q: What was the name of it?

Wilson: It was called SALDRU, which is the Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit. And Southern Africa, not South Africa, because my work on migrant labor, with migrants coming to work on the mines from Mozambique and Malawi and Botswana and Zambia and so on made me realize that you could not analyze the South African economy within the national boundaries; you had to see the wider picture, that we, if you like, have an economy that moves beyond the national boundaries in a way that has not happened in other countries in quite the same sort of way.

We started just by organizing conferences. We had a big conference in farm labor in 1976, really looking at issues about which we knew nothing, and trying to find ways of getting information, because my research has always been predicated on the view that you want to, (A), find out what's going on, and then try to explain it. I think it was Tawney who had a big influence on my life, who said that -- he was talking about historians. He was an economic historian. He said what historians need is not better theories, but stouter boots, much quoted by my mother. I thought it was a great remark, because that's exactly what research workers need, is to get out and find out what's going on, and try and really see it, understand it, and then begin to explain.

So we had a conference on farm labor in 1976. The farms of South Africa are something else, and nobody knows what's going on. Even now it's difficult to get information. So that was a conference, and we did another one on health care in '78. That led on to what then emerged in the eighties, which was the Carnegie Inquiry. [Interruption]

[END TAPE TWO, SIDE TWO; BEGIN TAPE THREE, SIDE ONE]

Q: How did you begin to think about the idea of doing a poverty study?

Wilson: Well, let me tell you what I remember, but bearing in mind how many tricks memory plays, and we'll need to test this with other people who go back over the same period. There are two ways of looking at it. First of all, during the late 1970s, I think, I think it began even in the seventies, Carnegie Corporation in New York started coming back into South Africa, and David Hood, the international director, came
floating around. I think that's when it first happened.

I mean, I had actually met Alan [J.] Pifer as a child in the 1950s in the Eastern Cape, because he was involved with Carnegie programs, and two of the people that he talked a lot to were Desmond Hobart Houghton, an economist at Rhodes, and my mother, who was a social anthropologist. I can remember very clearly meeting him, goodness, I would say about 19 -- mid-fifties, anyway.

Q: What were your impressions of him?

Wilson: I just remember him as a very nice man and he came from America. He obviously made some impression on me. He was always wonderfully courteous and took a small boy seriously. So that I do remember, so there is that kind of background. I mean, Carnegie had been in the background in that way. Of course, my mother used to talk about her work and what she was doing and so on.

Anyway, I was now still at UCT, obviously, and running SALDRU, this research unit, and always looking, as one always is in these research units, for money, how does one keep alive, because we were on soft money, and the university had given us permission to run SALDRU with the strict understanding that it would cost the university no money and that we would raise the money from outside. In the end, we've had some good support from the university, but it's been largely on soft money. At the end of the seventies, it must have been, David Hood was amongst those coming around from American foundations, and I think he'd been around a couple of times to talk, just in very general terms, about what was happening in South Africa and ideas for research and this and that and the other thing. He'd been talking, one of the ideas that he'd talked about, as I recollect, was about doing some monitoring of the Sullivan companies. Now, as you may remember, they were the companies that were operating in South Africa and were now under some pressure from the Reverend Sullivan to show that they had a reason to be here, that they were not going to bolster the system, but that they were actually helping in the process of change. So the Sullivan principles had become a very important political document in South Africa. The idea was that some bodies or academics and so on in the country would do the monitoring. That didn't seem to me a job that we should be doing.

But anyway, we had a meeting scheduled. He asked to come in, I think it was late January or early February, 1980. I remember he came into my office -- this is at the university in SALDRU -- and as I recollect it, and I may be wrong, he was thinking at that stage -- we were exploring. I had thought to myself before he came, it's time I began to get a little bit of

money out of Carnegie. I mean, they're a wealthy foundation and we're an impoverished little research unit. I've talked a couple of times, there may be -- some money might come our way.

As I recollect it, and I could be wrong, because memory plays these tricks, he was thinking at that stage or exploring the possibility of SALDRU doing some of this monitoring of the Sullivan companies. I actually wasn't interested and I said it didn't seem to me that it was our job as South African academics to be helping the American companies do their job, do their work properly. We had other things to be doing. I think I then made the suggestion, which was certainly not my suggestion, I mean, this has been an idea floating around for a long, long time. In fact, the first Carnegie Commission, which I'll talk to you about in a moment, already in the thirties the idea was being talked about, that there should be a Carnegie commission that looked at the whole of poverty, because the first one in 1928, 1932, that period, had been a commission looking at poverty among the whites. I'll say a word about that in a moment.

So I had dropped in the idea, which was not my original idea at all, because lots of people had had that idea through the thirties, forties, and so on, and, indeed, subsequently when I was traveling on this second Carnegie Commission exploratory trip I can remember meeting Ntata Motlana, Dr. Motlana, on the plane somewhere and told him what I was doing and he said, "But Francis, that's my idea." [Laughter] I think lots of us felt it was our idea, but it wasn't; it was an idea that was in the air.

Anyway, I tried it out on David Hood, as I recollect, and we discussed it and we thought, well, actually the time might be ripe for exploring it, but there were all kinds of difficulties, I mean, about the appropriateness of having a lot of American dollars, could one do this kind of study,

was it politically feasible, etc. But the first thing, of course, was to see what Carnegie felt about it.

It happened that Alan Pifer was in town, or just about to come into town, into Cape Town. So David Hood organized a breakfast, and I think it was just the three of us, Alan Pifer and David Hood and myself, and we talked around the idea of maybe there could be another inquiry into poverty, but it was very unclear and ill-shaped and clearly a lot of thinking had to be done. But Alan Pifer thought it was a great idea. Indeed, he may have already been thinking about it, for all I know. So it was decided that a little money would be set aside for me to do some exploratory work, travel money and so on. I was very clear. Immediately I said, "Listen, I've got some sabbatical leave pending in the middle of the year -- this was 1980 -- and I'm going to Oxford, and I really want to do that, but I could use my time away. I'll be away for a whole year. I could use that time for reading about poverty studies in other parts of the world." So that was built in at the very beginning.

So that's where it began. I was given a little bit of seed money to travel around and talk to people, and I'll say a bit more about that in a moment. Then I had the sabbatical leave coming, so I had a little bit of money to buy books and so on to do the study while I was overseas.

But I think before I continue with that, I should just say a word about the first inquiry, because that was important. It was called the Carnegie Ondersoek na Armoede, I think was its full phrase, the Carnegie Investigation into Poverty, and had happened in the late 1920s, early 1930s, and was an examination, a scientific study, of poverty. But being South Africa and being the 1920s and thirties, it focused only on whites, which was, of course, an enormous

limitation. But there was a lot of white poverty at that period. It was the time of the Great Depression, certainly by 1932 it was, but there was also the whole problem of landlessness, of whites having been pushed off the land, coming into the cities, competing with blacks for jobs, many of them not adequately educated and so on. So there had been a whole social movement in the 1920s and thirties trying to deal with white poverty, but because of the political power that whites had, because they had the vote, this had some real power, this movement. And the churches, particularly the Dutch Reform Church, was involved, because this tended to be, not 100 percent, but tended to be Afrikaan-speaking whites who were trapped in poverty in this way.

So Carnegie had funded what became a major commission with, I think, five or six commissioners, an economist, a sociologist, a writer, who, in the end, traveled around the country in two Model-T Fords, traveled all over South Africa, taking some amazing photographs of whites living in hovels and so on, to the white South African of 1980, unbelievable photographs, actually, and had done an extremely interesting survey of poverty, given the limitation of being for whites only. That had produced five volumes and so on.

But one of the things that had happened with that, was that it had been hijacked by the National party in its rise to power. Hendrik F. Verwoerd, who became prime minister in South Africa in the 1960s -- the 1950s, really -- had a big conference in Stellenbosch, and said that the Carnegie Inquiry had become a very powerful instrument in the battle against poverty.

Now, this had both a good side and a bad side. The good side was the sort of rise of social welfare, a social welfare department was set up in the government, and real attempts to deal

with poverty. At the same time -- and this became apparent quite quickly as we analyzed it -- the Carnegie study had been part of the intellectual source, if you like, of the movement towards apartheid, because what emerged was that an anti-poverty program could also take the form of excluding other poor.

So one way of looking at apartheid is that it was an anti-poverty program for whites. So there's that ambiguity built in right at the beginning, and it was very important for us to analyze that and to understand it. It could well be true of the second one. One must look at this with real care to avoid anti-poverty programs being ways of helping some people at the expense of others who are even poorer. Or if you're doing that, at least you must know exactly what's happening.

But politically, the Carnegie Commission was incredibly important, because if we could have a second Carnegie commission or inquiry, that immediately gave it political coverage, because nobody in Afrikaan-speaking South Africa could be anti-Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty. It had been too important in the Afrikaner drive against poverty, in both good and bad aspects, but it had a resonance that Carnegie meant battle against poverty. And so it had very good political vibes for the white establishment.

When I talked earlier today about feasible radicalism, or feasible opposition, I mean, this was a very important component of it, that if Carnegie would be willing to put money and allow us to use the name of Carnegie, that would give us a great deal of political space that wouldn't happen any other way. Now, how soon that became part of my thinking, I'm not sure, but that certainly emerged in the process.

So I spent these early months in 1980 talking to as many South Africans as I could find right across the political spectrum to test out the idea. Of course, it was very important, and I guess this is part of my political background, it was very important that this was not just going to be a study by whites of blacks. I mean, that would have been outrageous. It needed to be a study in which those who were themselves enduring poverty or those who had some real existential understanding of what that was all about were as involved as much as possible.

So that meant that this whole study, if it took place, would have to have what one can think of as a black center of gravity. So that was always an attempt, although this is 1980s and it was difficult to bring that about, but one needed to make sure quite sure that black South Africa felt this was a good thing.

I moved around the country talking to people, both in 1980 and subsequently when I came back from my sabbatical leave in 1981. It's very funny, I should look back on it, that by and large -- I'm simplifying, obviously, but by and large, white South Africans whom I talked to would to say to me, "A study into poverty, that's a very good idea, Francis, yes. We really need that, and if you can get some dollars from the Americans, great, go for it. We need all the information we can get about poverty, black poverty, in this country."

Black South Africans, on the other hand, when I talked to them, would sort of look politely interested and then quite pained and they would say, "Are you saying that you want to spend money, real money, American dollars, discovering that there's poverty in South Africa? We'll

tell you right now, free, for nothing, there's lots and lots of poverty. What we have to have is action against poverty."

That was an incredibly important statement or reality, and truth, that we had to think about, because here we were, little white academics who came to the University of Cape Town thinking, "Let's do a study on poverty." Then you had to suddenly stop and say -- stop in one's tracks and say, "Well, actually what are we on about? Is this just an exercise to massage a few academic egos, collect a couple of Ph.D.s and publish a book or two and everybody feels good and fuzzy and warm? Is that what it's about?"

So we had to do some hard, hard thinking as to what this was all about and if it was going to be worth doing, that people who were poor might, themselves, think that actually this was a worthwhile study.

Now, it's very easy to rationalize, obviously, and I'll come back later to more about the politics, but we decided that we should go ahead, that it would be worth doing -- and I'll talk about why in a moment -- but always with the consciousness that, if I can put it this way, to put like medical research, there's a purpose in mind, and the purpose is healing. So you're not just going off to collect facts and figures because you think they're interesting; you're going off to collect the facts and figures because you need to understand, you need to map what's going on in order that you can heal and eliminate poverty. If you're going to have poverty studies that don't have that objective, I don't think they're valid.

Now, that, of course, is contentious, because there's a value judgment built into that, and there

are lots of people who think that this kind of stuff should all be value free, which I happen to think is nonsense. I think one's got to attempt to be as objective as you possibly can. You've got to have absolute respect for the facts and so on. That's the scientific approach. You've got to test all your hypotheses, you've got to assume that you're wrong as Richard Feynman always taught his students in physics. You are to assume your hypothesis is wrong and try and bash it down. Then if it stands up, then okay.

So that's the essence of the science, but at the same time I don't think you can be involved in poverty research as though poverty doesn't matter, that it's kind of a neutral thing. It's an evil, it's got to be eliminated, and so you're there to try and heal. So I put it in the same category as medical research that way.

So that's what I did in the first half of 1980, and then I went off to Britain, to Oxford, and did a lot of reading. The interesting thing is that by that stage, there were really two sets of literature about poverty. There was what I would call the OECD literature on poverty, which would be poverty in Britain, poverty in the United States, poverty in Western Europe, going all the way back to the Webbs and the Rowntrees and all of that. Then there were the poverty studies being done in the Third World, the ILO [International Labour Organisation] study of Kenya, and that kind of thing. There had been curiously little cross-fertilizations. One needed to read all of that and try and make some sense of it and think
about it.

At this stage Carnegie was, through David Hood, who is an extremely able international officer for Carnegie, he was getting me to write memoranda about why we were doing the study and if

you were applying for money, what's going on, what's it for. So we had to be thinking very hard as to what this study was all about and what we could try and do, but it was an incredible opportunity. Of course, I mean this is a jugular issue, one can put it, in South Africa. I mean, why is there so much poverty? What is going on? And how does one deal with it?

I came back from Oxford having spent a year reading, having spent some time having talked to Carnegie in the United States and so on, and then spent some more time back in South Africa from July, August, 1981. I think I came back in July and started traveling in August 1981, traveling around the country.

Before I get to that, let me just explain why we began to think that the study was worth doing, although some of this insight really came after further travels as we talked to people. That is that if one is going to devise strategies against poverty, or for development, you have to have a map. You have to know what is the scene, what is poverty, what are the contours, what are its characteristics. So a mapping operation was essential. We didn't have that.

Secondly, and I believe very strongly that facts are themselves politically powerful, even, but perhaps particularly, in totalitarian societies, that societies that are very closed like South Africa was, if you can get some hard facts out, public, then they can be powerful. I mean, I'd seen that with work I'd done on the gold mines, did stuff on wages and so on, had had its political impact, even though it was a rather dull table of statistics. So that kind of awareness of the power of information is something maybe one believes in because one's an academic and one really doesn't have the evidence for it, but it seemed to me that that was relevant.

It was clear -- it seemed to be clear, once we thought about it, that it would be worth gathering information, and that the information itself could be politically powerful, but it then had to be followed, the fact-finding had to be followed by analysis into causes and then the development of strategies. That was the sort of the three-part process of all of this.

So by this stage -- and I'm now talking mid 1981 -- the idea was that maybe there should be another commission, a second commission. But the question then was, who was going to go into this commission? Who were the people? What was going to be the political basis of it? I mean, this is very tricky politics. I mean, who's got the authority to set up a commission?

I was looking back at my notebooks now, notebook number one, page one, August 1981, I'm up in Lenyenye [Township], in the Northern Province, the far north of South Africa, talking to Dr. Mamphela [A.] Ramphele, who was - is - a great friend of mine. I had gone up to talk to her because I had such respect for her political canniness and wisdom, and also she was working in rural South Africa, she really understood poverty, and we'd been friends for ten years already. And it seemed that she would give me a very good sense as to whether this thing was going to fly. I asked her whether she would be willing to be a commissioner, and she said, absolutely yes, she would be, provided she was not just going to be a name there, but could do something really important.

At this stage she was still banned, which meant that legally she couldn't talk to more than one other person at a time. She could not move out of a certain prescribed area. It was an area into which I legally could not really go without permission, and I couldn't phone her up to

make an appointment, because what we call the system, the special branches security people, would have listened to that and then known that I was coming. So I would travel those five hours, or whatever it was, from Johannesburg up to Lenyenye, hoping to get there on a Sunday, aiming to get there on a Sunday morning, so that I would be able to, hopefully, find her at home and we could then talk. And it worked very well. It worked very well. So that's how that happened.

I then went on from there to talk to all kinds of people around South Africa and traveled through those months. At that time or so, David Hood came out once or twice, and we traveled through the country. At least Alan Pifer came out, I think, in October of 1981, and we traveled. I can remember very clearly a trip that we made, he and I, up through, from East London through to Umtata in the Eastern Cape Transkei part of the country.

Fikile Bam was now out of prison and living in Umtata, unable to move out of the Transkei because he'd been declared a prohibited immigrant, because the Transkei was independent. So he was really stuck. So I'd gone a couple of times to see Fiks to see if he would be willing to become involved and so on.

I took Alan Pifer to meet him, and I remember very well we went into -- we stayed at the local Holiday Inn, which had just got going there, and Fiks was invited in for supper, or dinner, and Alan was standing us to a nice meal, and I can remember Fiks looking at the menu and ordering an enormous langoustine, a lobster. In due course, this marvelous dish arrived, and Fiks looked at it and sniffed and said, "Hmm." He says, "I haven't seen a lobster like this since I was on the island."

And we said, "Fiks, what do you mean?" He said, "Well, it was like this." I don't know if he told you the story. He said, "You know, we were on the island for those ten years and we were working in the quarry, and down by the edge of the sea, and sometimes the wardens would be get very bored and they would want to catch lobster." It's a protected area, I mean, nobody was ever allowed on Robben Island in those days, so
there were lobsters around. He said, "You know, they used to like to use us black chaps, because then if the senior officers came around and we were in the sea, we could just cling to a rock and they wouldn't see us."

So Fiks had on occasion actually gone off to catch a lobster on Robben Island. It was just such a wonderful juxtaposition of Fiks now stuck in Umtata, having been on the island, which was the last place he ate his lobster, while Robben Island was not -- that was a very exceptional situation, but it was a nice story.

Anyway, so Alan and I went around South Africa and talked a lot. We even went to see Dr. Malherbe, Professor Ernie [Ernst G.] Malherbe, who had been one of the commissioners in the first Carnegie Commission. He'd been in education and very involved in the first Carnegie Commission.

Q: Alan Pifer told us, in fact, that he had come up with an idea for a study on black poverty at that time.

Wilson: Well, I can't remember. It was probably he who had written at the time of the 1930, '28 to '32 commission, but certainly one or more of the commissioners have talked about it, highly likely to be E.G. Malherbe. So we went to visit him and he, of course, was very excited and very supportive about this. He had been one of the great men in South African education, had been vice chancellor of the University of Natal and so on. So he was very supportive. So that was a nice historical link.

Now, by the end of this period, after lots of talking to all kinds of people, it became apparent that a commission was not a good idea for a whole range of reasons, that a commission sounded very official, but didn't have any power, in this case. It would sound like the government, but would not even have the government's power. Also that a commission would lock up five, six, seven people, supposedly wise people, they would be the ones who would do all the work, and nobody else would actually do anything, and that seemed a bad model. Besides which, just the political difficulties about who actually chooses the commission and what is its authority. So the whole thing was just too complicated. We decided it would be much better to have a much more open process. I don't know whether this was apparent at the time. Maybe this is just wisdom after the event, but I was talking earlier about these social models where you try and create hydroelectric dams, where you, as it were, draw in the energy of people for whatever purpose, where there's like the Grameen Bank or the AMUL dairy or the Mondragon co-operative in Spain, whatever it may be. But in a, way this is what the Carnegie, second Carnegie Inquiry became, because it was an institutional format which enabled a huge number of people to be drawn in and to contribute their energy, their insight, their knowledge. And it became just 350 times more powerful than if one person had done it, because we had 350 active people writing papers.

Q: How did you select the people?

Wilson: So we selected them, to some extent, by interest. I went around the country -- now, let me just think of timing here. Some of this was in 1981 and then -- let me just step back one moment. In December '81, I think it was, Fiks and I went to New York to talk to the board, because there was going to need to be a major decision about commitment of money. There'd been money committed already for the preparatory phase and the pre-preparatory phase before I'd gone to my sabbatical leave and so on, but if the inquiry was to go ahead, it needed a major board decision.

So Fiks was able to come. This, again, was intriguing, because he was sitting in the Transkei, which was in

those times a politically independent country. Now, he was not allowed into the rest of South Africa, because there was a border post and he'd been declared a prohibited immigrant, more or less. After he came off the island, he was sent back to the Transkei, as it were confined to barracks. But in the paradox that was South Africa, he was able to get a passport, a Transkei passport, so that he was able to fly from Umtata to Johannesburg out to New York, although he couldn't drive down the road to East London or Port Elizabeth or to Cape Town. So here was this extraordinary situation. In one moment Fiks is locked up in the Transkei, confined to Umtata, which is a tiny little town, and the next minute we were walking down Fifth Avenue together eating roast chestnuts because it was Christmastime in New York. That was an extraordinary shift.

We went together to talk to the board, to try to persuade them that the inquiry would be meaningful and could make some contribution. Fiks was wonderful.

Q: Do you remember what he said?

Wilson: No, I don't remember. I've got a very bad memory for what people actually say, but he was very persuasive and carries enormous authority and integrity, and so he made a very powerful impact. So then the board then decided. I think it was more or less there and then, but, anyway, that decision was made. The inquiry was going to start officially in April '82, which is when we'd launched it.

Now, one point that I want to make about that is that that implied that we'd had over two years of gestation period, and I just want to make the point that I think that in these kinds of operations, gestation is a very important part of the process. It worries me when people try and do things instantly without any gestation period at all. Certainly those two, two and a half years that we spent as we were preparing the ground,
talking to people, involving people, thinking it through, shaping it, were hugely important in what subsequently evolved.

So from April 1982 -- [Interruption]

[END TAPE THREE, SIDE ONE; BEGIN TAPE THREE, SIDE TWO]

Q: You were about to say from April 1982 on.

Wilson: Yes. From April 1982 onwards, I was then moving around the country, and we were building a core team at SALDRU of people like Dudley Horner, who was deputy director of SALDRU, Wilfred Wentzel, who came into SALDRU around that time -- I don't remember the precise dates -- and was very actively involved in the whole process. I don't remember at what date exactly Helen Zille came in, but she came in to work, and she had been already, she was very young still in those days, had been a famous journalist, political journalist on the *Rand Daily Mail*, and had done all kinds of things, including covering, as I recollect it, the inquest into Steve Biko and so on. But by this she was an old China hand, as far as journalism was concerned, and was moving into other things, and she came and worked in the inquiry.

What was wonderful was that we got an amazingly powerful team. Charles Simkins, who is now professor of economics at Wits [University of Witswaterand], was also a core member of the group. The university as a whole was giving this tremendous backing. Stuart Saunders was vice chancellor, and not only gave huge moral support to this thing and provided the institutional space, shall I put it that way, but became chairman of the finance committee to oversee both the finance committee and me and make sure that we stayed reasonably on the tracks. So that this became an official UCT venture.

The politics of that is quite important, because when we are talking about the commission itself, there had been a lot of discussion as to where will it be based, or the, once we'd moved from commission to a wider inquiry, where can it be based, how can it be based?

And after a lot of discussion, we agreed that the best place would be a university. In those days, which five years later would not have been the case, but in those days UCT was chosen, and within UCT SALDRU was the research unit.

Q: Was there any controversy over that?

Wilson: There was some controversy about the university, because when we went public in April 1982, and my strategy there was to go very, very public, to say to everybody, "Look. We're getting involved in an inquiry into poverty, it's the second Carnegie Inquiry. It's like motherhood, it's not an evil thing. Just like the first inquiry which studied poverty, this is another one, but we're going to look at poverty in the country as a whole."

And also we made it clear that this is open. Anybody who wanted to be involved was invited to be involved, and nobody was excluded. So nobody could say this is some small little cabal organizing studies to bring down the system. We simply said, "Look. Anybody who wants to study poverty, come." And that was very deliberate. I mean, that was a political statement as well, in order to survive. I want to say a little word or two in a moment about some of the other politics. We made it very open, and I can remember, yes, there was controversy because there was an angry letter by somebody who subsequently became a great friend of mine, Sampie Terreblanche, the professor of economics at Stellenbosch, who was very angry that UCT had been chosen to do this inquiry into poverty, and why not Stellenbosch, which had been the proper center of the previous inquiry, and what did we know anything about? What did we know about poverty anyway at UCT? We were a bunch of urban types.

So I replied to him, through the pages of *Die Burger*, which was the Afrikaans paper, so we had quite a good little spat at that stage.

Q: What about the University of the Western Cape, a university with more black presence?

Wilson: This is the interesting thing, and this is why I talk about 1982 as opposed to 1987, because in 1982 still the University of the Western Cape was regarded in political terms as a bush college, not a place that was a serious institution politically. Now, that changed right through the 1970s, and it became, as Jakes Gerwel declared it later in that decade, to be the center of the left and became an enormous center of resistance and a place to which a lot of the returning exiles came and found refuge after 1990 and so on. But this was pre the high political profile of the UWC.

One of the fascinating political trajectories to track in South Africa for some historian is the perception and reality of the role of an institution like the University of the Western Cape, but that's precisely the point I'm making, that in 1982 UWC wasn't even a starter as far as a place to have an inquiry like this, whereas five years later it would probably have been the place to go. So it was UCT that had that base. Just one other political point which I've not made before, I don't think, is that during my year in England on sabbatical leave, it seemed to me very important that the ANC should know about this. Now, I couldn't go and ask the ANC for permission, because that would have got straight back to Pretoria. ANC was leaky as a sieve, like everybody was. The system had a lot of information about what

was going on. And we couldn't be blamed for doing the ANC's work, and also one doesn't want to have permission of political parties to do academic research.

At the same time, politically it was very important that the ANC understood what was going on, that this was a study that had real goals in the sense of trying to deal with the issue of poverty, because we needed -- I mean, this had to be a study which had the support of what I call the political center of gravity of black South Africa. Now, that's clearly ANC. So for me, the strategy was to start roughly where the ANC was and then to move as far right as you could and incorporate as many white South Africans as you could, as opposed to a strategy which started, let's say, with Verligte Afrikaner Nationalists, sort of enlightened Afrikaner Nationalists, and then move as far left as you can. Different political coverage. And that was very clear to me from -- and that, I guess, comes from where I come from, as it were, politically.

So I thought, well, I need to discuss this with the ANC, but how do you do it? I mean, because even whispering to the ANC or meeting them, I mean, you get chopped up into little pieces in this country in those days.

So when I was in England, I made contact with Pallo Jordan, who was a childhood friend. His parents were friends of my mother's. They were old Fort Hare types and so on. And I can remember -- I mean, this is being over-secure, over-conscious security-wise, but I remember I decided that I wouldn't take a taxi or anything, and I took a bicycle to London on the train from Oxford and then cycled around to Pallo's house so that I would go very privately, incognito, to talk to Pallo, who I knew was in very high up in the ANC, and

simply tell him what we were doing, so that he would be fully informed and, through him, Oliver Tambo and so on would really know what this was all about, because it seemed to me that if they really knew about it, that was all that was necessary. It was also a proper courtesy call, giving them the information as to what was happening.

And we did play that even-handedly in this sense, that Alan Pifer had gone to see a couple of cabinet ministers in this country, just to tell them what was happening, and had gone to see Konstant -- not Konstant, Dr. Viljoen, who was the minister of education, I think, in those days, and had gone off just to, again, put all the cards on the table and saying, "We're doing this poverty study." So we played a very open hand, but it was very important to me that the ANC should know all about this and know about it at first hand, so I'd gone to see him in London, but unofficially in that way.

So we got going officially as a commission in 1982, after our gestation period, and Wilfred and I were the main travelers, Wilfred Wentzel and I, moving around the country, going to different universities, telling people about what the inquiry was on. I would write articles. I wrote an article in *Maatskaplike Werk* which was the social work journal from the University of Stellenbosch. I was asked by Dr. Erika Theron, who'd been one of the leading Afrikaans intellectuals, close to the National Party in her own way, and trying to explain this whole thing in the light of the previous Carnegie Inquiry and so on. So that we were trying to find a way of surviving, although we were doing very sensitive research work. Wilfred and I then moved all over the country, talking to, I think it was, twenty-two different universities. I visited them all, I think, including the University of BLS it was then -- I'm just trying to think whether the University of Lesotho had existed around then

or was still University of B.L.S. at Lesotho. At least Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland. But there was University in Lesotho, which I visited. And we tried to draw in research workers from the front-line states, on the grounds that poverty in South Africa cannot be isolated from the wider economy of the region, as I've explained about the "Southern" in SALDRU's name, that because of the migrant labor system, places like Lesotho, Botswana, Swaziland, were intimately part of the South African economy, and the poverty there was not that different in its origin from the poverty in the Transkei and other parts of South Africa.

You asked how did we choose people. Well, first of all, we let people choose themselves. We said, "We're doing a study of poverty. We really want you to be involved. We're planning a conference." I think the conference was originally planned for October 1983, but it wasn't that long before we pushed it back to April '84 simply because we wanted to give people adequate time to be involved.

But we also took a strategic decision to try and find ways of involving people beyond the university community, because South Africa at that stage was -- Southern Africa, even -- as the kind of place where within the universities you found largely, not exclusively, but largely white males operating, because this is a very sexist society and it was an incredibly racist society. So that it was white males who sort of percolated into the universities. They might all have wonderful ideas, but they were still white males with the limitations of that experience. They hadn't had the experience of being black. They hadn't had the experience of being women. And we needed to be sure that all of that came in. The way we thought through that, and this was long conversations as we traveled the roads of South Africa with

David Hood, with Alan Pifer, with Wilfred, with Dudley Horner, with all of us as we talked this whole thing through with Charles Simkins, was to create special working groups, a working group on church and poverty, working group on law and poverty. So I was able to go to Fiks Bam, sitting in Umtata, who was not at that stage tied up with the University in any shape or form, and said, "Fiks, would you be willing to be chairperson of a working group on the law and poverty?" And he said, yes, he would, he'd like to. In fact, I think Fiks actually worked part time for the Carnegie Inquiry. I must ask him. But I seem to remember he did.

That was a very, very classy working group, because, I mean, among its members it had Geoffrey Budlender, who's now the director general of land; it had Michael Richmond, who's a very noted South African lawyer; it had Dullah Omar, who was the first minister of justice in Mandela's cabinet, and so on. Arthur Chaskalson was not a member, not because he wasn't interested, but he was just too busy at that time, but he did come to the conference subsequently and gave a paper, a wonderful paper. Of course, Sheena Duncan on the pass laws. But we had this very classy law and poverty program. We would meet generally in Umtata, because Fiks was not free to come and travel into South Africa, although it had been possible for him to get to New York. I've got some wonderful old photographs of this motley crew meeting in Umtata, talking about law and poverty issues. We had health and poverty, we had public allocation of resources and so on.

What we were trying to do was, both through the working groups and through inviting individual papers, to bring in people who were not academics. I can remember talking to a wonderful woman in what was then Northern Transvaal, who was the wife of a missionary,

who said, "But I don't know anything." But she knew an enormous amount about life in that rural part of the world, and we persuaded her to write a paper. Similarly, you know, Mamphela [Ramphele] had a co-worker, and we said, "Please write a paper on what you're doing at Lenyenya [Township]," so she was writing about strategies against poverty, a marvelous paper.

So we tried to bring in anybody we could, and some of that was by personal invitation, sometimes it was through their institution involvement, and sometimes they were already working on poverty things and we said to them, "Look. Would you be willing to come and present a paper at the Carnegie Inquiry? You retain control of it, you publish it your own way, but we would like it to be a conference paper as well."

So it was really an attempt to get a national, sort of a regional debate going, and regional involvement on poverty, and it worked. I mean, we really got a lot of people. It was in this context that somebody like Helen Zille played such a critical role, because I had done some traveling, Wilfred had done some traveling. We'd involved a lot of different people, but then they had to be followed up and chivvied and persuaded and, you know, have papers brought in and so on, and Helen Zille masterminded a lot of that work. So we had all kinds of people working to draw them in.

Those papers came in in all kinds of formats, and one of the most, to me, satisfying aspects of this was that we were trying very hard all along to involve more black South Africans, because otherwise you just let the free market operate in that context and you would have just had white males. One of the things we did was we got a grant from the Ford

Foundation. They were enormously supportive. They had at that stage a field officer, Bill Carmichael [William D.], who was one of the Americans.

It's happened not infrequently in the United States, where somebody gets so hooked on South Africa as a junior officer, that as they move up their corporation or their organization, they then kick themselves downstairs so they can come back to South Africa. Joe [Joseph] Lelyveld did that from *The New York Times*. I mean, he was a correspondent here in the mid sixties, I think, and then he'd gone right up in *The New York Times*, and he kicked himself downstairs so he could come back for a second dose, before he went back to become editor. And Bill Carmichael, I think, did a similar thing, because he was certainly far more senior in Ford than just a field officer in South Africa. But he would come by and was enormously supportive with co-workers Richard [M.] Horowitz and David Bonbright and others.

Ford had given us money for interns, as it were, to draw in young black South Africans to spend a month, two months, five months, whatever it may be, working at SALDRU during this period, and we put a lot of them to work on working papers, on writing papers about this area or that area. One of them, Mary-Jane Morifi, went off and did a paper in Phillipstown, which is a tiny little dot in the Karoo, a little town. I mean, it was not a Ph.D. paper, it wasn't an M.A. paper, but it was an extremely acutely observed description of life in Phillipstown, and it was Mary-Jane who came up with that marvelous expression which we've used again and again, you're talking about people in Phillipstown, and I can't remember what it was they were having to pay for, but it was extremely expensive, and she

had the remark that "poverty is expensive." We'd found that again and again, that the poor were paying far more for water than the rich.

Q: Can you break that down a little bit and explain to us in concrete terms the relation to air, fire, water, I mean ground to fire and water?

Wilson: Yes, I can, very easily. It became very clear during the course of our travels -- it was Mary-Jane who, as far as I can remember, came up with the phrase, which we all then used. But in terms of water, for example, I can remember Wilfred Wentzel and Brendon Roberts, I think it was, went off into the Karoo near Willowmore in the Eastern Cape, and Brendon started doing some calculations about the cost of water per liter there and comparing it with water in Cape Town.

I was up in what is now Northern Province, looking at costs that people were paying for water in the drought, and they were paying -- I can't remember -- it was fifty cents for a twenty-liter drum of water or something like that. And working out the costs, you were finding people were paying -- I think I'll have to double check this and we'll correct it if necessary -- but something like sixty-eight times more for their water per liter or gallon of water than I was paying for my water coming out of a water tap in Rondebosch. I mean huge amounts were being spent, which meant that poor people were paying not only relatively more, but even although they were only using ten, twenty, thirty liters a day, they were paying more in hard cash for water than I would be paying in my middle-class home in Rondebosch, Cape Town. So those kinds of comparisons became very important as we drove home just what poverty meant. Hence, Mary-Jane's expression about poverty

being expensive, which none of us had thought about, frankly, until we went out and talked to people.

It was also important using the young interns because they had a fresh insight. They weren't going in there with their Oxbridge Ph.D.s and a preordained idea of what poverty was and what was the important stuff to collect. I can remember a lovely paper that came in from one of the black townships here in Cape Town, where this student had managed to get down a sort of half-page statement by Sis Dinah, who is a shebeen queen, explaining why she was a shebeen queen. Now, a shebeen queen were those who were selling liquor illicitly. More or less she was saying, "Look. I know that it's not a very good thing in society to be selling lots of liquor and making the men drunk and then not enough wages are going home to the wives and so on." She was completely wide-eyed. I mean, she knew what -- she was conscious about it all. At the same time she said, "You must realize that I've got children to feed, I've got to make money, and this is a way I can make money. I'm a shebeen queen, and this is why I'm doing it." And it was an incredible statement, and it's a statement that will never date. I mean, it's there for all time, and there it was in a student paper.

So what I'm really saying is that the student interns had a capacity to come back with freshly observed information that sometimes the well-trained Ph.D.s didn't bother to put down or escape them or they didn't actually see. So there was that kind of report from the front line, if I can put it that way, dimension to some of these papers which was great. We had always said at some stage -- I mean, I'm not talking sort of 1982 as the inquiry began -- academics would come or phone up or write, and say, "Listen. You've got to give us,

Carnegie Inquiry, you've got to give us a definition about poverty. What is it we're studying?" And we talked about it at SALDRU and we said, "You know, actually we don't know. We want you to go out and find out. You're going to go and talk to poor people and find out from their perspective what are the things that hassle them because of the state they're in."

This was a very open kind of definition -- I'll tell you what the World Bank had to say about that in a moment -- because it was very important. I'm so pleased we made that decision, because what it meant was that people would go off and talk, let's say, to women in the Transkei in the Eastern Cape and say, "What are the problems hassling you?" And they'd say, "Well, have you ever thought about where we get our water from?" Then you'd start measuring, or some smart student or academic of Rhodes would go out and measure what it was in terms of water. These were the realities that came home to us that we'd never thought about, you know, (A), because we were white, (B), because we were urban-based, and all that kind of thing. Even those who weren't white hadn't always thought about it because they were urban-based and middle-class university people.

But water, for example, there was a study done in the Transkei that found -- let me see if I can recollect it -- three villages, who found that the average time spent by each household collecting water was 187 minutes every day. Now, that's three hours a day just collecting the water you need for cooking, drinking, bathing, everything. You know, I then did a spot check on the number of taps in my house per person compared with the number of taps per person, let's say, in the Eastern Mpumalanga area, what used to be the Eastern Transvaal, and there you would find maybe three hundred people to one tap. In my house, I think it

was about five taps to each person. So you suddenly begin to understand what water's all about. There had really been very little discussion about water and the distribution of water in this country and what it meant to the poor.

Then when it came to fuel, there was this very fascinating -- I remember reading a paper by the World Watch Institute in Washington, and there was a quote there from an Indian social scientist who said, "You know, let's assume that we're going to be able to produce all the food we need by the year 2000," because this was a time in the 1970s, I think, when there was real concern that there might not be enough food produced. "Let's assume we produce all the food we need by the year 2000. Are we sure that we're going to be able to cook it?"

Now, that's a great question, because it stops you in your tracks, especially as a male, because you never thought about this kind of problem before. Where do people get the energy with which to cook their food? There were people like Mark Gandar and others who went off measuring energy requirements of the poor and where they got their firewood, where they got their fuel from, and then you would find from studies in the Carnegie Inquiry that people would be walking maybe twice a week, going off for four or five hours to look for wood -- in Xhosa it's ukutheza -- you go and collect firewood. You go and collect wood, firewood. And it would take hours. It would be women doing it, and they would walk home carrying, maybe for two or three hours, carrying a huge bundle of wood on their head, weighing maybe thirty kilograms. That's a heavy weight.

For us, the images we worked through the inquiry, the process, the image of poverty in

South Africa became that of a black woman, because it would never have been a white person, and it would never have been a man, carrying a very heavy bundle of firewood, and as they walk home, they walk underneath an Eskom power line. Now, Eskom is the national electricity grid. And that, in a way, epitomized poverty in South Africa, because at that stage we were producing in South Africa something like sixty percent of the electricity of Africa. We were actually putting some of our power stations into mothballs because of excess capacity, and yet there was a huge proportion of South Africans who did not have access to energy, even for daily cooking and lighting.

So it was those kinds of realities that the process of the Carnegie Inquiry and the work by all these 350 people began to make visible. That was why it was so good that we didn't start with our definition of poverty, because if we'd started with our definition of poverty, I doubt that we would have included either water or energy. Wouldn't have thought about it. I mean, it's now so obvious, that one is embarrassed even to make that remark, but that is true. So we came through the inquiry, through that process of gathering all that information from the highways and byways and talking to people, we came in with what was both a very mixed bag, I mean it wasn't all good, it wasn't all that scientific, but a lot of it was extremely scientific. Then a lot of it was very acutely observed, like the conversation with Sis Dinah, the shebeen queen, which was giving you an insight that you weren't going to get from any questionnaire. And it enabled us to come to a much more complex understanding of poverty, and we began to emerge in the inquiry, those of us involved, with an understanding that poverty has many faces or many dimensions, and you can't reduce it to a single number.

It was about this stage -- I'm now talking '83, '84, I think -- that Joe Lelyveld dropped by one day and he said, "Francis, have you ever read this book by Steven J. Gould, on *The Mismeasure of Man*?" which I'd never read at all. I think he sent me the copy. Anyway, it was fantastic. What a revelation about how the reification of numbers can be totally misleading and be misused to bolster political prejudgments and so on. It was such an insight. I try to make all my students read it. I think it's such an amazingly important book.

So we began to wrestle with what is the value of numbers in measuring poverty, and so we got into the whole issue of definition. I happen to believe that numbers are very important, and my science training wouldn't let me let go of that one. But at the same time you have to see it within context, and so *The Mismeasure of Man* -- and it is the mismeasure of man, not of woman -- that one needs to have as part of one's understanding, one's scientific understanding.

One story along the way, which amused me somewhat, because in 1980 -- I'm jumping ahead, because we had our conference, which I'll come back to in a moment, but I think it was '85 or '86, I was in Washington, talking to the World Bank about our inquiry and what we were coming up with and so on, and I can remember at the end of my talk there, one of the bright sparks there came in more or less patted me on the head and said, "It's all very interesting, but, you know, this is just basically anecdotal evidence."

And I was very miffed, because I thought, this idiot doesn't understand that you've got to

get a feel of the contours and the reality and the meaning of poverty before you can decide what it is exactly that you're going to measure. I know I was right in that, because subsequently we then did go on in later years to try and get much better statistics. The Carnegie Inquiry, although it did generate a lot of information, the statistics that we used were essentially drawn from current government statistics rather than brand-new set of survey statistics. Now, that statistical information was very useful and very important, but it was only one component of that.

Q: Did you find discrepancies, though, between what you were finding from the field and what you were using from the government sources?

Wilson: Well -- [Interruption]

[END TAPE THREE, SIDE TWO; BEGIN TAPE FOUR, SIDE ONE]

Q: Francis, I just wanted to ask you whether or not there were any discrepancies between the information you were gathering and generating in the field and the information you were getting from government sources on poverty.

Wilson: Not really, in the sense that there wasn't always a huge amount of government information. I mean, we had no systematic study of incomes right across the field or of infant mortality rates. There were no national measures. Indeed, South Africa at that time, don't forget, was broken into all kinds of bits and pieces. We had an independent so-called Transkei, an independent Ciskei, and independent Bophuthatswana, an independent

Venda, all of which were effectively rural backwaters of the South African industrial economy and in many ways simply labor reserves.

But what was interesting at that time was how, amongst white South Africans, there was so little perception of poverty. I mean, we tried to do some work to find out what the establishment, by which we meant businessmen and leading politicians and so on, thought about the nature of poverty in South Africa. I'm speaking from memory now, but Helen Zille did some work on this. As I recollect, the sort of general impression was, yes, there is some poverty in South Africa, but it's not that serious, and what it is, is essentially some few shanty towns in big cities where you see terrible poverty, but as far as the rural areas are concerned, why people come from these lovely rural areas where green grass and blue streams and everybody's got their cows and are happily talking away in their own mother-tongue languages. Well, of course, the reality is almost exactly the reverse of that. The real poverty in South Africa is precisely in those reserves or bantustans or independent black national states, and that all comes from the history in which the way in which the South African, Southern African economy has developed.

So that I think that although black South Africans in a sense, as I discovered sort of day one of the inquiry, it was nothing new about poverty as far as they were concerned, and they didn't see that there should be much money spent on that, if any, but for white South Africans, I think there was a revelation about just the sheer extent and horror of the poverty, which emerged during the course of the inquiry, although, I mean, people like -- he was then prime minister because we weren't yet a republic, Prime Minister P.W. Botha attacked the Carnegie Inquiry at the time of the conference, because he said we were just

washing a lot of dirty linen in public with American dollars, and this was, (A) a very unpatriotic thing to do, and, (B), a very stupid thing to do because everybody knew that poverty in the rest of Africa was much worse.

So there was, whether this was just a political denial of the fact of poverty or a genuine ignorance, one can't always sort out, but I do think that one of the things that the inquiry did do was to raise the whole issue of poverty more publicly in the general consciousness. Of course, one cannot separate that from the whole shift of political power, because once you had a majority democratic rule in South Africa, then, of course, the people who are now voting know infinitely more about poverty than any researchers do, and so it very naturally came to the surface.

So, in a sense, the rising consciousness about poverty was maybe partly the Carnegie Inquiry helping to generate that consciousness, but more seriously, of course, the political shift that happened in the 1990s.

Q: Let's go back to process for a couple of minutes. When you're beginning to generate the research and identify the people, you talked at one point about wanting to develop an interactive network that would stay intact and help people convey information to each other about what they were finding and what to do about it.

Wilson: Yes. Well, what we tried to do, with some success, but limited, I think, was to involve people as much as we could in the inquiry. And the way in which we would involve them was to say, "Look. Come to this conference in April 1984 and bring your findings

there, and we will publish them as a conference paper." Now, that's actually very good technique, because a conference is a deadline that doesn't slip. I mean, if you haven't got your paper there for the conference, it doesn't appear. So people would produce in a way that they don't produce for edited books, as I know to my cost, both as a contributor and as editor. So that we, if you like, extracted an enormous amount of information through the process of papers.

The conference itself, of course, was a massive coming together of people who had not -- many of them had never met each other. There was a significant number of black South Africans there, for, in a way, one of the first times at a major research conference. Still, I think, it was majority white. This was 1984, and lots of people were still in prison or in exile. But there was a very, very significant black participation both in terms of writing the papers and in terms of participating at the conference itself.

We tried to make it multi -- what they call these days multimedia, in the sense that it wasn't just papers being written. One of the interesting aspects of it, for example, was I think I'd been able to get onto the SABC, miraculously, and made a little statement about the inquiry in April 1982, when we were stating that we wanted people to be involved, and publicizing it.

As a result of that, as I recollect it, I got a phone call from Omar Badsha. I'll have to check with O. I don't think I'd met him before that. I don't think we'd met each other, but I must ask him. Saying, "Listen. Tell me more about this inquiry, because it sounds very

interesting. But, of course, I hope you're not simply going to have dry academics writing papers." Well, that was more or less precisely what I was planning to do.

I said, "Well, why, Omar? Tell me."

He said, "Because you've got to have photographers in this thing."

I said, "Yes? Why?"

He said, "But I mean we can take photographs and we can interpret what poverty means to people enduring poverty."

So I said, "This sounds like a very interesting idea. Write me a memorandum."

So he wrote it and we discussed it at UCT in SALDRU, and we said, "No, this is great. Let's make a grant, a sub-grant available," as it were, because part of our job was to use the money as seed money to people who needed a little bit of money for travel and so on. Nobody got paid a tuppence for this operation. I mean, nobody made any money at all, but we were able to use it as seed money.

So Omar took this money and did a brilliant job in rounding up a whole range of South African photographers and involving them in the process of the inquiry. They taught the academics an enormous amount, because I can remember Omar very clearly saying at an

early stage, he said, "You know, in this photographic work that we do, there's not going to be one starving baby."

I said, "Why not?"

He said, "Because a photograph of a starving baby objectifies poverty, dehumanizing it. What you want to do is photographs that show the dignity of people in the adversity of poverty, how they are enduring what is happening to them." And it's a very, very important insight, that. Very important insight. So we were having photographers who were men and women of extraordinary sensitivity, most of them South Africans, going around, taking photographs which would really try to convey to the observer something of the reality of poverty without the observer becoming, shall I put it, a voyeur. It's subtle stuff, but they did a wonderful job. So we had at the inquiry this amazing photographic exhibition which then subsequently Carnegie supported to go all around the United States and so on. In fact, the first book, I think -- yes, I think the first book that came out of the inquiry was the book of photographs which Omar put together, a text which I just did for the photographs. And that was important.

The other thing we tried to do was to encourage videos. Now, this was the very early stages of move-around video camera work, and we gave tiny grants, you know, a couple of hundred rand, a thousand rand, to people who had an idea of a video they would like to make, and off they went, and with tiny bits of money, really, I mean minuscule, managed to generate and produce a whole range of videos.

I look forward to a history, actually, of filmmaking in South Africa, because I think that this was one of the very early coherent exhibitions of South African documentary work. There may well have been a couple before that, but not much. This was documenting the reality of, again, what it means to be poor, and some of the schemes that were going on, and, you know, strategies against poverty. A film was made of Mamphela and her work in the Northern Transvaal, as it then was, and so on, which Lindy, my wife, made, because she's a documentary filmmaker. So I was sensitive to the possibilities of what documentary film could do, and Carnegie was very supportive of that, and so we were able to use some money for that.

We also had at the conference an exhibition of films which we gathered from around the world, which we called "Signs of Hope," which were films of, for example, the Mondragon experiment in Spain or some marvelous health scheme in West Africa. What we were trying to do was to show people ideas, imaginative action.

I think that what emerged during the inquiry -- and this was by no means thought about at the beginning -- the inquiry was a very organic process. We were all struggling and trying to find out, you know, how do we operate. I think we came to an understanding about short-run and long-run action, if I can put it that way. By short-run action, we were trying to clarify what were the kind of things that could be done within the context of apartheid South Africa that were actually relevant and politically important from the perspective of the poor, but which -- and which -- not "but which," and which were not going to be part of helping to prop up the system.

So there were big debates, for example. I mean, is it worth getting involved in one of the homelands to have rural development? Well, you've got to be very careful that that process of rural development is not simply bolstering the whole bantustan system, the apartheid system, which is the way in which it was conceived and executed, was itself generating poverty in those very Bantustans. At the same time, if one could find ways of developing or enabling people who were enduring poverty in those rural areas to find ways of mobilizing their resources, to improve their lives and so on, then clearly that was important. Now, I think it was the black consciousness movement that had done a tremendous amount of thinking about that, and I was much influenced by that from the 1970s. So those are what we thought about as short-run strategies. In other words, things that could be done in the immediate here and now, which were not inconsistent with the long-term goals of political liberation.

The long-term strategies, of course, one was talking about what could be done in what we euphemistically called a world in which there was greater political flexibility. In other words, where one could talk about land reform. Of course, you could only talk about land reform in a democratic country. So we were quite clear that we needed also to be thinking about what could be done beyond apartheid, but we didn't do a huge amount of thinking about that, because at that stage all of us thought that this was still a long, long way off.

Q: Did you? Because it seems that there were some signs. When did the signs start to really appear that it was going to end?

Wilson: Well, it was very interesting, and, you know, it's possible to be wise after the event. Unfortunately for me and Mamphela, the book that we wrote together, *Uprooting Poverty [:The South Africa Challenge]*, which was published in January 1989, there's a paragraph which I can find in there for you somewhere, in which we say -- and luckily she agreed with it at the time -- in which we say that the kind of political changes of whites voluntarily handing over power and us emerging in a democratic country were a long way off and unlikely to happen for a long time. Now, twelve months later, that's exactly what began to happen.

Now, there are some people -- I mean, I've just seen a biography of Thabo Mbeki, in which I think he was saying it would happen in a couple of years, and Cyril Ramaphosa was saying it could happen in ten years' time, or vice versa, I can't remember, both of them clearly looking at the 1990s. I wasn't amongst those. It seemed to me -- and I think Mamphela agreed with this -- that we felt it was still a long way off, and certainly most people were completely taken by surprise by the events of 1990. We didn't see them coming at all.

Q: Let me back up a minute to the impact of the Black Consciousness Movement on you. Can you talk more specifically about that and about meeting Ramphele for the first time and how you were influenced?

Wilson: Yes, I can. That happened in the Eastern Cape, which is where my roots are, as I've said, and it happened through David Russell, who's this friend of mine, great friend of mine, who is a priest, now a bishop. When I came back from Europe the year I'd been

working on the assembly line in France, and I'd gone to teach at the IDS [Institute of Development Studies], out of which year came the idea for SALDRU and so on.

I came back to South Africa in January '74. I went down to King William's Town, which is very close to my home in the Eastern Cape, to the family home, to see David Russell, just to say hello, because he was a priest living there, and he, during the previous year, had made the church that was in the yard where he had a tiny little house, which was a surplus church at the time, he had made it available to this young group of political activists, one of whom was Steve Biko, another of whom was Mamphela Ramphele, a third one was Malusi Mpumlwana, a whole group of them.

So I met them, I guess it was January 1974, and I met Steve for the first time, who was a magnetic personality. I mean, he's the one other personality, I think, in South African history in our generation who had the same magnetism, the same presence, the same political astuteness as Mandela himself. I mean, he was absolutely in that league. I'd never met Mandela at that stage. I'd met him subsequently. But, I mean, Steve was a very, very remarkable person. I mean, he was still in his twenties. He died when he was thirty. Steve was living in King William's Town. He'd been banned there, because that was his hometown. But he was reverberating. He was making things reverberate right through the country, through the Black Consciousness Movement, for which he was the spokesperson, and Barney Pityana. Barney I had known -- goodness, I'm trying to think. I certainly knew Barney as well. I've known him for a long time, rather like Fiks, although it wasn't at UCT that we met originally.

I knew and got to know Steve, and Mamphela at that time was the doctor in charge of the Zanempilo Clinic, which effectively she started, or rather the Black Consciousness Movement started in 1973, I guess, just outside King William's Town. So I met her at that same time, and she became a close friend of mine. I used to go and stay and see their work there. I would keep in very close touch with them. Steve was a wonderful person. I knew him and liked him enormously, and he and David were very close, David Russell.

So they became friends in the seventies, and that was paradoxical, if you like, in the sense that they had this reputation as fearsome Black Consciousness people who disliked whites intensely and so on and so forth. In fact, they were, in personal relations, totally, totally, totally nonracial, because they were freed of any tinge of racism. The best way I can describe it in a way that may be more widely understood is that in the same way that Malcolm X's autobiography helps one to understand what Black Consciousness is all about, beyond the Martin Luther King [Jr.], if I can put it that way, so Steve was in South Africa. I mean, he was talking about the importance of power in relationships and all kinds of things, and it's naive to think that it's not important. He was just making people face it. I had read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* as a student -- well, when I was doing my Ph.D. in the States in 1965, which made an enormous impact on me, and I had really understood from Malcolm X something about these realities, if you like, beyond the liberal view of "Let's all be friends together" kind of stuff, to really understand something about the analysis of power and the corruption of imbalance of power in human relations and so on. Steve was speaking exactly this language very articulately, and he was extremely happy to have white friends. It didn't bother him two hoots -- and David was a great friend of his,

and I like to think I was as well. So I knew that group, and they had a great influence on my thinking, on David's thinking, on Geoff Budlender's thinking. A whole group of us, as it were, were taken, if you like, beyond liberalism to, I would say, a deeper understanding of human relationships by taking cognizance of power relationships and the power structure of society and all of that.

I remained close to them right through, and indeed when I came back from India in 1976, I'd gone for only seven weeks, but I'd learned an enormous amount about development and [Mahatma]Gandhi's view that all politicians ought to be social workers, and all social workers ought to know about politics. He kind of fused those two together, which is very much the Black Consciousness view, because they were highly articulate, politically sassed out, at the same time they were very involved in grassroots development, organization, self-help, and all the rest of it. So it was wonderful to be able to come back from India and talk to this group in King William's Town who were stuck there -- I mean, they weren't even allowed to move out of King William's Town, let alone out of South Africa -- and share with them something of what I had learned in India. So that was a great privilege.

So that was the context in which I met Mamphela. So when Steve died, Mamphela had already been banned to what was then the Northern Transvaal. It was a very cruel banishment, because she was taken off to an area which was not her home, and dumped in a place that she knew nobody and was known by

nobody, and more or less left to fend for herself, isolated. It was there that she not began to develop, but there that the steel grew in her, let's put it that way, because she set up shop, persuaded Anglo-American to give her some money, and proceeded to develop a clinic right

there, which was a clone, if you like, of what had happened in Zanempilo, and she then built the Ithuseng Clinic up in what is now the Northern Province. It was there that she developed her work.

It was while she was there -- in fact, she was in the hospital, very ill -- that Steve was killed in prison, and then the whole Black Consciousness Movement in 1977 was, as it were, scattered. I can remember saying to Steve -- it could even have been 1977, I think it was 1976 -- saying to him, "Do you think this movement of yours can be closed down?" And he said, "No, because it's a movement of ideas. It cannot actually be stopped."

And I think one of the interesting things about South African history which we're going to look at in years to come is just how enormously important politically the 1970s were. Now, at the present moment, the 1970s don't make a great deal of -- there's not a big profile of the 1970s politically, because the sort of senior leadership, most of the senior leadership in the ANC were either people from the fifties or they were in exile. You had the enormous importance of the defiance campaign in the 1950s, then you had Sharpeville, which obviously involved the PAC, whose march it was originally, that had the shooting, but the ANC very involved in the anti-pass-law campaigns of the late fifties, early sixties, then the Rivonia trial and the imprisoning of the top political leadership. And then the remainder of the sixties, anybody who wasn't in jail really had gone into exile, so we had this desert that I was describing earlier. Then through the seventies, the Black Consciousness Movement, led by Steve Biko, began to emerge and became, in my view, an incredibly important significant process in South Africa. Politically it's not really much looked at at the moment, because in a way, from the perspective of the ANC, things jumped from the 1950s, early

sixties, into the United Democratic Front movement of the eighties and into the 1990s, and then people came back from exile.

But a lot of the BC people are now in politics, many of them in the ANC and so on, but it put a political toughness into black South African thinking that is very significant and important, and so I think we will look back -- I think that historians are going to come back to the 1970s and reconsider them very seriously. Biko was at the heart of that.

It was there that I met Mamphela, and it was there that we became friends, and it was as a result of my enormous respect for her and her own political wisdom that when I was beginning this whole inquiry and being sent out to find out whether it would be a good idea or not, that one of the places I stopped at the very beginning was to discuss with Mamphela whether this would be a good idea, because she had an understanding of poverty, of rural development, but she also had this political antenna, and she could think analytically, so she was a natural port of call. So that's that background.

Q: Were there any sources of information about black poverty other than government sources?

Wilson: Oh, yes.

Q: Was it coming through the Black Consciousness Movement?

Wilson: Yes, the Black Consciousness Movement was writing, but you did have considerable work through the South African Institute of Race Relations, which through the -- I was trying to think whether there was much in the 1930s, but certainly through the forties and fifties, was publishing all kinds of work. There was the annual survey, of course, which became, justly, very famous, and then there were individual studies of poverty or particular studies like Ellen Hellman, who was an anthropologist working at the University of the Witwatersrand and so on. So there was writing. It's not as though nothing was happening.

There's a long tradition of study, and then there were historians like W. M. Macillan and so on, who were writing on these issues, but it hadn't become a major thrust of study. But let me not for a moment suggest there was nothing happening. The Institute of Race Relations particularly had published a good deal on this, and the churches were worrying away about it.

Q: It was a big theme in the international church community in those years, in the seventies.

Wilson: Yes, I would need to check as to the dates of all of that, but it was certainly emerging. I mean, as I said to you originally, I mean, the idea of having a second Carnegie Inquiry was kind of floating around, as most ideas often are.

Q: In terms of how economists were thinking about it, what impact did Simkins' research have on looking at unemployment issues generally in South Africa?

Wilson: Oh, enormous. Charles Simkins is one of South Africa's leading economists and very innovative in the way in which he was getting hold of official data and scouring it to try and get at the whole issue of unemployment. One of SALDRU's great early successes was when we were able to publish an early Simkins paper. I think it was one of our working paper number three or thereabouts, which was an attempt by Charles to measure unemployment and to show that it was actually getting worse. Now, when he came up with these figures, all hell broke loose, because, you know, people were sort of saying, "We certainly don't have unemployment this high." And he was saying, "Well, look. This is what the figures are saying. This is population, these are the jobs," and so on and so forth. Now, he had to revise some of his assumptions and so on, but it was an enormously important pioneering paper, that early one. When did that come out? '76, I would guess. I'm trying to remember. I think it was in 1976.

So that the attempt to get at the official data and to interpret it and to try and understand what was really going on, Simkins pioneered a whole range of that, because he was looking at population movements through the country, looking at the censuses and so on, and we have a whole range of Simkins papers on income distribution and so on. He and Mike McGrath, there were a number of economists in the seventies now beginning to get to grips with this data. [Interruption.]

[END TAPE FOUR, SIDE ONE; BEGIN TAPE FOUR, SIDE TWO]

Q: Francis, I wanted to go back to the process a little bit and ask you how important was it to get the support from the Ford Foundation in the way of fellowships, and what function did that play in the overall project.

Wilson: The Ford Foundation was enormously important in all kinds of ways. They were working in South Africa at this time, and the lead in this was taken, I think, by Bill Carmichael, who was one of those very senior executives who just found South Africa so riveting that he kept coming back himself as a field officer, effectively. Ford was superb during those 1980s, because they managed to sass out the political terrain probably better than anybody else, and find ways of putting money in good creative places, without being beholden to any particular political group, and yet moving with the center of gravity of where South Africa as a whole was moving, I think, as opposed to just white South Africa. So they were extremely creative, and I hope somebody some day does a good study of the role of Ford in South Africa during these years, because they did an excellent job.

We were lucky to be beneficiaries of that process. I haven't gone back to when -- I can't remember the exact details of timing and so on, but Ford were very willing to be co-sponsors, if you like, of this inquiry and fully understood that this was a Carnegie process, Carnegie-led. They understood the historical resonances of the first inquiry and so on. So they came in, in the best possible way, more or less sort of saying, "How can we help in the most useful way? Our name doesn't have to be part of this at all," which is tremendous and very generous of them.

The support that came to SALDRU in this was really in the form of money available to hire

interns, but not only interns, it was returning scholars. And we had a great deal of money from Ford during these years which enabled us to bring people into SALDRU for a couple of months or even a year or two at a time. For example, in our returning scholar scheme, somebody like Bill Nasson, who is now a very distinguished historian at the University of Cape Town, he was just at that stage finishing his Ph.D. in Cambridge. He had been a student through the South African Committee of Higher Education, which was run by Lindy, my wife, in the days before she was a filmmaker in Cape Town. Bill had been one of these students who had come up the hard way, avoiding what were then the bush or the tribal colleges, unable to come to UCT, had done his studies through Sached, had gone, I think, to the University of Hull, if I remember it correctly.

Anyway, he had finally wound up in Cambridge doing his Ph.D., and was ready to come back to South Africa, but there wasn't a job immediately available, and he hadn't quite finished his Ph.D. So we brought him -- we were able, with the Ford money, to bring him back into SALDRU, and he worked with us for some time. I don't remember exactly now how long it was. And he was doing two things. One was, he was finishing his Ph.D., which just needed typing up, and also he then got involved in research into the inquiry and did a great deal of work in issues of farm labor and education on the farms and so on, and eventually was one of the two editors of the book that came out of the inquiry on education, *From Poverty to Liberty*.

So that's a very good example of how SALDRU, with Ford money, was able to provide a base, a space, if you like, for people in transition, and similarly with younger people. I mean young people within South Africa who needed some space, frankly. There's a nice

story about Ebrahim Patel, for example. I got a phone call one day from somebody -- I'll tell you in a moment who it was [Dullah Omar] -- who said, "Listen. I've got this nephew of mine out at UWC and he seems to be dropping out because, frankly, he's bored. I'm very worried about him. Couldn't you take him at SALDRU?"

I said, "Yes, well, we do have a bit of money. Let him come along." And this was Ford money.

So Ebrahim Patel duly arrived as a fairly angry young student, got involved. We didn't do any teaching, really; we just provided a space in which people could read and learn and get involved. He started writing and doing projects tied up with the inquiry. In due course, he was organizing the workers at UCT campus, which made SALDRU pretty unpopular with the authorities down the hill, the university authorities. Not that unpopular, but you know. What was SALDRU up to, organizing workers?

Eventually, Ebrahim Patel moved on from SALDRU, having been very involved in the Carnegie process and writing papers and so on, having organized a union of workers at UCT, and is now, many years later, is one of the most significant trade union leaders in South Africa, one of the intellectual leaders and political leaders in the trade union movement, in the clothing and textile workers union.

That was SALDRU, in a way, simply providing space during those very difficult political years of the 1980s, and where a place like the University of Cape Town had a certain -- how shall I say -- there was certain protection there, so people could come and just do things.

That was all made possible with the Ford money, and they were very understanding and very generous, very supportive in that process, and knew exactly what was going on.

Of course, it was education of the very best sort, because people came in, there was a scholarly atmosphere, there was a good library, they were expected to work, they were expected to write. And if one looks back at those early papers by many of these people, you know, that was some of their early writing and committing themselves to intellectual thinking and policy processes and so on. So that was a very important part of the Carnegie process, but it was, in that case, Ford money very generously brought in, in a way that they didn't want to claim any kudos for it.

Q: When you say it was very important to the Carnegie process, were there questions being raised at Carnegie about whether or not you could generate the kind of research you wanted to generate with full participation, without, in a way, training researchers?

Wilson: No, I don't think so. Carnegie themselves were wonderfully sensitive about it all, both through David Hood and through Alan Pifer, who, like Bill Carmichael, Alan Pifer in those days was president and a very senior foundation person. But South Africa was also his beat, almost as the field officer, but he managed it in a way without getting in David Hood's hair. I mean, they were very skillful about that. But he knew and understood South Africa extremely well. I mean, he'd spent a lifetime, really, in one way or another tied up with Southern Africa. I'd met him as a child when he was involved as a Carnegie field officer, I guess, doing work with academics, including my mother, in the 1950s.

So that Carnegie were, in my view, the very best kind of foundation, because they were interested in much more than money, because foundations have got much more to contribute than money. It's really their insights and the interactive process between grantees, if I can put it that way, and foundations, or particular people in foundations. That can be even more important than the money, and I'm not saying the money is not important. One needs the dollars to get on and do things. But just dropping money onto people can be counterproductive if it's not very sensitively done.

Both Ford and Carnegie, with different styles, I think managed it extremely well, but we're talking about Carnegie now. The way in which it happened, I think, was that they spent a good deal of time with the grantees. In the inquiry case, it was with me, in the Centre for Applied Legal Studies with John Dugard, in the Legal Resources Centre with people like Arthur Chaskalson, and then Geoff Budlender, talking through everything so that they really understood it, and making contributions. Now, one didn't necessarily always agree with every idea that David Hood came up with, but at the same time he was very creative and understood the politics of the country, and had a number of very powerful insights.

So it was a very creative interaction, is what I'm trying to say, without being directive. I mean, Carnegie, once they'd made the grant, said, "Listen. This is your inquiry. You South Africans, you sort it out, and we are there to support you. We're also there to make sure that the money is properly spent." There's always that tension, as you know, because one has to jump budget lines because something happened. You've got to spend money or whatever, you know. I can tell you many stories about that.

So there's always that -- well, there should always be a tension there, because, in my view, one of the things that foundations can do is make sure that one keeps accountable, and one needs to learn how to be accountable. At the same time, down at the stope face, as it were, things can suddenly change. Circumstances change, and you have to make quick decisions, and sometimes you have to sort of spend money and repent later. It has to be done. But at the same time there's a trust relationship being built up there. So I think that the essence of the interaction is if there can be a good trust relationship built on real understanding of the politics, and politics with a small "p," if you know just what the issues are at stake. Carnegie, in a sense, were superb. Alan Pifer, as president, had really an unrivaled understanding as an American.

Q: Can you talk about that a little bit?

Wilson: I can. I mean, I've just read very recently a paper which I hadn't seen before, which he gave, I think in Princeton in 1980, in March 1980, to the board, to the Carnegie board, in which he was spelling out, I think, if I understood it rightly, he was beginning to make the case for more involvement by Carnegie. This was prior -- yes, this was prior to the big decision to go ahead with the Carnegie Inquiry. He'd spent a bit of money in the initial phases. I mean, I was really involved, but the big decision hadn't yet been made, and I don't think the big decision for the Centre for Applied Legal Studies or the Legal Resources Centre had yet been made. So Carnegie was sort of sniffing and edging towards further involvement. They had been very involved in the earlier years because of the way in which the will of Andrew Carnegie was set up.

Alan Pifer gave a paper in Princeton, which, reading it now, with hindsight, I mean, it stands up extremely well in the light of history. This is about twenty years later, and this is after the fall of the Berlin Wall, after the collapse of communism, after the whole F.W. de Klerk speech in February 1990, after the release of Mandela, after the transformation in South Africa, which none of us expected. And his reading there, as it were, reading the signs of the times and looking at what was going on in politics, in economics, in the society as a whole, in terms of why it's broken down into English and Afrikaans, in terms of black society, in terms of economic change and industrialization, I mean, it's a *tour de force*. It's really good.

So that he had an intellectual understanding and a political understanding which was very profound, and, may I say it, very unusual for an American, in that he really did know what was happening in this country, and based on deep insight going back maybe years. Now, that meant that Carnegie, in a way, had a head start in how to work in this country. Of course, for those of us whose analysis was similar -- I mean, I think if you look at those who were involved in the Centre for Applied Legal Studies or the LRC or those of us in the inquiry, I think we would have had a very similar analysis at the time, of what was happening in South Africa. And the essence of it was that we don't actually know what's going to happen in South Africa.

And he finishes his paper by saying, "I'm simultaneously both very pessimistic, because it looks like it may not change forever, or not for a long, long, long time, but at the same time I'm very optimistic, because there is some deep changes going on." And if you read the

introduction which Mamphela and I wrote to *Uprooting Poverty*, although there is a statement in there about why we think that change is not going to happen very soon, which one can be used against us, and I often quote it to show how one can't predict, at the same time if you read that introduction more carefully, we are also pointing to the same kinds of changes, the underlying changes in the society, of urbanization, of industrialization, demographic forces, and all of that. I mean, we were writing that in 1988, which was eight years after Pifer was writing his paper. Very similar kind of analysis.

So that I think that there was room for those who understood the change, non-change, as it were, that dichotomy within South Africa to find ways of operating, and in Alan Pifer, those of us who were inside South Africa found somebody who understood exactly the ambiguities and why it was worth trying to work, but what the limits of that work would be and so on. Yes.

Q: That kind of leads us into the question of -- participation leads us into the question of the whole issue of sanctions.

Wilson: Yes.

Q: Alan Pifer had a fairly strong position on that, that he developed over a period of years. Did you and he talk about that issue at all when he was here? Was that part of the early discussion or did that emerge as one of the final points?

Wilson: I would have thought it must have been part of the discussion. I don't actually remember discussing it with him, but what I do remember was that in those early years, 1980-'81, both before I went on my sabbatical in mid 1980 and after I came back in July of 1981, one of the points that I was raising, particularly with black South Africans as I moved around the country and talking about whether we could have an inquiry -- don't forget, the inquiry itself wasn't set up until April 1982, and so there was that whole long gestation period, one of the key points that we were talking about all along was, could we use American dollars.

That is shorthand, if you like, for saying, what about the whole issue of sanctions? What about the whole issue of American imperialism, which is significant? Maybe Americans don't see it because when one's inside the empire or at the heart of the empire, you don't necessarily see what's going on or understand how that impinges. But those of us sitting in a place like South Africa are very sensitive to all of this, so we needed to tease out in our own minds whether politically this was an acceptable thing to do.

That was one of the reasons, if you like, why I had gone in London in 19 -- when was it? '80, '81, while I was on sabbatical, I'd got on my bicycle and ridden round to Pallo Jordan and said, "Listen, Pallo, this is what we're up to. I just want you to know." And implicitly what we were all agreeing was that there was work to be done in the country, and it was okay. Now, we didn't then have to take a big stand on the sanctions issue, and in a way we finessed like that and simply said, "Look. This is okay. We'll go on with it very quietly."

I think everybody understood the ambiguity, even about the sanctions issue, that, you know, although sanctions were an important part of the process and we tried to write about it in the book, that the contradiction between -- if there was a contradiction between the strategies needed for economic growth in dealing with poverty and the strategies needed for political change which might involve sanctions, we'd try to face that at the very end, because that was still a major issue.

It didn't become an explicit problem in the development of the inquiry itself, and that, I think, was because we'd taken time. We took more than two years in negotiating, if you like, the politics of having an inquiry, and everybody agreed, "Look. It's a good idea. Let's do it."

Q: When you announced the inquiry, there was a tremendous amount of press.

Wilson: Yes.

Q: Could you talk a little, first of all, about your contacts with the press both here in this country and the U.S.? Did you have contacts in the U.S. that you deliberately used? Did you want to disseminate it as much as possible?

Wilson: Yes. At that stage, early 1980, I wasn't at all interested in what was happening in the U.S. press. It was of no concern to us. Not that we were disinterested, but that wasn't what I was involved in. What I was concerned about was the need to launch it inside South Africa very publicly, because that seemed to be the most protective way, because if you try

to do it secret, well, it wouldn't be secret anyway. The special branch would get very particularly interested if it was trying to be secret, so the more open we could do, the safer we would be, because, you see, it's difficult, this distance, or this kind of environment, to recollect just how difficult it was to operate inside South Africa.

What we had to find was a way of this inquiry having the support, the broad support, political support of black South Africa, i.e., the ANC and the liberation movements, in a way which wasn't going to be chopped up into little pieces by P.W. Botha & Co., because they could simply turn a little tap and say, "No money. We're not going to allow the Carnegie money in." Or ban three or four of the key people. I mean, most of my -- not most, but an awful lot of my friends had been banned in 1977, and I came within a whisker of it myself. When was it? That October the nineteenth when David Russell and lots of people from the Christian Institute -- and I had been a board member of that -- lots of people were banned, Beyers Naudé. That was the year the Black Consciousness Movement was shut up and all of that. So that banning was a very real possibility.

Now maybe I should pause for a moment to talk about banning, because banning was a weapon which was incredibly powerful, because you would simply -- the minister of justice -- I think it was the minister of justice -- could simply sign an order. There was no appeal against it, and he would declare that you were banned for, for example, five years. Neville was banned, for example, Neville Alexander.
Fiks, they deported him to the Transkei, so he was shut up in that way.

But by administrative fiat, people could be turned into lepers, effectively, and in terms of

the banning order, from the moment that order was received -- and the orders varied slightly -- you could not meet with more than one other person at any time. So if your wife was banned, which happened in some cases, then you couldn't have a meal with a friend. And there were cases of the special branch arriving to peer through dining room windows. You could not go onto any factory premises. You could not belong to any trade union. You could be confined to a particular magisterial district. Nothing that you said could be quoted publicly, or that you had written could be quoted publicly. So you were effectively turned into a nonperson.

It's difficult, if you haven't lived in a society where this happens, to appreciate the power of that, because it also turned people into their own jailers. It's a very cruel way of doing it, because people would sort of say, "Well, I can't go out of my magisterial area because I'll be caught," or, "I can't have a meal with somebody else." But there were people -- I had a number of friends -- who simply said, "I'm going to live as though I'm not banned," and, of course, that's what happened to Steve Biko. He was caught on his way back from Cape Town, where technically he had no permission to travel to because he was banned and confined to King William's Town.

So the state or the system had at its disposal an array of weapons where, without any trouble at all, they could have stopped the Carnegie Inquiry in its tracks simply by stopping the money and banning three or four of us. Finish. So we had to find a way of operating in which you're holding these contradictions together, that you have the broad support -- and this is understood, and this is not a kind of white operation or American operation, or anything like that -- and yet at the same time, where the system was not feeling sufficiently

threatened, that they felt, "Well, we have to turn this tap off," or you did it in such a way that the cost to them of taking action was higher than the benefit to them, derived from it. So you're playing politics here with a very -- sniffing the air, as it were. And that's what we had to do.

I can remember real concerns of mine as we began, that we have to get this launched in such a way that nobody can accuse us of being partisan, which is why we said anybody who wants to participate is warmly invited. Open, open, open. And when people wrote to complain about it, we said, "What are you complaining about? Write a paper. Get involved. It's up to you." So in a way we put the responsibility of involvement on the people who were feeling excluded, and we said, "Look. If you want to exclude yourselves, that's up to you."

Q: And who were the people who were feeling excluded?

Wilson: Well, down the track, I mean, P.W. Botha and his attack on us in Parliament just after the conference, because the conference in 1984 got a huge amount of publicity, and P.W. Botha made a strong statement in Parliament attacking us. As I recollect, he accused us into inter alia of refusing to invite people from the Department of Social Welfare. Anyway, one of the government departments.

And we were able to reply to him, because Stuart Saunders, as vice chancellor of UCT and chairman of the Carnegie finance committee, and I as director of the inquiry, we wrote a joint letter, sort of dealing with all P.W.'s points one by one, and were able to point out to

him that actually we had been approached -- I had been approached by people within government or close to government, who wanted to participate. A friend of mine from -- I think it was the Development Bank at that time, but anyway there were a couple of people who wanted to be involved. I said, "That's great. Come and write a paper on how the state is viewing poverty or how your particular institution is." I'm trying to remember exactly who it was, but I'll have to check my notes.

They said, "No, we'd love to do that." They went back to their principals, who said to them, "Look. I'm very sorry, but it's much too sensitive an issue for an official statement or a semi-official statement being made publicly at this stage, so you can't do it."

And we'd said that, "You can come to the conference, provided you write a paper. We're not having any voyeurs, gawkers, or anybody else coming in." And that was partly to ensure that we had really committed people, and also to try and ensure that we didn't have a sort of overdose of whites who just wanted to breeze in and sort of be there. We said, "Look. If you've written a paper, that's fine. You come."

In the end, those two semi-government people, we winkled them in as journalists so that they could be there, because my assessment was that they were actually very important and should be there, and that was great. I mean, one of them is now vice chancellor of one of the Afrikaans universities and so on. And it was very important that they came.

So there was all this kind of politics going on as to how people get involved and to ensure that the money was not turned off, and also to ensure that the research workers -- and this

was the next area of vulnerability -- that research workers, as they moved around the country -- I mean, the special branch and the system generally were extremely powerful, and they could -- I'm not saying blow up your motorcar, but they could sort of ensure that your motor didn't get from A to B, or they could prevent you from getting into a particular area. I mean, it was a very powerful system.

So we could have been blocked at all kinds of levels, so we needed to do this in such a way that everybody sort of said, "Okay, these are a bunch of academics just doing their thing. Let them get on with it," and that's where the name of Carnegie was incredibly important, politically important, because we would say, "Look. This is the second Carnegie Inquiry. The first one was in the 1930s, it was all about white poverty, it was very important in South African history, and you all know, you guys in government, just how important the Carnegie commission was. We all agree that poverty is a serious matter in South Africa, so how can you oppose just ordinary research about it?" So that was the strategy, and it worked. It worked.

I can remember going off to talk to Piet Cillie in *Die Burger,* who was editor, sort of legendary editor of *Die Burger,* about the inquiry, and he said, "It's a good idea. It's okay." And he said, "You know what we used to say about Andrew Carnegie in the 1930s?" And he went back to that first commission and so on.

I said, "No."

He said, "Well, you know, we always used to say about Andrew Carnegie that he never saw

the inside of a blast furnace until after he died." [Laughter] Which we thought was a rather nasty crack, but, you know, that kind of remark meant that *Die Burger* was not going to be attacking us or at least were going to keep reasonably calm about the thing. So that kind of political work was important in giving us the space to do what we wanted to do.

[END OF SESSION]

TTT

Interviewee: Francis Wilson Session #3

Interviewer: Mary Marshall Clark Cape Town, South Africa

Date: August 4, 1999

Q: Francis, could you talk a little bit about how you basically got going, the initial work, how you organized and structured the work to catalyze the process?

Wilson: Yes. Again, a lot of this is from memory, because one of the difficulties about oral history is that one sorts of sits in front of the camera and you start talking without having checked all your notes and your footnotes and double-checked everything, which one can do when one's doing a written text. Just bear that in mind. I have got a whole set of notebooks. I started notebook number one in August 1981. Well, the Inquiry had already, in a way, been going for a year, or more than a year, because I had started in January 1980. But at this moment I haven't found those notebooks. I do have notebooks since 1981 which one day I'll go through carefully and be able to give much more chapter and verse to this.

But for the moment, my recollections were that we officially got going in April 1982, after the board meeting in December 1981. Fikile Bam and I had been at that board meeting. We then had to think about how we were going to do things, and we built up a small core group at SALDRU. I don't remember precisely the dates at which everybody came, but I know that Wilfred Wentzel was an early
person. I think he might have started even on April '82.

The two things that we began with were, first, as all good researchers should, is to start

with a literature search, so Wilfred had the task of going back and having a look at research and writing about poverty in South Africa and then broadening that out. He did a wonderful job and put together a working paper which I think was published in about August 1982, a bibliography on poverty in South Africa, which is a tremendous document and takes us all the way back to the beginning of the century and looks at all the writing about white poverty, the Carnegie Inquiry, but stuff that predated that, and subsequent work, because we were not the first people to be focusing on black poverty. And it's a very, very good bibliography, and we wanted everybody to have a document in hand where they could get quick access at least to the references and find out what was there. And that we disseminated widely.

The second thing we did, and Charles Simkins was very involved in this because he was also part of our core group, was to draw together a number of social scientists. I check the paper now, and I think we had twenty-two social scientists from about nine universities -- I'll come back to that business about the universities in a moment -- in which we met in Cape Town for a day or two days, maybe, to look at the whole issue of questionnaires. Could we use questionnaires? And how did we use questionnaires? Because we were now trying to get a systematic look at poverty in South Africa, but of course we didn't have the resources to do a huge national statistical survey. We weren't the census department or the World Bank or anybody like that. But we had to sort of think strategically about all of this, and we were going to have to ask some questions and we needed to give guidelines to our research workers. If we said to somebody, "Look, go off and find out about poverty in the Karoo," which is the sort of central part of South Africa, they would sort of say, "What questions must we ask? What are we going to find out?"

So we met, and looking back at the paper now, I'm actually very proud of it. I think it was a paper we should publish properly because we had some excellent material brought in by people like Eleanor Preston-Whyte, on questionnaires, and not the answer. She's an anthropologist. And, of course, I am the son of two anthropologists, so one has to be very careful of this idea that you can go with a questionnaire and in the space of a couple of hours or even a day find out what's going on, because an anthropologist reckons you have to be in the field for several years, really, to get the stuff.

I think Monica [Wilson] -- I had one story when she came back from Cambridge and she went off into the field in the Ciskei, near where we lived in the Eastern Cape, I think she spent three months in the field getting all this material about the villages there, and then she said to me, "Of course, I never published that stuff. That was just practice." Well, you see, for a modern social scientist, three months in the field is a very considerable period of time. But those Malinowski anthropologists would go into the field for two or three years and then reemerge to write up their material. So they had a kind of depth of understanding.

And who were we, as little social scientists, going out now with questionnaires to find out about poverty? So we had to think very hard about this. We were trying to work out how do we systematize, as it were, in a way that is going to give us comparable material from around the country, and we came up with this rather splendid working paper called "Questionnaires are No Short Cut," which was simply saying don't think this is the easy

way through. It's worth reading now, and we've put that out as a document really as a guideline to people as to how they could approach the issue.

I think it was really in that workshop, but in subsequent discussions and so on, that we recognized that we couldn't define poverty in advance. There were certain characteristics that we would ask about, but we really needed to go and interact with those who were poor or those who were close to the poor, like nurses or priests working in rural areas or in townships, and talk with them. I guess that part of that was the lessons of the first Carnegie Inquiry, which was in many ways a brilliant piece of work. I mean, it had its limitations, confined to whites only, and there's all kinds of criticism one can have of it, but it's still a riveting social history of South Africa.

Now, what those guys did was -- not only men, there were women involved as well -- but what those people did was get in their two Model T Fords, drive around the country, go into a village, and then say, "Se vir ons; wie is nou arm in die dorp ? ," "Tell us who is now poor in this village," and then go and find out about them. Now, that's not such a stupid way of doing things, actually, because inside the village people know who is poor and guide you to it. So that element, which is not exactly the questionnaire way of doing things, is much more an anthropologist's way of doing things, it's one of the strands.

So we wanted to, as it were, pick up on the old Carnegie methodology and then add that to more modern methods. So when people came to us and said, "Listen, you guys in Cape Town. Tell us exactly what it is we're going out to measure and look for," we would say, "Well, we're not quite sure. You are having to go out and there are certain characteristics,

certain broad guidelines, that we can give you, but you're going to need to feel your way and talk to people." And that actually was a very good approach, because although it meant that we could not then do a systematic statistical analysis subsequently, because things weren't all measured in exactly the same way and we didn't always have hard numerical data, it, nevertheless, gave us a very good sense of the contours of poverty. That's the first part of the story.

The other part was to think through, what are the kind of different geographical, social, realities in South Africa? For example, South Africa you can immediately divide into three parts. There are the commercial farms, which is most of the land area of the country. There are the urban areas, which break into the big metropolitan areas like Johannesburg or Cape Town or Durban, and into the smaller towns, or into the even smaller towns like Grahamstown or Beaufort West and so on, and then you have what used to be called the labor reserves or the homelands or the bantustans or the black national states, which were those areas of South Africa, broadly speaking, into which blacks had been penned, if I can put it that way, by the process of conquest, not unlike the Indian reserves in the United States. In terms of the Land Act of 1913, subsequently amended in 1936, of the legislation, subsequently redeveloped in the whole bantustan structure of the 1950s and '60s, those were the areas where black South Africans seemed to be the poorest and where they were most densely crowded.

Now, you had these three different categories that were in the country: the white farms, so called, white because they were white-owned, the reserves, and the towns Now, if you go back to 1950 or thereabouts, roughly one-third of black South Africa lived in each of these,

and then you had a process of urbanization taking place, although that was very retarded because of the pass laws, and so there was very little urbanization, in fact, between 1960 and 1980, in the sense of people moving permanently to town, but there was a huge movement of people off the farms with the process of mechanization and so on, just like in Mississippi, people get pushed off the farms by the cotton-picking machinery and off they go to Watts or Harlem or wherever it may be into the urban areas.

That process had taken place in South Africa, but because of the way in which the legislation operated, they were not able to move to town, so they'd gone into the already overcrowded reserves, making them even more crowded. So we said, well, clearly we need to find out what is happening on the farms, in the towns, and in the reserves, so let's make sure we cover those bases.

Then there are different kinds of towns. There's the metropolitan areas, there's the larger towns, smaller towns, and then there are the dorps, which are, within the white farming community, but are really pretty small villages. We then tried to ensure that we would have people covering some of all of these, to try and be representative, now it was not exactly a random sample, but it meant that we were beginning to pick up information, let's say, from Cape Town or from Johannesburg or from Durban, and sometimes we commissioned a paper or commissioned two people to go and do a particular survey of a township in Durban, or some of our younger students, with this Ford [Foundation] money I was talking about, we would say, "Look, you go off into this Karoo town and study that."

So somebody like Mary-Jane Morifi, who I think you will be meeting, went off to

Philipstown as a young student and did a wonderful job, wrote a paper about life in Philipstown. Now, you couldn't say this was true of all the towns in the Karoo, of all the villages in the Karoo, but it gave us a real insight into an aspect of South Africa about which we knew nothing.

So it was that kind of attempt to be both directive in the sense of making sure that we covered the different kinds of places in South Africa, and having somebody like Charles Simkins with his marvelous demographic analysis to sort of say, "Well, we need to do this and this and this, and these are the different kinds of areas in terms of different kinds of towns and urban settlements." And also letting people go on a very loose rein, as it were, simply say, "You go in there and talk to people and find out what's cooking and come back and tell us." And that was a very good combination.

So that my sense is that historians are going to find the original Carnegie papers, of which there's something like 302, I think, they go up to 315 or thereabouts, but there were some missing ones which in the end never came through, so there are just over 300 papers plus some post-conference papers. I think historians are going to go back and find this an amazing quarry about that period in South Africa. And what we were doing subsequently, of course, when we wrote the book was to read that stuff and try and bring some of it together. But it still remains an amazing mine of information, with all kinds of different academics involved, some of them very senior, experienced, well trained, others very young, bright-eyed, bushy-tailed, going off to do their thing, but all coming back with very good material.

The other aspect -- and I've talked about this already, so I won't say much more about it -- was that we were very conscious all along that we had to keep trying to find ways of shifting this thing from being a white male research operation to being something much more representative. This isn't just for affirmative-action reasons. This is because if you are a woman or black, you have experiences. Who am I to be saying all of this? But one has experiences, one views the world in a certain way which, if your experience has been white or male, you don't see things.

Now, I had been brought up with that on my mother's milk, more or less, in this sense, that she used to tell me about how she and Godfrey [Wilson] would go off into the field as anthropologists, both very well-trained observers, and they would go to a wedding or a funeral or a beer drink or whatever it may be, and they would come back and write up their notes, and they wrote completely different things.

Godfrey was writing about the structure of the whole process, and Monica was writing about what the relationships were, writing about completely different sorts of things. They saw different things. Monica would look at the botanical surroundings, the environmental stuff. Godfrey, it just didn't cross his mind. So that I had been trained from a very early age that one's experience determines what you see.

Therefore, any research project has to have people with different experience, and if you're trying to do a research project into poverty, to have just people whose experience is urban, middle class, white, and male, I mean, think of the things you're not going to see with that kind of experience. So that quite apart from the politics and the affirmative-actionness and

all of that, it simply made solid sense that you needed to have a completely different mind-set, as it were, of research workers.

So we were saying to ourselves, how does one shift this whole thing in such a way that you really involve people who have different experiences and who are going to be able to see realities to which somebody like I am completely blind? Which is why we set up this idea of working groups, why we would go to particular people and say, "Listen. For goodness sake, please write us a paper," and they'd say, "Look. I'm not an academic. I can't do this kind of thing." We'd say, "Nonsense. You actually can see a lot that we don't know, so bring your paper along." And that worked very well. It was wonderful.

So although more than half the research papers were written by white South Africans, I think we will look back historically and see there was something of a sea change at the Carnegie Inquiry in the sense of real participation by significant numbers of black South Africans and significant numbers of people who were women.

Q: You were bringing together a lot of people. I don't know, was it for the first time? Were many of the people meeting each other for the first time and crossing boundaries in a sense around race and experience, that sort of thing? Was there a way in which these conversations were new or different conversations?

Wilson: Well, yes and no. There weren't many people involved in the Inquiry who hadn't met socially as black and white in one way or another somewhere down the track, because those are the kind of people who tend to be worrying about poverty in South Africa, but

what the Inquiry did in particularly some of the working groups, sort of on the way to the conference itself, and what the conference itself did, was to provide a forum in which people who had been very isolated for one reason or another came and met each other.

You could simply be -- I can remember sometime in the Western Cape we had two people, both white, both male, both involved in rural development work, one in a sort of Dutch Reformed mission type of place, one in another kind of situation, and I don't think they had ever met each other. They came to the conference with their different papers and were absolutely riveted to discover each other. So there was a lot of that synergetic energy released, if I can put it that way, where people began to discover each other. Of course, that happened at a much wider national level where people would have heard, let's say, about Mamphela Ramphele , but had never met her. Indeed, it would have been very difficult to meet her because she had been banned. Luckily, her banning had already expired just before the conference, and she was able to come to Cape Town. We tried to get her to a conference, a health care conference in 1978, but she'd been banned just before that, so she couldn't come to that one.

So that the process of meeting and sharing ideas for a common goal I think all of us found quite a heady experience. The conference itself, I could talk about that, but it was an amazing conference in that way, and in that sense was a very important political event in what was a very tough period, because this was 1984, which was just before things got really hot in South Africa, which dated, I think, from about mid-1985.

Q: Let's get to the conference in a minute, but before we do, I want to ask you one more question about the universities. What kind of representation did you try to get from the universities? Were there black universities as well as white universities? Could you talk about that?

Wilson: Well, obviously the universities were the places that we started at, because that's where you would expect to find research workers. So I made it my business to go around to as many as I possibly could. Wilfred Wentzel, who was working within SALDRU, I think he and I were the main two travelers, as I recollect. Helen Zille subsequently came in and also moved around. But what we were aiming to do was to just find any research center, any university, and go in there and sort of say, "Who in here is, (A), doing any work in areas of poverty of one sort or another, whether it's to do with health or energy or housing or whatever it may be," and there was lots going on. I mean, it's not as though the Carnegie Inquiry invented research into poverty.

There was plenty happening in the country, but what we were able to do -- and this is partly because it was a long, slow process -- was to say to people, "Look, once you bring this river of energy into the dam of the conference," if I can put it that way, "and share it with us, and we're not in any sense going to take ownership of this, it's your research, your name, you go on and publish it in any way you'd like to, but if it can become part of the wider process, then we'll all learn from each other."

And that was fantastic, because we found all kinds of people. There were people at Rhodes University in the Eastern Cape, doing research into, in the geography department, doing

research into the energy expended by women in the rural areas collecting water, actually measuring the kilojoules of energy, and came up with these amazing statistics that the actual energy that women would exert as they walked up a steep hill carrying one of these twenty-liter barrels of water, plastic containers of water on their head. That that energy was roughly equivalent to the energy used by a miner underground wielding his pick. Now, that's a lot of energy. So you began to get some scientific evaluation of just the effort involved in collecting water.

We knew nothing about any of that in Cape Town, but we found these guys in the Eastern Cape doing this, and we said, "Please, won't you write up some papers, or the papers that you're working on now, won't you, as it were, *maak 'n draai* as we say in Afrikaans, sort of make a turn through the Carnegie conference. And everybody was very generous, very, very generous. And nobody was paid a cent. I mean, nobody made any money out of it, because we'd simply say, "Look, can you come?" And they'd say, "Yes, we could, but it would help us enormously if we could have a couple of thousand rand just to go and do these measurements, or to get down to do this issue." It was a matter of seed money only, all over the show.

And we went to, of course, all the black universities we could find to talk to people -- Fort Hare, UNITRA [University of the Transkei]. There was work there in what was then Bophuthatswana and so on, to the different universities, to the Afrikaan-speaking universities, to the English-speaking universities, and we simply said to people, "Look, you're doing research on land tenure or role of the chiefs or whatever it may be. Bring it along." And so we had a very kind of catholic, broad church, inclusive view of it all, and we

simply said, "Look, if it seems to be in some way relevant to the issue of poverty or development, come."

So people came, and we had this astonishing collection of papers, quite astonishing collection of papers, which then needed to be sorted out, but we didn't know in advance everything that was coming in, so part of the agenda -- well, the agenda in many ways was determined by how people responded. Of course, it left some big gaps which we weren't always able to fill either because we couldn't find somebody to write a particular paper or because we hadn't perceived the gap, only later did the penny drop and said, "My goodness me, why didn't we do that?" And then we did try to have some post-conference papers. So going around the universities was a very deliberate process to involve the whole country, and then going to try and set up working groups like, as I say, Fikile Bam, asking him to draw together a working group on law and poverty. All of those were techniques to try and involve as many people as possible.

Q: What were some of the particular studies that came in that stand out in your mind in terms of the human stories that were recorded? I noticed that in the questionnaire book you asked people to conduct life stories, life histories.

Wilson: Yes. Wow. That I've done no homework on that particular aspect, and I'll have to just think for a moment, because it's amazing how one's memory fades. But we did get astounding personal stories. I quoted yesterday this student who had taken down the shebeen queen, who explained why she was being a shebeen queen, which I do remember very clearly.

We got stories from -- about what it meant to be unemployed, and those, for me, in many ways were the most harrowing stories, where men and women, whether it was in Cape Town -- we had a couple of papers about that -- unemployed men in Maseru in Lesotho tried to get to the gold mines, but they couldn't because there weren't any jobs anymore, and where people gave us, as it were, quoted directly stories of people, as it were, told as real oral history, where some woman would say, "You know, I'm so desperate now, when I hear my children crying at night, because I have lost my job and my husband has gone to Johannesburg to look for a job because he lost his job here in Cape Town, I haven't heard from him, he hasn't sent me any money, and I hear my children crying, hunger crying at night, and when I hear them crying, that hunger crying, I want to feet them rattex to kill them. And then when I think that thought, then I feel what a terrible person I am."

And that whole sense of guilt and blame and misery, the human degradation, the human -- what's the word I'm looking for? The assault on dignity that poverty means, that unemployment means. There was another man in the Lesotho who was -- I think it was Jeff Guy and a co-worker, co-author whose name I forget at the moment [Motlatsi Thabane], wrote a paper and they quoted this man, he said, "You know, when I can't get work, I feel as though these hands of mine have been cut off and I can do nothing, because I cannot even feed my children."

So that for me, one of the things that really came out of these studies was that even worse than being poor, if I can put it this way -- and maybe this is a silly way of making a distinction -- is the assault on the personal integrity of the individuals who are trapped in a

situation that they can do nothing about, but who feel guilty about it. And it's this awful sense of that. You could just hear that mother who wanted to feed her children rattex, an incredibly honesty to say to somebody, "This is where I'm driven to," and to sort of say there but for the grace of God I go, or that man unemployed.

I was much influenced by a book which came out in about 1935, I think, called *Men Without Work*, by the Pilgrim Trust in New York, which William Temple, who I've talked about, had a great influence in. And that book was really the voices. I mean, this is pre-Studs Terkel and all the rest of it. That was
a book in which the unemployed themselves were speaking about what it meant to be unemployed. And I think for those of us involved in the Inquiry, either because we met people in this way or because we read about, because the research reports would come in and people were brilliant at capturing those voices, we got very much closer to the realities.

I want to be very careful about this, because there's no sense in which I really know what it means to be poor or really know what it means to be insecure. I mean, there was a quote that I think maybe Mary-Jane got out of Philipstown, about Mrs. Witbooi, who was asked to define poverty, and in [a] sentence she just defined it, a brilliant sentence in which she articulated the meaning of poverty, and the key point was the insecurity. The key point was the insecurity, "Always waiting for my furniture to be put out in the street or my husband to lose his job," and the sense of vulnerability. So that, to me, was one of the most powerful aspects of the Inquiry, that we moved, as it were, beyond the statistics and we collected some, but not enough, statistics. That was subsequent work. But really to hear the human being enduring.

Of course, this came from the photographers as well. They made us much more sensitive about this, because with their eye through a camera trying to capture what it actually meant.

[END TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE; BEGIN TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO]

Q: Francis, in much of this work it may be that sometimes you thought you were creating a future and sometimes you simply thought you were imagining a future. Could you talk about that?

Wilson: Yes. I think that one of the things that I have always believed in, or maybe it's what I grew to understand, was the enormous importance of vision or imagination, and I guess that comes from the gospels, you know, and one's theological training and understanding. But certainly, although I would never describe myself as a man of prayer in any shape or form, I do try. And one of the prayers that I really believe in is the prayer for imagination, that one tries to think of possibilities and then find ways of making them happen. And that is something we all had to work at very hard -- I mean, it's not just me at all -- in South Africa, because if you're living in such a closed environment, how can you begin to aerate it a bit, really?

Well, let me go backwards a moment and then forwards. This belief that one can find ways of changing things, or that change is possible even in the most impossible circumstances, I mean, for those of us who have lived through the last twenty-five years, thirty years in

South Africa, I mean, that is so obvious now, but we didn't necessarily always see it at the time. I think South Africans can really say that they in their lifetime have seen more miracles than the disciples ever saw, in this sense.

Let me sort of pick up two or three examples of it. I mean, go back to my first notebook in 1980, visiting this banned doctor [Mamphela Ramphele], a black woman in the remote rural northern part of South Africa, apparently, you know, flattened by a system which was going to be there forever, if one had thought, and none of us did, of course, but if one had thought that, look, within twenty years she would be vice chancellor of the University of Cape Town, I mean, she would have been the first to laugh and sort of say, "That is totally, totally impossible. That simply cannot be." At all kinds of levels. I mean, the apartheid system was in place. Somebody black becoming the vice chancellor of the University of Cape Town? A woman becoming vice chancellor? I mean, please. So there's miracle number one, if you say.

Now, we take this as so obvious now that we tend to forget just what has changed in that process. You can go back ten years earlier than that, in the early 1970s, arguing, let us say, for trade unions in the mining industry. Now, there were a number of us around who simply said, "There must be trade unions in the mining industry. This is absolutely critical." But that was like spitting into the wind, completely impossible.

I'm going way back in the late sixties and so on, where the system was very tight, the trade unions had been smashed, the political movements had been smashed. The thought that trade unions would emerge were simply something one couldn't see how it was going to

happen before the revolution, as it were. Who knew when or how the revolution was going to happen?

Well, there was the mining industry which within ten years came out, led by Cyril Ramaphosa, was one of the most powerful mining unions in the world at that moment, making a major impact in the politics of the society. So there's a second change that was unimaginable in the early years, which then happened. Of course, the whole release of the political prisoners from Robben Island, the unbanning of the political organizations and the political transformation, everybody's talked about the miracle.

But the point I'm really trying to make here is that it is legitimate, and it's been proven in South African history, that miracles are possible, that impossibilities can actually happen. And I think we need to remember that. We really need to remember that. When one sort of says, "It's going to be impossible to abolish nuclear weapons," for example, which seems to me one of the things we just have to do, and everybody says, "It's impossible," but in the end, it's not necessarily impossible if people have that vision.

So I guess that what for me is the very important drive is that creativity is possible in society. It really is possible in society. One doesn't have to accept the existing status quo and say, "Look, this is impossible to change. It's impossible to change all the violence on American television," for example. Of course one can change that if one chooses to. It's going to maybe take a generation to do it, two generations, but one needs then to choose one's goals and decide systematically, "Okay, what are we going to do and how does one get into the long haul?" And it may take one lifetime or ten lifetimes. It may take a lot of time.

I think, in a completely different context, I think of Dr. Kurien with his cooperative dairy in India, which to me is one of the miraculous organizations of the world. I mean, there's a young officer in a remote rural part of India north of Bombay, and really worrying about poverty and income for the poor and so on, and a little seed is planted and nurtured and grows, and out of that comes one of the most modern, hugest, most efficient, effective dairies in the world based on those grass roots.

So what I'm really trying to say is that it does seem to me that individuals and groups of individuals can make a difference. Now, this is hardly new. I mean, one's always looked at, let's say, the abolition of slavery as one of those miraculous movements, although we know the argument about whether it was in the long run uneconomic and so on. I don't want to get into that debate. But there were times when political goals or social goals just seemed impossible, and I think what we have learned, shall I say, the existential way in South Africa, in a very exciting organic way, is that this is true.

As I say, we've seen dozens of miracles when one looks at the reconciliation that has taken place between individuals, between communities, between families and so on. It doesn't always happen. It's not inevitable. It's not built into the stars, but it is possible.

So, for me, one of the most important political attributes is imagination and finding ways of imaginative action, and then the perseverance, which isn't just dropping in for a day or two or a year or two. I mean, this is lifelong perseverance to make things happen. And it seems to me that history is full of these examples.

In a very small way, in a very tiny way, it seems to me that what the Carnegie Inquiry emerged into was one of those imaginative operations because of the way in which people became involved. It was hugely exciting as everybody brought their ideas into this, from Alan Pifer, David Hood in the United States, and then the South Africans who became involved.

That here emerged a process which at one level was impossible to have this kind of political process taking place right through the middle of the 1980s, and yet there it happened in a very public way and in a way which, looking back historically, we were just very lucky about the timing, because nobody could know at that stage that in 1990 there would be the beginnings of fundamental change, which would make that research relevant. We all thought, "Well, we're doing this research simply so that it's there. We've got that understanding. We can begin to do some short-run actions."

But none of us saw it as the beginning of the rethinking the shape of the future, although -- no, let me recast that. We certainly wanted to be doing some thinking about the abolition of the pass laws, about land reform, about all of that, but none of us saw these things as likely to happen in the near future, so we didn't feel we had the power to shape things.

Q: You said specifically that you wrote David Hood in 1983, that you didn't think that ten years earlier it would have been possible to find whites willing to work on this subject.

Wilson: Right.

Q: Could you talk about that? What changed the minds of whites? Did they begin to see a loosening in the regime?

Wilson: Right. That's a very interesting question, and one really needs to go back to other people's diaries and writing to remember exactly at what stage one began to think certain things, because it's very easy to telescope one's current views with one's views then, without being quite aware of the timing.

But I think it is certainly true that in the 1960s, for example, if I can try and remember that, after Rivonia Trial and so on, I mean, as I've said before, this was like a political death. Nothing was happening and very little was possible. It would have been, as I wrote in that memorandum, in that kind of situation it would have been impossible to draw in the kind of wide spectrum. There just wouldn't have been the interest, the commitment, the involvement, the space, and so on to do that.

By the eighties, clearly things were loosening up, and this had to do -- we tried to write about it in our book -- that had to do with the process of urbanization, of industrialization, of black South Africans moving up into higher parts of the economy, becoming much more significant, skilled workers within the economy. Although you had a pretty effective color bar still in place, it was floating up.

So that the kind of assumptions were subtly changing in the society, and I guess part of what one is needing to do and part of what Alan Pifer was so skillful at, and that is

reflected in that memorandum of his to the board in Princeton, was that one was needing to interpret the signs of the times, when there were shifts taking place which hadn't necessarily been articulated or which were necessarily even visible in the political process.

I guess what was happening in terms of the Carnegie Inquiry was that we were beginning to feel in our bones that, yes, we could actually begin to move with this in a way that would be feasible, which had not been possible, let's say, at the time of the banning of the Black Consciousness movement in 1977, that it would be possible to begin to move, although we did not yet see, and we did not yet see that just around the corner was the huge political transformation coming. We certainly didn't see how quickly it was coming.

We often used to quote -- I can remember about this, I think it was Mao Tse-Tung who once said, "In a society you push and you push and you push, and nothing happens. You push and you push and you push and nothing happens. You push and you push and you push and nothing happens. You push and you push and you push and suddenly everything falls down." That's certainly been the history of the 1980s. I remember we used to hear that story way back in the seventies and think, "Well, we're still in the push and push push phase." [Laughter] "It's not going to change in our time."

Q: As people were being released from Robben Island, did you have contact with people who were close to [Nelson] Mandela, and did his vision somehow help infuse what you were doing?

Wilson: Yes, I'm trying to think that through honestly, to remember exactly what happened. Through Fiks, whom I've talked about before, Mr. Justice Fikile Bam, we've been friends all our lives, and he is my son's godfather, we kept in touch with him on Robben Island, and when he came off in 1974, of course he would sit and talk to us for hours about his experience. So through him we would learn about Mandela and Sisulu, the enormous importance, of course, of Walter Sisulu, who was really the father who nurtured everybody, including Mandela. And Govan Mbeki.

So we heard a great deal about the senior political leadership and what was happening, and then subsequently, in the same sort of time, Neville Alexander came off, and he came to see us. That was very moving, because he came to see Lindy and me really to talk about the work I'd been doing on mine wages in the gold mines, just to say, "Look, this has been read on the island," or, "People have read about it and we're very pleased with that information." Well, I was terribly thrilled with that. Then he would talk about what was happening on the island and something of the political differences and so on, which obviously existed. But we heard a great deal, and a number of different people -- Lesley van der Heyden as another one -- came off the island, and we were hugely privileged. They would come and sit and talk for a day, two days, three days, or Fiks, of course, I talked to for weeks, on his experience, and Neville as well.

So we learned a tremendous amount about it, and I think what we learned, rather than political policy and so on or anything like that, was just this sense of dignified endurance. Here were these men who had given their lives, and they weren't bowed or cowed in any shape or form. I think it gave us all huge strength. That was really what we learned from

those on the island. It was, "Look, if they are able to handle this, who are we to be complaining about little pinpricks, and especially if one's white?" I mean, one's very privileged. So there was no sense of -- how shall I say -- I don't know what I'm trying to find. There was no sense that we were in a difficult place, because we weren't. I mean, one was just living in South Africa trying to do one's bit.

The presence of Mandela and the leadership and, of course, there had been Robert Sobukwe, whom I'd been very fortunate to meet when he came off the island and shortly before he died, was another very inspiring figure. The inspiration of these men and women, of course, although there weren't any women on the island, was that they had given so much more, sacrificed so much more, and had this huge capacity to endure with dignity, that seems to me what it's about, without losing their hope, and they kept hope alive. "We just have to go on." So that was what came from that. I think that subsequently reading Mandela's autobiography and reading his whole process of negotiations, that was fascinating, but we were completely unaware of that at the time.

Q: Meanwhile, you were doing your own work as all this was going through.

Wilson: Yes.

Q: What were you working on, and how did the process of gathering all this data on poverty affect your thinking?

Wilson: Right. The 1980s, for me, were really the Carnegie years, obviously, and both before and after the conference. The conference was in April 1984. Before that time, I wasn't involved in any direct research myself because there were just too many things to do. It's rather like being a film producer or film director. One was just trying to ensure that everything was happening in a reasonably coherent manner, and one had great researchers out in the field, so one needed to monitor all of that.

But I also made it my business, because I needed to know and understand more myself, to get out into the field and go talk to people. The Eastern Cape I know very well because I grew up there and I go back all the time. But I did a couple of journeys with people. For example, I went into what is now -- I can't remember if it's exactly in Mpumalanga or the Northern Province, but it's in the Sekhukhuneland area of South Africa northeast of Pretoria, into the Leolo mountains.

I think I was talking to Charles Van Onselen at Wits, who's the oral historian who's done this marvelous work on oral history [*The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, A South African*], and I think it was he who introduced me to one of his research workers who he said was absolutely magic in the field, I think was the phrase he used, Teddy Matsetela and persuaded Teddy to take me into that area, which he knew well. We then spent, I can't remember, three, four, five days walking through that area, through what was South African reserve areas or bantustan, which was one that I didn't know because I come from the Ciskei, Transkei, the Xhosa-speaking area, and this was a different part of the country completely.

And that, for me, was a very illuminating few days, because I was just walking through that area. I would be taken to a village and shown a water pump, and people would say, "Do you know that they actually start queuing here at two in the morning? Otherwise they're not going to get water." And to get some real sense of the reality of deprivation in terms of basic needs like water or electricity or fuel.

So that, for me, was a very important experience, and I did the same thing on the other side in what was called the western Transvaal, now more or less the Northwestern Province, I think, near Kuruman, which is a much drier part of the country, then going to a really remote area called Bendell, then going beyond Bendell to an even remoter village.

And I can remember using one of the cases, if I can put it that way, but a situation that I found there in order to deal with some of the analysis about unemployment, because I can remember meeting a young man in this village beyond Bendell, which was miles from anywhere, and there were a few tufts of grass and a couple of goats and people living, but it was poor, poor, poor. And this young man, if I can remember the details correctly, had been working at the Sishen iron ore mine, which was beyond Kuruman, a long way from where he was some eighteen months ago, had been retrenched and lost his job. Because he lost his job, he had no place to stay on the mine, so he had to leave the mine and come home.

Now, coming home was expensive because he then had to get a bus fare to Kuruman, and from Kuruman back to Bendell, from Bendell back to his village. And now he was sitting in

his village and there was no work to do and there was nothing to do, and he was desperately poor. But he couldn't go and look for a job because, (A), he knew that he wasn't going to find any kind of a job in Sishen or anywhere else, but (B) if he did go, it was going to cost him money, and he didn't have the money even for the bus fare to Kuruman.

So it enabled me to recognize that there was such a thing, is such a thing, as structural unemployment, in theoretical terms, that there can be situations where people are simply too poor to go and look for work. Now, in that situation if there can be one person like that, there could be 100 or 1,000 or maybe a million people. So it was important to have that kind of grassroots in-touch-ness. It helped me a lot in terms of an overview. You got to other places where you see dozens of people queuing around a water tap, and you then start to work out the ratios of people to water taps in that region and so on.

So what my work involved in the 1980s, but we were all working different ways, I want to stress again this was so much a team process. But you asked me about what I was doing, was trying to sit in Cape Town and keep a sort of overview as to who was doing what. But there were all kinds of people like Helen Zille and Wilfred Wentzel and Charles Simkins and Dudley Horner, who is still deputy director of SALDRU, all working on this, just keeping in touch and finding out what was happening. And at the same time I would try and get out and about, not only to the universities to drum up more writers and participants, but also into those areas where there was real poverty. I didn't spend a great deal of time in the urban areas, because a decade before I'd done a lot of work on migrant labor and had gone through many of the hostels and so on, so I had known a good deal

about conditions in the urban areas, and it just seemed to me we really needed to have a particular thrust onto the rural areas of South Africa.

Q: What significance did it have to work on South Africa as a single economy? Was that something that was done as a normal matter of course?

Wilson: Yes. Thank you for that question, because it is important. As I've said before, we have always seen ourselves as a research unit looking at southern Africa, rather than South Africa, and the reason we've done that is because the way in which South Africa industrialized essentially with minerals at the heart of that industrial process -- diamonds from 1867 and gold from 1886 -- leading to the development of Kimberley [diamond mine] and then even more to the growth of Johannesburg and the huge petroleum at Witwatersrand, Vaal triangle, the big industrial hub of South Africa, which grew, as it were, on the gold mine, is that that process, in a way that has not happened in any other society that I'm aware of, drew in workers on a basis of oscillating migration.

Let me just explain that for a moment. Essentially what happened was that black workers were drawn into work on the diamond mines, on the gold mines, and other industry and so on, came in, were housed in these compounds or hostels or, as I've said before, labor batteries, and were able to work there for six months, nine months, a year, or two years, and then sent away again under contract. Now, there are two features about that. One is that that process of oscillation meant that far fewer families settled in town. It's not as though no families settled in town. Soweto exists. So there was a process of permanent urbanization, but it was much slower for black South Africans than for whites. And in the

1960s, that process was halted completely. Between 1960 and 1980, the proportion of black South Africans in the cities did not change, or went up by half a percent, which means that at the time when under any other circumstances there would have been very rapid urbanization, the only increase in the cities really was national population growth. There wasn't that rural to urban move, apart from the migrants coming in, the workers.

That was the first feature, and one needs to analyze just what are the long-term consequences when a very large proportion of your labor force are coming in from rural areas and then going back to those rural areas so that their wives, their children, their grandchildren, are staying in the rural areas and you're not getting movement into the cities, for one.

Secondly, that that migration process was not just within South Africa. The mines drew, and have always drawn, on labor from way beyond the boundaries of South Africa, both from places like Lesotho, which is a small country entirely surrounded by South Africa, but it's an independent state and has its own flag, its own place at the United Nations and so on. But most of the workers in Lesotho actually work in South Africa as migrants. But not only from Lesotho, but also from surrounding countries like Mozambique, like Botswana, even up to Zambia and Tanzania one had workers coming in. And you can look at the mining industry in the 1890s, which is 100 years ago. At that time something like sixty percent of the workers on the gold mines were migrants coming from Mozambique. Now, that proportion has changed up and down during the century, but for most of that period -- indeed, all that period -- Mozambique and miners have been absolutely essential core component of the South African mining industry. Therefore, one needs to do an analysis,

an economic analysis of the economy which does not assume that the economic boundary and the political boundary are in exactly the same place.

Now, for American economists, or indeed even British or French economists, it's a whole new way of thinking, because one is assuming that one has a national economy, and then you have international trade, as it were, and maybe you have some migration coming in. This kind of relationship, breathing out and breathing in, of oscillating migrants is unique. So we had to focus on that, and it's one of the reasons why one cannot possibly think about poverty in South Africa or strategies against poverty in South Africa without asking oneself about what does this imply, let's say, for the people of Lesotho or, indeed, the people of Mozambique, who've been part and parcel of the South African industrial process for that century.

Q: These are not some of the same issues you had dealt with in your dissertation, having to do with questions of ownership?

Wilson: Yes, indeed they were. I guess that my research trajectory, if I can put it that way, because of my roots in the Eastern Cape, had always been concerned about I suppose what one would now call poverty and development issues in the Eastern Cape, Ciskei, Transkei area. That's where I grew up and I was very conscious of all of that and wanted to understand more about it as an economist. Then that led me, as it were, into thinking about the migrant labor and so on. Then when I was in Cambridge doing that work on the economics of discrimination, particularly when I got to the United States and talked with Gary Becker and tried to think through how one could use the American analysis, and

recognizing that actually for me it wasn't going to be the best way into the South African scene, and then coming up with this question about let's find out what happened to wages on the gold mine and write about labor in the mining industry.

I mean, some of this is so obvious now but one really blunders around in the dark trying to find one's way through all of this. Clearly, the mining industry was the industry to study, and if one could understand something about labor in the mines, one was beginning to uncover the South African substructure, if I can put it that way. So getting into the wage situation in the mining industry and why wages were so different between white and black, and why they'd widened, that then took one straight into the migrant system and the role of the labor supplies. Then you start thinking about migration.

So shortly after I'd finished that thesis and published the book on mine labor [*Labour in the South African Gold Mines 1911-1969*], I got involved, at the request of the South African Council of Churches, in a study of migrant labor, which, of course, was centered on the gold mining industry, but by this time had become much more widespread in South Africa because -- and this is important to see that apartheid, there was a very important component of apartheid, which was modeled on the mining industry developed by the English-speaking component of South Africa, which they tend sometimes to forget.

Because essentially what Verwoerd was doing, first as minister of native affairs and then as prime minister, but as the sort of big thinker of apartheid, was saying that we will resolve the contradictions -- he didn't put it in these terms. On the one hand, apartheid wanted to have economic growth. Everybody wanted economic growth. On the other hand,

apartheid was saying that black South Africans must have their own national states and they'd do their own thing in what were the bantustans. Now, in economic terms, those bantustans were the labor reserves out of which the migrant labor came.

The only way you could resolve the contradiction between economic growth, which implied urbanization, and separate development or apartheid's vision of separate nations, as it were, the only way you could bridge that contradiction or sustain that contradiction was with a permanent oscillating migration labor force. But it had to be enforced, because no longer did people wish to stay willingly. I mean, the pass laws were used, and so you had huge increase in the number of people being arrested under the pass laws, because women would want to come to town, obviously, with their husbands, they would want to come and look for work. So during the fifties, sixties, seventies, you've got astronomical increases in pass law arrests which were being used as the structure to maintain the migrant labor system.

That I began to understand in working on the book on the gold mines, understood even more as I worked on the book on migrant labor [*Migrant Labour in South Africa*], both of which came out in the early seventies.

[END OF SESSION]

TTT

Interviewee: Francis Wilson Session #4

Interviewer: Mary Marshall Clark Cape Town, South Africa

Date: August 6, 1999

Q: Francis, you had just been saying that you understood the significance throughout your work of the need for South Africa to preserve its oscillating migration and that you had understood that through both of your books.

Wilson: Yes. Let me modify that slightly. It's always difficult to know how one's thinking, to go back to the timing. This is so much building on insights and drawing insights from other people, but I think I came to a gradual recognition, which I think I'd got more or less by the time the book on migrant labor [*Migrant Labour in South Africa*] came out at the end of 1972, about how at the heart of apartheid was this systematic enforcement of a migrant labor system which wasn't so much dividing black from white, although it was doing that in full measure, but was dividing the black man in half, in a sense "You've got to be a worker here, and you work here, but if you're going to be a husband, a lover, a father, a grandfather, a citizen, a human being, you do that over there in that rural area." So you had that divide right at the heart of black South Africa.

Now, that, to me, was, if you like, part of the core of what apartheid was. Not the only thing, of course, but it was central to it. And so one needed to analyze this migrant labor system which was at the heart of the South African economy, and the way in which -- it shaped our industrialization process. It wasn't just an add-on rather regrettable social

factor with sort of bad social consequences; it was fundamental to the way in which the South African economy was constructed.

So that much was clear to me, but what I think happened during the process of the Inquiry is that we all worked on this, a lot of different people working on this. We came to a greater understanding of how, through the migrant labor system as the sort of connecting feature of this, the process of generating wealth in South Africa, by which I mean the growth of Johannesburg as a great big city, gold mines and streets and big office blocks and people making lots of money, and jobs being generated. The process of generating wealth was simultaneously -- that very process was simultaneously generating poverty in the rural areas, because what was happening -- you know, this I can lecture on for hours, but I'll try and be very brief -- what was happening in the rural areas was that over a period of time people in the rural areas were moving to town to work on the mines or subsequently in industry and so on.

They were then coming back to those rural areas where population could increase because people had wages and so on which they brought back, but where the capacity to generate that wealth in the rural area was actually falling away because people were moving from maize production, let's say, to gold production. Now, that doesn't normally matter if you're moving from producing one thing to producing another thing and then trading. Britain did that when the Corn Laws were abolished and then started producing more textiles, which they exported to the United States, and the Americans produced the corn which came in to feed England.

So it can happen in trade, but if you're doing it with a migrant labor system, then what happens is the people of a rural area, which could be a rural part of South Africa, or could be Lesotho or could be Mozambique, move from producing maize to producing gold. The production of the gold that they're producing, they're not actually doing it within the place where they live; they're doing it somewhere else. Now, that alters the analysis fundamentally, because then it becomes a geographic component of the distribution of wealth and of assets and of capacity to produce wealth. So cutting a long story short -- I mean, I can go on this for hours -- if you take just an anecdotal example to try and illustrate what is going on here, Lesotho, which in the end of the nineteenth century was producing food for export, it was exporting food to South Africa, and then by the 1920s, after the First World War, by the time of the First World War, was more or less feeding itself. Then after the big drought of 1932-'33, Lesotho started importing food, and now it's a net importer of food, although there's very little produced in Lesotho itself, little else. Why is that? It's basically because the people of Lesotho have moved from the production of maize and food to the production of gold and diamonds and all the rest of it, which they're producing outside Lesotho.

So you end up in a situation where I can remember in a small town, Mohaleshoek in Lesotho -- and I'm now going back to 1983 or thereabouts -- seeing one evening one of these enormous lorries with eighteen wheels, loaded with Long Life milk, which it was taking to a trading place in Mohaleshoek, and that lorry had a CB number plate. Now, let's analyze what all of this means. Here is a lorry coming from CB, which is Port Elizabeth, which is an industrial urban part of South Africa, loaded to the gills with milk which had been grown by farmers around Port Elizabeth, South African white farmers, taken into the town,

to the dairy, and pasteurized and turned into Long Life milk, then taken off to Lesotho and sold to the people of Lesotho, who are rural people, 100 years after participating in this spectacular economic growth of the South African economy, are unable to produce their own milk. And they are buying that milk with money earned in wages in the diamond mines and in the gold mines inside South Africa.

So that basically what does Lesotho become? It's become a bus stop. Are you with me? And so the process of generating the wealth through demand and so on, is that that is milk being produced by the farmers in Port Elizabeth, which is creating nice jobs for the farmers in P.E. and income for them all, going off to Lesotho, where it is being sold to people who need it, with money that they have earned in the gold mines. So there's zero development in Lesotho in that process.

That story perhaps helps to illustrate what I mean, that the way in which South Africa or southern Africa industrialized was such that for many -- not for all, but for many of the rural areas, that very process of generating the wealth by the men being drawn into the mines and so on, and subsequently into industry, was also generating poverty in the rural areas. I think that's reasonably clear.

I think that was something that we began to understand much more clearly as we began to look at poverty and the mapping of poverty in South Africa, began to understand what is actually going on in the reserves strategically, and to see how the economic system, the industrial process in South Africa as it had functioned within the constraints of a racist

society where the land is largely owned by whites, the labor is controlled in terms of the pass laws and so on, and what is happening.

Another example of this structural thinking, if I can put it this way, is that the pass laws were being used to enforce this process I've talked about, of the cities being the white man's creation. Blacks were not going to be allowed into the cities unless they were there just to work. Okay? And hence we get to this enforcing of the oscillating migration process.

Now, one of the consequences of this -- and it may well have been unintended in the sense of not thought through or planned -- but just think of it like this, is that in 1950, one-third of black South Africa lived on the white commercial farms. You then get a process of increasing mechanization. More tractors come in, combine harvesters, chemical weed killer, chemical fertilizer, all that, all of which means you're producing more and more with less and less people. A very familiar pattern to Americans. You know exactly what's going on. People are being pushed off the land. Now, normally that push off the land, people are pushed to the cities and go to the cities and wind up at the bottom of the economic pyramid in the cities, and then make their way up and get jobs in Detroit or wherever it may be.

Now, in South Africa that process of being pushed off the farms took place in a way that you would understand in the United States, but you couldn't simply go to the cities if you were black, being pushed off the land, because the pass law said, "Nothing doing. You may not come to the cities," especially if you're a woman or children or unemployed. Not on. So you are deflected, as it were, and the only place to go is to the bantustans, which are already

overcrowded, because for 100 years you'd have this migration process going on, where people have not really been allowed to urbanize. Some have urbanized. As I say, it's a way to exist. But many have not. So that the reserves are much more crowded, cannot possibly sustain the people who are already there, let alone the influx of new people coming off the farms. And this is not insignificant numbers of people; this is one-third of black South Africa who are being pushed off the farms in increasing numbers.

So you had, during the sixties and seventies -- and we were able to document this in the Carnegie Inquiry as we thought about it all -- huge increases, astronomical increases in population in those rural parts of South Africa that could least sustain that population. Are you with me?

Now, I don't have the figures in my head anymore, but there's a place called Qwa Qwa, which is a sort of -- one might describe it as a reject [Orange] Free State farm. I mean, it's a little patch of land north of Lesotho in what is the Free State, called Witzieshoek. Now, that had a population -- I'll need to check, and I'll come back and talk about it -- but the figures were very small in the 1920s. They grew natural population growth to the 1970s or so, after which they just took off astronomically from -- I can't remember -- 30,000 people to 300,000, you know, huge numbers, increase. One can only describe it as a rural ghetto. I mean, people were unable to keep any kind of livestock. There was no space there. But there wasn't work there. There wasn't any industrial base. You couldn't call it a town because it had no economic base. But you couldn't call it rural either, because you couldn't graze a goat, let alone cows, and there was no space to grow things.

So that process of population movement through the combination of economic forces, mechanization, the free market working, as it were, within a legal structure that determined where you could or could not go, was generating poverty in an appalling way. Part of what Carnegie did was to document what was going on in places like Qwa Qwa and say, "Well, now, what is it like to be living in that area?" And it's not irrelevant that it was in Qwa Qwa that we had really the only recorded cases of people dying of hunger. Then you could sort of try and contextualize that case, as it were, within the broader parameters of what was going on.

So I think that what was useful in this process was that it was giving us a map, as we'd originally tried to get hold of, of poverty, and then you sort of zero in on Qwa Qwa and say, "Good Lord, look at what's actually going on here," and you can document the population trends and find out what's happening to individuals, and then you try and analyze that in terms of the consequences of migrant labor system, the consequences of the pass laws, preventing urbanization, etc. And that's how that all came together.

But I'm really trying to stress that it was because we were able to have these hundreds of research workers doing this thinking and analytical thinking combined with finding out what's going on on the ground, and then trying to put that together, that we were able to come up with some kind of an overview, preliminary overview, let's put it that way, about the nature of poverty in South Africa.

Q: It sounds as though you had a puzzle and a lot of jigsaw pieces. Were you able to put enough of those together in a way before the conference to know some of what your eventual outcomes and strategies would be?

Wilson: Absolutely not. What the conference was designed to do was to sort of say, "Let's make sure that we've got all the jigsaw pieces in one box, so when we start to put the puzzle together, there's actually some coherence to it." So the purpose of the conference was very open-ended, in the sense that we said, "Look, anybody who's got something solid to say about poverty in South Africa, particularly if you've got chapter and verse about it," but we weren't excluding theoretical papers for a moment, but, "If you've got chapter and verse and can come and tell us, bring it along. This is the phase, the first two years, this is the phase where we want to find out what is going on, and let's put that on the table."

And I think all of us believed -- if you like, it's a belief -- that the collection of information, of good data, is important. Now, I'm very mindful of the fact that the data you collect is preconceived by what you see and what your theories are and all that kind of stuff. I had various friends of mine who used to say to me about stuff like wages in the mining industry, they would say, "Francis, these are wonderful facts, but what an appalling theoretical understanding you've got." And one lives with that, because you sort of say, "Well, at least the data is down there. You guys explain it better."

So I have a tremendous belief in the importance of the rigorous scientific collection of the information, recognizing that what you actually collect is informed by some kind of preview. So clearly we had some kind of a preview, and obviously we were saying, "We need to

collect from different parts of South Africa. It's the kind of information we want." That's predicated upon some preliminary theoretical thinking. But we wanted to bring that information in. We also wanted more at the conference than just the information, but maybe I can talk about that in a moment. But the purpose of gathering that information was to say, "We have got it all here, or as much as we can get for the moment, and then let us read it through and see if we can find some pattern in what's going on." Of course, it wasn't as though we were starting from scratch. I mean, one knew. I knew, because I had grown up in the Ciskei, that there was lots of poverty in the Ciskei. I mean, as black South Africans said to us, "Please don't spend a lot of money discovering things we already know."

At the same time, we wanted a better map, so the purpose of the conference was to enable us to draw that map with more beacons, if I can put it that way, and then to say, "Okay, from here we then need to go and to analyze the causes of this reality that we find, and from there we go on to look at the strategies." So there was that kind of process. At the same time, if people wanted to come to the conference with analysis of causes, great. If they wanted to come with strategies, wonderful. And we wanted both of those there.

In the event, I think that the conference was particularly strong on facts, pretty feeble on causes, and with some quite interesting strategic thinking, but not enough.

Q: Could we go to the conference itself?

Wilson: Yes, we could.

Q: Talk a little bit about how many people you originally anticipated having -- I think a couple of hundred -- how many people you really did in the end have, and something about how you organized it.

Wilson: Right. Well, again the conference was a bit like Topsy; it just growed. And I don't remember originally how many people we thought realistically of having. We'd had a conference on farm labor in 1976, with, I think, fifty-five papers, and then a conference in 1978 on the economics of health care, with something like seventy-seven papers, give or take. Those are roughly the numbers I remember. So perhaps we were thinking -- and maybe there's some memo which I've forgotten about -- that we were thinking of 100, 200 papers, which had been wonderful.

We were literally in the hands of the research community. There was some commissioning we could do, but we didn't have a lot of money. We had some seed money, so we could commission this paper and that working group and so on. We knew that would come in. But there was so much more that in the end came, and this was the situation where people -- you know, the team at SALDRU did such incredible work. Wilfred Wentzel was doing a lot of moving around the country.

Helen Zille was sort of chief coordinator and brow-beater. She was -- is -- a very good journalist. She's now minister of education in the Cape. But in those days she was doing a new kind of a job for her. She's a brilliant organizer and understands deadlines because she's a top journalist. So she would simply get on the phone around the country and beat people up and say, "Bring your paper in."

So there was that process of gathering papers, and we would allocate a number to a paper and put the title in, and then occasional papers to which we had allocated numbers didn't actually happen, so they became blanks, which is why, although we got up to paper 314, there are only 302 papers, something like that. But it was far more than we'd ever expected.

What was good about the organizing -- and this wasn't me, because I'm not a great organizer -- but I had somebody, Michael King, I think it was, was organizing the actual publication of papers, because we said, "We need to be sure that all the papers are on the table at the conference," and that we managed. So that when people came to the conference, they could get a complete set of papers, and that was fantastic, because that meant that we'd honored, if you like, our commitment to Carnegie to publish the material, because there it was. People wanted books and were complaining because we took a long time getting the books, which is a legitimate complaint, but at the same time, the material was on the table and available and could be used. That was part of the very open process. So there was that element in it, which was the sort of heart of the conference.

At the same time, we wanted to move beyond the merely academic, and this is where the photographers actually taught us a lot of things. I've already described to you how I had this phone call in 1982, I think, when I'd just gone on to the radio to advertise and talk about the Carnegie Inquiry, and I'd had this phone call from a young photographer, Omar Badsha, in Durban. He eventually had set up a whole process of drawing in photographers.

So there came to the conference an amazing collection of photography which Omar had coordinated by twenty, thirty of the very best photographers in the country.

This was a whole new world to me. I didn't know these people. One or two, like David Goldblatt were very well known, obviously, but most of them I didn't know. They either had photographs of their own or, again with seed money, had gone off and done photographic essays. Very moving, very profound, and very insightful. And, as Omar quite rightly pointed out, they were telling us things that the academics couldn't begin to communicate. So that was a very important dimension, and that eventually resulted in the first of the Carnegie books, actually, which was *South Africa: The Cordoned Heart*, which Omar coordinated and came out and we had help from Alex Harris and a couple of others in the States, and -- plus a text, and so on.

Then besides that, we wanted to draw in films, if we could, in two ways. One was to use video, which was just emerging as a new medium, as a feasible tool of research, and to try and get some films made. And then, secondly, to use films to bring in ideas from outside.

Let me talk about stage one. The first stage, again, was seed money, I mean ridiculous amounts of money for making film, 500 rand or 2,000 rand or 500 rand is less than 100 dollars, you know. Can you do anything with this? And people would take it and go off and make films and get little bits and pieces of money from elsewhere. We had, as I was saying yesterday, a number of wonderful films that came in. I see that as a very significant beginning, part of the process of beginning documentary film work in South Africa. It wasn't the beginning. I'm not claiming it was the beginning, but it was a very early phase

in which a number of filmmakers came in and made their early films about South Africa, about the realities.

That was combined with getting hold of, hiring, and we had, again, great help from Carnegie, who put us in touch with somebody who was able to hunt these films for us outside and bring in films which we called *Signs of Hope*. In other words, films about models that worked, models against poverty, grassroots development. So we had a regular process of showing films through the conference.

So that also worked pretty well. It would have been nice to have had a lot more money and to spend much more, and we wanted, in the end, to have a film produced on poverty in South Africa, and that didn't work. We tried to get that together, but it never quite took off. It was a difficult one to do. So to that extent we failed to use film media as much as we would have liked to have used it, but it wasn't bad, in the sense that we had one or two very good documentaries that came out of that. I think it helped to disseminate the idea, no more than that, it helped to disseminate the idea of the power of film as part of that process, because we were all -- I mean, these were early days in the video world. We were all emerging with this. Of course, there is this very strong documentary film tradition in South Africa now.

So those were the components. We also had at the conference -- and it was a wonderful planning committee, a very young Stellenbosch student, Micheline Tussenius who I think was only about twenty at the time, and she was the chief conference organizer. People were sort of saying, "How could you possibly appoint somebody so young?" Well, I come out of a

tradition where students in society, certainly in South Africa, have often been light years ahead of their adults in terms of energy and capacity to organize, and Micheline was exactly that. She was incredible.

And there were a number of other people involved in organizing a conference which was going to be, as I said, a multimedia event, so we had music and we had drummers and all kinds of things. So to try and have a cultural richness dimension to it, because we were very anxious. This was being said very loudly and clearly by black South Africans that this wasn't just going to be a kind of victim approach to the poor poor. One is really trying to celebrate life while analyzing realities that shouldn't exist, if I can put it that way.

So that's how the conference emerged, and it was wonderful. I wish we had some sort of a record of that conference, a visual record of it all, because it was an amazing thing. We took over a big building at UCT. And it was a very heady time for all of us, because I think it was one of those events, sort of pre the change, which gave a glimpse of the energy, the potential energy of South Africa if it could only free itself from the shackles of racist exploitation, if I can put it that way, which energy we have seen, of course, since 1994, with the whole flowering of a democratic government, which is, I suppose, one of the reasons why people find South Africa so incredibly compelling, that it is this combination of disaster, racism, awfulness, combined with the potential energy that comes from creative tension and synergy based on differences. I'm not being very articulate about it, but this conference was exactly that. I mean, you had all kinds of people coming in there from different corners of South Africa, meeting each other, focusing on a common issue, enjoying each other and listening to the music, watching the films, looking at the photographs, and talking.

So in that sense, it was a great event whose consequences one doesn't begin to know, because it inspired us all as we met each other. So it was one of those events -- and there have been many in South Africa, we've been very lucky that way -- which helped to inspire people on the long road. I was talking earlier about how one needs perseverance and these things are going to take one lifetime or two or three, and people periodically need some oasis where they get refreshed and recharged, a pit stop which is going to help them keep going. And this conference was one of those.

[END TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE; BEGIN TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO]

Q: I wanted to ask you about David Hamburg.

Wilson: Yes, indeed. Well I think that we were extraordinarily lucky in the Carnegie Inquiry and I think Carnegie were extraordinarily lucky to have two presidents in succession like Alan Pifer and David Hamburg because Alan Pifer, I've already talked about and his deep understanding of South Africa and the politics and his capacity to read the signs of the times and to be supportive, an extraordinary capacity to be supportive of a wide range of people.

And then it came to the end of his tenure, and David Hamburg was appointed. We heard sort of noises down, as it were, that David Hamburg was not nearly so keen in involvement in South Africa as Alan Pifer was, for all kinds of very acceptable reasons, you know. What on earth was Carnegie doing being involved if they were breaking academic boycott? Was

there anything creative that could be done in South Africa? And I had many friends who I had wanted to come out and who said absolutely not, they couldn't come as part of the academic boycott, which I completely understand and accepted.

But it was going to be a little difficult if, in fact, suddenly Carnegie was going to start putting the brakes on or, indeed, go into reverse in terms of their involvement in a process that we had spent some time thinking through ourselves and were now convinced was actually a useful exercise. So we were a little worried about all of this.

But in the event things turned out wonderfully, because what it meant was that David Hamburg came in with a very critical, but, because this is who he is, a very open mind, willing to be convinced. I don't remember the dates when we first met, but what I do know is that he came out with a whole phalanx of Carnegie people for the conference in 1984, because he wanted to see South Africa for himself, see what was actually going on before he made any decisions about further work.

He and the others who came wanted also to see something of South Africa for themselves, so we organized, with John Dugard doing a lot of the organizing, from the Centre for Applied Legal Studies, a trip to the Eastern Cape of South Africa so that they went around rural South Africa and really saw something of what was happening. I think Geoff Budlender was also involved in that process through the contacts with Legal Resources Centre.

So the top brass at Carnegie, New Yorkers that came into South Africa but not just into the

urban environment and not just on a tourist trip. They actually got right inside rural South Africa in a way that was very important. I think it is fair to say -- but you'll have to ask him, of course -- I think it's fair to say that during his visit in South Africa, David Hamburg, whatever doubts he had, I think were stilled, and he came to see the value, not under all circumstances, but that the particular way in which Carnegie was involved in South Africa through the Legal Resources Centre, through the CALS, Centre for Applied Legal Studies, and through the Inquiry, that these all, on balance were, it was better to be involved than not to be involved. Let's put it in those terms. And he gave us his full support.

Of course, he has enormous energy, enormous intellectual insights, and an enormous amount to give. So for me personally, the interaction with David Hamburg, as somebody who I could phone up and talk to about this problem or that problem and for insights as to what we were doing, particularly in the years after the conference, in terms of writing up and thinking through strategies and so on, he was a major influence. His address at the Carnegie conference itself was a very powerful address, because he was coming in as one of the United States' leading scientists, very well known, tremendous authority, president -- was he president of the AAAS [American Association for the Advancement of Science] then? But he had a very high position in the American scientific establishment and spoke with real authority. He was able to add that extra degree of scientific authority, independent-minded authority, which was exactly what certainly I hoped one might achieve in an inquiry of this nature, and so he brought a real extra dimension to the way in which the Inquiry proceeded and the way in which it was perceived, and continued the support. So he changed his mind, which was tremendous. The support which Alan Pifer had, as it were,

put into the Inquiry was something which David Hamburg picked that baton up and carried it in full measure, and that was wonderful.

Q: Let's move, then, into the post-conference era. What were your plans immediately after the conference?

Wilson: Well, again I would need to go back to my notes to double check things, but as I recollect, it was along these lines that we had started off way back in 1982, when we were exploring, thinking we would have a commission. And then we'd come to the realization that a commission wouldn't do; we needed a much more open-ended process which would go to the conference. So far, so good.

I think we then thought that we would like to have post-conference some kind of maybe another -- not a commission, but a group of people who, with authority, would be able to draw up a statement about poverty, about its reality, about its causes, and about its strategies, and to issue a document with real authority about poverty in South Africa. And we were sort of feeling our way with that.

But that became very difficult, because after 1984 came 1985, and politically South Africa just began to explode, the townships. I don't remember the exact dates, but I think it was in September of '85 that P.W. Botha tried to bring in the new constitution, which was basically declaring black South Africans as non-South Africans, and I take that as a key date, because that was the point at which black South Africans said, "Thus far and not one step further. This is absolutely unacceptable." And it's from around then that the

townships became -- you know, the whole process of ungovernability and the urban explosion, as it were, took place. This had deeper roots with the schools protest going back into the mid seventies and so on, but really from 1985 on, the whole thing started to bubble in all kinds of ways.

That went on, and again I would need to check my notes, so this is a tentative statement I'm making, but I think that the turning point really came in 1986, with the shooting of seven young black men in Gugulethu. I think this was what happened. Which the police put out that they were guerrillas engaged in an operation to shoot up some police van, it was going to be an ambush, and they were all killed. Black Cape Town was incredibly angry. I think white Cape Town didn't quite understand what on earth was going on. I think that was the funeral at which there were 30,000 black South Africans, almost all black. There were not many whites at that particular funeral.

And as I'm trying to piece this all together, but it was after one of the massive funerals, and I think it was then and I think it was that date, but I can double check this, that I'd been talking with Mamphela [Ramphele] about the whole process of establishing the commission or an authoritative committee, and she said, "You know, after this it's going to be quite impossible, because what's our mandate? From who does our mandate come?" And we recognized that that was just not going to work, that there was no possible political way of establishing a mandate which would carry any authority.

So those political events as it were impinged on what we were doing, and it was from then on that we began to develop the idea of writing the report and a number of different books.

Now, it may turn out, as we examine our notes and so on, that we'd been thinking about some of the books earlier and so on, but as I recollect, it was after the conference that we recognized that actually there was no way we were going to put together an authoritative group with a mandate. Just couldn't be done. And my clear memory is Mamphela said that to me just after this huge funeral, which I think was the funeral of the Gugulethu Seven, which I think was in about March '86, but we'll need to check our dates.

Anyway, be that as it may, we shifted after the conference to a process of dissemination. How do we get this material out? How do we get it properly discussed? And we shifted from the idea of an authoritative group issuing a statement in their name, to a slightly different thing -- well, a very different thing, a book being written. And we hoped to have other books around that.

Now, by this time Dr. Mamphela Ramphele had joined us at SALDRU as a research officer, because her own work in Lenyenye had really come to an end. Her banning order, of course, had expired in 1982 or '83, but before the conference, and she was able to move after that. Without going into all the details of what was happening in her life, she had wound up in Port Elizabeth working at the Livingstone Hospital, you know, pretty much of a dead end, as far as she was concerned, and not at all sure where to go. That was one of those moments where access to a foundation which understood the realities was wonderful, because she needed to move out of Port Elizabeth, and we discussed it. I had gone to visit her and said, "Well, what about coming to Cape Town and working here as a research officer at SALDRU while you think about what to do next." And she thought that would be a great idea.

So I then phoned up Bill Carmichael at Ford [Foundation]. Bill had met Mamphela, and I explained the situation. I said, "I just need a year's salary," and over the phone he said, "Yes, you've got it." And it enabled me, as one of the beneficiaries of the foundation, to make the point that one doesn't always need money, but one always needs access to money, if I can make that distinction. [Laughter] That it is incredibly useful sometimes to know that you can, in tight situations, phone up and say, "I just need this. No further questions asked." And Ford came up trumps.

So it was possible to appoint Mamphela immediately to UCT as a research officer at SALDRU, and then that grew into a process where she and I became the kind of co-workers on the main report, which we then worked on together. I think Mamphela always feels that we took far too long over it. I need to make the point that we had 300 papers to read, and some of them were not short. They were major papers. So even if you managed to read one paper a day, that's a year's work just reading this massive, this huge quarry of information, and then having read it, you really had to learn it all by heart, to put it all together so that you were able really to draw this stuff in.

So it took us a long time, but we were able to work together in a very creative way, because we get on very well. She has got a tremendous sense of humor, and I also, I think, have a sense of humor, so that helped a lot. And we both had rural roots, that I'd grown up in the Eastern Cape, she'd grown up in the Northern Province. We both came from deeply devout families, so we had a similar kind of ethos. But she was black and a woman. I was white and a man. So you've got all that extra kind of experience there coming in, because she

would have insights, as I have tried to argue previously, that I knew nothing about, because, you know, I'm not black and I'm not a woman. She was a medical doctor and I was an economist. So between us, we covered a lot of bases, let's put it that way, and we could sort of read these papers together. Or she'd read some and I'd read some, then we'd comment on them, and then we would sit down, and I would sit at the computer and type away, and she would then dictate and I would make some comments, so we wrote the whole thing together through those years '85, '86, '87, really, writing that report.

Now, there was a lot else going on, of course, in South Africa at this time. I mean, the whole place was in uproar with the riot police rushing around everywhere, the townships in turmoil, so it was a tough time. I mean, a lot of people being assassinated, and an awful lot of the Truth and Reconciliation material, you know, there were the Gugulethu Seven, of course, there were all the people in Cradock, the appalling killings that took place. So it was a very turbulent and painful time inside South Africa.

Speaking personally, I found that I had to withdraw in order to write, and that was partly just self-protection that I couldn't absorb everything simultaneously. So I just said, "Well, there's a job to be done now, and that is writing, and it's going to be a slow, long process, so we'll work on that."

Other things that happened were that the photographic work that Omar Badsha had been coordinating emerged with this marvelous collection of photographs. There was a sense that this ought to come out as quickly as possible. Omar put together his book on the cordoned heart and then brow-beat me into writing the text for that. So we needed to write

sort of mini-essays for the different texts, really to contextualize those essays. That book came out in 1995, and that was accompanied -- and Omar will be able to give you all those details, because I don't remember them all right now -- with the whole process of developing a traveling exhibition in the United States.

And that's a whole separate story which maybe we'll want to talk about a little bit later, about the use of the Inquiry for the education of the American public opinion, which was a concern of Carnegie's. And we were very happy to go along, but it was not our central concern at all, but it was an important goal of the corporation's. So there was the book of photographs. There was also, in the middle of all of this, and I don't remember the precise dates, but I would guess about 1986, '87, UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund] arrived on the scene, and Richard Jolly I knew, and he was number two at UNICEF. Richard Jolly had been sort of a young academic back from Zambia. He's about six years older than I am, I should think. He had read my thesis at a penultimate stage in Cambridge, and I'd met him way back in the sixties. We'd known each other when he was director of the Institute of Development Studies in Sussex, and I'd gone to do a little bit of teaching there in 1974, so I knew Richard. We'd kept in touch down the years.

UNICEF was beginning to sort of feel its way into southern Africa, but of course from their perspective as a member of the UN [United Nations] family, this was extremely tricky, because they could not be part of breaking the UN embargo on South Africa. UN organizations simply could not operate. At the same time they needed to know what was going on. So this got finessed by the commissioning of a paper which became *Children on the Front Line*, when they asked me to do some work emerging out of the Inquiry, about

what had happened to children, children in poverty and so on. So Mamphela and I, as part of our work on the book, essentially did a kind of byproduct which was a report of *Children on the Front Line*, which was then put together with work that other people were doing, commissioned by UNICEF in Mozambique and so on.

So this paper came out, which made a lot of noise because it was really the impact of apartheid to the impact of the Botha campaign into southern Africa and the destabilization campaign that they were operating in southern Africa, and the consequences of the civil war in Mozambique, which had largely been stoked up by the Rhodesian Front government and so on, and then picked up by the South Africans. So the South Africans were up to no good at all in the region, and the destabilization part of the consequences of that obviously were what was happening to children, and UNICEF focused on that.

So this report came out by UNICEF as an official UNICEF report [published, 1987], which had current South Africans, as it were, involved in it, so that was also a political finessing which Richard Jolly managed and we then went to Nairobi for the launch of that paper. So that was an exciting feeling of actually this material is beginning to make some kind of an impact. And the fact that it was focused on children was particularly good because that's where it really matters.

So that was part of the dissemination process. Then at the same time, as director of the Inquiry, I was working to try and ensure that we had a number of books coming out. In this area I feel that I failed very much, because we had such amazing papers at the conference, and at one level it would have been very simple to have just put together -- say

we had 300 papers and we had chosen fifty of them and brought out five books of ten papers. They could have come out very fast, as nice volumes and disseminated that way. And I failed to either do it myself or get that organized, and, yes, it didn't happen that way, and I feel bad about that. We tried to have a number of books come out focusing on particular themes, on poverty in the homeland, on poverty in agriculture, in rural South Africa outside the homelands, and different themes, and those books, for one reason or another, didn't happen. And maybe that's just how it is. Maybe the papers to the conference were, as it were, conference papers and the fact that that information was available then, and still is available, because we put that into a lot of the different libraries, was sufficient.

But one important book did come out, and this was edited by Bill Nasson, who'd been one of the Carnegie people brought back with the Ford money, a Ford returning scholar, if you like, coming back from Cambridge to finish his Ph.D. He finished his Ph.D. at SALDRU, then got involved in education on the farm schools and so on. And Bill Nasson, together with John Samuel, who was national director of SACHED, the South African Committee of Higher Education, he's one of the senior educationists in the country, and subsequently went into a high level of government and then went to the Kellogg Foundation for a while and so on. Anyway, Bill Nasson and John Samuel then co-edited a book on education, with papers by a whole range of people, including Pundy [P.N.] Pillay, who's one person I've not mentioned thus far. But Pundy was another of those very actively involved at the core of the Inquiry because he was working in SALDRU through much of this time and doing a lot of work on the economics of education and so on.

So that whole process of drawing together themes on "poverty and" worked very well in the case of education, and we got a lovely book with a marvelous photograph that Omar produced from somewhere, for the front cover and so on. But the other books we failed to do -- I failed to do.

So that left the main reports, which was what was occupying the waking and, indeed, the sleeping hours of Mamphela and myself as one tried to wrestle with all of this huge massive material. And it's amazing about writing books, you know, because once you are finished, it all looks so simple and straightforward, you wonder why you didn't do it in three or four months. But as I always tell my students, the first person for whom one writes a book is for oneself, because you're trying to work out what you think, and if you knew in advance, you wouldn't have to write the book.

So we really struggled, Mamphela and I, as we tried to bring some order into all of this. We had two problems. One is that there was too much information, and the other was that there wasn't nearly enough. The too much information was that we had masses of stuff on facts and figures in Philipstown and Calitzdorp and Durban, and we had to bring that all together in a coherent pattern. Then when it came to, let's say, analytical stuff, there really was not very much analysis done by the academics, and there were other areas which we didn't adequately do even subsequently, which is the whole macro economic stuff. I'll come to that in a moment.

And also in terms of strategies. There was some work done on strategies, but again not enough, and I think it would be very interesting for historians of -- intellectual historians. What do they call it? Intellectual history, where you're looking at what ideas are current and what people focus on and so on. The extent to which the Carnegie Inquiry was a facts and figures inquiry, as opposed to an analytical inquiry. I hope we manage to readdress that somewhat in the book, but certainly if you look through the papers, the overwhelming set of facts and figures, and that, looking back on it, wasn't a bad thing, because we needed that information.

So we struggled away, and some of the writing was fairly obvious to do and some of it was infinitely more difficult. I can remember one particular chapter which we really struggled with. We couldn't get any shape to this thing. This wound up as a fairly early chapter on the book, on "Earth, Fire, and Water," which now that it's been written and put together, it's just so obvious, I mean, it's ridiculous. But it took us a long time to feel our way through this.

And essentially the argument here was that in the reserves, or the homelands, what had happened in South Africa was that these places become hugely overcrowded because of the way in which the migrant labor system was operating over the century to draw the labor out, but leave the population to expand in those areas. And then to that population had been added all those people being pushed off the white farms. So suddenly you had this huge dense population living in rural areas where there had been almost zero investment either for agriculture or for anything else, and, as it were, rural ghettos, without any

provision for water, with absolutely no provision for fuel and so on, as a result of that, people were walking hither and thither to cut down all the trees for fuel in Qwa Qwa, which was this densely populated area I told you about, even having to cut down such fruit trees as they had because in winter it got so cold, collecting the dung for fuel and so on.

Well, the consequences of all of that are environmental, and it took us a long time to get there, but suddenly you began to see how the apartheid system and the way in which it operated was also creating environmental disaster in the country. So that was what the "Earth, Fire, and Water" chapter turned out to be. Now, I can explain that to you in three or four minutes in a very simple way, but we didn't see that at the time and we really struggled before that pattern finally emerged.

So this business of confronting a massive quarry of information and then trying to make sense of it in terms of patterns that cohere and begin to see the connections, that's the tough work, and sometimes the most obvious things take a long time. So that book -- this is all by way of being an excuse of why the book didn't come out until the beginning of 1989, which was now nearly five years after the conference itself. So we had our material from '84 and then during that '85, '86, '87, '88 period we were writing. And, of course, we were trying to update. We had a number of post-conference papers, but there was other research work being done, so we could try and update all of that.

Then finally the book came out as the report of the Inquiry, which was not at all how we originally planned it. We thought we'd have five or six volumes. We thought there would

be a kind of commission or an authority or a board. In the end it was just two people writing a book on which we reported, essentially, on what had come out of the conference.

But that book then was well received and had a tremendous amount of publicity and discussion in the press, which was important because that's really the whole purpose of it, was to get a major debate going inside South Africa. And it was not banned, which was important. Of course -- not of course, but the reality was that by 1989, the political environment had shifted dramatically so that where at the time of the conference, 1984, the SABC [South Africa Broadcast Corporation], who'd sent people to interview us and to write up and to do a post-conference analysis and so on, on the SABC, that was all pulled off because P.W. Botha was attacking us. So we were more or less cold-shouldered by the broadcasting corporation, nothing on television and so on, or very little.

Five years later, if you like, is the political changes that were going on in the country. By the beginning of '89, when the book came out, we got -- and I spent a lot of time going and talking to the press and so on, huge double-page spreads in *Die Beeld* and *Report* and all that kind of thing, in the Afrikaans papers, very serious reviews by Afrikaans writers and journalists and thinkers and so on, saying, "Look, these are realities that we now have to face," and particularly because the book did make the connection between apartheid and poverty, without saying that's the only factor.

So that our sense was that we were very lucky in the timing, very, very lucky in the timing, because if that book had come out in 1980, it would have sunk without trace. If it had come out even in 1985, it would have sunk without trace. Coming out in 1989, although we

weren't all conscious of that at the time, kind of looking back on that with some hindsight, it was a perfect moment in terms of having the thinking in at that moment in South Africa. Now, that was just luck, with this proviso, that I don't think any of us understand quite yet as to how ideas emerge. Why should it be that at the beginning of 1980 the idea of a Carnegie Inquiry, which had been in the air for fifty years, forty years, suddenly takes root?

I mean, what are the sort of unconscious consciousness in this society that say that would happen then,

even although those of us who were involved in it were completely unaware that there were just major political changes around the corner which would make this kind of inquiry much more relevant than we thought it would be?

[END OF SESSION]

TTT

Interviewee: Francis Wilson Session #5

Interviewer: Mary Marshall Clark Cape Town, South Africa

Date: August 6, 1999

Q: Francis, coming out of the conference and beginning to write up the results, can you reflect on what your interactions with Carnegie were during that period?

Wilson: Yes, I'd be very happy to do that, because I've talked quite a lot already about interaction and the impact of Alan Pifer and of David Hamburg, as presidents, on this whole process, and, of course, of David Hood, who was a pivotal figure right from the beginning and in terms of my interaction and his interaction with other members of the commission. Of the commission -- of the [Carnegie] Inquiry -- that's a slip -- as we went forward.

But once the conference had happened and, of course, we'd had a number of people from Carnegie, both board and from the staff, out, then we were -- I think at the conference itself both Helene [L.] Kaplan and Barbara Finberg were both there, and certainly there was a lot of interaction with them, then back in New York itself with staff members. Because, really, for me Carnegie became something of a family. I mean, I was coming in and out of New York a great deal, as were other members of the Inquiry process. A number of people came in. We became very much at home in the offices in Madison Avenue.

For example, with the emergency of the book of photographs [*South Africa: The Cordoned Heart*] and the whole discussion about the whole thinking about the traveling exhibition

and the need for it in the United States and so on, Avery Russell, who was the publications officer in Carnegie at the time, played an absolutely key role both in terms of her professional advice to us and also in terms of her personal interest and commitment to the project. Avery believed in this thing, boots and all, as indeed many members of the staff did, but Avery had a huge commitment, although she'd never been to South Africa and has not yet, I don't think, ever been to South Africa, alas. I hope she will come. She was very involved in the whole process with the photographs and finding the right people in the United States. Alex Harris and Margaret Sartor, for example, coming out as a team to advise us, and others.

So that the photographic exhibition was very much developed in conjunction with Carnegie in New York, as was the book itself, because I had lots of discussions with people. I can't remember when Mamphela [Ramphele] herself first went to New York, but she got to know a number of members of Carnegie, David Hamburg, of course, particularly, during this process. And in the discussions and interactions, we were learning.

It helps illustrate my point that there is so much more that a creative foundation can do than simply supply dollars. It's the ideas and the experience and the cross-fertilization, because Carnegie, of course, had been the godfather, if that's the right word, of the [Gunnar Karl] Myrdal Commission [Footnote: This report became Myrdal's book *An American Dilemma*] in the United States, and that was very much a model for us as we tried to think through the South African dilemma, if I can put it that way, and just what had happened and how had Myrdal put that whole commission together, and all the other work, enormously creative work, that Carnegie's done within the United States. We looked at

that to sort of see what we could learn, and then members of the Carnegie staff or, indeed, board members would tell us something about it. So David Z. Robinson, for example, came out here and talked and was part of the process, and different members were involved.

I want to stress the importance of that, because it was very sensitively done, not any kind of "We know best" argument. It was a listening involvement, "But is there something that we could contribute from our own experience and our own ideas?" And that was tremendous. I really appreciated that and still do. And just put it on record that this was very much more than just a grant of dollars or a grant of dollars by one particular officer. It was a whole foundation involvement in the Inquiry, even by people who didn't even themselves come out to South Africa, Avery Russell a notable example of that.

So we were then doing a lot of hard thinking, post-conference, about how to disseminate, and I've talked about the book of photographs, the traveling exhibition, about the book on poverty education, *From Poverty to Liberty*, and about the *Uprooting Poverty* book itself. And then in the year that followed that, that book was published in January 1989, then we made it our business to try and ensure maximum publicity for the books and maximum discussion of the ideas in the books. So we took, first of all, the conference as a major public relations event, to have huge discussion about poverty in South Africa, which was good, but it was tough on the journalists because they had 300 papers to read and to try and put into interesting news stories in the space of five or six days or whatever. I don't remember how many days it was. But that was a tough call for journalists to try and make that interesting and palatable in the event there was an enormous amount of discussion at the time of the conference.

And in the same way we tried to make the publication of the main report, the *Uprooting Poverty* book, also an occasion for public discussion by means of reviews and extracts and all of that. That, I think, was quite successful, because we had a lot of reviews, we had a lot of discussion, we had a number of interviews, so that the whole thing became part of the public debate. Now, we weren't to know in January 1989 that within a year, literally -- of course, it was February 1990 -- that this would actually be part of the long term. But perhaps this enables me to move straight on to the discussion about the recommendations, the findings, if you like, of the Inquiry, because essentially as the report emerged -- and *Uprooting Poverty* is essentially a report on what happened at the conference and in the subsequent work and subsequent analysis, so it stands in the name of the two authors, but it incorporates, encapsulates the work of 350 or more.

First of all were the sheer facts of poverty in South Africa, and that we were able to document in very, very great detail. It affects, of course, largely black South Africans, that it has a rural bias, that it has a gender bias, that it has an age bias, that young people are likely to be more unemployed than older people, that women are likely to be poorer than men, that female-headed households are going to be, on average, poorer than male-headed households. You know, all those kinds of things which, of course, alas, are not true only of South Africa, but are more global phenomena. But all of that we were able to document, plus the stuff on health, on unemployment, on absence of clean drinking water.

So we built up a profile of poverty in South Africa which was very thorough as far as it went, but was not a statistical sample. I want to make this -- it wasn't yet the overall

questionnaire based on a scientific random sample which could say, well, X percent of the people don't have clean drinking water, and Y percent don't have wood to cook their food and so on. But we were, nevertheless, able to give a very clear picture of poverty, and I think that, in general, was its main impact, because it did stop people in their tracks. I don't think it was only white South Africans; I think it raised the consciousness more generally about the centrality of poverty as a major political issue in South Africa, that it really had to be dealt with.

Now, I don't want to overstress that. It's not as though black South Africans needed the Carnegie Inquiry to tell them about poverty, because, as I've said all along, they made the point at the beginning, "Look, we know about this." Nevertheless, I think that the process, that nine-year process of intellectual involvement by South African academics, and not only academics, but both black and white, in thinking around these issues, sharpened all our minds about the issue.

Then with regard to the analysis, that was written into the book and that, of course, is still debated, and people wouldn't necessarily agree with the particular analysis that Mamphela and I put down, although I would still stand by it and I think she will, too, in terms of our understanding of the role of the historical forces, conquests, slavery, the pass laws, the way in which the system operated. Of course, we were trying to make the point that one couldn't simply say that in South Africa apartheid is to blame, because that is part of the cause, but it doesn't cover everything. One needs to sort of try and analyze in more detail. So we were looking at things like education. At one level, apartheid is behind education as well. So it's kind of like peeling an onion, really, when one's talking about causes.

But we wrote a fairly systematic account of causes, which I think still stands reasonably. I think where we, with hindsight, I would argue we didn't have enough emphasis was the sort of macro economic perspective, the kind of analysis that came in when the World Bank brought its big guns to bear on South Africa in the post-1990 period and we got more examination of growth patterns, investment patterns, and all that sort of thing. I think that the World Bank analysis which subsequently emerged in the post-1990 period was a huge addition to our understanding of the causes and nature of poverty in South Africa.

So ours was by no means comprehensive and certainly not the last word on the subject, but there were some insights there that I think were important and which need to be maintained. And all of us, I think, were quite clear that poverty was not something that was the fault of the poor or some psychological manifestation, as the first Carnegie Inquiry had had quite a lot to say about the feckless poor and all of that. That was absolutely not part of this Inquiry.

But then the more interesting work, it seems to me, after that is having documented the poverty, which I think was the significant achievement of the Inquiry, was to start debating and discussing strategies, and we talked an awful lot about that, in a way only go into the foothills of where to go, but there was some quite important points made. The first one, which was important in 1989 but didn't become very important after 1990, although not irrelevant, was that we made the distinction between short run and long run. Short run, for us, was what could be done now, i.e., 1989, within the parameters of an apartheid state that could significantly affect the lives of the poor, of poor people, involving them, of course,

because it's a process of empowerment, which would in itself not be counted to any longer-term strategy to bring about political change. So that was the whole debate about short run.

In the long run, we would say, "Look, there is need to recognize that all sorts of aspects of poverty cannot be dealt with in South Africa without fundamental political change which will enable, e.g., land reform, the abolition of the pass laws, or whatever it may be." So we tried to make that distinction.

When it came to short run, we looked at a framework for thinking. Mamphela, of course, had enormous insights into this whole framework for thinking coming out of her black consciousness and activist period of her life, where there was that -- very correctly, in my view -- that enormous emphasis on empowerment of the poor and how to involve them themselves. Ithuseng [Community Health Center], which was her health center up in the Northern Province, Ithuseng literally means "help yourselves." So that whole theme, the black consciousness theme, if I can put it that way, of how do we ourselves deal with this problem, we the poor, and how do others help and empower those who are poor to deal with that problem, that was part of the paradigm shift that seemed to be necessary as a framework for thinking. In other words, take ownership of this problem as poor people and say, "All right. What are we going to do?"

Then there was a whole range of things. We thought about organizations for change, and organizations for change were like the role of the trade unions, the role of the churches, the role of business, the role of law, the role of research, even, in the universities. How could

this be more finally honed or tuned to dealing with issues of poverty? What could be done in terms of non-governmental organizations? How could they take root or be encouraged to grow stronger? And, of course, the 1980s, looking back historically, will be seen as a very strong period for non-governmental organizations in South Africa. I mean, they were sprouting like mushrooms all over the show. I didn't think we were quite aware, although we wrote a lot about them, just how significant they were historically, because that was the high decade of NGOs [non-governmental organizations] in South Africa. So we talked a lot about that.

Then we came to a chapter on the role of the state, in which we said, well, fundamental to dealing with poverty in South Africa is a recognition that power is at the heart of it and one isn't going to be able to really get at the issue of poverty and the causes of poverty until there's a democratic society, a democratic government in place. But once that is in place, what are the issues that that democratic government is going to have to deal with, and how does it look at them?

So we talked about issues like water, for example, issues of energy, what kind of water, what sort of responsibility does the state have to ensure clean drinking water for all citizens and what infrastructural investment is required? And those issues are very much on the table. Indeed, I was put on by Kader Asmal when he became minister of water affairs, on to the National Water Advisory Council, and I'm sure was because of that section of the chapter where we were talking about the role of the state to ensure clean drinking water for all citizens. So there was a lot of discussion about the role of the state.

Then we finished off with a chapter on tough questions, which came directly as a result of a seminar in New Haven at Leonard Thompson's South African research program [at Yale University]. I'll remember the name of the person in a moment who came up to us and said, "You know, you really have to look at some of the tough questions that still remain to be answered," and we sat down and wrote that chapter, because he was absolutely right. The person who subsequently became Bill Clinton's -- organized a lot of his focus groups. I'll think of his name just now [Stanley Greenberg].

We tried to think through some of the critical questions that remain to be asked in South Africa. For example, the issue of sanctions. What happened if the strategies to bring about political change were contradictory to the strategies required to deal with poverty? How did you handle that? We were very careful in the way in which we wrote it, because we felt we didn't want to come out against sanctions. At the same time, we didn't want to come out against strategies against poverty.

And so we made the point that part of the agony facing those who were poor in South Africa, the majority of black South Africans, was that the cost of change could be actually prolonged poverty, that if sanctions were going to be an important weapon, that for a time being that might stifle economic growth or dampen economic growth. And we quoted -- we were lucky we had a good biblical quote here, which was the children of Israel complaining to Moses about they'd had enough of all this business of in the wilderness. They really wanted an end of all of this process of transition, because they were finding it too painful.

What we were trying to say was that a political way was going to have to be made, or was being made, by the ANC and others in terms of sanctions as strategically necessary to bring about change, even though in the short run that had consequences for growth, because at that stage, you know, the establishment view in South Africa -- white view, largely -- was, "How can anybody who's against poverty be in favor of sanctions?" Because those are contradictory. And one had to live through those contradictions. So that was one question that we tried to deal with in a way that would help people to see that one sometimes needed to move beyond that, if I can put it that way.

A second issue was the whole question of land and arguing that a state would have to face the issue of land distribution, and did one just nationalize the land? What did one do? Now, we didn't do much more than ask questions there, but simply made the point that nationalization, because this is sort of pre the fall of the Berlin Wall when this was actually being written -- I'm trying to think when the Berlin Wall fell. I think just after the book was published. So the issue of nationalization was still a very lively issue, and we were not convinced that nationalization of the land would necessarily solve problems or that nationalization of the mines would solve problems.

At the same time, it was clear that the way in which the cards had been stacked against black South Africans for all these years meant that land and minerals were now all in white hands. And how was one going to deal with that redistribution? Well, that is still a very tough question and still facing South Africa.

Another question was the capitalism/socialism debate, you know. Do we simply go the capitalist route with free markets and so on? And we argued, "Look, the insight from capitalism is that markets under most, but not all, circumstances can be the most efficient way of allocating resources, that free markets can release energy of individuals who wouldn't otherwise be released, that an important insight of the capitalist system is the need to separate." I'm not sure if that is still an insight, but the need to separate economic from political power and not put it all in the same hands as was happening in the Soviet Union and so on.

But also making the point that the insights of the socialist system were that we are, as Saint Paul makes the remark, "We're all members one of another," and that life is not simply a rat race, with everything going to the leanest and sometimes the meanest rats, as it were, but that one's got to find a way of developing a society in which there is real care for those who, for one reason or another, can't cope with getting to the top. And that remains a very real issue. One just looks at health care in the United States to make the point.

How does one devise a society in which those who are, for one reason or another, outside the framework of success and security, how do they survive? And that is both a national question within a country, but it's increasingly an international question. And that question's not going to go away just by sort of saying, "Well, the market's going to solve the problem."

And so those were the kind of tough questions that we thought it would be necessary to end

the book with. Of course, the final one -- I think it was the last one, but it was an important one -- was to say that although political change and democracy is a necessary condition to deal with poverty in South Africa, you're not going to deal with it until you have a democratic society. We have to recognize that it's not a sufficient condition, that to have a democratic government in power does not thereby guarantee that poverty is going to be eliminated or that the poor are not going to go on getting exploited in one way or another, because democracies have the capacity to build power groups who can squash the powerless. So that issue, we felt, was very important to put onto the table before any democratic government came to power and said, "Listen, this is also something we have to work on." Now, that, of course, remains one of the big questions in South Africa today.

So those tough questions were an important component of not the recommendations, but of the process of consciousness-raising, because I think what the Inquiry did more than make proposals, because it wasn't fantastic about making proposals, it tried to coordinate some ideas, let's put it that way, but I think what it did manage to achieve to some extent was a raising of consciousness about the realities of poverty in South Africa, about the realities of inequality in South Africa, and facing people with the complexity -- because that's important to recognize -- the complexity of bringing about economic justice. Let's put it that way, of dealing with issues of poverty, dealing with issues of inequality. Those remain on the table.

Q: Let me ask you a couple of questions, then, about that issue of impact. First of all, what degree of impact did you intend and what degree of impact did you see in terms of the general white community's understanding of the depth and breadth of poverty? Did it feed

into, as far as the government, understanding that this poverty is so efficient, that apartheid must be dismantled? Did it add to that process?

Wilson: You know, I'm not party to the thinking of the apartheid government. I think that we felt when the book came out and the newspapers, particularly the Afrikaans-language newspapers started taking it very seriously and the kind of reviews we got and the spread we got in terms of the ideas, was that it was clear that within Afrikaner nationalism, things were happening that we had been unaware of. There was an openness and a willingness to look at the arguments that were coming up in this book which we were very surprised by, partly because we'd been blind to the political changes that had been taking place. And it was certainly very different from, let's say, even five years before with P.W. Botha attacking us for even discussing the issue.

So we were very thrilled with the extent of debate within white South Africa, and I think it is true that the Inquiry managed to communicate to white South Africa something of the realities and something of the connections. Now, one's got to be careful, because, you know, one review the authors of a book will read avidly and learn all by heart and know all about it, but most other people in the society won't even know that that review's been written. So it's a little bit difficult to analyze what its impact is. But I think that there was very good debate.

What we wanted to know, however -- and this was subsequently very exciting for us -- was that, I mean, we learned later that Nelson Mandela himself had got hold of a copy while he was -- by this stage he was out at Pollsmoor in his prison house, on his way out, but we

didn't know that, and so he'd had the book for something like a year before he came out from jail. So he'd had time to read it and think about it, which was terrific, because that meant that that was part of the process of our subsequent government thinking, which we weren't to know.

What its impact on government thinking, on post-apartheid thinking, on the new government was, post 1994, it's impossible to say. How do I know? Simply to make the point that the arrival of a democratic government in South Africa did not need the Carnegie Inquiry to put poverty on the map. I mean, this was why you'd had the liberation movements all these years struggling for a just society and wanting to get political power so that they could begin to do something about it.

What I think was fortunate was that the Carnegie Inquiry took place in the decade just prior, so that there was a process of uncovering the contours, if I can put it that way, and involving a lot of people who subsequently became involved in government, either as MPs or as civil servants in government, who had been doing some quite hard thinking as part of their participation in the Inquiry about, let's say, health and poverty or about water and poverty or about law and poverty. And so that that thinking could filter very naturally into the wider process brought about by the democratic revolution, the democratic transformation. So the timing was incredibly good, and that was just one of those historical very lucky breaks, that it was the right topic to be working on at the right time, and because it involved such a lot of people, that that thinking could filter through in ways that I think did help to shape something of the debates subsequently, yes.

[END TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE; BEGIN TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO]

Q: You mentioned in the last tape that you have now been appointed to a water advisory committee in the new government. I'm intrigued, given the situation in the old government and the amount of work you did on water, how things have changed.

Wilson: That's extremely interesting, and certainly we wouldn't, from the Carnegie Inquiry side, claim very much in this instance, except to say that what the Inquiry did do was to put the issue of water deprivation onto the map in a way that hadn't happened before. And I'm very interested in that myself as an economist, because, you know, when we were sort of young radical students floating around the University of Cape Town arguing left, right, and center Marxist, non-Marxist, and everybody else, all the focus was on the land question in South Africa, and never did I hear anybody talk about the water question, and yet it is fundamental. What happened in Carnegie was that we began to get at that because those who were enduring poverty in rural areas told us. They said, "Have you thought about water? Just consider this fact, that we're spending all this time collecting water." So those facts began to trickle in, if I can put it that way, trickle down.

But it really took the appointment of a dynamic minister, Professor Kader Asmal, who was the first minister of water affairs in President Mandela's new government in 1994. There was a crack made at the time that the closest that Kader Asmal had ever come to water before he was appointed was in his whisky glass. But he was a very smart politician and very able lawyer, and what had been seen as a kind of rather minor ministry he turned into an absolutely central ministry in the new government in a very powerful way. Essentially

what he did was to focus on issues of distribution of water and say, "Look, we have this situation of water," and a lot of the facts had come out of the research that academics had done both in the Carnegie Inquiry and in a subsequent overall survey in which SALDRU had also been involved, and said, "This is untenable, and we have to redress this, and there are a number of things that have to be done. (A), a whole infrastructure has to be created. There's going to be social investment to enable the poor to get access to clean drinking water," and set about using funds from the reconstruction and development program and wherever he would lay hold of funds from whatever government was prepared to give some aid, in order to try and extend the number of households that had access to water.

And that has been a powerful program. It's not done as much as needs to be done, let's put that straight away. There's still huge numbers of South Africans who do not have access, really access to clean drinking water, let's say within 200 meters of where they stay, or 200 yards of where they live. But, nevertheless, there has been a big thrust. Of course, this was the first government that had ever focused on that issue.

But more significantly even than that, in my view -- and this is something that we hadn't really thought about at all in the Carnegie Inquiry -- was the focus on law, because Kader Asmal, being a lawyer, thought this through from a law point of view, and the facts are really as follows, that in terms of the law applying to water in South Africa, riparian rights meant that the people, largely men, largely white, who controlled the land in South Africa, who owned the land, had the right to control the water. Now, that wasn't entirely -- I mean, there was an act of 1956 which ensured that towns could get their water and so on,

but very largely through the rural areas of South Africa, through which the water runs, the landowners had the riparian rights, which meant they controlled the water.

So that the water question really was a distribution question, and those who controlled the water really controlled much of agricultural wealth. One of the facts that I had never realized -- and it's appalling how ignorant we economists are about so many important things -- was that the consumption of water in South Africa, fifty percent of the water is used for irrigation purposes. Now, I was staggered when I heard that figure. In fact, in South Africa it's relatively low compared with some other societies, and the United States is incredible when one starts examining the political economy of water in the USA.

There's a book I was reading recently, *The Cadillac Desert* [written by Marc Reisner], which all Americans should read, just about the politics of water in the West, in Arizona and all the way through to California. And so through the intervention of our new minister of water affairs, who has now, in fact, moved on to become minister of education, South Africans have to do some really hard thinking about the reform of law, water reform. So unexpectedly it's been water reform rather than land reform, which has been the hallmark of the first Mandela government. We got that completely wrong in our book, because we said, "Look, the focus is going to have to be on land."

In fact, the focus in many ways, quite properly, has been on water, and they needed a whole new law, for example, to move away from riparian rights, to a sense of water belonging to the whole society, and that there needed to be a water reserve to ensure that the first priority was that every household had the right to basic minimum of water for decent life.

And secondly, there had to be in the reserve whatever water was needed for environmental considerations to make sure that the estuaries didn't run dry and that the frogs could go on being frogs.

Now, that double thrust of fundamental human right to adequate water for household use and an environmental right to ensure that the environment is sustained, that is brand new in South African thinking. So that law I see as one of the great achievements of the first democratic government in South Africa. It's very exciting to see how rather dull research being done in the 1980s then got written up and helped to raise -- it wasn't the only factor, of course -- but helped to raise consciousness about the importance of water, so that when the new government came to power and a really intelligent politician like Kader Asmal wound up with a water portfolio, he was able to grab that information and use it to drive a whole new political thrust into the society. That's really the story.

Now I can expand on that in all kinds of ways, about all that remains to be done and the problems of governing water at the local level and so on. We've got huge issues, though we haven't solved our water question by any manner of means. We haven't answered it, but we've begun to move in the right direction.

Q: Are there other areas that you identified as potential policy areas in your research that one could draw a thread from and see ways in which it may have made a difference in the life of the poor under the new government?

Wilson: I'm not sure that there's very much that I want to focus on at this stage. I think that historians are going to need to look back and trace the sources of the thinking of the new democratic government, because it came from all over. I mean, don't forget you had a group of very intelligent people in jail for twenty to thirty years, thinking things through and doing a whole lot of thinking on their own. Then you had all the exiles traveling the world. I mean, with experience of New York, London, Cuba, Moscow, Japan.

I mean, so that the lessons that were absorbed by the African diaspora, it seemed to me, need to be put into all of this, so that there was a period from 1964, you can put it, to 1994, that thirty-year period was, at one level, an extraordinary period for South African intelligentsia, largely black, but not all black, around the world, obviously thinking about change in South Africa and thinking about alternatives.

I think with hindsight, if we had all been more aware of how likely change was to come in the twentieth century as opposed to sometime in the twenty-first, we would have done more thinking about policies of a new government as opposed to strategies to bring about change. But, of course, you couldn't think about policies for a new government until you'd sorted out the strategies for change.

What we tried to do in Carnegie -- and this was, in a sense, a lucky break, partly because it was just too tough to be thinking about these things inside South Africa, was we said, "Look, we are not going to be involved in thinking about the strategies that will bring about political change. Just count us out. What we do need to be doing something about is what

sort of policies might happen." So we had done a little -- but I want to stress "little" -- thinking, because the conference didn't focus primarily on that.

But there was some work done, and I think that what one can say is that the mapping of poverty and the raising of consciousness about poverty and inequality, although this was by no means the invention of the Carnegie Inquiry and something that was generally known, that thinking was sharpened. That consciousness was sharpened, so that it maybe became more of the political process than might otherwise have been the case.

But I think other people are going to have to look at that probably with a greater historical depth, but what one can trace is in something like water, how our new minister was able to pick up certain facts and say, "Right. This we have to move on." And there may well have been some other areas, but in a way, all the issues of education that we were talking about, the issues of poverty and inequality, these in broad terms were known. So it didn't require the Carnegie Inquiry, as it were, to help direct the attention of the new government. What perhaps the Carnegie Inquiry did do was to help provide a few more markers along the way as to where were the areas that had top priority and what were the kinds of issues in the nitty-gritty that needed to be looked at.

Q: As you were mapping this belly of the beast from within, gridding it, did you ever feel sort of like Job, like you needed to jump out and find some help from outside? Did you ever come to a point where it was just overwhelming and frightening, the amount of information you were getting about the amount of people being starved in this country?

Wilson: Yes, that's a difficult question. I mean, one does sometimes get overwhelmed by the amount of suffering in the world, and, I mean, that's not just a South African phenomenon, but you think of the wider African continent or you look at all kinds of suffering -- bombing in the Vietnam War, you know. So that the degree of suffering in the world is indeed, if you just stop and think only of that, quite overwhelming.

But I think that part of what we may have learned in South Africa is that even when things seem impossible -- and that's really the lesson of Nelson Mandela's life and so many others, not just him, but I mean he, as it were, embodies it -- even when things seem impossible and there is no future, that if you can go on believing and persevering and working, then in ways way beyond one's understanding, things can, as it were, emerge. And that seems to me to have happened many times in history. So the capacity or the necessity to go on struggling for justice, working against poverty, working for peace, eliminating nuclear weapons, all these kinds of things which at times seem completely overwhelming and impossible solution.

I think that it's worth tackling them, and I think one can make an impact, and I think individuals have shown the impact that they can make. I can talk for days on stories of different people who I either have known or watched or seen do things which over time have made an enormous difference. So I think that was very much part of my own consciousness.

Of course, one of the extraordinary things about South Africa, and very much during the seventies and eighties, sixties, seventies, and eighties, was that although it was a very

tough place at one level, a sort of overview level, you look at it from the outside and there was a very tough system in place, there were the most amazing people tucked away under stones quietly doing their thing, you know, running a little development agency here or a little scholarship fund there or a little literacy class here and so on, and people simply saying, "Look, we're human beings. We're creative. We're going to find a way of operating," and who do find ways of operating.

So it seems to me that what one needs to try and focus on is not worrying too much about drowning in a stormy sea, but making sure that one learns how to swim and keeping going.

Q: Could you talk a little bit about the selection of the title *Uprooting Poverty*?

Wilson: That's interesting. I wrote a book once years ago, which I had a great title, which I thought -- it was all about wages in the mining industry and differences between black and white, and I wanted to call this book *Black, White and Gold*, which I thought was a great title. I still think it's a great title. But the Cambridge University Press, in their wisdom, said to me, no, that was a very bad title because the kind of people who would be attracted by that title would be appalled by the content, all the figures and so on, and the type of people who wanted to read those statistics would be put off by this jazzy title. So we ended up with *Labour in the South African Gold Mines 1911-1969* or something, unbelievably boring.

So I was determined this time around that we would stick with a decent title, and Mamphela and I talked this through endlessly. What kind of title could we get? And I

simply don't remember where the idea of *Uprooting Poverty* came from, but I do remember testing it out on a very senior American journalist, whom I shall protect by not naming him, and saying, "What do you think about this as a title?" And he said, "Won't do. Just no good at all." But we thought some more, Mamphela and I, and we decided, no, this would be a good title. We liked it. So we called it *Uprooting Poverty* and thought through a bit more about why we wanted to call it *Uprooting Poverty*, and I suppose the two points there -- well, we needed "poverty" in the title, because that was the central theme, but the concept of "uprooting" really had a couple of dimensions to it.

One was because of the roots, *radix* in the Latin origins, was a focus on the need for radical action, and we believe that very profoundly, that we're not just talking about alleviating or making it slightly marginally better; you want to uproot the thing and uproot the processes that lead to poverty. So that was the one thing.

The second is that the concept of roots implies something organic -- growth -- rather than engineering. And while one can talk about reconstruction of a new society or building a new society, we think -- and maybe this comes from my rural and Mamphela's rural backgrounds -- we think that growth is a much more better analogy. You want to think about the organicness of the process in a society and how things can grow and how to uproot those processes that are causing poverty, and nurture those processes that are doing away with poverty. So there was that.

There was another aspect, of course, and this was sort of kind of a couple way of looking at

it, that poverty itself is very uprooting. It destabilizes people. So there's that dimension as well.

So we thought, in the end, this is not a bad word. In fact, it's proved to be useful, because "uprooting" itself has become almost associated with poverty in the South African context. So that's where the title came from. But I have no idea who came up with those two words originally.

Q: Can we talk a little bit about dissemination in the United States? You went to the post-conference at Duke [University].

Wilson: Yes. Well, this was never on our particular agenda, for obvious reasons. I mean, we're South Africans worrying about the setup here. But Carnegie wanted very much to have real dissemination in the United States, and we were very happy to go along with them. We'd had this enormous help from Carnegie, so the least we could do was to go and do it there. And I think there were two reasons behind that. One is that we wanted to share our ideas and put it on the map, as it were, and tell Americans about it. And of course it's part of the political process about helping people in the United States understand what was going on in South Africa.

But there was also another side to it, it seems to me, looked at in slightly bigger terms, and that is the United States is the world power in 1989, even before the fall of the Soviet Union, was very clearly, you know, the major world power. And yet I know, having lived in the United States in the sixties and so on, just how prone it is to isolationism and it's very

easy in the United States, where one is -- well, certainly up till then -- only one language, because Spanish hadn't yet become -- everyone wasn't so conscious of it as they now are. But there is a real danger for Americans thinking that this is how the world is and there's nothing else out there. We know those maps of the world seen in the minds of various American presidents who shall remain unnamed.

But the sense that one could contribute in some measure to public education in the United States, which has clearly been a Carnegie theme all these years, I mean, it's in the interest of all of us, because those who wield power in the world are now wielding power not only on behalf of the United States, but on behalf of the global community that those who wield power really understand a lot more about the world than they currently do. So that was the broader thing.

So the dissemination process took a number of forms. At the time that *The Cordoned Heart* came out, the book of photographs, Omar Badsha's book, we traveled in the United States. I'm just trying to remember. It may have been that at that time Omar was still unable to travel because of a passport. I can't always remember just who was able to travel when and so on. But certainly I know that at some stage I found myself on an airplane flying all over the United States, talking about this book in a wonderfully organized, coordinated Carnegie dissemination exercise, which had its own amusing side.

I mean, I can remember winding up in some morning chat show, which I do not think was *Oprah Winfrey*, as I would have remembered that, but it was in Chicago at eleven o'clock in the morning. There was this chat show for women in the suburbs of Chicago, and there was

this wonderful waiting room into which all of us who were going to be in this chat show were penned, kind of a sack around us, hot as could be, and then we were led on one by one, or whatever it was, in front of the cameras.

I mean, there's a great novel, almost, to be written about the kind of interaction in these rooms, because on this occasion we had a hunk who had to be taken before the cameras to explain, asked some political questions about which he knew nothing, but he could just be a bodily hunk. We had two ethical ladies from the South who came in to talk, I think on abortion. I can't quite remember. But they were having very ethical discussions about serious issues. And we had a gray-suited man who explained to me beforehand that he was involved in computer dating. I thought this was a very interesting innovation. He explained that this, of course, in Chicago he was getting going computer dating just between men. That was his concern. And, you know, as a South African, I thought to myself, well, this is a long way from Bloemfontein, if I can put it that way. Because this was still 1989. Then after this riveting discussion by all kinds of different people, I was led on like a lamb to the slaughter in this morning chat show, and the host looked at me very earnestly and said, "And now, Dr. Wilson, maybe you'd like to tell us about poverty in South Africa." And you could just hear the entire television sets of Chicago suburbs closing down as I tried to be interesting, given what had happened before. So there was this process of dissemination, some of it I think more successful than that.

We had subsequently, in 1989, when the *Uprooting Poverty* book came out, Carnegie organized -- again it was a lot of work done by Avery Russell in this -- organized a conference down at Duke, to which all kinds of people came to discuss the book and to

launch it, and that was the conference at which Thabo Mbeki himself was there for all the time of the conference. In fact, I think it ended with a snowstorm, and most people then stayed for another day or two days, snowed in, so there was further discussion on a number of different themes. That was a wonderful conference and very stimulating. It was one of those conferences I would like to go back to and read some of the papers, because you had a number of black South African exiles writing some of their own thoughts about all of this, because this was 1989. This was still before 1990 and we didn't know anything about the changes that were in the offing.

So that was the process of dissemination which was aimed largely at Americans, but which also had the very useful component or dimension that it was broadening the debate to include the exiles in a way that hadn't quite happened before, because having Thabo Mbeki, and I think his brother Moeletsi [Mbeki]
was also there on that occasion. So we were getting a wider debate amongst South Africans about these issues.

It's impossible for me to say what impact this process of dissemination had except to say that I think that the photographic exhibition, which was largely put together by Omar, but working with the Institute for Photography in New York, and again with Avery putting a tremendous amount of energy and skill into that. That exhibition went on and on and on and traveled all around the United States, so I would imagine that when that is assessed, one will see that that had a very considerable impact, which we always know, of course, the power of the visual and the power of photographs and how a well-organized exhibition like that can really make an impact.

Now, that was all way beyond what we had thought about originally, but we were very happy as South Africans to participate in that process.

Q: At the end of the day, how would you characterize the impact of all of this work on your own life, in your own thinking?

Wilson: Wow, that's a difficult one to answer. I mean, it took ten years of my life, because it began in January 1980, I can remember, with this conversation with David Hood, and went on all the way to really 1990, because in the year after 1989, quite apart from dissemination in the United States, I was running around South Africa making speeches here, there, and everywhere, talking about the whole issue of poverty in that process of dissemination.

I think that for me it was one of the great opportunities of a lifetime. I mean, imagine having that kind of opportunity to be involved with all one's colleagues from a wide political spectrum, doing research that one believes really matters, and being backed by a very sensitive foundation who's prepared to put in the money that is necessary to make it happen, and able to come through to the far end with some output that one can put onto the table, as it were. So that for me, I'm just hugely grateful for that opportunity, and I learned an enormous amount because this kind of research work is largely a learning experience for those involved. I mean, I learned from my colleagues, of course. I learned an enormous amount from people I met around South Africa as one went to different homes and different

organizations and talked to people, discussed with migrants, discussed with housewives talking about what it meant to be poor.

So there was a focus to conversation, if I can put it that way, for a long period of time, and a growing consciousness about just what made the society tick. So in terms of my own personal work, why I ever became an economist, was to try and understand South Africa better. So you find out a bit about the gold mines, you find out a bit about the migrant labor system, and then that whole canvas broadens as you try and understand more about the wider issues of poverty and economy and distribution and the international dimensions to all of that. So it was a huge learning process at an economic level, at a political level, at a personal level.

Yes, I could go on. Maybe I should summarize it by saying it was very, very rich, and out of it came all kinds of friendships which have endured and will endure until I die, largely with South Africans. But, of course, also that interaction with Carnegie. I want to make this point that I'd said earlier about the family, as it were, that I could wander into Madison Avenue and feel very at home talking with different members of the Carnegie staff, both in the Alan Pifer time and in the David Hamburg time, which gave me, again, real friendships and the possibility of understanding and meeting Americans as we wrestled with issues and they helped us think through problems in South Africa and as one talked with them about their own other issues either within Carnegie itself, as they were thinking about their own programs in the United States and elsewhere.

[END TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO; BEGIN TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE]

Q: Francis, you described your efforts to gain access to certain research about the gold mines as a giant detective search. Tell me something about that and what it was like to try to get hold of real information in South Africa at that time and then also later in the seventies and eighties.

Wilson: Yes. Well, of course, the research on the gold mines was in the early 1960s. I started that research, actually trying to dig out information in 1965. At that stage we had extraordinarily little information was published about wages and that kind of thing, particularly in the mining industry, so I thought it would be useful if I could get hold of that material. And it was detective work.

I came back to South Africa with Lindy. We had spent that nine months in the States, as I described, and went to live in Johannesburg. She got a job at *Drum* magazine, working with Jim Bailey, and I went to work my way around the mining industry, put on a jacket and a tie, and went to talk to everybody I could, to just see how I could get information. I was getting absolutely nowhere.

Eventually I managed to persuade Anglo-American that I could work in their library. They had a library. They said, sure, I could work in the library, but I wouldn't have access to everything. I worked in the library for quite some time, as I recollect, and got to know the librarian very well. Librarians, of course, are interested in information, so periodically I would see something that was kind of slightly off limits, but, nevertheless, there was still quite careful access.

I think then people got more used to me, and bit by bit, more and more information came my way, officially, as it were, but without people actually saying, "We're giving it to you." And then I was granted the opportunity of going underground, which is incredibly important, so that I could actually go down in the mines and meet miners and talk to people and so on.

So bit by bit, the information came. Of course, one of the key sources was the Chamber of Mines itself, and I can remember at that stage going to talk to one of the senior people in the Chamber of Mines, people who knew my parents-in-law. My father-in-law was a Johannesburg businessman. So I had some kind of respectability rubbing off on those grounds. They said, "Sure, of course we'd like to let you have access to this information," and so on, and, in fact, took me down into the great big archives to see these huge files behind -- they were in safes. I was absolutely amazed that here was all this information.

Then at the end of that discussion or a couple of days later, they said to me, "Of course, there's just one small point here, and that is that if we do give you this information, we'll need you to sign a little statement that when you've written it all up, you'll allow us to check it all through, because, of course, you may make some mistakes. We'd like to just be sure about that, and we'd obviously have the say as to whether or not it was going to be published or not."

So I said, "Well, I'd be very happy for you to check it, because I don't want to make any mistakes, but in the end, I must have the editorial right to whether I'm going to publish or

not, because the interpretation you may not agree with 100 percent. You may or you may not, but I can't be subject to that sort of veto." And they were very upset, and the doors clanged shut and I never got that information from the Chamber of Mines.

So this business of trying to get information while retaining some kind of academic intellectual integrity and independence has always been tricky, but bit by bit the information came my way. In fact, you know, I decided, in the end -- my mother at that stage was doing a lot of work with natural observation in one of the animal reserves in South Africa, studying animals because she and a psychologist, Ronald Hall, were looking at animal behavior, and, of course, part of that is you've got to spend a lot of time there until the animals get used to you, and then once they get used to you, then they just go on behaving normally. And I decided that actually research work was not that different, that you just needed to be around for a long time until people got used to you and they didn't see you as too threatening. You were slightly different and a bit odd, but you were still an ordinary human being.

So just by being there for long enough, people, I think, began to feel that they could trust me with the information, that I wasn't going to misuse it, but that I would remain independent. So in the end, I was very lucky and got an enormous amount of information about the mining industry and I was given access to all sorts of things and was able to get that statistical data.

So that's what I mean by the detective work, because that was, I think, the first time that that particular set of data about wages in the mining industry and the comparisons and so

on had come up. And I'm sure there were some politics behind all that, that some people wanted that information to come out and others didn't. I'm aware of all of that. So that's the sort of detective work.

But it has always made me very conscious of the enormous importance in society of information. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of a totalitarian society is that it keeps tight hold on information. I think it was Kenneth Boulding, the great British economist who was for many, many years in the United States, of course, who made a remark years ago which I always found very comforting, living through the long hard days in South Africa. He said something to this effect, that a totalitarian society in the long run is doomed because it corrupts its own sources of information. Very profound remark. Because those at the top in power like to get information that is comforting, so it tends to get filtered that way. And if you don't have other information coming in from the side, then bit by bit that information becomes very warped until in the end the reality that you perceive is completely not what is actually the truth.

So that the importance, the political, sociological, social, whatever the word is, importance of information is enormous, and this is true not only, of course, in things like a free press, which we agree about, a really free press where people are free to come up with unpopular ideas, but in terms of the basic information about society, about wage structures and all of that. So we believe very strongly in that. This is pertinent to the subsequent work that part of what we were trying to do in the Carnegie Inquiry was simply to put on the table information. Of course, we had to think through and then argue the case that that sort of work was important. It's not enough. We've agreed earlier that just collecting information

all by itself is not sufficient. It's for a purpose. It's for healing, as it were. But it's not to be despised or underestimated just how significant it is to be able to get that information, as one can see in those societies where it's not available.

So that was very much part of the thinking behind why that decade of the Carnegie Inquiry was important, although I would hope there was much else besides just getting information onto the table, and has been important for subsequent work.

Q: In reading Helen Zille's work, she worked on the problem of influx control and interviewed a number of people in the government about their knowledge, really, of the rural areas in particular and the real facts of hunger. Were you surprised that they really didn't know or were they pretending they didn't know?

Wilson: You know, there's a wonderful Yiddish phrase which I now forget, and I don't speak Yiddish, but which comes from the 1930s, which we quoted in *Uprooting Poverty*, in fact, about "You make yourself not to know." And my view about white South Africa is that during those apartheid years, we all in different ways, and some people more than others, made ourselves not to know, and we do it all the time. I can think of events going on in the world today that I just don't want to know about, because once you start knowing about things, then you have to respond in some way. This is particularly true inside a society where if you know certain things, then it has very comfortable implications in terms of your rights to be living as you are living or whatever it may be. So that I think that this process of making oneself not to know is a very important component of the human psyche.

At the same time, I think there were situations -- and I've heard it many times -- where people now say, "We had absolutely no idea what was going on." Well, I never quite know how to take that, because it was perfectly possible to live in South Africa and to find out what was going on or to find out a lot about it. At the same time, if one came from the privileged sort of family that I came from -- by privileged I mean a family with real access to what was going on -- one would know more than if you came from, let's say, the heart of some national party suburb where you read one of the daily papers which was supporting the government, and a lot of information simply didn't come your way.

There was a famous story which Helen may have quoted, about a photograph of a kwashiorkor baby that appeared, I think, on the front cover of *The Financial Mail*. I may be a decade or two off, but I think in the 1960s. One of the ministers saw that picture and was absolutely appalled, and phoned up the editor and said, "How dare you print some picture of a starving baby from somewhere else in Africa on our cover and drag our name through the mud?" So the editor said very simply, "Minister, if you care to come with me, I'll drive you down to the hospital at -- " I think it was the hospital at -- I think it was at Nqutu in KwaZulu. "I'll drive you down to the hospital where that baby was photographed." And it is certainly true that it was possible to make people think very hard by presenting them with facts or reality, like, you know, you take a cabinet minister in to see some starving babies, who's never seen that before, but even although dimly he may be aware of all of this he's kind of put it out of his mind and it's not really in his consciousness until he sees it.

So I think that one of the things that we discovered or thought through and found important to emphasize -- we didn't discover it. Heavens, lots of people have known it before. But we became re-aware of it, was the political impact, the political power of information that is correct, that is truthful. I mean, if you like, you know truth is powerful.

Q: Did this dissemination of information just simply through the conference itself have any visible shock effect on the white society, either through the press or through things that you heard?

Wilson: That's quite difficult to assess and to know, because it was part of a wider process. The whole political scene was changing through the eighties, as I've tried to describe. 1984 and 1989 were different political -- there was a different political atmosphere, although apparently nothing had yet changed. My sense is that the publicity about the extent of poverty and the chapter and verse of paper after paper after paper after paper, helped people to understand the depth and seriousness of the problem and of the issue in a way in which perhaps none of us fully understood before.

Q: Taking one issue out of all of that, something I've noticed through many of the papers was on a decision to try to not think in polarities about the rural poverty versus urban poverty. How much did your study affect the consciousness about the extent of rural poverty, and how did it change the debate around which ways to approach poverty?

Wilson: Well, that's several questions wrapped up in that one. I think that it is fair to say -- I think this is true -- that one of the aspects of the Carnegie Inquiry that was significant was the focus on rural poverty and the amount that emerged. I'm talking not only about basic information about income, because that kind of passes people by, but when you could present people with the concrete facts from a research paper that in these three villages in the Transkei the average household is taking 187 minutes to go and collect water, and have you thought about spending three hours every day carrying buckets of water backwards and forwards, that stopped people in their tracks.

Similarly, there was this paper that I talked about earlier, about just the energy expended in carrying water, where some research workers at Rhodes in the Eastern Cape had gone to measure the energy being expended and found it was incredible, just the amount of energy being used by human being, by women, in order to carry water.

Similarly, the issue about fuel for normal daily use. Nobody had really thought about that. The poor, of course, had, but they didn't have any political power. So all those realities came into the consciousness of South Africa, and I think that there is a significant difference between the second half of the 1980s and the first half of the 1970s, let's say, in terms of a consciousness about issues of water and of energy and of basic human needs in rural areas. Of course there'd been a lot of work done before by academics and others. I mean, there was a big survey on Keiskammahoek, which is an area in the Eastern Cape which a number of people were involved in, including members of my family, which had focused on life in the reserves. There had been work a generation before that by James Henderson, and there'd been even an economic commission in the thirties focusing on it.

So none of this was new, and yet I think what was happening at the end of the 1980s, or indeed from 1984, with the conference, was a kind of reassertion of the reality and bringing it back into the consciousness again. And, of course, Harold Wilson's remark about a week being a long time in politics, I mean, the human public mind has a very narrow time depth, and so people can forget very quickly about poverty realities that were being discussed, let's say in the 1950s or in the 1930s, which remain realities, so they need to become re-aware of them.

So the Inquiry did, I think, help to shift perceptions there. That, of course, was overwhelmed or taken over by the political changes, because then you have a majority government coming in that is totally conscious of the realities of poverty and politically wanting to do something about it.

In terms of strategies, I don't think there was a significant shift of strategies immediately after 1984, in the sense of the apartheid government was not going to worry too much about the findings of the Carnegie Inquiry. But I think those findings may have had some impact in helping to shape the way in which the political agenda of the new government was put together.

Q: Let's talk about dissemination for a moment, Carnegie's goals to disseminate and their plans to disseminate. How aware were you of that as you were working? Talk a little bit about the reception of your book, *Uprooting Poverty*, in terms of its reception here in the United States and in England.

Wilson: I think we were all very keen on dissemination because I think we all understood that part of the politics of a program like this was that people should become aware of the realities, because in the end it's only going to be political action that can really do something about it. So that if one just collected all this data and sort of locked it up in a cupboard somewhere, it was going to serve no purpose whatever. So we were very anxious that there should be dissemination, and Carnegie was very supportive about that process both inside South Africa and were pushing it very hard within the United States, and foundation officers, notably Avery Russell, were very determined that there should be real dissemination through the States, whether it was through book reviews or going on speaking tours and book promotion tours or through the photographic exhibition, whatever. So there was a lot of that.

With regard to Europe, they were very supportive. I was very keen that there should be a consciousness about the book in Britain and on the mainland of the continent, and Carnegie was supportive of some efforts to do that. So I think that for this kind of pretty boring academic book about a subject that people really don't want to read that much about, on poverty, I think that the ideas got fairly wide circulation at the time as a result of those dissemination exercises, yes.

Q: Did you have any discussions at all with institutions like the World Bank or other institutions like that during this period of dissemination? Did you have any talks with them about what they could then come in and do in terms of providing more information or sharing information?

Wilson: Yes. Well, you see, I did have links with UNICEF through Richard Jolly and, of course, the paper that Mamphela and I did on *Children on the Front Line* was one way of putting some of that information into the United Nations family. And I had links with the World Bank and used to visit from time to time. There were some very supportive people in the Bank. There were also some fairly snooty people who sort of felt that this was fairly anecdotal evidence that we were coming up with and we need a proper, coherent, systematic, statistically sound sampling process.

I was simply arguing that the realities in South Africa then, which was the 1980s, this was the best that we could do, (A), and, (B), that one needed to do this kind of feeling one's way through the contours of poverty and knowing what it was all about and what it was like and what its different characteristics were before you could actually develop your questionnaire and come up with good information. So I was fairly unrepentant about the importance of this kind of exercise before getting on to the slightly -- well, the wider form of a questionnaire.

That, in fact, subsequently did happen, interestingly enough, after 1990, because with the political change -- and this would never have happened if there hadn't been the political change, and this is why I talk about the good fortune of the timing of all of this -- I think it was in 1992, Thabo Mbeki was in Washington with a delegation of ANC and COSATU [Congress of South African Trade Unions] talking to the World Bank about links between the new government when it came to power in 1994, whenever, because I don't think we

were then quite sure what the date would be, and the World Bank, and what kind of relations there would be.

And part of that process, as I understand it, was that Thabo Mbeki, who had been, interestingly, at the launch of the book in Duke, had been at the conference in Duke, we like to think that it helped to sensitize him to the issues, but of course he, like so many people in the ANC, didn't need the Carnegie Inquiry to tell them about poverty in South Africa.

Nevertheless, at the meeting between the South Africans from the COSATU and ANC, led by Thabo Mbeki talking to the World Bank, said, "When you are coming into South Africa and helping to think through economic policy in the new South Africa, we'd be very keen for you to be doing specific work on issues of poverty." Now, the World Bank, of course, was very thrilled by that, because they had done a lot of work on poverty. They'd had their living standards measurements surveys all over the world as part of the World Bank theme of poverty. They said they'd be very happy to do that.

They went a team out to South Africa, which went around and talked to everybody about poverty and how they would be thinking about strategies, and also in all of that the need for some kind of systematic survey. By and by, they wound up in my office in Cape Town, having been pointed at SALDRU because of the Carnegie Inquiry, and said, "We're thinking of doing a survey, not another survey. We're thinking of doing a study into poverty in South Africa."

And I said, "Well, we have just spent ten years doing this." Maybe I only thought that to myself. "I'm not sure we need to do another study." I was beginning to feel like, you know, all those South Africans had been saying to me, "No more study, please. We want action."

Anyway, we talked through that, and what became apparent was that if we were working with the World Bank, there would be the possibility of doing a systematic sample survey. As we thought that through in South Africa, we decided actually this would be a very good thing to do, because it would, as it were, build on what we had done in the eighties and give us a much more precise picture of the nature of poverty and of its extent and of its ramifications.

So what then emerged or what then developed was a process which was called the Project for Statistics and Living Standards in Development, I think, which was run in South Africa by South Africans, with a great deal of help and support from the World Bank. But that really happened because Trevor Manuel, who was then the economics chief within the ANC -- this is before they came to power -- helped the -- well, persuaded the governments -- I think it was Norway, Denmark, and the Netherlands, to put money up for this, which they then gave to the World Bank, and the World Bank then had the money to finance a study to everybody and would be immediately accessible. And that in turn was, as it were, subcontracted to us, if that's the right phrase.

And we then had a major process here, because we needed to involve as many people as possible, so the way in which it was set up in Cape Town was that although we at SALDRU

were coordinating it, we had a steering committee which had a couple of key social scientists from the University of the Western Cape and the University of Stellenbosch and from UCT so we had, as it were, the three universities in the Cape, in the Western Cape, involved.

And then we had a reference group. And the purpose of the reference group, rather like the editorial board of a magazine, or a major journal, was to, as it were, help to bless, and make sure that the thing was perceived, and was -- had integrity, and was being properly run. And that reference group had on it a marvelous collection of South Africans, because we were very keen to ensure that we could take the political bias out of the way in which statistics were perceived, because the statistics that had come from the government in the past were seen by all and sundry as government statistics, apartheid statistics. And we had to neutralize that. We had to help people to recognize that statistics were actually part of the new South Africa, this sort of information. So we had a reference group that had on it people in their own right, but who were well known as ANC people, Umkhonto people, PAC people, independent academics, church people, trade unionists, other kinds of trade unionists, et cetera. It was a very good committee, reference group.

And that really did work, because it helped to create an ethos that the collection of data is not a party political matter, it's not part of maintaining the old system, nor is it something that is simply for the benefit of the ANC to the exclusion of everybody else, but which government is very badly needing.

And part of that process, and it's a very important component of that process, was that we said to everybody at the time, and I was very clear about this -- I mean, it wasn't just me, all of us -- but I was arguing the case and saying, "Listen, that information, that statistical information, when it is collected, does not belong to the World Bank, it does not belong to the University of Cape Town, it does not belong to SALDRU, it does not belong to anybody. It goes into the public arena, because it is part of the public -- it's public property. It must belong to everybody. And we'll make sure that it gets disseminated and is immediately accessible. And the reason we said that was A) because there's been far too much information collected in the world, starting in South Africa, but I think you'll find it's true in many other countries, where a lot of resources have been spent, very often public resources, and then that information has been held tight and controlled, and we think that's a very bad thing. And I also -- it was important to lock the new government, the incoming ANC government, into a position of public -- the publicness of data before they became themselves chief ministers and so on, where they might be tempted -- I don't say they would, but they might be tempted -- to say, "Well, let's just, you know, keep this information quiet for the moment," because information is power and information is sometimes uncomfortable to those who are in power. So we wanted to establish that in South Africa, part of the democratic process, part of the democratic inheritance that we were now coming into after all those years of struggle, would be that information of this sort would belong to everybody and would be immediately accessible. And that is so. So that we then were able to spend the next two years -- we had to move very fast -- and organize.

As I say, the World Bank was enormously helpful and supportive in this process and put a lot of people at our disposal. We were also doing it within South Africa. But this is the subject of another tape on another occasion. But we did a scientific sample survey of 9,000 households, a stratified sample, right through South Africa of 9,000 households, which then became, and was available by August 1994, just after the new government came to power, we were able to put at the disposal of the new government a really good picture of South Africa based on this sample survey of the entire country, including those old bantustans or independent states like Transkei, Bophuthatswana, and so on, for which data had simply not been available for the last ten years or so.

And this was important, because it gave the government the kind of information they needed in the first instance simply for mapping and finding out how many people are without clean drinking water, what proportion of the population don't have any clean drinking water, where are they mainly located, what is the scene with regard to education and so on. Some of that information was available. It's not as though there was no statistical information in South Africa. A lot had been collected by the previous regime, and a lot of it very useful and still well worth analyzing. But there hadn't been an integrated household survey across the entire country, ever. So that data set became available.

We were very worried about some aspects of it. We tried very hard to get the anthropometric stuff right, and the scales hadn't been as good as we'd wanted or as good as we should have ensured they were, let's put it that way, and we were worried that we were only measuring babies to the nearest half kilogram de facto. But in the end, even that analysis of the anthropometric data is not looking too bad. Our sense is that that data set

has given us an amazing benchmark as the democratic government came to power, what was the nature of the country that we all inherited. In that sense, it was a very useful exercise. And one can say it was built on Carnegie in the sense that the experience from the 1980s and the process of finding out about poverty and the process about doing that research gave us, or helped us develop the capacity to be able to do that in the 1990s, yes.

[END TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE; BEGIN TAPE TWO, SIDE TWO]

Q: Francis, what happened after the World Bank study that you helped run?

Wilson: Well, it was a study which we think of as an important component of the information that was coming to the new government, and they used it. It came out in white papers on water policy and so on, and health people were using it really to give themselves a map of what was going on in the country.

Subsequent to that -- and I mean, I can spell that out at considerable length, but I think to just simply say that it was one of the components of information that the government was able to use as they came in in 1994 and had to move very fast to try and devise policies that would begin to make a difference in terms of what was happening in South Africa, in terms of water and electricity and housing and all these kinds of things. So it was useful information for that process.

Subsequently what has happened, I think, is that the government commissioned a Poverty and Inequality Report which really was asked to look at -- and this was coordinated by

Julian May at the University of Natal at Durban; he wasn't then with the university, but he now is -- was an attempt to assess what the government had done in the whole reconstruction and development program in order to deal with issues of poverty and hopefully in inequality, and to do an assessment of all of that.

There is an ongoing process now that one has a sense of this government, led by President Mbeki, is really concerned to maintain a strategy which is getting to grips with the issues of poverty. And of course it needs to do that, because the voters are going to say, after some time, "Look, if nothing's changing down at the base, why vote for this regime?"

There is an office, for example, right at the heart of the presidency right now, to coordinate a lot of work in the whole area of poverty and development, and in that office a very senior person, if he's not actually the chief coordinator, is Pundy Pillay, who, of course, learned an enormous amount through his participation in the Carnegie Inquiry, wrote a number of papers both on particular places and on the whole theme of education and poverty, and then subsequently became very involved as the director of the survey on the Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development, which we did with the World Bank. So that he has been very much part of that whole intellectual process in South Africa, which has involved so many different academics and others during the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s. It's very good to see somebody with that knowledge and that expertise and that experience in that position.

And one hopes that will have some influence. Of course, the real difficulty, which is what faces all of us, whether we are presidents or just ordinary little research workers, is how

does one actually in society ensure the eradication or the uprooting of poverty, because that's a tough issue, particularly in a place like South Africa, where with the conquest whereby land and water and minerals all went into white hands, with the whole pass law system and the migrant labor setup which succeeded slavery has completely biased in a very peculiar way the pattern of capital accumulation in this country and the cities and the rural areas and so on, to redress all of this is not something that you can do in a day or a year or ten years; it's going to take a long, long, long time.

So the government is faced with having to undo years, centuries of exploitation and racism which have given a particular pattern to this society, and that, as President Mbeki has made very clear, he understands, as did President Mandela, and a sense that this is the big challenge. Having, as it were, got through the first stage of change in South Africa, which was to get a democratic government in process, in a way that was the easy part. I don't want to underestimate how difficult it was and how brilliantly it was managed, because that was a huge achievement which South Africa can take great pride in, you know, forever, but having said that, it's the challenge that lies ahead of us that is the really tough one.

Let me just try and illustrate that. If you look at the figures of unemployment in South Africa which came out of the study that we did in the 1990s, when we were trying to get hold of very precise statistics, you will find in there -- and I don't have them all in my head -- but that the average unemployment -- of course, you have to be quite specific about how you're defining it -- but as we were defining it there, is running at about thirty percent. If you're looking at youngsters who are black, under the age of twenty-five, those people who are not in the educational institutions but who want to have work, who are actively looking

for work or needing work, unemployment is then running at something like sixty-five percent. If you are in the category of a white male over the age of fifty-five, which is my category, then the unemployment is running at two percent.

So you see, people are living in different universes, completely different universes, in this country, and that is the reality that the Mbeki government is faced with, how to manage a society with such enormous inequalities, such widespread poverty where at least forty percent of the population is living in poverty, most of whom are black. How do you restructure that society? How do you generate the wealth? How do you generate the distribution in such a way that you're beginning to make a real difference to what is happening, particularly in a world where the pressures toward inequality are rising? I mean, it would seem fairly universal at the moment that one of the consequences of globalization seems to be a widening of inequality both within countries and between nations.

So the South Africans are caught in this as well, and if you can think of it through in economic terms for a moment, South Africa, because of our history, labor is very closely linked, or workers or the poor are very closely linked to what's happening in Mozambique, which is one of the poorest countries in the world. So you could get workers from Mozambique coming in to look for jobs in South Africa, not necessarily always in terms of the law, but, nevertheless, arriving here to do that -- wetbacks, if you like.

At the other end you have the top managers of South Africa, whether they're in the private sector or the public sector, having a look at the global market for managers, which is

currently going through the roof, if not the stratosphere. So you're getting, as it were, within South Africa at the moment, all kinds of forces pulling people apart at the top end and at the bottom end, because if you've got unemployment at a very high level, there is obviously going to be a huge pressure on earnings at the bottom.

So that to try and build some kind of community with acceptable levels of difference in that society, economic differences in that society, where you're trying to put a floor under poverty, as it were, so that the poor have got some kind of security net through pensions and unemployment insurance and all the rest of it, that's very tough in a society which although it has an average level of income which puts it into the upper middle income range, nevertheless, it's difficult to mobilize all the resources so that those who are enduring poverty, let's take those at the very bottom, the bottom twenty percent, can actually begin to have some of the basic needs met.

For example, there just are not the resources at the moment in the hands of the government to ensure that the infrastructure is put in place to provide clean drinking water for everybody. Just cannot be done at the moment. And you can say, "We've got to find the money from somewhere," but then it means taking it away from education or from pension funds or whatever it may be. So that the realities facing the government are very tough, and you've got to do this while maintaining your democratic base and the support. So the difficulties facing the government are very considerable and have nothing to do with their determination to do something about the problem, but with the realities or the inheritance that we have.

So that, if you like, is the challenge facing South Africa as we move into the next century, because I think what one can argue is that -- and this is certainly true -- that having done that research work in the eighties and in the nineties, obviously one wants to keep it going so that one is monitoring what's going on, so that it remains an active understanding of the realities. There's been a lot of discussion about causes, whether it's been long historical causes -- [Tape interruption]

So that that work that's been done in the 1980s and the 1990s, although one wants to keep doing that to make sure that one is up to date and also one's got to be training students in all of this, in learning how to analyze it, the emphasis does now need to shift onto -- well, has shifted, and rightly so -- onto action, what can be done.

There's been a lot of discussion about causes, both inside the country and outside, you know, from the World Bank and elsewhere, and so I think there's a lot of understanding about why we are where we're at, and the issue now is to try and really change it, which is what the government is focused on, and non-governmental organizations and business and the trade unions and everybody else. So that is the challenge lying ahead of us now.

Q: What can foundations do? What can philanthropy do to help you in that challenge?

Wilson: That's a nice question. Thank you. I think that the first thing that needs to be said is that the South African struggle wasn't over in April 1994. There was a tendency, some tendency, I think, of people to sort of say, "Well, thank goodness now apartheid has

been dealt with. We can take that off our list and get on to other problems elsewhere in the world." Now, I'm not saying there aren't other problems elsewhere in the world which require a huge amount of attention, but I would want to make the point that the South African story has by no means ended, and there's still a long way to go before we can classify as having got through that horror of the 19th and 20th centuries. I'm meaning about how does one rebuild or regrow or grow a society in which there is some kind of justice and so on.

I would say that it's enormously important for those foundations that have had a long interest in South Africa particularly and in Africa generally to go on maintaining an intelligent and involved concern about the place. And this does mean money. Of course it does. Dollars is part of the story, and Africa is, at the moment, very poor. I don't think we'll always be poor, but right now we are poor. But it's more than that, because it's a matter, as I've been trying to -- I hope I've been able to show how in this process the interaction between the Carnegie Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, and those of us working in South Africa, whether in poverty research or legal resources, whatever it may be, that interaction has been very important because it's helped aerate our ideas. It challenged us. It made us think of new things.

I would argue that there is a huge job to be done in this next century by those who are elsewhere, who perhaps have got easier circumstances, easier financial circumstances, easier political circumstances, easier social circumstances, easier educational circumstances, to say, "How can we use a little bit of the extra fat that we've got -- let's put it that way -- psychic space, to go and sit alongside other people who are struggling in a

much tougher environment, trying to do the same things and trying to bring about a more creative environment in which there is no poverty and hunger and destitution and all the things that people are struggling with here?"

And therefore I would argue that there really does need to be an ongoing involved concern by American foundations, American corporations, outside the United States, because I think it's important for those of us outside, because it benefits us a great deal if it's done sensitively and the best of those ideas in the United States and elsewhere are shared with us.

But equally I think that it's important for the sake of the United States, that as we move into the what is going to be seen as *the* global century, it would seem to me, there is a real danger of America thinking that the world is just either irrelevant or is just like the United States. And, of course, it isn't. It's got many important differences and legitimate differences. So Americans need to become engaged in a very humble way, not just as missionaries coming to bring good things, but as people to learn from Africa and from elsewhere what are the insights that come from Africa in terms of culture, so many things.

So I see this, the need to move to a two-way process, an interactive process, in which the gifts and strengths of different sides, if I can put it that way, are brought to bear so that we can enrich each other. What I've been trying to show in this discussion is how the involvement of the Carnegie Corporation really was very enriching to us in South Africa. That I can speak about. I would hope it was enriching the other way around as well, and certainly one needs to go on devising policies which are enriching that way around. But the

need for this kind of international involvement, intelligent involvement, committed involvement, sensitive involvement, seems to me greater than it has ever been. And to find people or institutions switching off because they say, "Either we don't need to be there anymore," or, "The problem is solved and we've got more problems at home than there are there," I think that's very short sighted.

Q: Given that the resources of any one foundation are somewhat limited, would it be possible in your mind, in your experience, to see American foundations cooperating in major partnerships in situations like the one that you've been living in, to work together to support?

Wilson: Yes, I do think so. I think that the South African government is very open to that kind of creative involvement. There's a marvelous organization here at the moment called the Health Systems Trust, which is a very original idea which is involving American people. There's a South African, in fact, in Washington who's doing a lot of the thinking in it. But that is providing real resources, real ideas in a situation that has been very supportive of and creative within the ministry of health in this country and helping the ministry of health just do a much better job. We've been working tangentially with them in one of the research programs we've been doing.

So the place of creative imagination, to be building new kinds of institutions, new kinds of alliances which can help people do better what they're really trying to do, there's enormous scope for that. What the priorities should be, that will depend to some extent on the interest of the foundations themselves. From the Carnegie point of view, Carnegie's been

involved in South Africa since the 1920s, if not earlier, and their big thing has been poverty and development on the one hand, whether it was the Poor White Inquiry in the 1920s or the second Carnegie Inquiry in the 1980s. That's been one theme.

Another theme has been education, through the libraries and the whole issue of knowledge. Now, education in this country is in a critical condition. The universities are probably in better shape than any other part of the educational sector, but the issue of how to get the schools really to function, how to get the primary schools really working, I'm quite sure that people like Kader Asmal, the minister of education, would welcome with open arms creative involvement.

And here I want to come back to what I was saying about imagination. It's a matter of finding new ways of acting and new ways of bringing to bear all this energy that exists amongst young Americans, amongst all kinds of different people, but that comes in a way that is sensitive and not overbearing and not overmissionizing and not overknowing. I'm sorry to sound a bit negative in that way, but these are issues that South Africans are grappling with in this place, but the right kind of people coming in the right kind of way can make an enormous difference as we all struggle to build a world that is just without the pain that it currently has.

Q: I think we're done. Any final words?

Wilson: No.

Q: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]