Judge Dennis Davis in Conversation With Leon Levy

- Everybody, it is my pleasure to welcome back Judge Dennis Davis, who's well known to all of you. And tonight he will be in conversation with Leon Levy, an honoured guest. Leon Levy was born in 1929 and was part of a small group of progressive trade unionists, who in the 1950s pushed for the formation of the first non-racial trade union federation in South Africa. These aspirations were realised in 1955 with the launch of the South African Congress of Trade Unions, SACTU, where Levy was elected president and remained in that position for nine years, the predecessor of the Congress of the South African Trade Unions known as COSATU. In 1956, along with many others, including Nelson Mandela and his twin brother Norman Levy, he was charged with high treason.

The trial continued until 1961 when the accused were eventually acquitted. Leon was one of a large group of activists arrested after the declaration of the state of emergency in 1960. He shared a prison with fellow activists, Helen Joseph, the only two White people who served on the treason trial for the full period of almost five years from 1956 to 1961. After serving a period of time in solitary confinement, he returned to trade union work, but was forced to go into exile in the United Kingdom in 1963 after his arrest under the 90s Days Detention Law.

On his return to South Africa after democracy dawned, he joined the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation, and Arbitration, known as the CCMA. This was in 1999 and served as a senior full-time commissioner until 2019. I'll hand over to Judge Dennis and Leon Levy, who will share with us how he and other young Jews became political activists, the rise of the trade union movement for Black workers, the Freedom Charter, on trial with Mandela, and his remarkable contribution to the work of the CCMA. Welcome Leon, pleasure to have you with us. Thank you.

- This is an absolute shared delight to interview you. I should start off by saying, I was indicating to Wendy the other day that some years ago, about 20 odd years ago, I think it was the Young Presidents' or Senior Presidents' Organisation came to South Africa, and a number of us, I was doing television at the time, a number of us who were television interviewers were asked to go and interview many of the people who had been prisoners on Robben Island, and which I dutifully did and then got into my head that why should only, in a sense, foreign people get to know about our history.

So I had this meshugas about actually doing television interviews with a whole bunch of people on Robben Island, which eventually would culminate with the interview of Mr. Mandela actually on the cell in Robben Island. All had been organised. For a whole range of reasons, we only managed to do three programmes, which were never flighted. So it's an unbelievable pleasure to be able to interview you because of the fact that your long and distinguished political career and the fact that you've been blessed with such long life gives us the ability to have a really remarkable insight into the politics of the time and what was going on in South African progressive history, if I could put it that way.

So I want to start off if I might, Leon, with asking you this. It's always intrigued me when I read Glenn Frankel's book on the Rivonia, Children of Rivonia. All of those who were there that he interviewed of course were Jewish. And of course all of the White accused at Rivonia were also Jewish. Now you weren't there, you were in the treason trial, which I'm going to come to shortly. But I suppose what's always intrigued me is how come it was that this young group as you then were, who essentially got involved in liberation politics that you were all Jewish? What was the reason? What got you going?

- Well, speaking for myself, and I suppose you can say that it applies to quite a lot of the others, if not all of them, it comes a great deal from the parents who were inclined to left wing ideas, who were members of the, in Johannesburg that is, of the Cultural Federation, the Yiddish Cultural Federation. And this was the 1920s, a very interesting time just as the period after '45 was to me and others. In 1920, you already had the League of Nations and a whole lot of new ideas. There was a great feeling of greater things to come.

And my parents were very taken with Yiddishism. They were Yiddishes. And I had, there were four siblings, my sister and my brother. My sister was seven years older than me. And those two were sent to the Yidishe Folks Shuln to learn Yiddish. My brother and I were sent to Haydo because my father had died at five. And that's another story. And I think that a great deal of that comes from there. Just to add on very quickly, but do stop me if you want to ask me another question on that. My sister, age 17, when I was 10, used to be a member of the Left Club in Johannesburg.

And I crossed the colour line at the age of 10 and I listened to lectures and mainly musicals and song groups. And it was extremely interesting. They were all trade unionists who came along there, Izzy Wolfson, Eli Weinberg, Bettie du Toit, quite a number of others. And so the Left Club was a tremendous influence on me. And I think that a lot of Jews came into the political movement that way. Others were just normally interested. Jews were interested in politics. And I'm really hoping that one day the politically interested Jews will take part in politics in the countries that they live in. Doesn't mean to say that they shouldn't be interested in Israel or any other country that they hold dear to them, but I think that it would be so good to see Jews come back. They have so much to offer from every possible sphere of life.

- Leon, I just want to apologise to everybody that there's a flicker on your computer, which we couldn't fix, but I hope people will bear with us. I want to just, don't worry about that. I wanted to move on, because you also mentioned to me that at some point you had had links with Habonim and Hashomer Hatzair, and can you just tell us a little bit about that?

- Yes, of course. I was a member of Hashteli at a very early age, I think seven or eight. And then by 10 or 11 I think, I was in Habonim but only for a short while, because I was at the Yeoville Boys' Primary School at that time. And a friend of mine said to me, "I think you would be interested to come to meetings "of the Hashomer Hatzair," that is a Zionist organisation, a

Zionist socialist organisation, "and I think that you should try out a meeting." Well, I did go and I was very taken with the Hashomer Hatzair. It was extremely correct in the way it handled people. The subjects that they discussed were very interesting. I think my first, the first discussion that I attended was about sex and I learned something there, and the Borochovian idea was very prevalent and we talked a lot about Borochov and Borochov's idea as a solution to the Jewish problem. And I shall answer other questions on that.

- Can I just ask you one question before we move on? So the question of Zionism was that, that was obviously within your domain at that particular point in time. I mean, you're obviously talking about these questions.

- Oh yes, I talked about a Zionist socialist set-up.

- Yeah, sure. Now how then did you get, because I've got so much to cover, I apologise that I'm moving relatively speedy through a very, very broad canvas, how did you then get involved in the trade union movement?

- Well, South Africa was a very difficult country, where I think it's well known that its segregation system and the apartheid system were menacing policies, which affected all African people. And right from the young age of 10 or 11, most White people, if they had a domestic help, they would write special passes for them to be able to go into the street after 10 o'clock at night. And we obviously were very worried about the racial discrimination in South Africa. It certainly worried me. And I went to lots of meetings in Johannesburg.

The liberation movement was rising, the tide was rising. The feeling for emancipation was there. You could breathe it in the air right to the time I already left South Africa in 1963 when I went into exile. And the meetings that I went to discussed every conceivable subject from the independence of India, the independence of African states, the problems of the world, the problems of the country, hugely internationalists, if I may say so. And--

- How did that convert into organising the trade unions?

- Yes, and so, by 1950, the Suppression of Communism Act was introduced. It was introduced on the 25th or 26th of June 1950. And that enabled the government to remove every trade unionist that it wished to by deeming them communists. Later on you didn't have to be a member of the Communist Party. They still deemed you a communist if I deemed you a communist sympathiser or bringing about the ideas of communism. And so by June 26th, 1950, most of the well-known trade unionists had been banned.

And I was asked by Helen Joseph actually to whether I would like to help out in two of the unions that were needing a general secretary 'cause they were left without one. And I agreed to go into the trade union movement. I accepted the position and I became a trade unionist through the need to step in where it was necessary to do so to actually honour those tireless

individuals who were a tar of strength generally, the life and soul of the trade union movement and were now forced out of the union.

- And just out of interest, I mean these were Black workers that you were organising. Were they suspicious of White people like yourself? Did they think it odd that you guys were around there? I mean, I'm trying to kind of define was there a sense of non-racialism? Was there a sense of suspicion?

- Huge sense of non-racialism in the trade unions. There was not an anti-White feeling or a desire not to have White leaders or White officials meet with them, discuss with them, take up complaints with them, for them to come and talk to with their ideas. It was an incredible period. I have to say that from the time I started in politics in South Africa, the idea of and the value of non-racist politics was incredibly strong. It was a value that really was invincible at that time.

- So you organised these unions from 1950 on, and then of course you've become rather important because you were heading this union movement in what was called the Congress of the People in 1955 at the famous Kliptown, Congress of the People, where the Freedom Charter was unveiled. Now I want to just ask you about, firstly, about the origins of the Freedom Charter, which became the central ANC document literally until we got democracy. Can you just talk a little bit about that?

- Yes, I can tell you about that. The Freedom Charter was born out of a campaign for a Congress of the People. That had always been the liberation's idea to have a national congress, a national assembly, where everybody would be present to decide on the kind of society they wanted. Indeed in 1912 when the African National Congress was established, they invited others to come along and discuss that idea.

Of course it was never picked up that invitation. And in 1953 after the Defiance Campaign, which was a very successful campaign of peaceful disobedience, the liberation movement and the trade unions got together and agreed. It was then called the Congress Alliance. It was an alliance of all the liberation movements in South Africa at that time. And the Congress of the People organised meetings throughout the country. There were people who went out to the farms and the villages and the factories, schools, wherever, I suppose very much, Dennis, like the United Democratic Movement here in in those days. Yes, they did indeed do that. And people were asked to say what sort of society they want, what were their grievances.

And so the grievances were written on small pieces of paper about trade unions, the right to have trade unions, the right to work, the right not to be sent out of the magisterial area in which they lived or sent to their homelands. And the campaign lasted two years in order to organise people around the ideas of the congress movement. And eventually on the 26th of June 1955, which is exactly five years after the Apartheid government assented to the Suppression of Communism Act, in 26th of June 1955, the people at the Congress of the People assented to the Freedom Charter, which eventually found its way into the Democratic Constitution of South

Africa.

- Rusty Bernstein was very crucial, I mean, another Jew was very crucial, in the drafting of that document.

- Rusty Bernstein and Ruth First and some others received all these small pieces of paper. There were hundreds of them. And they put them together and took all the grievances, all the suggestions, and put them in an order of peace and freedom, trade unions, women's rights, worker, the mining industry. Generally speaking, there was something for everybody in it.

- Now, but now you have the Congress of the People, and of course during that time you were interrupted, the proceedings were interrupted by the police.

- During the Congress of the People, yes.

- The police arrived.

- Yes.

- What happened?

- Are you referring to a meeting that I was at?

- No. At Kliptown.

- Oh, yeah.

- The cops arrived.

- Yes, of course.

- [Dennis] They arrived.

- Yes, I can tell you about that. There were 3,000 people present at the Congress of the People in Kliptown just outside Johannesburg. And for two days on the 25th and 26th of June, every clause of the Freedom Charter was discussed and agreed upon clause by clause. There was not great seating, but very low benches, but 3,000 people managed to sit there for those two days. And on the Sunday when the Freedom Charter had just been adopted, the last clause had been adopted, I was speaking on the platform at that time. It was Helen Joseph and Lillian Ngoyi and some others who were on the platform with me. We saw hundreds of police, mounted police, surrounding the entire conference parameter. And Major Spangler, I think it is, I'm not quite sure.

- It was Major Spangler, you're quite right.

- It was Major Spangler. And he mounted the platform and he said, "We have reason to believe that an act of treason "has been committed over this weekend. "And we are not allowing you to leave, "anybody in this room at this meeting to leave "until we have finished our business." Their business was to search every single person present, take away their documents if they had documents, get their names and addresses and any other other information that they wanted. Often they would be asked whether they had their passes with them.

And so the meeting ended on that note. It was interesting to note that there was tremendous discipline that as the people waited, they composed their own songs, freedom songs, and sang one song after another. Many of those songs crept into the songs of the Freedom Movement and are sung to this very day. So that is the answer to that question, Dennis.

- No, I'm going to come to the fact that that led to the trial. But before I do that, I wonder if I can interrupt, because you mentioned a number of people who are of great interest to me and I suspect others around listening to this. So you mentioned Ruth First.

- Yes.

- She seems the most extraordinary woman and was a very important figure in her own way. Just can you just say a little bit about, I mean, you must have known her pretty well.

- Yes, I knew Ruth very well indeed. We were great friends and colleagues and comrades. I knew Ruth from the age of, when I was 14 and she was 19. I went to hear her speak on Spain at the time. She was an incredibly interesting speaker, very intense, but full of knowledge and fact. And thereafter she was a journalist, and I had much to do with her in giving her lots of news about the trade unions and stories. And we played tennis on Saturdays, her day off. And she was everybody's great pin-up. I think that she, everybody was in love with Ruth.

- Yeah, that I've heard. And just tell me about Joe, Joe Slovo, I mean her husband.

- Joe Slovo was in Hashomer Hatzair just before I came into it. Mara Herson was there at the time I was there. These were two prominent personalities. I'm sure the audience probably knows about Joe Slovo and Mara Herson. And Joe Slovo of course was a very good lawyer, a very, very good advocate, and he defended many of the people who we led on strike or who got into difficulties as a result of their trade union activities. And he often, he often won or mostly won. He defended me once when I was accused of breaking my banning order. I was allowed to work in the trade union, but I wasn't allowed to attend any meetings.

And one Sunday where there was a meeting of unemployed workers who we invited to our offices and they were talking and there was this familiar knock at the door, the police came in and they arrested me on a charge of breaking my ban. And Joe Slovo had the most incredible

defence for me. He persuaded the court that I was only there to arrange the chairs of the meeting, that I did not participate in that meeting. And he went into incredible detail about as to where those chairs were. The magistrate was slightly confused about this, but in the end he agreed that I was not attending a meeting, that I was indeed helping to prepare for the meeting and he discharged me.

- Yeah, I heard he was a good lawyer apart from anything else. Of course, I only got to know him when he came back to South Africa. I wonder if we can move on, because obviously to the various of your trials to the treason trial.

- Yes

- Which, of course, from the Congress of the People, and of course just to speed things up there, of course initially 156 of you were charged, but eventually as I understand it, it got down to 30 odd, is it? That's right, isn't it? I mean--

- Yes, 30 at first.

- Who landed up to five years on trial, including Mandela.

- That went on until 1961. It started in '56, ended in '61. And Helen Joseph and I were the only two White people in that trial.

- And the trial was basically, I mean, essentially, you guys were standing trial for treason. Now they were trying to, as it were, criminalise your political activities as I understand.

- Yes, they were actually putting the Freedom Charter on trial. They wanted to prove that the Freedom Charter, the Freedom Charter's aims and objects were to set up a communist state based on the ideals of the Freedom Charter and that it was to set that up through force and violence. And so the Freedom Charter was the centre of that case.

And every piece of evidence was a speech that detectives had recorded in their notebooks, not through recording machines or anything. And they presented their evidence to the court, and each one of us had made many speeches and those were read out and they had to be the, our counsel had to obviously interrogate that.

- So just talking about your counsel, you had an extraordinary legal team.

- Yes, it was

- You were led by Isie Maisels.

- [Leon] Sorry, you were saying.

- Isie Maisels, who was the leading solc in the country, by country the time, a young Sydney Kentridge, who was a brilliant advocate as I've already indicated. And you also had Andre Berrange as I understand it, is that right?

- Yes. Vernon Berrange, he was--

- Vernon, Vernon, Vernon, right. Now just talk to me about these people. I mean, how did they relate to you, Isie and Sydney, et cetera? I mean, they were more on the liberal wing of the South African progressive movement compared to you.

- Yes, actually it was a very interesting, it's a very interesting question, Dennis, because when the trial started and we asked them to represent us, they weren't sure about us at all. Were we communists who wanted to overthrow the state by force and violence? And they weren't entirely clear what they were going to have to face.

And progressively, as evidence was produced as to the meaning of each speech, the meaning of each activity, even those hundreds of meetings that were held during a campaign for the Congress of the People, our counsel became more and more convinced and began to support it in a sense that it was a liberal document. And of course this was tested in court when the court called an expert on communism, Professor Murray. And Professor Murray--

- Tell me about Murray. Very, very famous piece of cross-examination. Please tell us about that.

- Yes, and he was given these, he referred to the speeches that the detectives, that the witnesses for the state had prepared. And his view was that it was all straight from the shoulder communism. Those were his favourite words, straight from the shoulder communist. Now Isie Maisels came in to play there and was absolutely remarkable. And Vernon Berrange and Sydney Kentridge. But Isie Maisels led that and he asked about every single speech that Professor Murray had talked about and given evidence on. And he managed to break down the content of each line of the speech to prove that there was nothing communist there.

It was a desire for a multiracial democracy, a desire for trade unionism, a desire for peace, a desire for equality. And the whole essence of the charter was egalitarian. And that was Professor Murray's attempt to show that the Freedom Charter was a communist document. It failed completely. Indeed there were in cross-examination, there were passages put to Professor Murray to tell us whether they were communist or not communist, and indeed some that he regarded as not acceptable were indeed his own words that he had written in work of his own.

- It's one of those classic pieces of cross-examination in South African legal history.

- Yes.

- That it was put to him about whether it was communist, and he said of course it was, and then they said you'd be interested in who may be the author was, and the author was Murray himself. So I mean, you had this extraordinary team. I mean Isie Maisels and Kentridge in a normal society would have both been Chief Justices in South Africa. So did you guys go and approach them? I mean, how did it work that they came to become your defence counsel?

- Well, we approached them. I think that it was Bram Fischer who was very prominent in that team. And I think these were very well known, very able and respected counsel. And there was no doubt about it that they would represent us fairly and they would not, they would not do anything to suggest that we were, that they were supporters of our cause. Ours was their case and they took that case as seriously as one would expect a counsel to take it. And they conducted themselves right to the very end most incredibly well.

- No, they were, it was extraordinary. I want to just ask one final question about this before I get onto Mr. Mandela. The judges, I mean, strange 'cause it was a, I mean you wouldn't have expected this, but Rumpff became the Chief justice and two others. They seemed to actually, I mean they took a pretty good line here. They acquitted you people.

- Yes, they did acquit us that the, in I think it was March 1961, a judgement that the Freedom Charter was indeed not a communist document. And they acquitted every single one of the 30 of us.

- So Leon, I just want to come back to, I mean, I know we've spoken about this in the past and I wanted to deal with this. I mean obviously throughout this period, Nelson Mandela was one of those 30 accused, and you must have got to know him quite well. And I suppose my question to you is, when you were a co-accused of Mandela '56 onwards, did you see him as a sort of iconic figure that he became in the world?

- Not necessarily.

- The leader sort of thing?

- Yes, I know. Would he lead the ANC?

- Yes.

- Or would he be the president of the country should we have freedom at that time? The answer to your question is there were a lot of others. He was chief literally a tower of strength, a most able person. And he took first place among the members of the ANC and the liberation movement. There was Yengwa, there was Walter Sisulu. There were others who were extremely able people. And I didn't necessarily think that Nelson was going to be the, would emerge as leader and president. But towards the end of the trial there, I know a little before that, in 1960

after the massacre at Sharp, all the accused in the treason trial were arrested and detained in the Pretoria local prison. And with us there were hundreds of other young African people who were picked up as a result of their support for the campaign to burn passes at the time. And the interesting thing was that I was, I travelled with Helen Joseph to the prison every day, they would drop me at the male prison and they would drop Helen where the females were. It wasn't in the same prison. And Helen and I would go together. In the evening, however, I was allowed to go to the African section where we were preparing for our case. Each day we had to prepare evidence and decide who was going to cross-examine because we asked our counsel to stand down briefly while we were being detained.

And so I had the opportunity to go into Nelson Mandela's cell with, and there were others, Duma Nokwe, Kathrada, and others. And it was interesting to see how Nelson Mandela had risen in stature. He actually went up to the people who were in their cells, the young ones, asked them if they had sufficient blankets, whether they had books to read 'cause they were only in detention. There was no charge against them, just detention. And he took up all their cases in so far as the needs. He'd asked if they'd seen their parents. In other words, this was a dress rehearsal for Robben Island where Nelson would play the same role and emerge as a leader, as a thinker, and as a great human being.

- Then just one question on Albert Luthuli. You told me

- Yes.

- There was a remarkable exchange between you and him. I'd like you to share that with everybody.

- Yes, I will share it with you, happy to do so. I haven't actually talked about this ever before. I used to travel with Chief Luthuli in the police vehicle, which took me to the detention centre. And we were dealing with some evidence at the time, which required Chief Luthuli to be a witness. So he used to be present at court every single day for quite a good time. And he was, he was housed in the hospital of the Pretoria prison, local prison, which was right next to the White area where I was. Well, one day I got into the van and I asked the young ward who got to know us and I was always required to sit in the front and a Black person had to sit at the back. And I asked this young man, I said to him, "Would you mind? "I just want to have a chat to Chief Luthuli. "Can I sit at the back?" And he said yes I could.

And I did so, and I told, I said to Chief Luthuli, "Chief, we have some very good news for you. "I can tell you that you have won the Nobel Peace Prize." He was so taken aback by that and he said, "Oh no, it's not me, it's everybody." I said, "It's very much you. "It's all the things you said, "all the effort you've put into making "the liberation movement grow in the way it has. "In fact, we're here today "because we have frightened the regime "into trying to suppress us." So that's the story of Chief Luthuli. I could go on and talk about him a lot of time for a long time.

- Because I want to give people an opportunity to ask questions, I'm going to try to cater our conversation by moving literally about 40 odd years on. You've come back to South Africa after--

- [Leon] Yes.

- And how did you get involved in the CCMA?

- [Leon] Yes.

- For Those who don't know, it's essentially the central body that deals with both the mediation and arbitration of labour disputes in South Africa following the Labour Relations Act, which was passed by democratic country. How did you get involved?

- Yes, well, I was asked by Sam Shilowa, who was the General Secretary of COSATU, recommended me to the CCMA for commissioner's position. And I was, I was taken on and I was there for 20, nearly 21 years. And that was the most remarkable period of my life. If you'd like me to tell you a little bit about that, Dennis--

- Just a few things quickly because I've got one final question to ask you of.

- Yes, do stop me if I'm going too far.

- Okay.

- Carrying on too long. The legislation was a magnificent piece of procedure and process. The legislation helped settle cases because the procedure described in it, which we were to follow. And we used the processes exactly as required. And I was used to a tremendously different setup. When I became a trade unionist at the age of 24, there were strikes over wage demands, strikes over unfair dismissals, strikes for unilateral changes to terms and conditions without asking permission or agreeing to achieving consensus with the worker. There was not a single process or procedure that could be used to settle a dispute, minor or major. And the strikes that I had to handle in those days were all about that.

The new legislation that had come in, which had followed on from Professor Vihan's amendments to the legislation of the past. But the new 1995 legislation was quite magical. But what was very interesting was that by the time I arrived back in the country in 1997, the COSATU had developed amazingly well and the shop stewards and the union officials would come to CCMA procedures in order to put their cases forward, to present their cases. And what interested me was that previously when a worker was asked, why were you dismissed? I don't know. I was just dismissed. With the new legislation, the shop stewards became quite a force. They had already, through their unions, had agreed with employers to go for training a few times a year to learn the legislation. And they would talk about the procedure not being used properly, the processes not being used properly.

And the shop stewards were good at that. The union officials were superb. And management too had learned the route. And there was already a shift from the street where you had this class warfare into, as you know the title of your book very well, "Lawfare." The class struggle had shifted from the street to the legislation to the court or to the tribunal to arbitration. And that was the remarkable part of it.

- I agree with that, I agree with that. I mean, yeah, we could talk about this for a long time. I should just say to the audience that what they don't know, which is what I know, is that having been a guest speaker at the CCMA conferences a number of occasions, you have 500 people, which reflects the demography of South African in all sorts of ways. The esteem and the love that many young commissioners, Black and White, had for you was something to me, which is utterly remarkable, utterly remarkable.

But I want to end by asking you one final question. We have spoken about a canvas and we've not really been able to do it all, which literally begins in the 1940s and literally ends with you finishing off at the CCMA. And you've lived now on the Democratic, you came back in '97, you've been in Democratic South Africa for 23 years, you've given your life to this. And we all know that there's serious troubles here. When you talk about Luthuli and Mandela and Sisulu, you're talking about giants. Don't you look back now and say, how did we get it? I mean, aren't you disappointed by where we are now compared to what your aspirations were?

- Well, Dennis, our cause was the liberation of people from apartheid injustice. They were crimes against humanity. And we gave our all to actually rid ourselves of, rid the country of that kind of oppression. And we worked together and hard and achieved it. The corruption, the fraud, the malpractices that pursued are extremely disappointing. But the major point is that we had won our freedom, that we had got rid of apartheid. And even though I am disappointed and I do hope that the values that we had, which I said earlier were indestructible, will come into their own once again, and that the cause of freedom is invincible really.

- Well, as they say, as they say in Shuv, in no mar amen. But let me hand over to Carly now if there are questions, she'll handle that. Thank you.

- I'd like to say just as a final point that even though I'm disappointed, I believe our cause was just and right. And no matter that there is all that corruption and those problems, if there was a situation where we returned to what was before in terms of discrimination, I'd do it again and go through whatever I had to.

- Oh. Oh, completely.

Q&A and Comments:

Q: Thank you Leon. Wow, that was a real, a real honour for me. And I couldn't quite keep up

with all of Dennis's references. So my questions are a little broader if you don't mind. But you touched on on the last one. So I'm not sure the audience necessarily understood and maybe you could share a little more about the real personal risk that you put yourself through.

- [Leon] Oh, yes.

- And the sacrifice that was required for you and your family. You were instrumental in bringing about freedom and equality in South Africa, and you've said you would do it again, but were there times when you questioned yourself or wondered if this was where you should be?

A: No, I didn't question whether I should be there or not. I think that my ideals and my thoughts and my efforts were proven every day to me why I should be doing what I was was doing. The injustices were there and it was necessary for young people of my age and there were quite a lot of them. We haven't got time to go into them. There were some remarkable people who stepped in. And I was detained in solitary confinement a great deal several times.

I served on the treason trial for five years. I worked during the times we were on bail and were allowed out to go to do my trade union work. I did an awful lot of work there. And eventually I was detained under the, I was the first person to be detained under the 90-day law, which was, as we said, you could be there till eternity. You didn't have to have, there was no trial, there was nothing. You could just be left there to rot.

Q: Turning now to the trade union movement in general, the trade union movement around the world used to be at the heart of the Jewish community, at the heart of Jewish professionals. Arguably most trade unions were built like the labour parties around the world by the Jewish community. In recent times, the trade union's importance to the Jewish community has wavered. Why do you think that is? And do you feel there's an opportunity to reconnect?

A: Well, I really would like to see Jews come back into politics, come into the trade union movement, and they have so much that they can offer. Yes, there was Eli Weinberg, there was Ray Alexander, Izzy Wolfson, Julia Wilson, Baylor Page, Katie Kagan. These are names which will always be with us. And their contribution to building a trade union movement was excellent. The legacy they left us are in huge archives in each of the unions.

The minutes, the hard backed minute books tell so much of the history, so much of the activity, so much of the international solidarity. They contributed so much and they regarded that as accountability to actually record what you agreed upon, to get approval of what was written down was our way of being accountable.

Q: While Leon's grandson rescues him, so Dennis, perhaps you could tell the audience, Leon's unbelievable career in the trade union movement. Without people like him to really be dedicated to this cause, what changes do you think wouldn't have happened in the solidarity movement in South Africa?

A: Well, that's a very interesting question you asked, Carly, because there were two sets of, if you could call it Jewish generations in the South African historical context, meaning the unions that Leon started in the 1950s, which were utterly remarkable. There had been trade unions earlier than that, but the 50s were quite remarkable. COSATU, which was the organisation that he basically built together with others, was a very vital organisation in essentially creating some form of attempted industrial democracy unto the heart of apartheid. What is interesting is in the 1970s from that tradition, where an independent trade union movement was actually constructed, huge amount of Jewish influence in that.

So many of the people who were crucial in the construction of that particular trade union movement, which became COSATU, were Jewish. Bernie Fanaroff, Johnny Copelyn, Kathy Adler, a whole range of others, David Lewis. I can go on and on, Mike Morris, all Jewish. So it is a weird thing if you want or an interesting thing that the tradition that Leon and all the people that he mentioned in the 1950s, you had a new generation in the 1970s and 80s who essentially were central to this. Perhaps the most classic example of the non-racialism of all was Johnny Copelyn, who was the General Secretary of the Clothing and Textile Workers Union.

And in the 1980s, a sort of Black nationalist sought to actually unseat him by putting up a Black candidate to be the general secretary, and he won hands down. The Black vote, the Black workers voted for him. So it's the same tradition all over again. And that and COSATU, which is not anywhere near the organisation it was today, but in that period in the 80s, utterly crucial in delivering us democracy.

Q: Perfect, okay. So what I was about to ask Leon is the role of the trade union movements around the world in bringing people together who are in conflict. So for example, the Israelis and the Palestinians, often the trade union movements and the workers' solidarity can cross boundaries that governments and politicians can't. Do you have any thoughts on the role in the trade union movement between the Israelis and the Palestinians?

A: Well, I think that there were people, who later, not in my time, but later on, who were very interested in the Histadrut's approach to trade union activities and were very taken with some of their ideas and the ways they operated. And so, whereas I was not at that time involved in a discussion or in looking at the Israeli approach to trade unionism and particularly the innovations of the Histadrut, I know that Johnny Copelyn and others were very taken with that.

- Thank you, Leon. Unfortunately, that brings us to the end of our hour, so I'm going to hand back over to Wendy.

- Okay, yeah. I need to have some help here.

- Leon? Hello. I'm back. So I'd just like to say to Dennis and to Leon thank you very much for that remarkable presentation and what a pleasure it was to have you both here with us tonight.

In fact, I remember Isie Maisels and his daughter Helen is part of our faculty and is probably listening to you tonight. And I'm sure she was thrilled about everything that you had to say about her dad. Your bravery and commitment to the cause really is inspiring. Without you and your colleagues, South Africa might have followed a different course.

We are still on this journey and we sincerely hope that South Africa finds a path to finally or to hopefully reach its full potential. Leon, to hear from you, your story firsthand, was a true, real, true privilege. Thank you for spending time with us tonight and for sharing these deeply personal stories with us. And Dennis, thank you very much for the collaboration and it's always a pleasure to have you with us. So on that note, I'll say to everybody, thank you for joining us and goodnight.