

Gerry Cordon remembers the student occupation of Liverpool University Senate House in March 1970

In March 1970 students occupied the Senate House of Liverpool University in support of demands that called for the resignation of Lord Salisbury as Chancellor of the University – a man with proclaimed racist views and extensive economic interests in southern Africa – and that the University divest itself of investments in South Africa. Ten students – including C4 News presenter Jon Snow – were expelled or suspended after the protest, in the most savage punishments imposed by a British university on anti-apartheid protestors.

Beginning in February 1969 with a sit-in staged to support students at the London School of Economics opposed to the appointment of Dr Walter Adams as director of the LSE, a man with links to the white supremacist regime in Rhodesia where he had been director of the University College, opposition to racialism and the apartheid regimes in southern Africa remained at the forefront of radical student activity at Liverpool during the autumn of 1969 and into 1970. In November Peter Hain, organiser of the Stop the Seventy Tour campaign against the South African rugby team, addressed a mass meeting in the student union and the following week 25 coaches took more than 1,000 students from Liverpool University to the protest in Manchester – the largest of the demonstrations against the Springboks. The spring term in 1970 marked the beginning of a period of intense political activity among students at the university, as the issues that eventually became the 'Five Demands' emerged, leading eventually to the occupation of Senate House in March. Two of those demands concerned Liverpool University's connections with racialism and apartheid South Africa.