Interview with Peter Brayshaw by Christabel Gurney, December 2013, for the Anti-Apartheid Movement Archives Committee project Forward to Freedom
http://www.aamarchives.org/

Christabel Gurney: Could you confirm your name.

Peter Brayshaw: Peter Brayshaw.

CG: And when and where were you born?

PB: In Leeds, England, in 1947.

CG: And could you just say what your occupation is?

PB: Well, now I'm a full-time councillor in the London Borough of Camden.

CG: Thank you. How did you first become aware of the situation in Southern Africa?

PB: I left Leeds and came to study at the LSE in 1965. That was the year of UDI, of Smith declaring UDI in Southern Rhodesia. There were sit-ins and protests and the LSE students were quite involved and a number of them were from Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. There was quite a lot of interest and then the interest in 1967 heightened when the famous LSE troubles were triggered by the appointment of Dr Walter Adams as the Director of the LSE. He had been the principal of University College Salisbury, which a Socialist Society pamphlet deemed to be sanctions busting, because it was heavily supported by the University of London – there were a lot of financial transactions between the two. And that was criticised and the personal stance of Walter Adams was also very much criticised for failing to stand up to the UDI government.

CG: Was the University College of Rhodesia largely white?

PB: Yes, it was. It was University College Salisbury at that time.

CG: Were you involved in protests?

PB: Yes, there were protests and a little bit later in 1969 there was quite a big demonstration organised by something called the Zimbabwe Solidarity Action Committee, chaired by Alan Brooks, but separate from the AAM and including the representatives in exile of ZAPU and ZANU, who occasionally were mutually hostile, including some student groups and I was part of the organising committee. I'm not sure I was representing anybody in particular, I think I just walked into some of the meetings and participated. And that actually culminated in a big demonstration in, I think, January 1969, that included the march being stopped by the police at Rhodesia House, quickly reversing and a mass surge on South Africa House. I vividly remember smashing some of the windows personally. I had some leather gloves and on Duncannon Street there are some leaded lights and they are quite easy to punch out one by one. Then four quite

heavily uniformed motorbike cops came and protected the back door of South Africa House, which is where I was, smashing windows, because people were trying to break in there. Having later been many times a guest in South Africa House, and also having worked there for a while under the new regime, I know that it wouldn't have done them much good to have broken in, because there is another glass airlock behind that door. It became a bit of a cause célèbre – there was allegedly just one person guarding South Africa House and I think the British government had to pay a lot of compensation to the South African government for all the broken windows and what have you. There was also an attempt to set fire to it and I think fires were lit in what was then, and still is now, I think, a British army recruiting office – unless it's become the Co-op, on the Strand side of South Africa House. So there were events of that sort, which made an impression on people. After leaving South Africa House, I think we ran off to a Rhodesia tourist office, which was near Regent Street, and had a go at that.

CG: Do you think it was the spirit of the times?

PB: Oh, very much so, and certainly most of the LSE troubles, which were reflected elsewhere in Britain and in France and Germany and the USA, were internationalist and the very biggest issue was Vietnam. The big Vietnam solidarity demonstrations were very well supported and with a lot of enthusiasm. And I think people generally were getting a bit fed up with just saying everyone should be nice and we should ban the bomb and East and West should be friends. I think there was a mood of active support for liberation struggles in the sense of armed uprisings in the third world, in Vietnam, Cuba before that and Cuba's attempts in the Latin American countries, and in Angola and Mozambique. And it was towards the end of my time at the LSE – I was there for four years – that we had some direct contacts with MPLA and FRELIMO. I remember organising a meeting where the MPLA representative to Europe, who was based in Belgrade, came and spoke to the Committee for Freedom in Mozambique Angola and Guinea. I wasn't a leader in it that at that time – it was Tony Gifford and Polly Gaster and those people that set it up. In fact Tony, I think, set it up initially as the Committee for Freedom in Mozambique after visiting the liberated areas of Mozambique, probably in 1965, I'm not sure of the exact date. He was very impressed with what he saw, very supportive. And I remember collating and stapling as they came off the Gestetner pages of a magazine called 'Guerrilheiro', Portuguese for guerrilla. That was the magazine of CFMAG and that was my earliest involvement with them.

CG: That's very interesting. Do you think that then – was there almost more interest in the struggles in Mozambique and Angola because of the armed action, because they were more militant, than in South Africa itself?

PB: Yes, I think so. And I know that the ANC were in a military alliance with ZAPU and we knew of that, I think, at the time of our Zimbabwe solidarity demonstration. I remember we had some queries about a poster – I don't know if it's in any archives – it was a beautiful poster, it was done at the Poster Workshop, which was a non-sectarian Left facility. I don't know who actually designed it. It was real art – nude – a man and a

woman and a child and they had AKs. It wasn't the nudity, but the AKs, and the ZAPU person said 'We are in armed struggle'.

CG: It would be great to track that poster down …

PB: I've not been able to keep all those – they were silk screened. There were some beautiful posters. The event that made an impact on me, again it was a linkage with University College Salisbury and collaboration by the University of London with UDI, and I was one of the organisers, was a march to Senate House from ULU, University of London Union. Senate House was the admin headquarters of the University of London. It was quite a small march. I also remember drawing the poster and putting it on the main notice board of the LSE at the time. It was a drawing of Senate House with a fist and it said 'Smash Senate House collaboration with South African fascism'. There were about 30 or 40 of us and it had been well intelligenced by the authorities, including the Special Branch. It was the first demonstration of the new academic year and we were ambushed …

CG: What were you protesting about?

PG: About the links between the University of London and University College Rhodesia, which we deemed to be busting comprehensive sanctions. This wasn't just LSE, there were people from other … it was students but not just LSE. We were ambushed. Several of us were arrested, including two Americans, Paul Hoch and Gordon Gillespie, and myself, and we were taken off to Tottenham Court Road Police Station, kept in overnight and charged with riot, assault and malicious damage, etc. etc.

CG: Quite serious charges …

PB: Very serious charges actually, with unlimited … it was common law at the time, it's now been thrown off the statute book. It could have been anything and these were very serious charges. We were remanded in custody and taken down to Brixton for about three weeks before we managed to get a judge in chambers to give us bail. So we went on hunger strike when we arrived there. There were marches to Brixton Prison from supporters on the outside demanding 'Free the Senate House Three', which is what we became known as. The only written up version of this was in 'Black Dwarf' in the summer of 1970 – I wrote a one page article about it. Through Polly Gaster we eventually got Jack Gaster as our solicitor and he lined up – it was originally meant to be Tony Gifford and John Platts Mills QC and the assembled panoply of the left of the judicial system. I think our judge must have known when we walked in and we had the top left-wing barristers that there was something special going on. Anyway we were lied about by the Special Branch on oath, and eventually Paul and Gordon were found guilty of fairly serious offences and Paul was jailed for about nine months. He was on the Isle of Wight and then deported, being an American. Gordon had a suspended sentence and he was immediately deported. The judge said of me that, unlike the other two, my political beliefs were sincere and I had been trying to draw attention to what I had thought were perceived wrong doings and ills, and I was found guilty of unlawful

assembly, common assault rather than actual bodily harm, I think, and malicious damage – I'm not sure what happened to that. I was given a conditional discharge, but then I did a bit of campaigning about that issue. So that obviously made a big impression – being on trial at the Old Bailey – in the summer of 1970.

CG: Did it put you off further political action?

PB: No, it didn't. Concurrently I was quite involved in Ireland. I had been on the committee of the RSSF, the Revolutionary Socialist Students Federation, and they took up the cause of civil rights in Northern Ireland in quite a big way and worked with People's Democracy. I went on the march from Belfast to Dublin, which was also banned by the Northern Ireland government and in fact I was late getting there. I missed an attack by the RUC on that march, in Lurgan I think it was. Eventually I joined it with Eamonn McCann, who was later a quite famous writer on Irish affairs. I was also grabbed by the police in the Strand the day after Bloody Sunday in Northern Ireland, on a march from the LSE to Parliament. It was the Monday and Bloody Sunday had happened the day before. Sessional orders were in place so you were not allowed to march within a mile of Parliament. We ignored that. My real crime was shouting out the number of the policeman who had just arrested my then girl friend. And the police said 'Alright, we'll have you too'. None of this 'You have the right to remain silent', just 'You're in next'. And again, I think I got a conditional discharge. This is a bit of a digression, but the police had said they had seen me running across the Strand, banging on the bonnets of cars shouting 'Up the IRA'. Whereas at the meeting at the LSE Theatre I had fiercely opposed a guy called Gerry Lawless, who was a very violent ex-IRA man. He was deemed I think to be too violent even for the IRA in the 1950s and set up his own Trotskyist version of the IRA. He had wanted 'Victory to the IRA' to be the slogan of this march and myself and others had argued fiercely against that, but anyway that's another story.

CG: Bernadette Devlin at that time did speak on anti-apartheid platforms, at least once or twice, so there was a cross-over …

PB: When she was a Member of Parliament?

CG: A bit after that.

PB: But of course she never went with the Provos. She was originally in the Official Republican movement and then set up the IRS, the Irish Republicn Socialist Party.

CG: So coming back to Mozambique and Angola and the Committee for Freedom in Mozambique, Angola and Guinea …

PB: After leaving the LSE and going into various junior academic research jobs, I landed my best and first career job in the TUC, in the Economics Department. My brief was international companies and that sort of thing. And I do remember every year, when the Congress report was being produced, giving Polly [Gaster] a sort of draft of the sections

on the Portuguese colonies, because the TUC was actually very hostile to the Portuguese dictatorship both in Portugal and the colonies, Angola and Mozambique. And I sort of was in touch in that sense, but not as directly, not as much … But then my then partner, Tracy, and I set off in '75 on a world trip, a sort of late gap year. Tracy had worked in Tanzania for a couple of years before coming to the TUC. She was in the International Department and we met doing work on multinational companies, and we wanted to travel. We originally went to Tanzania, but I asked Polly to write a letter of introduction to MPLA and FRELIMO, who had base offices in Dar es Salaam. We went and had meetings in Dar with Marcellino dos Santos of FRELIMO, for instance, and they said we would be welcome to go and visit Mozambique. This was before independence, though, this was the spring of 1975 when we were in Dar. And FRELIMO was in a very ramshackle office at the bottom end of what was then Independence Avenue and then became, I think, Samora Machel Avenue. And so we had some discussions there, but they said they wouldn't be able to receive us because they would be setting up the …

CG: The Portuguese had pulled out by that time …

PB: The Portuguese were going to hand over in 1975, actually in both Angola and Mozambique on entirely different dates. There had been a ceasefire in the autumn of '74, and there were processes that were meant to lead to orderly transitions in both countries, which did happen in a way in Mozambique because the Portuguese handed over to FRELIMO. But we also went then and visited the MPLA offices, which were over a café in central Dar es Salaam, a very nice café. And who did we find to be the MPLA representative in Tanzania but José Condesse, who I'd arranged to speak at a meeting five years previously in London. They very much wanted a delegation to visit Angola and Tracy and I began racking our brains and thinking how could we persuade Jack Jones or Hugh Scanlon or someone like that to go. And in the end it became very obvious that they wanted us to go pretty immediately from Dar to Angola, where there were sporadic outbreaks of what later became full-blown internal war between at the time the three movements that were recognised by the OAU, which were MPLA, FNLA and UNITA. We also had meetings with the OAU Liberation Committee in Dar es Salaam. I remember arriving at their compound and a Tanzanian army guy with a rifle saying 'jambo' (hello), 'karibu' (welcome), rather than threatening us. We met with the head of the OAU delegation, the Liberation Committee. They had offices in Lusaka as well. It's perhaps worth remembering that at the time the frontline states were Tanzania and Zambia, and that was it, that was the frontline states. And Nyerere and Kaunda personally had set up that concept and they were seeing themselves very much in support of the people of South Africa and the liberation movement against the apartheid regime. But at that time the apartheid regime could count solidly on a big block of military allies, including the Portuguese and including Ian Smith's forces in Rhodesia. There was a concept called ASPRO – Africa South, Portugal and Rhodesia, that block. It's very weird if you look at the map, at the apartheid frontline, how it changed. So there we were setting off, buses to Lusaka, and then we were housed in an MPLA base camp called VC camp, VC for 'Vitória é certa', in a hut there. The next door hut was Lolo [Tony Kiambata-Neto] and Zazie. Lolo later became the Angolan ambassador to Britain actually and Zazie was his wife. And eventually Lolo and Zazie and me and Tracy and one or two other families set

off in a big Russian lorry with very very low gears for difficult terrain and a guy called Katonde, who was another MPLA combatant, and they had their two AKs. I had sort of envisaged, because the situation was deteriorating day by day in Angola, more of a convoy and more arms going with us but that was it really. We crossed illegally from the Zambian side into the east of Angola at a place called Jimbe. There was no visible Portuguese border post with anyone in it any more. There were Portuguese military facilities but they'd been abandoned by then. People came and welcomed us singing and clapping, so obviously they were MPLA supporters. We went a bit further into the country before we heard shots fired at a place then called Teixeira de Sousa on the border between … basically the border between Angola and Zaire. The FNLA were in Zaire, backed by the Mobutu forces. So we heard our first shots and we dived for cover behind a wall and Lolo climbed back onto the lorry where he'd left his AK strapped to his suitcase. Then we went further inland. We spent a lot of time in what was then called Luso, Villa Luso, again meeting trade union delegates from UNTA, not to be confused with UNITA. UNTA was the União Nacional dos Trabalhadores de Angola, the National Union of Angolan Workers, which was affiliated to the MPlA, and we had discussions with them and meetings, etc. We were supposed to get to Luanda and in fact we had some difficulties with that, but eventually we flew, we were flown, to Luanda. MPLA arranged a flight. We arrived in Luanda, we were meant to be met, but some communications had fallen through, as they often do. So there we were at Luanda Airport, not knowing where we were meant to go or be. We eventually got into town and I think we got to a hotel that was being used by the FNLA and made some phone calls to our MPLA contacts. We eventually made contact and we were taken to a place called Estalagem Mulemba, which was a motel to the north of Luanda, a few miles north, and from there again we began going to meetings in factories with shop stewards committees that were springing up and the National Executive of UNTA. Then one day they never arrived and we could hear a lot of gunfire going on and that was the day of the eruption of the real all-out shooting war between the MPLA and the FNLA. Each had particular districts of Luanda under their control and particular towns. Basically on 1st May the FNLA had opened fire on the May Day march that the MPLA had organised and the MPLA had organised a sort of counter-offensive called generalised popular resistance and some of these documents that I've put in some quotes from the proclamation. And of course we were then cut off from Luanda because the FNLA were between us and Luanda. They had occupied an old Portuguese fort called Sao Pedro do Barra and were pretty entrenched there. Next to it was the oil refinery, so it was difficult to use any heavy weapons to dislodge them. The MPLA controlled the city. The FNLA had a rear base up the road in in Zaire and we were sort of cut off in the middle. Our building was under attack several times, where we learnt the difference between incoming and outgoing fire. The outgoing fire is the loudest and the scariest, until you realised that's our guys firing back.

CG: So where were you in the hotel?

PB: We were in a room on the fourth or fifth floor. It was the MPLA's building, up and down the stairs or on the roof, depending what was going on at the time. Interesting actually that people despite the risk like to know what's going on. Everyone went up on

the roof to peer at the people who were shooting at us, which is not a wholly rational thing to do. I remember the MPLA were so polite even then, rushing up the stairs with a heavy Russian machine gun thing, which was pretty slow. I do remember one particular incident. There was a restaurant on the ground floor of this place and there were petrol pumps, and I remember listening to the BBC World Service saying there was no petrol in Angola any more. But people were filling up at these petrol pumps. I've got a few photos actually of some of these places. But we were there eating and there was very heavy fire and Tracy and I hit the deck and crawled into the kitchen which was away from the windows. And our guys went out and stood their ground, with not just AKs, even old Schmeissers, for instance.

CG: Were you frightened?

PB: There's a picture on time lapse that I took of myself and Tracy and we look pretty calm. We had a hand grenade in our room and one of the plans was that if the FNLA got in and were about to kill us or capture us, to pull the pin. Another plan was to hang sheets out of the window and go down to the coast and find our way past Sao Pedro do Barra, all of which would have been extremely dangerous.

CG: So what did happen?

What did happen was that a Portuguese army convoy of two armoured cars, one at the front, one at the back, and a couple of lorries with Portuguese army troops had gone north. At one point we had missed a complete evacuation of our building because it was thought about to fall. I don't know how we slept through it, we didn't know when it was. This convoy had gone north and then come back south. It was on the face of it much more powerful militarily than anyone else had, MPLA or FNLA. A number of motorists had been stopped at this hotel because if they went past Sao Pedro do Barra, it was thought, I think with good reason, that the FNLA would capture them, torture them, kill them, steal their vehicles or whatever. So they were parked and they saw this convoy. The leader went on and the rear one stopped so there was a gap in the middle and these guys ran for their vehicles, got in and we by sheer good luck happened to be standing near the front door at that time, possibly looking at this Portuguese army convoy but not realising that would happen. We had left most of our gear in our room, sleeping bags, rucksacks, whatever. We had with us … we wouldn't have been wandering about loaded with all our possessions. I said to Tracy, 'Run this way'. We had our passports in our pockets, a bottle of water and a few bananas in a daypack. We ran, jumped in the back of this vehicle, a complete stranger driving it, but he drove into this convoy and it went down to the city and we got into Luanda, which was completely in the hands of the MPLA, and we were relatively safe. They couldn't have got us out, we had actually been phoning them from the hotel, saying 'We are here on this delegation', saying, 'Can you get us out from this surrounded isolated hotel?'.

CG How did you get back to Britain?

PB: That's an even longer story. We stayed in Angola longer than we had planned for, but this was a life-changing as well as life-endangering event. We were then with MPLA in Luanda and needing to get back to Tanzania the way we'd come and we'd come overland. They eventually got us flown under assumed names via Huambo, which was in the hands of UNITA, who at that time were still neutral. They only declared war on the MPLA in August of that year, August '75. I think they were hoping – they were very much the smallest and the weakest of the three organisations – I think they were hoping MPLA and FNLA would decimate each other and then they would emerge stronger. So we had flown via Huambo to Cazombo, a small airfield in the east which is where we'd come in, it's in that square, like a dot in the middle of that square bit on the Zambian border, the square bit being a bit of an anomaly where the rulers had … at the Congress of Berlin. These borders were straight lines. So there we were in Cazombo. pleased when we touched down to see that the MPLA flag was flying over it, because it was by no means clear who controlled where. And a member of the Central Committee of the MPLA then drove us into Zambia down to Lusaka. He had a sort of landrover and two bodyguards, one with an AK and one with a Schmeisser, so thus equipped we drove over the border. I think he gave a crate of beer to the Zambia border guards because there was no evidence of us ever having been in Zambia, of course, we'd crossed the border clandestinely. So we drive through the Copper Belt and on to Lusaka. I remember everybody was treating me or Tracy as if we were in charge, people who wanted lifts or whatever, this was the Copper Belt under free Zambia, but still with a lot of racism. And they thought I was the bwana and Sapilinha, being black, was my assistant. In fact I think Sapilinha and Tracy were denied entry to a café at some point in the Copper Belt. Eventually we gave a lift to some vicars and they were sat on the back of this landrover. Little did they know – by then the weaponry had been put under the tarpaulin and you were not meant to walk around Zambia brandishing weapons – they sat on these. We got to Lusaka and then eventually we managed to get ourselves back from Lusaka to Dar. We did a meeting about Angola at the university, organised by the TANU Youth League. That was basically that episode.

Eventually, after further travels, we got back to Britain and plunged into what had been set up, I think, in the summer of '75, the Angola Solidarity Committee. We became very very active in that. It had been set up, I think, by Tony Gifford and Polly Gaster, and I remember Paul Fauvet and I think David Kenvyn and one or two other vintage people who were involved in that. It was entirely free-standing, it hadn't been part of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, although I think it sent delegates and I think it had not always met with the reception it wanted for its aims, which included recognition of the People's Republic of Angola. It included a number of things that had, I think, caused some political problems for Anti-Apartheid. But we actually operated at a pretty effective level, there was a very good response. I remember doing a speech or two in Scotland, at the Scottish NUS. Basingstoke Trades Council organised a meeting. I was advertised as an MPLA speaker and there was a bomb threat by the National Front. We had to move the meeting, it went to a clandestine destination. The leadership of Basingstoke Trades Council, which was a power in the area at the time, gave people directions to a new venue.

CG: Were there connections there through the Anti-Apartheid Movement?

PB: I think there must have been, but I wasn't aware of them and I was very active on the Angola Solidarity Committee. That was very active for genuine MPLA speakers, produced some literature, some of which I've got here, which you can have for the archives if you haven't already got them.

CG: Were you involved in opposing the South African invasion of Angola, because the AAM was very involved in campaigning against that.

PB: Yes, if you look at the front covers of these newsletters. There were other invasions though. There was also the FNLA from the north, backed by Zaire and by the CIA. If you read *In Search of Enemies* – I can't remember the name of the CIA agent, Philip Agee, a very interesting book about how they were looking for someone to fight against the MPLA, deemed to be Communist and an arm of the Soviet Union. The anti-Communism was really one of the issues. But in the end of course, militarily by March '76 the MPLA had actually pushed the South Africans back across the border and I think there was a big celebration in March '76 on our side of the border with MPLA and SWAPO and the Cubans helped. I think the South Africans overstretched themselves a bit, it's a long long way from the border. They were occupying Namibia at the time. It's a long long way to Luanda and difficult terrain. In the north there was the incursion by the British mercenaries, 13 of whom were captured and put on trial, four of whom were executed. We campaigned around that as well. There's a leaflet 'Mercenaries, the Other Side of the Coin'. One of those mercenaries in his memoirs reports being involved in an arson attack on the Newport Street office that we had been using, which had happened actually just before I got back from Africa. The office was burned and when we were doing a mass leafleting about mercenaries, two large boxes of leaflets, many thousands of leaflets were stolen from there. On one bizarre night I was working there alone and two mercenaries came up the steps, two ex-British army people who'd been in Angola with this ill-fated venture. I thought 'Oh God, they've come to do me over', but they wanted to change sides, they thought I could help them fight for the winners. They were pretty hopeless, to be honest, these two guys. I think they eventually fell foul of the law over illegal street trading. But it's a sign of the times, these were quite different times really to some of the things happening now. We actually had an appeal for more funds for leaflets after the theft of a lot of them and raised even more money for more leaflets. I think we distributed over 100,000. We had various days of action, a workshop on all the detailed stuff of what was going on in Angola and a series of meetings in the Roebuck pub in Tottenham Court Road, upstairs there, which were quite illuminating, I think. But we were with permission using the office of MAGIC, which at the time was the Mozambique and Guinea Information Centre in Little Newport Street, Soho. Eventually Angola decided, independent Angola decided, to join that Centre, transforming it into the Mozambique Angola and Guinea Information Centre. We had some internal debate, I was in favour of continuing with a solidarity committee because I thought it could do things and campaign in ways that a government funded agency couldn't. But in the end on a vote it was decided to wind up and the final edition of 'MPLA for Angola'. From now on the Mozambique Angola and Guinea Information Centre would be the body which

would carry on, again from Little Newport Street. This was the last newsletter and it says the struggle in Southern Africa is far from over. We had a final rally on November 11th, a year on from the declaration of the People's Republic, organised jointly with the National Assembly of Women. We had people from the Angolan Women's Organisation.

CG: We've got that leaflet, so Anti-Apartheid had a hand in that, because Anti-Apartheid distributed the leaflet …

PB: OK, it doesn't say so here. And it was in St Pancras Town Hall, which is where we are at this very moment. I think Ruth Neto came and spoke at that. We handed over the torch, if you like, after 15 intense months both in Angola of armed conflict, very unpredictable, and with hindsight you might think it was always obvious who would win, but it wasn't at the time, very definitely. There were issues where the Angolans were let down – there was still a lot of neutrality between the three allegedly symmetrical liberation movements all recognised by the OAU. The vote at the OAU on recognition of the People's Republic of Angola was 50:50 the first time round. It was only recognised later. There was also an issue of United States recognition and that went on for years before the United States …

CG: When did the British …?

PB: The British were fairly early. Their policy is whoever is in de facto control of the country, we may recognise them without any sort of approval of their policies. And by March '76 the MPLA was definitely in control of the country.

CG: Bob Hughes went as Vice-Chair of Anti-Apartheid to a very big solidarity conference in Luanda very early on and then the problems over recognition for Anti-Apartheid fell away when he came back.

PB: The ending of the Angola Solidarity Committee and the setting up of MAGIC and the eventual setting up of MAC … I had been opposed to the winding down at the time of the Angola Solidarity Committee. At one point during the Angola Solidarity Committee I had been accused by one of our members of having a degree of loyalty to the MPLA that was unbefitting a British socialist, which I thought was quite an interesting concept. I have always then and since, and even now, had a much higher level of feeling for, understanding of and support for the liberation movements than many involved in Anti-Apartheid and ACTSA. I am a firm supporter of the ANC, FRELIMO, MPLA, SWAPO of Namibia and of internal self-criticism and recognition of things that should be better. But I am very loyal to the liberation movements and that really goes back all those years to the upsurge in support here for the liberation movements. So we did wind up and MAGIC set up. This is actually, I think, their first leaflet as the Mozambiuqe Angola and Guinea Information Centre. It does say 'A luta continua', 'The struggle continues'. They had various documentation and originally produced information, photographs, films. I don't know whether any of these are still kept anywhere.

CG: The information angle – was that because at the time it was felt that the war was over and there was no longer a need for solidarity, but for information?

PB: Yes, but of course that began to change.

CG: When did that change?

PB: I suppose the change in relations with Mozambique partly resulted from the sponsoring of RENAMO, when Mozambique worked closely with Britain against UDI and the Smith regime in Rhodesia, and they closed the border and there was the Beira patrol and all that sort of thing. The Rhodesian secession, UDI or whatever, sponsored RENAMO to set up another front inside Mozambique to fight against FRELIMO. FRELIMO from very early on were very hostile to UDI. I remember in Dar in 1975 there were discussions between Judith Hart and FRELIMO, even before independence. I spoke to people who'd been involved in them, including hearing an anecdote about FRELIMO fighters rescuing Judith when she got into trouble on the beach …

CG: Judith was a Labour MP …

PB: She was a junior minister, so she was in a position to negotiate. FRELIMO were very good right from the start on all that. But they eventually began to pay the price in terms of rebel incursions and what have you. And UNITA, rather than FNLA … the FNLA rather fell away in Angola. But UNITA was getting a lot of support from Zaire and from the Americans and was being built up to be a real thorn in the side.

CG: Was it getting support from South Africa?

PB: Yes, it was. And some of the camps in the Caprivi Strip in occupied Namibia, occupied by the South Africans, housed UNITA. And there began a see-saw in the south-east of Angola of UNITA from those base camps protected by the South Africans driving into Angola, sometimes driving back the FAPLA and the Cubans, then the tide turning and the Angolans and the Cubans pushing them back, then the South Africans invading in support of UNITA and another push with their strength …

CG: In the late '70s?

PB: Marga Holness's pamphlet 'Angola the Long Road to Peace' – this was published by MAC in 1996 probably – gives more of the detail. But it became clear that there were problems and that both Angola and Mozambique were under attack. MAGIC heped set up something called SWAM [Stop the War in Mozambique], which I know very little about. And at the same time …

CG: SWAM was part of …

PB: And MAC was established as well – the Mozambique Angola Committee. A lot of its original members were either the same long-standing people, some of the names I've

already mentioned. Tony Gifford was always in it, Anne Gray, Polly, Marga Holness and Jenny Warren, etc. There were also people who … a new influx of people who had worked as cooperants in Mozambique. They would have been recruited by MAGIC to work in other spheres, health etc., like Oliver Probyn, an architect, and he became the secretary of MAC. They had worked there and come back and then stayed involved as a new element in MAC. Angola hardly – I don't know of anyone who worked as a cooperant in Angola. The Angolans – sometimes they can be a little bit less outward looking, certainly than the Mozambicans, let's put it that way. Also fewer people in Angola speak English, more Mozambicans do and it's right on the border with South Africa and all its neighbours are Commonwealth countries and now it is in the Commonwealth, partly as a result of that. So there were more people in Mozambique and it was easier in terms of cooperants or whatever. So MAC was set up, I don't really know when. I and Tracy attended some of their public events, meetings, day conferences, and kept volunteering to go on speaker lists, particularly on our previous experiences in Angola. We kept up to date with what was happening in Angola. This never really got taken up.

CG: Did MAC work more on Mozambique?

PB: No, I think it tried to work on both. But it obviously depended on where the need was at a particular time. Certainly, Marga Holness and Jane Bergerol, the late Jane Wilford, who was very active in MAC, and by the way who had been the Financial Times correspondent in Luanda at the time when that first war was breaking out, were very interested in Angola especially. Tony Gifford and Polly, I can't remember when Polly went to work in Mozambique. I don't know of anyone who went and worked in Angola. I think Michael [Wolfers] went – he is about the only one.

CG: Can you say something about how in your experience how difficult it was to get people in Britain interested in Angola or Mozambique. It was very different from South Africa …

PB: Well, the Anti-Apartheid Movement and work on South Africa attracted tens of thousands, CFMAG and MAGIC and MAC never attracted those sort of numbers to events. But as I say, we gave out over 100,000 leaflets about the mercenaries, the mercenary events were a bit of a peg to hang things on, and I know for instance that at the time of the independence of Mozambique in June 1975 – I actually was celebrating it in the east of Angola – there was an event here in the Camden Centre which had a huge attendance. It was full to capacity and people were outside, overflowing, celebrating the victory. I think there was a lot of enthusiasm and the image – the Angolans and the Mozambicans had something of the Cuban style, with posters of guerrillas, and captured the imagination of quite a lot of people.

CG: So when did you get involved more closely in MAC?

PB: Towards the end of the '80s, I think, we began attending AGMs, '87, '88, that sort of period. I think the first office I held in MAC was as their delegate to the Anti-Apartheid

Movement, both to the London Committee and to the national conference and to the National Committee as an affiliate. It had been Tony Gifford and he might already have gone to Jamaica to live. He hadn't been going, basically. Shortly after that he stood down as chair of MAC. So I began as the MAC delegate and bashing AAM to do more on the frontline states.

CG: What was the relationship between MAC and the Anti-Apartheid Movement?

PG: There was a degree of tension. Particularly Mike Terry and Dick Caborn and people were conscious of the lack of resources that AAM had, the demands … I think they'd burnt their fingers a little bit, I think the Namibia Support Committee, which the Anti-Apartheid Movement had been involved in, I don't know whether it had resources or what, I don't really know the details of that. But I think they were wary of clamour from another organisation affiliated as it was, wanting more work on two countries, and by implication less work on South Africa at a politically crucial time.

CG: In the AAM's thinking and strategic approach I think they saw the importance of Mozambique and Angola, that it was important that they should be defended against apartheid aggression, but also that it was politically important for the liberation of South Africa that those countries were strong. So do you think it was in fact a resources issue rather than a political issue?

PB: I think there might have been a bit of both. I know Bob Hughes, before during and after, was personally very committed on Angola, especially Angola.

CG: Bob had been involved in the Movement for Colonial Freedom before he became chair of AAM …

PB: We invited him to become president of MAC and he did, so for quite a while he was also president of ACTSA and MAC. And Mike Terry had been, I think, almost accidentally, maybe in '76 or maybe '75, I remember him telling me that he'd been there. But there was less knowledge, I think, and there was the language issue, obviously. There were hardly any Angolans or Mozambicans in Britain, or in London, whereas there were quite a lot of South African exiles, many of them political exiles, who were politically active in the Anti-Apartheid Movement, knowing more about South Africa …

CG: There was a cultural angle, there were music groups …

PB: Yes, I remember the Kafala Brothers, for instance, an Angolan duo who performed here. MAC arranged a concert called 'A Night for Namibia'. This was actually MAC, but the funds were going to Namibia and the Kafala Brothers were the main act. There was also quite a lot of involvement from a lot of British stars, including Cathy Tyson, who starred in Mona Lisa. This was at the University College and we did the rehearsals at the church … so there was a continued cultural interest. But going initially as MAC's delegate to Anti-Apartheid, I can't remember all the chronology, I eventually became the co-chair of MAC, interesting in that there were two candidates for chair when Tony

Gifford stepped down. Tony was such a famous figure, with such a good track record and knowledge of both Angola and Mozambique, a noted civil rights lawyer and a member of the House of Lords. So there was a bit of consternation when MAC had to find someone to succeed him. There were two groupings, one of whom who were advocating that I should become chair and one of whom was advocating Margaret Ling, who was best known for her AAM activity, editing the AA newspaper and involved in AA and it was thought that this would give us a close relationship, In the end there was a meeting in Oliver Probyn's architects office and Margaret and I walked down the road and had a coffee together and said 'Why don't we be co-chairs?' And we were very happy co-Chairs for a number of years, probably from '89 or '90 till '94 or '95 and that worked quite well.

CG: Did that strengthen the relationship?

PB: I think it did. I'm not sure of the exact chronology. I remember going to Sheffield for an anti-apartheid conference with a resolution that had been composited. In those days the AAM conferences were like the Labour Party conferences …

CG: It was two days …

PB: Quite big events, with all the panoply of compositing and what have you. There was a motion from MAC, the AAM Scottish Committee and the London Committee, which demanded the setting up of a frontline states working party within AAM and had a list of things it would do. This was actully opposed by the National Executive, who fielded Dick Caborn with some of the arguments I've already gone into about the resources …

CG: Dick Caborn was the Treasurer …

PB: In the event they asked us to remit, and me and Brian Filling and Roger Harris, I think it was, had a quick huddle behind the stage and decided, 'No, we'll take it to the conference'. We each did fairly powerful speeches about Angola and Mozambique, especially, and we won the vote. And Anti-Apartheid set it up …

CG: So did Anti-Apartheid set up a working party … ?

PB: It did, and it fielded on it Alan Brooks and Mike Terry to make sure it didn't get above itself [laughs] …

CG: I think in 1988 the Local Authorities Anti-Apartheid had a conference on the frontline states. Do you remember that?

PB: No, I don't. I saw the report you sent. I was incredibly impressed. It was at the Shaw Theatre across the road from here at the NUT, or the NALGO building. I'm sure Nirmal Roy would have been involved in that, but I wasn't.

CG: How much interest was there in Mozambique and Angola campaigns outside London?

PB: Scotland and Bristol were always good. I remember going to Bristol three or four times, speaking at meetings they'd arranged, once with Basil Davidson actually. Bristol was very good. I remember people coming to our conferences from Birmingham. And there was a Leeds and Bradford Group, a sort of freestanding group, I think, around the universities there. I'm not sure what happened to them, whether they became organically part of MAC or if they were just a friendly organisation. So it wasn't just London. Another AAM tension was this thing called ECASAAMA, the European Campaign against South African Aggression against Mozambique and Angola. It was an initiative of MAC because there were sort of sister organisations, especially in the Netherlands and in Germany on either Angola or Mozambique or both.

CG: Historically, in the Nordic countries there had been a lot of emphasis on Mozambique and Angola.

PB: MAC got together with, I think, people like Sietse Bosgra in the Netherlands, I think there was an umbrella committee at the time in the Netherlands. There was something called KKM in Germany, which was the Church Committee on Mozambique. There were other organisations as well. We put in a bid to the European Union to organise a big Europe-wide conference and bring speakers from Angola and Mozambique to it. This was in Bonn. It did happen. It was '88, I think. I did find last night an article I wrote about it, a report back. It was well attended, there were people there from all over Europe and speakers from the governments and the armed forces of Angola and Mozambique, the Red Admiral was there, the last Portuguese governor, Rosa Coutinho from Angola. We had a civic reception in the North Rhine-Westphalia Land offices, and Tony Gifford was there. AAM were very suspicious of this.

CG: Why?

PB: It's hard to say. In the end they sent Abdul Minty and Abdul did some very good speeches. But they didn't mobilise to send delegates. The British delegates were organised through MAC or our direct contacts. It set up an ongoing body, so it would rotate, would meet in Lisbon, Bonn, Amsterdam, London, etc. There was some funding for a newsletter. It also fed into AWEPA, which was the Association of West European Parliamentarians for Africa, again funded by the EU in various ways.

CG: Do you think that Anti-Apartheid saw ECASAAMA as a resource issue, because there was also the European Liaison Group, which was lobbying on sanctions at the EU … ?

PB: It wasn't made all that clear, even though by then I was becoming more involved in AAM. In fact better relationships did develop and I think much later, at the foundation of ACTSA, there was a closer relationship between MAC and ACTSA. MAC was an active affiliate and always tried to put resolutions …

CG: To the AAM? Can you say something about the Angola Emergency Campaign, which I think was in 1992 …

PB: Yes, In September I think there were elections as a result of a Peace Accord in Angola. The Peace Accord had been between the Angolan government and UNITA with various monitors and sponsors of that Accord including America, Russia and I can't remember … but there was outside involvement. There was an election. The UN were observing it. Margaret Anstee was the UN Special Rapporteur and it was clear that the MPLA won it outright with a landslide. The leader of UNITA, Jonas Savimbi, couldn't possibly believe this and he always thought it was stolen. Margaret Anstee, I happen to know, used to tell him to wait – if the MPLA have five years and screw up the economy and everyone is complaining, you can get in. But instead, in a set of deliberately confusing moves, blowing hot and cold, gradually escalated and went back to the bush and started basically a long war which on and off raged until he was finally killed some years later.

CG: In 2002 – more than ten years …

PB: And I remember I was chair of MAC, going to see Mike Terry in his office in Mandela Street, and Mike said 'How do you stop a war? And I said 'By making sure that whoever starts it, everyone in the world comes down on them really hard'. And we were afraid of a Spanish civil war situation, with official neutrality of governments and what have you. We decided that going through the democratic structures of AAM and MAC, that we would jointly set up a new joint body called the Angola Emergency Campaign, hoping the emergency might not last all that long, fearing that it might be protracted. It eventually became hugely damaging and displaced a quarter of the population, killed hundreds of thousands of people, etc.

CG: With American collusion …

PB: With American collusion and eventually a very convoluted series of talks that the Americans were in, which focused on linkage between Cuban presence in Angola, South African occupation of Namibia, as well as MPLA and UNITA. There is a book by Chester Crocker, who was the Assistant Secretary of State called 'Making Peace in a Rough Neighbourhood' …

CG: That was before 1992 …

PB: Yes. The Americans were not all that good. We had some contacts in the States – Prexy Nesbitt and others. And the AEC in Britain, I don't know the exact dates, I don't think there's an archive of their stuff, some of it may be in the AAM Archives.

CG: It is.

PB: Bob Hughes and I were the co-chairs and we attracted wider organisational support – quite a lot of trade unions affiliated, War on Want had a campaigning company, subsidiary – I think the charity itself wasn't able to get involved. The UNA were very strong supporters and particularly Malcolm Harper. Malcolm was the Director of the United Nations Association of Great Britain. They were stalwarts really. And we had a lot of volunteers who, I think MAC probably recruited. I remember again Mike Terry obviously supported this, but when one day he walked into the Mandela Street office and every desk and every phone was staffed by a MAC volunteer working on the Angola campaign, I think it began to worry him a bit. We tried to draw up some protocols and what have you. We had some very big meetings. We had some large petitions signed by thousands of people. We were able to place increasingly big adverts in the Guardian, sponsored by the people who signed them – the great and the good, MPs and Lords, and I got from Camden a list of famous people who lived in Camden and some of them, Margaret Drabble, signed it and some of the literary establishment. So it was effective on that level, we arranged several visits by Angolan speakers.

CG: Was it asking the British government to take any action … ?

PB: It varied depending on what the situation was in Angola. I remember we had a warm response, although they didn't always do what we were wanting, from people like Lynda Chalker [Minister for Overseas Development]. Lynda would pose for pictures with me and Bob presenting petitions to her that went into the Morning Star and Anti-Apartheid News. She was quite happy to discuss. I occasionally google my name and what I found was letters from Lynda Chalker to Bob Hughes and me. They did eventually support … they sent a logistics battalion later, as part of a UN force when there was a temporary, as it turned out, peace. There's even a fly on the wall documentary of the debates in the Foreign Office about this – it was on TV. I watched it with great interest. They were debating where to send it – they called it BritLogBat – British Logistics Battalian, and they built airfields for the UN and that sort of thing. The AEC actually never formally wound up and as you say the war went on for much longer than the end days of your period. I did go in '93 to the ANC International Solidarity Conference in Johannesburg in February, a very large conference with delegates from all over the world. And I persuaded the ANC to set up an Angola solidarity campaign. I remember Walter Sisulu particularly taking it up and organising demonstrations in South Africa. I indeed almost hijacked the ANC international solidarity conference to include in the final declaration a chapter on Mozambique and Angola. We had a fringe meeting, a lot of people came to that, convened by myself and Paulette Pierson-Mathy from Belgium, who is a long-standing activist on Mozambique, Angola and Guinea. We haven't talked at all about Guinea [Bissau] – that has sort of faded away, due to problems inside Guinea. There was international involvement in that campaign, as I said we were close to people in America. We also did a bit of material aid, as well. I had huge cartons of injectable antibiotics delivered to Mandela Street, which were being transhipped to Angola. I remember me and Claire McMaster having pictures of ourselves packing these and we put the pictures in the cartons so that the people in Angola would know they had friends a long way away, and this was all done through the Angolan, the Luanda, paediatric hospital, and we had quite a lot of Angolan delegations coming. In '92, '93, '94, that sort

of period. On one famous occasion they were two weeks late for the Labour Party conference due to having had previous engagements in Austria and I was left in Brighton with Bob Hughes and several other MPs who were our platform waiting for the substitute from the Angolan Embassy to turn up and they were late as well. And I'd been holding rooms in the prime conference hotel with the Labour Party International Department for MPs from Angola, who did eventually arrive but two weeks late. Communications issues can sometimes be there. It had reached that sort of level with Angolan MPs travelling and speaking – the Friends House meeting was very big, very well attended. The initial impetus was very strong and it grew for a while. Then, I think, as things got more confusing and Savimbi never quite declared all-out war, there were always glimmers of potential negotiations in different places, in Lusaka or wherever, and they never quite led to any outcome, and any time they did, he would twist and turn with another demand, the goal posts would move. And in the meantime his troops on the ground were going for villages and people and railways, etc. So people did get confused.

CG: So looking back, how do you feel personally about your involvement and do you think it was all … how effective was it?

PB: I think the liberation movements themselves have always said that they are very grateful to those in the West who supported them and even – I'm still involved, I'm the Vice-Chair of ACTSA, the AAM's successor body. MAC has petered out, it's never officially wound up. When my partner died, she was the Secretary, I was the Chair. ACTSA produces the Angola Peace Monitor …

CG: So in a way the spirit of activities goes on …

PB: Yes.