

*Interview with Louis Mahoney on 18 September 2013, 11.30am, The Holly Bush, Hampstead, London*

*Matthew Battey: This is Matthew Battey interviewing Louis Mahoney for the Forward to Freedom Anti-Apartheid Movement history project. Hi Louis, please give me your full name and your background?*

Louis Mahony: My name's Louis Mahoney and I was born in The Gambia in 1938. I came from a family – quite a large, sort of middle-class family, they were all professionals, doctors, lawyers, teachers. My dad was the principal of a school, and I had a lot of relationships as a young man with the Royal Navy coming over to The Gambia, to Bathurst – it was called Bathurst then, now it's called Banjul – and as a young man I remember being taken on board and being put on one of those swivelling guns, you know, and having fun and being given chocolate. So there was a lot of warmth about these guys who were fighting a war, and as I was growing up I took quite a lot of interest about what was going on. I then discovered that my dad, who was principal of a school in the street where we lived. [General de Gaulle was in hiding in a house on that street after the Vichy France happened], and my dad was one of the chaps who had to keep an eye – it was like the Home Guard, even though he was in his office, but he was watching what was going on. And in fact, President Roosevelt made a stopover to talk to de Gaulle on the way [to see Churchill in the United Kingdom], and all this was told me – so I got terribly involved with that period, as I was growing up, and so when I came to England in 1957 – I came to study medicine – I was very familiar with this, with people from Europe, especially English people because I was a Wesleyan Methodist, I went to church, I used to listen to Sunday Half Hour on the BBC World Service.

So it was all very familiar to me, and I was therefore very involved in the way of life in England as a student. And I decided then that perhaps I didn't like medicine, I wanted to become an actor. And then went to drama school, this was in the '60s. I got very fired up though, because in the '60s, you used to see what was happening in southern Africa, with Rhodesia, and the Selous Scouts going and bombing, killing people, and I couldn't understand it, and in a way it was funny hearing the Prime Minister of Rhodesia, Ian Smith, saying 'not in a thousand years will there be a majority black government in Rhodesia'. And also there was this conflict with Harold Wilson, and meeting on a [war] ship to decide the fate of Rhodesia. And all that got me very fired up because I'd always thought of white people, especially English people, as being, you know, very friendly and very much for fighting for the good of the world, for freedom, like they did in the Second World War.

And I couldn't understand so I thought, 'No, this isn't right', so I started looking at perhaps areas where I could make some contribution. As it so happened, we had a union policy that was quite well supportive of going to work in South Africa and playing only in front of mixed audiences, not segregated audiences, and I thought that was a good thing. We also had the feeling that in terms of television programmes, there should be no sales to South Africa, and that actual policy was in place. However, during the '70s, there was a lot of political activity happening in the union [Equity, the actors union] and there was a group called Ipi Tombi, these were a group of South African dancers and singers who came over. I think they'd done a tour of Israel and then they came over to the United Kingdom. And I had actually become councillor on the Equity Council – this was 1974 to 1976 – and information came through to us that this group that had arrived, when they played in Norwich, either Norwich or Ipswich, rather than stay in a hotel, some of them had to sleep in a bus. Now it seemed to me at the time, as a councillor for actors, when actors travelled somewhere, you are giving accommodation, and in fact, sometimes you give them money to get their accommodation, most time they actually book it for you. Now, we wondered why this wasn't happening, and we questioned it, and we were told by one of the producers, a white South African, 'All these people are used to sleeping in buses', and so on. And we got very furious, because in

England that shouldn't happen. This was, in fact, the point at which I decided, right, no lip service to anti-apartheid – I used to, you know, make contributions – but to become actively a member.

*MB: So that really galvanised you?*

LM: This galvanised me to become a member.

*MB: Just quickly, what was the name of the group that you mentioned?*

LM: The name was Ipi Tombi – I-P-I T-O-M-B-I. It was a very successful company, it played in the West End for a long time, did tours all over the world. And then by becoming involved with them I followed their progress, and some of them decided they didn't want to return to South Africa. I got to learn a lot about what their conditions were in South Africa, and managed through the union to get them a sort of refugee status, so I formed a theatre company with Mike Phillips, who was the brother of Trevor Phillips [the head of the Commission for Racial Equality], and we formed a theatre group called Black Theatre Workshop, and used it as the basis for helping some of the ones that stayed behind to become involved in doing projects and maybe doing plays. However, at that time there was a big change in Equity, the actors union, because one of the major councillors, Marius Goring, had decided to look at the rules of the union, and went to the High Court for the interpretations of some of the rules. We weren't sure what the reason for it was, but then it came out that he had got this bugbear of the ban on TV sales, and the question of people being forced to play in front of mixed audiences; he felt that the right of the individual actors shouldn't be tampered with by the unions, and in fact he had resigned, I think, during the first miners strike in the '70s. The union had contributed some money towards a fighting fund, and he felt that the union should be non-political.

So he used that as a basis of looking at the rules, and that then [spurred] him on to try and look at the issue about South Africa. This then became a very serious battle for us in the fact that as I was what we called the Afro-Asian councillor, my particular remit was making sure that the welfare of non-white actors was being looked after by Equity, by me obviously having a wealth of information telling them who these people and where they were, what drama schools they were going to, and looking at productions the BBC were doing, whether they were reflecting the mixture of the population. This then gave me a foothold in the Council to try and address what Marius wanted to do in wanting to reverse the [cultural boycott] on South Africa, and that then made it a battle-cry for me, in knowing that we as a union were non-political and we couldn't affiliate with the Anti-Apartheid Movement.

We then decided to form what we called 'Performers Against Racism', and by being a group of performers who were against racism, we could then look at racism in all its forms, where it happened, where our members had to perform, and what disadvantage things were, in terms of selling programmes to South Africa became for us. What had transpired was that lots of the actors in the union – a lot of British people – really don't like the idea of racism, and therefore joined up. The list of stars – I mean, Glenda Jackson, Prunella Scales, Miriam Karlin – lots of people came in, and the support was tremendous. So when Marius started his activity, somehow or other we felt that he might have a link with the South African Broadcasting Corporation, because they came over to England to try and get Equity to reverse the ban on TV sales, because they would say, 'Look, your members work, you're not making money for them, we don't particularly like American programmes; we would prefer British programmes, blah blah blah ...'. But they made a specific request that if they were going to buy British programmes we had to understand that the black actors in the programmes had to be servants or gardeners, like they are in South Africa. Which said to us, here was a question of determining what roles black actors should play in an

independent BBC or ITV ... and purely for sales to South Africa that should change. We said no, and the union said no. And Marius, obviously, felt that there was a point in saying that members were losing income by not agreeing to sales. So a referendum happened, and members voted in support of Equity's stance.

*MB: When was that?*

LM: This was in [the '80s].

*MB: And just in this article here, it mentions Derek Bond, who was also a controversial ...?*

LM: Well, Derek Bond was the President of Equity, and I was the Afro-Asian councillor, I was on the Council – he was my president. And Derek Bond was convinced that going to work in South Africa was a good thing in that they were going to educate the Afrikaans about our theatre and what we did. And the play he was going with didn't have any black actors in it, it was 'An Inspector Calls', but he had guaranteed to the Equity council that in his contract he was only going to play to mixed audiences. Not segregated audiences. And not to only a white audience.

However, my contact with the Anti-Apartheid Movement – because when we formed Performers Against Racism, we were as a body of actors, perfectly entitled to be associated with or affiliated with the Anti-Apartheid Movement – which is exactly what we did. People like Mike Terry, who was in charge at the time, and a chap called Chris Child, and I think even Charles Clarke, who became Home Secretary [in the last Labour Government], used to be involved with the Anti-Apartheid Movement. And we felt then, because we had that close link with the AAM, we would ask them to monitor very closely what Derek Bond did when he went to South Africa. As it happened, Derek Bond was asked to play in front of an all-white boy's school, which he did. And when we questioned him when he came back he said well he had no choice because he hadn't been informed about it. But we took him on board and we said, 'Look, you had given an assurance to the Equity council that you wouldn't do that', and this thing blew up, and the press, Granada TV I think, took it up. I had to have an interview with Derek sitting there, and I was adamant that he had actually, as the president of Equity, he had the responsibility of not breaking what the policy was, and that he had assured us that he wouldn't, but he did, and here is evidence, in the form of a newspaper cutting. So he resigned. And that was all basically from me fighting him, and putting my neck on the line, as it were.

However, there were a lot of other actors who felt that, in solidarity with how we felt, they would back 100% what we were doing, and that was wonderful. And the support we had from the AAM was just unbelievable in terms of information, sometimes in terms of contributions towards having a meeting. We had a meeting at a pub called, I think it's called the Globe, in Baker Street, opposite Baker Street station, and we had people like Janet Suzman came to it and Julie Christie, and that showed the level of support of leading actors for our policy. And that gave me a lot of strength. So this then became a big issue, because having a president resign like that was like people thinking I stabbed him in the back, but you know, it was a question of him giving an assurance to the council that he wouldn't break the policy and he did break the policy. And a lot of the South African Ipi Tombi people who were now part of Black Theatre Workshop I'd worked with, told me a lot about how things were in terms of the pass laws and so on. And it seemed to us, and certainly to me from my background, that the injustice was something that we couldn't as a union continue to tolerate. However, Marius continued: in 1992 he tried to [overturn the boycott of sales of TV programmes to South Africa in the High Court], and the court ruled in our favour, and I think it ended up with him having a bill of £180,000.

*MB: So you think it's a kind of political statement.*

LM: That's right, it was in a way and there was a company called M-Net, and we think that M-Net gave him a lot of support because they became involved in the referenda that was happening – they were writing on the sidelines, pieces on the stage, and forcing Equity to [change].

*MB: Was that a theatre company?*

LM: No, M-Net, I think it's almost like ITV in South Africa. SABC was like BBC, and M-Net was an independent TV company in South Africa. So that became, really, the battle that I had to fight in the union, and the support I had was just unbelievable, unbelievable.

*MB: From within the acting community?*

LM: Oh yes, absolutely from within the acting community, from outside – I mean I had friends who were white South Africans and were professors, one was at Leicester University, and he was right behind and used to ring me up and say, 'Well done, that's why I left South Africa and I think you people are doing a great job'. I met Oliver Tambo, he was very pleased, and I met Dali. In fact, because of our efforts at Equity with a cultural boycott, Dali Tambo then in [the mid '80s], I think '86/'87, formed something called Artists Against Apartheid. In fact, Dali came to meet me, I met him and we talked about it, and then we met Mike Terry, who was the Secretary of the AAM, and we got affiliated as Performers Against Racism with Artists Against Apartheid, shared information, you know, making sure, watching very carefully that the policies still stayed in place.

*MB: Did you have much interaction with local groups within London?*

LM: Not so much, I mean I, in terms of Camden Anti-Apartheid, because I lived in Camden, I mean there were one or two meetings that I attended – I did also with my other fellow actors stand in front of South Africa House night after night, with various people. In fact, one of the other people who was there was Paul Boateng, the MP and his wife Janet, they were very strong supporters of anti-apartheid – in fact Paul ended up being the High Commissioner in South Africa, in 2005 I think, until [2009], something like that. I certainly know that he was there in 2007.

*MB: So you've got this clipping here about Goring?*

LM: Yes, and this – just to show you – 1992.

*MB: So in '92 it's still going on.*

LM: No, it's settled now because South Africa has changed.

*MB: So do you feel there was a significant faction within the union behind people like Goring?*

LM: Yes, well you see Goring was part of a group [Act for Equity], Equity became quite factionalised in the '70s. There was what was called the right wing, which was people like Goring and Derek Bond and Bruce Bennet, Margaret Rawlings, some of whom had connections in South Africa, apparently I heard, but don't quote me on this, but I think it's true, Derek Bond was married to a lady [whose family were connected with Tate and Lyle, who had big interests in South Africa]. So that was the other thing whereby him going to South Africa – being very dangerous for the ban in that if he succeeded, he might have been able to do something to overturn it.

There was also what I call 'left of centre' and I got quite close to that group. And then there were two other groups, there was ELA, and WRP, Vanessa Redgrave and Corin Redgrave, and I think that they were labelled purely to discredit them within union politics. Because a lot of the stuff they were fighting for wasn't, you know, some political message, it was about the union should be seen to be caring about its members and therefore if the government's laws that were being passed that were affecting Equity members then we should stand up and be counted. And the right wing didn't like that, so that's why Marius started looking at the rulebook, the rulebook of Equity, very closely to see if anything we were doing was against the rules, and where the rule was silent or ultra vires, he went to the High Court to try and get some ruling on what that rule actually meant. So that was a constant fight that we always had within the union.

For me, the anti-apartheid movement as a whole, I think played a very significant part in the changes that happened in South Africa, and eventually the release of Mandela, because I do remember how close – I did a film called, well, two separate films, one was called 'Cry Freedom', a Richard Attenborough film about Steve Biko, and he was very close to making sure that he accurately reflected what was going on in South Africa. And a lot of people felt that he didn't concentrate enough on Biko but more on Donald Woods. However, I was sympathetic to where he was going because there were a lot of people in America and the UK who didn't quite understand what was happening in South Africa and so until they could see the mirror of themselves in South Africa they didn't want to change. So Richard Attenborough's emphasis on the Woods family, and how even as a white family, the regime was prepared to send the kids T-shirts which had been soaked in acid so that when the kids wore it and perspired, their skin came off ... Middle America didn't like seeing that, nor did people here, so there was a big push for change.

*MB: It's a very effective medium.*

LM: Very effective, yes; and I think that compensated for him not concentrating too much on Biko. Because to be honest, people were seeing time and time again on TV, a lot of black bodies, from Rhodesia, South Africa, from other parts of Africa, Biafra ...

*MB: So you think there's a kind of over-saturation?*

LM: Yes, that wouldn't have been so powerful... so this – I thought that the emphasis on this part of it was good. The other thing was a programme the BBC did called 'Death is Part of the Process', which was written by Hilda Bernstein, a South African lady. It showed the start of the ANC military wing [Umkhonto we Sizwe], and that film I thought was very important in getting – at a time when the question of South Africa was foremost in the minds of everybody – why and how it started. And it showed that in fact, it wasn't [just a 'black' organisation, it also had a couple of white lecturers [from Johannesburg University] who felt that what was happening was so unfair that they came together with some black people and decided to form this [active group], but they were only going to target things like electric pylons and goods trains, just to create havoc rather than killing people, you know. And they were very successful in doing that. So when we did that film, people realised that's where it came from, it started changing people's views about the ANC and what they were doing. So these were the involvements I had at that time.

*MB: You mentioned the '60s as a time when you became aware of what was happening in Rhodesia, and South Africa – do you think it's fair to say that's when your involvement began?*

LM: Yes that's right, because until the '60s, even up to the early '60s, my life from Africa to the first five years in England, was one of great warmth and pride in coming to England, and having met white people in The Gambia in the school I went to. The principal of my school came from Cardiff,

and the Vice-principal was from Cornwall, and we were very much like an English public school, so we sang some of the songs you would sing in public school, and had different houses. I was head boy actually of my school in The Gambia, it was called 'Gambia Methodist Boys High School' and also head of the house – my house was Crowther; so we had red, blue, yellow and green. So it was basically very much like in England. And a lot of the stuff we were doing – we did English history, a lot of the subject matters, we did Clive of India, all that stuff. I used to play cricket, I was coached by George V. Gunn, who was a son of Gunn and Moore bats, he came from Nottinghamshire to The Gambia. So when I came to England I was playing cricket for Ilford in Essex, and the University of London, so I was very much part of the culture here. So I didn't feel any racism of any kind – OK, there were one or two people who were idiots – but the majority of people I knew were very nice and warm and together, there was no question of ...

And then suddenly you were seeing what was happening on the television in Rhodesia, and unfortunately there was a brief spell when the Prime Minister in England was Alec Douglas-Home, and I think he said something about 'kith and kin', we should support the white Rhodesians. And I thought 'God, you know ...'

*MB: And that must have been a real contrast?*

LM: That's right, very, very different from the people that I knew and friends I had here and so on, and still have. So that was what fired me up – because I wasn't afraid, and because I was talking logically, I wasn't some mad guy going to put a bomb somewhere, it was more an intellectual debate of rights and wrongs and I could sit and argue for hours, and obviously understand the other person's point of view and see where they're coming from and whether I can argue them out of realising that areas that might be wrong. And similarly, listening to what they had to say and how the system works and where and how I can go to effectively bring about change – I listened to all that.

*MB: Can you remember a moment when you were aware of the Anti-Apartheid Movement itself, in London?*

LM: Yes, well I think that came in the late '60s partly because we'd had a series of plays from South Africa, and I met Athol Fugard, and there was a thing with him working with two black actors and the Anti-Apartheid Movement made a big spread about Fugard's work and so on. And I went to see Mike, I went to the offices [at Charlotte Street] at the back of Goodge Street.

*MB: Mike Phillips?*

LM: No, Mike Terry – he was actually the big boy, the General Secretary at the Anti-Apartheid Movement or the main man. And so got involved around that period, in the late '60s.

I think – I mean the only other story that might be interesting for you is that when this group Ipi Tombi decided to have refugee status and we formed this theatre group [in the mid '70s] and we did a play and we took it to a festival in Lagos – it was a black festival of arts and culture, and we took the group to Lagos [Nigeria]. When we came back we did this show in a theatre called the Greenwood Theatre and we then got an American guy who saw it and liked it and wanted us to come to the States. And within a month we went to New York, and we performed at the United Nations theatre, Dag Hammerskold Theatre, also in Chicago. And on our return, we did some more shows but after one of the shows, two ... I've got to be careful about this ... two white South African girls came, and they wanted to meet the group. So I said 'What do you want?', and they said 'Oh, no, we are South African, we just want to meet them'. So I said 'Yes, I'm the director, I think they're

a bit tired at the moment, can I help you?' And they said, 'Oh no, we just wanted to say how fantastic the show was, blah blah blah'. And they sort of took my number and I kept a number. And she came and met me – and I was interested to find out why they were so interested, so I had a social meeting with her in Hampstead and had a drink, we chatted and so on. She asked a few questions about work of these guys and how good they are and so on. And then within a month of meeting her she invited me to dinner. She said 'Oh, there's a friend coming from South Africa, he's a journalist, he might not have the same viewpoint as you but it will make for a good evening!'. So I said yes, why not, fine ...

So I rang the Anti-Apartheid Movement and I said, 'Listen, there's a girl who I'm not too sure about, there's something about her that's not quite right. She's invited me to dinner and to meet this guy from South Africa, Hope'. I can't remember his name now. They said, 'Don't go! He is from the BOSS', Bureau of Special Security, you know like MI5, in South Africa. So you could have dinner and be poisoned at any time, you know. I said, 'Really', and they said yes, we know about him and he's done terrible things and so on, so don't go. So what I did was I waited until the day and about half an hour before arriving at her place I rang this girl to say my sister was coming from America and I couldn't come to dinner, I had to go and pick her up and so on, sorry but I'll try and meet this guy at another time and so on.

Three days later, she wanted to meet me for a drink in Hampstead again, I met her for a drink. And she abused me horribly, 'Why did you lie to me?' I said 'Lie to you about what?'. 'You're not South African!'. I said I never told you I'm South African. She said, 'Yeah, but when I met you'. I said 'No, I never told you I was South African, I was the director of that play, and the cast were all South African.' [she swore at me] and walked off.

I then went to The Gambia for Christmas, and I was at a party, and I met the First Secretary of the High Commission, and he had been a school colleague of mine when I was a boy in Gambia, and he said, 'Oh hello old boy, I see you've been giving a lot of trouble in London with the South Africans!' I said 'What do you mean?' He said 'Oh, they were checking, trying to find out whether you're Gambian or not'. I then realised that she was probably working for the security services, and I just stopped any connections I had with her, and gradually to be honest, I wound down my involvement with South Africa, stayed in the sidelines but not up front. Because it seemed quite serious, that they would have gone to the extent of checking. I mean I think what they wanted to do if they knew I was South African – maybe affect my family if they knew I had a family in South Africa, that sort of stuff. But when they discovered I was Gambian, this girl might have been, you know, might have given them the word that I was South African, and they wanted to pursue it.

But these were the various areas of danger that were there, but it didn't deter me in the sense that I always felt that standing up for fairness, for equality ... there were lots of real people that were shy to come out, and when they knew that somebody else had come out and tried to do something, they also would come out and support it, and that's exactly what happened.

*MB: Do you know if any of your colleagues within the actors movement, did they have any similar experiences?*

LM: No, the people I might have – this was a grouping at Equity, around the time of the Marius Goring ... and this was around the time, just after the time of the Marius Goring thing. So this is a group, I stood with the various people in this group...

*MB: So these were the kind of people that were involved?*

LM: That's a list of people who were standing for election when I became vice-president of the union.

*MB: Were any of these people heavily involved?*

LM: Yes, all these people – you see, that's Tony Blair's father in law, Tony Booth, Lord Langley, Charlotte Cornwell (half sister to John Le Carre), Miriam Margoyles ... because we wanted a Council after the Marius Goring affair, we wanted a Council that was going to be in the majority that was supporting the policies that we had.

*MB: Did you have many links with actors or unions in other countries?*

LM: Yes, when I was vice-president, I got involved with the International Federation of Actors, FIA, so actors, unions from America, Australia, Europe, Denmark, Sweden and so on. We had meetings to talk about general policies and a lot of those unions were very impressed with the stance we had at Equity on apartheid and South Africa. And I'm sure that what we did was adopted by some of them. I can't specify exactly.

*MB: Were you based mainly in London?*

LM: Yes.

*MB: Were there other centres in other parts of the country?*

LM: Yes, I mean the thing about the union Equity is that we had various branches, and also areas like Cardiff looked after Wales, Scotland – Glasgow looked after Scotland, and in Manchester there was a big group who did a lot of variety because they controlled things like the light at Blackpool, and all that sort of stuff, variety acts, that's why a lot of the comedians, people from the north have a sense of humour, so there was a big branch there. At Cornwall, we had groups in Cornwall. But by and large, what I'm saying is because we had these different areas, we could go, I could go and talk to them about what was happening on the referendum or about apartheid, so some of them who were isolated in their little areas and Equity was seen like, the union for actors and they think about their work and nothing else, and didn't ever get involved, didn't really know what to vote for or how to vote. We had to go out and talk at various meetings about the policies, so I did get a chance of going to different areas.

*MB: How do you think the political climate at the time, with a Conservative government – do you think that affected your activism in any way?*

LM: Oh yes, oh absolutely – I mean I felt that we had to be very careful during the Thatcher era because she seemed to want to support South Africa in a way. It looked like that.

*MB: Whether directly or economically ...*

LM: Or indirectly, economically, yes that's right. So we were very careful about how we behaved. And she had it in for the unions, I mean, if she could break the miners, she could break the ... you know. And I don't think they were very keen at all at the Department of Culture or whatever – they hadn't realised the amount of invisible earnings brought in by showbiz people – people coming to watch shows at the West End, having to book into hotels, having to use transport, to eat in restaurants and so on. That was beyond them, they just saw actors as vocational people who were airy fairy, and in fact that's not true.

So she was very like that, because I remember going as vice-president to a meeting to the then Culture Secretary, Virginia Bottomley, and trying desperately to look at things like intellectual property rights, and various things about government funding and tell her how much we're contributing towards the economy. And support for the regions was another thing. And I said to her, 'You might find this strange, but I care very much about the brass bands in the north-east of England', and then gave a little story about brass bands and their significance and so on, and how we thought in the colonies, how fantastic it was to see. So it was all kind of background stuff, and then suddenly it was 'Oh, I didn't realise it was that important'.

So it was those sorts of things that we were doing all the time. However, I had to stomach the fact that there were people who thought, you know, if they got me into a production, there's gonna be some political disturbance or whatever. But I was never like that, I mean, the work was the work, you know – there was injustice in terms of how people were treated. I mean I might say something but I wouldn't accept, for instance, a piece of drama, and having read it said yes, and then suddenly whilst doing it, decide to change because I didn't think it was PC enough or whatever. In fact, I had gone the other way where things that I wouldn't like in real life to have happened, I've done because I think 'Yes, it happens in real life, so, you know, you have to act that way for people to understand what's going on, you know...

*MB: I suppose art and especially performance art is quite political and has to be ...*

LM: Oh, absolutely, and people realise that it sinks into the nether regions of the brain, you remember, and you suddenly find at some point or other that in a similar situation you almost react because of what was then, but I don't think that in this we were setting out to if you like infect – just really saying to people, hang on, we should be showing Britain as it is, not accepting what they say that so many people in Britain are servants or gardeners, I mean they're doctors, they're teachers, they're sportsmen ...

*MB: So you didn't perceive yourself as having an extreme political position, more a sense of principles?*

LM: Yes, principles, it's more based on principles, yes. I mean I think I tended to be more Labour than Conservative. However, family-wise, I should be Conservative because they were all professionals, and 'proper', and things about manners and that sort of stuff. I mean I'm very close, for instance, to the first president of The Gambia, because he married my cousin. He's here at the moment in Haywards Heath, he lives in Sussex. Sir Dawda Jawara was his name. He was one of the few Commonwealth presidents that the Queen liked very much, and even Thatcher liked because he was very democratic in all his political leanings, and he started the first human rights groups in Africa, which is now quite a big thing, you know. But I wasn't involved with any of that political thing because I lived here and my prime concern was being an actor, and becoming involved in anything involved with my union and fellow actors.

*MB: Were you involved in another campaigns at all, other than the ones you've mentioned?*

LM: Yes, campaigns, not in... apart from the anti-apartheid stuff, I was very much chairman for a long time of what we call the Afro-Asian Committee, and we looked at things like opportunities for actors here, black actors here. And we had seminars with the BBC with casting directors, in fact that [documents] shows you a little bit about it.

*MB: So was the Afro-Asian Committee also focused on combating racism in Britain?*

LM: Yes, more within the profession itself... because as I said we couldn't...

[Break]

*MB: So going back to what you were saying about the Afro-Asian Committee and the kind of internal struggle for equality for actors...*

LM: Yes, the thing about it, aside from what I said earlier, I started off with medicine from the academic side for me it was a big jump for my family to leave medicine and decide to become an actor, because in The Gambia there was very little that was significant about actors, except seeing them in movies, and very occasionally hearing them in a play on the World Service.

So it was important for me to take seriously the profession of acting. So I then realised that there were in fact big hurdles to be jumped by anybody who was non-white – because there was an assumption, a) that the majority of the programmes that people were watching on television and a lot of the plays people were going to see in the theatre were mainly with white characters.

There was also an interesting period where the Greater London Council, GLC, were very aware of career advisory officers going to schools and discouraging black kids from applying to drama school, to become actors, because they were saying well you don't see any of them on the box or whatever so what's the point – a chicken and egg situation. So that fired me up again to say look, let's look at the situation. And I got involved in Equity in the National Council for Drama Training, so we used to go out in a body on the BBC, ITV agents and so on, go to various schools and look at their philosophy, the policy of how the school operated their intake and so on. And we realised that very, very few of the schools had any black students, and that we tried to change. And we got it through GLC then saying look, if we're supporting and giving funding to various schools you need to look at the mix of the society – especially if you're London-based, because in London there were so many mixed cultures and so on.

And slowly that started happening, and it happened for me because when we talked to BBC and ITV and so on, there were one or two producers who (a) were saying well, we don't have any good black actors for parts you know, they're not trained, blah blah blah ... so you clicked up you know, OK: (a) if you're not trained you're not going to have a chance. And then we talked to the writers, and we wanted to know why there weren't enough parts for black actors – some of the writers might have mentioned like the BBC that they're not trained actors... but some said, 'You know, well I'm not black, I don't have any black friends, I don't live in a black community, so how can I write a black part?'

I used to argue that 'Hang on, you didn't live in the 18th century, but you can write, adapt what happened then', you know because you've read something then. Look, read the newspapers, see around you, and write about it.' And gradually there was this awareness that was beginning to happen through these seminars. And even casting ladies who were saying 'The part says ... white, 45 year old blah blah blah', so you look at it and you say, 'Well, he's a doctor and he's 45, he could be black or could be white, whatever!'. So gradually there was this awareness, and this is what I was saying to you right at the start of the interview, I never ever thought that people in England were necessarily racist, it's just that they didn't know or have the information that if they hadn't met you and spoken to them they didn't know and could only see at a distance..

So that exchange started happening, people were saying 'Yeah, why not?', and you know this was the reason why I pushed that in the union because I knew that when people started realising that

they weren't thinking that way, there's a difference between that and cold-face apartheid, so my work in Equity was very easy in terms of the organisation of the seminar, inviting various people, and you had the Commission for Racial Equality gave some money towards organising a seminar to talk about this, because they could see the advantage of it. There's a lady called Karen Ross, who was at Warwick University, who did a big research project on all that, and looked at various ... looking at Lenny Henry, for instance, that maybe he was doing a disservice when he was younger playing that stereotype and all that sort of stuff. So all that was understood and explained, we used to have a go at him. Actually I did his series [the Lenny Henry Show] – I used to play his uncle Jake [in the show].

*MB: So do you think those two things, you're talking about institutional racism really within the acting community and the opportunities open to black actors, do you think your struggle against that was informed by your other work against apartheid and vice versa?*

LM: Absolutely, I think the apartheid stuff, right, was so aggressive, and it was different from what I was experiencing here, in the fact that whatever prejudice there was very minor, and most people here, once they became involved, you realised they didn't have that type of prejudice at all, so it was very easy to show them that, 'Hang on, you're not thinking about, you know, these people who are different who are actually a part of the society}.

And then always this question of are they good enough, are they talented enough, and you have to work through that... so I worked through people going through drama school, little groups happening on a Saturday, there's a thing called 'Interaction' in Kentish Town, and my ex-wife was a teacher at Acland Burghley School and this started with a lady called Celia Greenwood, they started at Interaction, the Weekend Arts College and they got this place in Haverstock Hill, that's produced, you know, the lady in 'Secrets and Lies', the Mike Leigh film – Marianne Jean-Baptiste – she went to [WAC], that's how she started. And [Miss Dynamite], the singer, all these people...all started through [WAC], because little groupings started happening and people were funding them... we were fighting government, the BBC was contributing towards servicing conferences and groups like Black Theatre Cooperative, where young boys who joining together and were doing plays, a very streetwise type of thing, but before that people didn't understand, they would think 'Oh, that black guy's going to cause trouble' and when they started doing plays they started to understand their language and where they were coming from. And the whole thing about dubbing and that, that's where that started to become socially acceptable. And the 'fear' thing of something you don't understand started disappearing, you know. That was what I was trying to achieve here in terms of the conferences about... and Asians always seemed to be keeping to themselves but once this was happening suddenly there was an Asian family in Coronation Street, because some of them had the corner shops and so on. If that was happening in real society, why not have a little bit – so people can have ... the man in the corner shop – OK, he's a service, but who is he? Has he got a family, what does he think? Suddenly starting to understand him, you know.

And that for me was the big thing my work set out to do, and lots of people actually believe now that those early days and the things we started to do then are reaping the benefits because we are in a society where things are so much more relaxed, there's no... and all these people like..

... this guy [indicating photos] adapted the Hilda Bernstein [book] called 'Death is Part of the Process' – Alan Plater [the playwright].

*MB: Do You mind just writing his name on that? We have a photo here which we're not sure of all the names are.*

LM: I think I can name them all for you;

[LM labels photograph] 59:17:00 - 01:05:53

*MB: Was there much cross-over between people involved in the anti-apartheid movement within Equity and also the Afro-Asian Committee?*

LM: Oh yes, almost all of them, yes almost all of the members of the committee supported and went on those demonstrations, standing outside South Africa House. I mean there's some people who are not here who were very active too, you know. this is a special – I'm trying to think of when this is, obviously a special meeting – otherwise I wouldn't have been dressed like that! What's this ... maybe that's it...

*MB: I think it might be related to this [article].*

LM: 'Don't Entertain Apartheid' – that's what it was. David Yip is there.

*MB: So was that a gig you put on?*

LM: I wonder whether that's Denis Goldberg, but he has glasses... that might be Denis Goldberg... 'He had a heroic wartime career fighting the Nazis ...'

*MB: This is Derek Bond?*

LM: There you go.

*MB: This is from the AAM newsletter...*

LM: So they focused on Lenny and David ... for me that was OK, I was more of a background person. I had my position as chairman of the Afro-Asian Committee and created Performers Against Racism anyway, you know ... that's good information.

*MB: Well, I think we've covered just about everything that's on my list, so unless you have anything more to say, this seems like a good place to finish.*

LM: Well, all I have to say now is that I think that the Anti-Apartheid Movement has done a tremendous amount of good not only for what happened in Southern Africa, but also in the UK. I mean I certainly was close to both Trevor Huddleston and ... there was another man, another priest, who is he... [Canon John Collins]

*MB: OK, well thank you very much Louis, that's very useful.*

LM: Not at all.