

Interview with Mike Gerrard, former member of the Anti-Apartheid Movement Executive Committee, by Christabel Gurney on 5 May 2000, reproduced on the Anti-Apartheid Movement Archives Committee Forward to Freedom project website <http://www.aamarchives.org/>

Christabel Gurney: Can you begin by saying how you first became aware and concerned about apartheid and the situation in South Africa.

Mike Gerrard: My first awareness of it goes back before I was actually involved in politics, goes back to when I was at school and we used to have lecturers coming from various places, and we had a lecturer come from what was in those days called the Imperial Institute, to talk to us about South Africa and about the development of what then wasn't known as apartheid but was a very well entrenched system of segregation.

CG: When was that?

MG: That would be 1952. I had been asked to prepare the vote of thanks, so I had to listen to what she said. I found what she said completely fascinating and it stuck with me ever since. So that was my first involvement. I've been, if you like, a latent anti-apartheid activist for nearly 50 years.

CG: When did you join the Labour Party?

MG: I didn't join the Labour Party until after university and that would have been in 1962.

CG: When were you first aware that the Labour Party was doing anything on Southern Africa or when did you try to become involved?

MG: That didn't take very long at all because at about the same time, I suppose, I actually approached the Anti-Apartheid Movement and exchanged correspondence with Abdul [Minty].

CG: In about 1962?

MG: It would be '61 or '62, yes. There were a whole lot of things fermenting in my mind at the time and I exchanged correspondence with Abdul then. The issue was political prisoners. That was the thing that first caught my attention. It was given publicity in the *Observer*. And I wrote to Abdul following this, because they gave him as a contact point. So that's where it started.

CG: What were your links with AA from then on? Were you in a local group? Where were you living?

MG: We were living at the time in London and we were shortly to move out to Theydon Bois in Essex. It was a quite busy time of my life. My wife and I were young. We had a small baby at the time and we were saving up money to buy a house. So the things that I might have started doing in, say, 1960, or '61, I deferred

for a bit because my priorities were to save up enough to put a deposit on a house, and so it would have been 1961 or '62 by the time we relaxed a bit and began to do these things, and that included joining the Movement as such, and joining the Labour Party.

CG: What did you do in relation to AA in those early years?

MG: Well, the first things that I did with AA were to write to political prisoners in South Africa and I did that for a time. I got involved in the boycott, and I then spent time locally where I lived demonstrating a boycott attitude towards South African fruit and vegetables particularly, but also to other South African products. And I got information from the Movement which already was producing first quality information. For example, little leaflets on alternatives to South African canned fruit, and that sort of thing. And I was disseminating those to people who we knew and talking about them. So that by the time a year or two had passed, I had some sort of reputation as an anti-apartheid person.

CG: Were you at the same time involved in the Constituency Labour Party?

MG: Oh yes. We revived the ward in Theydon Bois. And for a couple of years I chaired it, until I felt that somebody else should take over and be the chairperson. We were getting ourselves electorally organised and making a front of opposition to the local squirearchy and so on. I was also involved in the constituency because of the sort of ferment that was going on before the 1964 election.

CG: And was the constituency receptive to the South African work?

MG: Yes, on the whole it was. There was a man in Harlow by the name of Jim Beecher, who had gone to South Africa. He and his wife had adopted a girl and they brought her back to this country when they were confronted with the option of getting rid of her or of the whole family being classified as Coloured or black. They said this is disgraceful and nonsensical and brought her back to the UK. They obviously had an axe to grind on the subject. Harlow was in the same constituency as the area where I lived at the time. So our activities at the south end of the constituency and Jim's influence in the north end of the constituency brought the two issues together.

CG: After UDI [Unilateral Declaration of Independence] did Rhodesia become an issue?

MG: Rhodesia was always an issue. As long ago as when I was at university, it was in the days of Roy Welensky and Sir Godfrey Huggins, and even then we were aware of the situation that was being maintained in Rhodesia and of the steps that were being taken to keep land ownership, particularly, in the hands of whites and the sources of income. So that it was quite a natural thing and I suppose at the same time it was building up internationally, as an issue there. We were well aware of Rhodesia and campaigned on the subject, before it became a question of the *Fearless* talks.

CG: Was it easier to get interest, especially after UDI, in the grassroots of the Labour Party in Rhodesia than in South Africa? What was the relation between the two, from the point of view of the Labour Party?

MG: I don't think it was specifically easier, except in the terms that it was the issue of the day. I think that there was always a recognition of the peculiar relationship between Britain and South Africa. I think that was crystallised at Sharpeville. Following the Sharpeville shootings, a lot of people became deeply aware of what the situation was in South Africa, and what was developing there. So that it never really left their consciousness. And when Rhodesia became the issue of the day, certainly Rhodesia sparked a great deal of anger and indignation, but South Africa didn't disappear, because people were conscious of the fact that Rhodesia was really only another manifestation of the same thing.

CG: Of course Anti-Apartheid didn't campaign directly on Rhodesia until UDI, or until just before UDI, and then it became one of the central issues.

MG: We could always see which way the Labour Government was going. The Labour Government on the whole was quite transparent, or it used to be in those days. You could see which way it was going, how the Prime Minister particularly was looking for a way out of a problem that caused him a lot of headaches, and he wanted to resolve it in a peaceful way without breaking the relationships between people in this country and people in Southern Africa. And of course there were enormous power groups that related to Rhodesia – the Marquis of Salisbury and associates. People like Welensky and Smith were newcomers on the scene really. But there were people who represented landed interests in Rhodesia and who represented everything that went back right to Cecil Rhodes.

CG: Can you look back and chart ... was there a changing attitude in the grassroots of the Labour Party to Wilson's various talks and evolving government policy?

MG: Definitely. It was really sparked by the shift on the part of Harold Wilson and his senior ministers. After all, at the time before the 1964 election Harold Wilson was an active speaker at anti-apartheid meetings and Barbara Castle was the President of the Movement. Then once they went into government they had to resign from positions in voluntary organisations of that kind and they started adopting official attitudes. I'm not talking here about Barbara Castle, but about Harold Wilson. He was quite forthright in earlier days, and now began to flail about like someone in water too deep for him. You could see him changing his position – people felt that he was changing his position – and wrote and spoke to him in terms of maintaining the position he had adopted before and trying to hold him on the same path. Or alternatively, trying to stop him from going too far.

CG: When did you first go to Party conference?

MG: The first Party conference I went to was 1967.

CG: It's in the Minutes of the Conference, how every day – this is in my notes – 'Mike Gerrard (Epping) asks Chair to say that Rhodesia will be taken.' They didn't discuss

it – there was a petition, wasn't there? Who got the petition up? And how much discontent was there really among delegates?

MG: There was a fair amount of discontent among delegates. Because Standing Orders imposed days – the Conference used to start with the Chairman's opening statement and a report from the Standing Orders Committee saying 'We're taking this subject, we're taking that subject – and we're not taking anything else'. And all the trade union people used to sit in a block in the middle, in the front, and they used to agree the report without argument, because generally speaking the Chairman of the Standing Orders Committee was a trade unionist.

CG: Who was the Chair?

MG: I can't remember – it will be in the Report. But when they came to the bit which said there would be no debate on Rhodesia, of course the conference actually did erupt. And Bob [Hughes] and I, who had emergency resolutions on the agenda, were among the first to do so. And we got what I considered at the time to be a notable concession from the Standing Orders Committee, who allowed their report to be amended, for Bob and I to meet them and put our case, which would enable them to take a decision later on about a resolution on Rhodesia. Which we did in due course – we met them. But they didn't, not in the end.

CG: Every day someone took it up – the NGA [National Graphical Association] took it up.

MG: Yes, that's right. We kept at it all the time, we were really very upset about it.

CG: Did you go next year?

MG: No, I went in 1969, not in 1968. We used to have a rotating annual conference system in our constituency. It was felt that if one person went every year, it denied everyone else the opportunity.

CG: Can you remember how you first joined the National Committee and then the Executive Committee [of the AAM]? How did you get more involved in AAM?

MG: Well, I certainly got more involved because Rhodesia had come to the fore. And over that period of time I moved from just being a boycott and anti-apartheid supporter to actually doing things in the Movement. It was really, I think, after Ethel [de Keyser] took over from Dorothy [Robinson] that Ethel said to me 'Look, I want to encourage you to do more active things'. I am sure that Ethel was at the heart of that.

CG: So when did you join the EC?

MG: It would be about 1968. It was when John Ennals was still the Chairman. I had started coming to National Committee meetings, just representing myself, or my Constituency Labour Party. We didn't really have an anti-apartheid group in my constituency. They broke up Epping Constituency in 1969 into Harlow constituency

and Epping Forest constituency, at which time I found myself in Epping Forest constituency. My involvement was mainly personal and there wasn't an anti-apartheid group there, although we had a working party on Southern Africa which amounted to the same thing. It conducted public actions in Harlow.

CG: Was that within the Labour Party?

MG: Yes, it was within the Labour Party. It conducted public actions in Harlow in order to raise awareness. It upset some of our people, because some of our own people were market stallholders and they didn't like being told what apples they could stock and what apples they couldn't stock, but in the end they were very good about it.

CG: Who else did you work with in the Labour Party? Did you have any connection with Joan Lestor?

MG: Yes, I did know Joan Lestor. But she was right the other side of London from me. So I only knew her as one of those people you saw on special occasions. How I actually achieved prominence in the Anti-Apartheid Movement is in some ways a bit of a mystery to me, because I wasn't in a local group. I found myself doing things like, for example, chairing meetings in Trafalgar Square. One of the things I'm proudest that I've ever done was to chair a meeting in Trafalgar Square.

CG: When was that?

MG: In about 1970. Another thing I chaired was a conference at Transport House. I think it was mainly on account of Ethel's encouragement.

CG: In the early days, do you have a picture of how much importance, in the '60s, the anti-apartheid office were giving to work in the Labour Party and how effective they were? How strong were their links?

MG: One thing that has to be said about the Movement from 1959 onwards is that it was always highly effective in terms of the quality of information that it put out, and that rings through this report all the time, the fact that the United Nations were willing to listen and take reports, the fact that so many people were influenced, means that the information had to be accurate, it had to be high quality and it had to be perceptive. And that's what it was. The annual report that Abdul used to give every year was really a masterpiece – on many occasions a masterpiece of analysis. We were very fortunate to have people of that quality. I don't exclude from that other people, like Alan Brooks, for example, who contributed a lot intellectually in the early days. So that we were fortunate to have that kind of people.

This is a digression – but it was important that that information was of the quality it was, because although there was only Ethel in the office, virtually at that time, and some volunteers, they managed to churn out enormous quantities of work and worked all the hours that God made. Because the material that came to Ethel from Abdul and other sources was of the quality it was, even if they didn't have the time or the energy to campaign actively within organisations like the Labour Party and the

Liberal Party, nevertheless people were impressed because the information that fell into their hands was so good. That, I think, has been the key to the success of the Movement all the way through. It never failed to produce information that was accurate and of the highest quality.

CG: One of the things that is interesting about AAM is that there were other organisations working in the field, but it was the one that got legitimacy. Were you ever involved with the Movement for Colonial Freedom?

MG: Yes, a little bit. But I found the Movement for Colonial Freedom too diffuse. And if we jump forwards to the '70s and the early '80s, when we start talking about the Anti-Nazi League and the anti-racist movement in this country, I think that Anti-Apartheid's strong point was that it had its particular *raison d'être*, and that it stuck to it. It kept its eyes firmly on it and it was always accurate, it was always perceptive, its analysis was always first rate. You couldn't ignore it. And it didn't get sidetracked. Although in the Movement there were many forces which tried to sidetrack it to their own agenda from time to time and it was sometimes difficult to overcome them.

CG: Do you think that on the policies – when the Wankie incursions started, the Movement moved very quickly to support armed struggle and at the same time it was always very consistent on pushing for total sanctions. Do you feel that, within the Labour movement, that caused problems?

MG: The armed struggle always had the potential to raise hackles in the Labour movement because the Labour Party is a party that pretends to govern and that sees itself as a legitimate political movement and one that rules by law rather than by violence. And it can't be seen to condone violence elsewhere as a means of achieving a result. However, the Anti-Apartheid Movement also was consistent in sticking by what were the objectives of the people with whom we were associated in South Africa and elsewhere. It was a long time before that the ANC, for example, had committed itself to military activity. The people in the Labour Party and the people in the trade union movement who knew about these things also knew that. They knew that in supporting calls for direct action, the Anti-Apartheid Movement was not deviating from a position of support for the ANC and various different bodies within Southern Africa and that they weren't asking the Labour movement to condone violence as a blanket move. What they were saying was 'Look, the way forward is the way people in the country themselves wish to move. And the way people wish to move is not just Albert Luthuli and peaceful progress, but it's Umkhonto we Sizwe as well'. I think people were prepared to accept that although we in this country were not in that situation, we had to acknowledge that people who were in that situation had to find means other than political means, because political means weren't at their disposal.

CG: And do you think that people accepted that AAM should be supporting what people in South Africa wanted and that they accepted the ANC as the voice of the people?

MG: It took time for them to understand. It's a difficult concept for people whose horizons are their own trade union. But they got to understand it and once they did

understand it, then they accepted it as something that was not necessarily the way that they would wish to go, but that was something that other people had no choice about.

CG: Going forward to the '70s – was there more support in the Labour Party even before 1976 and Soweto? There was the Tory government. Can you remember what the impact of the Tory government and their decision to sell arms was?

MG: The Movement produced a lot of good material about arms sales to South Africa and about South African military and paramilitary violence. A lot of the sports boycott material was to do with violence. Do you remember 'If you could see their national game you wouldn't want to play their cricket?' It was fortuitous, but worthwhile, that the sports ban campaign focused on their national sport because it drew attention to arms sales and the rest of it. Of course there were many other countries in the world who were imposing arms bans on South Africa, so that obviously hit a chord in the Labour Party. It enabled them in opposition to adopt the virtuous role that the Heath government was prepared to sell arms but they weren't – or at least, they said they weren't – and they could once again take up the high ground while in opposition. It's a shame that one has to say that, but nevertheless it's true, that it was easy to get the Labour Party motivated then because they weren't in government.

CG: Do you think that AAM during that period was able to build stronger links in the Labour Party?

MG: Yes, all the time. I don't think that AA's leadership – and I include myself in that – was ever blind to the fact that the wider you spread your message, the more intensely you put information around and you expand people's knowledge and understanding, the more influence you would have. And so it was a cumulative process. It started with the boycott rallies in Trafalgar Square in the early 1960s. And it just went on from there, through the Rhodesia business and at this stage to the sports boycott. And all the time it was gathering momentum and all the time more people were becoming influenced. I think that's going to be reflected if we look through those resolutions and look at the resolutions from Labour Parties and statements from the NEC and from the Party or the government in the period.

CG: How do you think that the AA issue tied in with other, more burning, domestic issues. In the '60s there was prices and incomes and the wage freeze and devaluation, and in the '70s there was the £6 a week ceiling for wage rises. But was there more opposition in the grassroots of the Party to the '70s Labour government than to the '60s Labour government? Did that make the grass roots more receptive to campaigning against Labour government policies?

MG: I think the 1960s government was a huge disappointment to the grassroots. I can't remember a time of parallel excitement in my adult life – when Harold Wilson became Leader of the Labour Party in 1962 and started to get out on the hustings, and he made speeches all over the country on the economy and the way that Labour was going to deal with things that the Tories had allowed to go to rack and ruin. He also talked about various issues, including South Africa – it was in this time that he

was appearing on platforms. People were really buoyed up, and looking for something very exciting. Now we all know that in spite of everything, when the 1964 election took place, there was only a tiny, tiny majority for Labour in Parliament. And we all know that the economy had been burned up by the Tories beforehand so that there were a whole lot of things that the new government didn't know about, which they had to contend with when they came in, but nevertheless the way in which the new government immediately adopted a conventional and orthodox posture on many many questions on which they'd been exciting and radical before they came to power, and the way in which the government had put out its horns and then drew them back on foreign policy issues generally, and on labour relations, led to a great deal of disappointment on the part of grassroots members. I remember even in 1966 when the Labour Party did win a good majority, there were people then saying 'The 1964 to 1966 government has just been too much for us and we don't want to have hide or hair of it'. But I think the 1966–70 government was even more of a disappointment to Party members and I would instance 'In Place of Strife' towards the end of the life time of the government, and the public argumentation between Ministers (both political and personal) after the devaluation debacle as examples of this. Speaking for myself, I always found the response of Jim Callaghan a disappointment. He often spoke in terms which might have seemed encouraging, but when approached officially, gave an impression of self-containment and imperviousness to the arguments put to him. I do not recall him expressing any reservations over the *Tiger* and *Fearless* talks and the government's capitulation to the Smith regime in Rhodesia. And I think that the attitude to the 1970s government was in a sense more of the same thing. But it was a different kind of feeling. It was almost as if the Labour government which had been so exciting in prospect in 1964, by 1974 was a burned out candle.

CG: You mean they didn't expect so much of it?

MG: No, I mean that members of the Party were disillusioned with the Party, and their expectations of the Government were perhaps not as keen as they were in the '60s. While they certainly chivvied the Government to try and make it stay in the right place on issues, with the IMF intervention in 1976 and the change of government from Wilson to Callaghan, and the change of many members of Government – Barbara Castle going out of Government, Tony Crosland dying – with the new people coming into Government, there was just a feeling that the whole thing was second-rate and that we were supporting something that was barely worth supporting.

CG: So how did that impact on their attitude on South Africa?

MG: I think a whole lot of people moved outside of mainstream government politics, went away from the issues that were confronting us in this country, and they either went into what one might call semi-populist politics in the UK, or they went for issues like anti-apartheid. I think that South Africa coming to the boil again in 1976 was a good stimulus for that.

CG: So you think that was happening from 1974 – people moving out of being active in the Party?

MG: After three years of the Heath Government, after 1974 when the Labour Party again came back with a small majority and then managed to consolidate it a bit later on in the year, then people were infused with a little bit more hope, but then when they saw in practice, they said to themselves that it was more of the same thing and it's going to be a disappointing government. I think that – it's my view, not necessarily the correct view, but it's my personal view – that with the change in government from Wilson to Callaghan, you had a change from a half-hearted government, but a competent one, to one which was inferior in almost every department.

CG: But at the same time what they actually did on South Africa got a bit tougher, because they did support the 1977 mandatory arms embargo.

MG: That's true. But it was the result of cumulative pressure on them, pressure from their own membership, pressure from outside – from other countries. Wasn't America ahead on the arms embargo at the time?

CG: To go back to Anti-Apartheid and its strategy and its policies, how did that change over time from when you first became involved in '67-'68?

MG: Well, the Anti-Apartheid Movement had to adapt all the time to its new adherents. And as the Anti-Apartheid Movement grew stronger and bigger (looking at the Labour movement and the trade unions) it had had, if you like, something of an initial base in the Liberal Party and in liberal thinkers, perhaps academics and so on, but once it went into the Labour Party and the trade unions, it had to come face to face with trade union branches and executives and it had to face the whole monolithic machinery of the Labour Party. But as it began to influence them, and it went to students and other places, it began to take on a bigger and bigger constituency, and it had to balance its own policy interests with the interests of those constituencies, which were always trying to get a quid pro quo. So I think that Anti-Apartheid had difficulties in the '70s in sustaining what I think was central to the success of the Movement, and that was the focused look at South Africa and how things were developing there and what was the best way to assist the people in South Africa, moving towards their own freedom.

CG: So how did it respond to those problems?

MG: It responded by mobilising a lot of people on a lot of occasions for a lot of different purposes and encouraging the enthusiasm of those people. But it also ran itself into difficulties by having to take on the people who said 'Alright we'll go with you on students in South Africa, but at the same time we want you to do things for us in this country, and support us in activities we are undertaking. We want you to look at the broader spectrum of racism and discrimination in this country'. Anti-Apartheid had to say 'No, this is not our job. If you want to do that you must do it elsewhere'. And that led to a lot of tensions in the Executive and the National Committee and at national conferences. But I think that Anti-Apartheid on the whole retained its position – that's about the time when Ethel went out and Mike Terry came in, isn't it [as Executive Secretary of the AAM]?

CG: There was an interregnum. Ethel left in '74 and then there was Basil Manning ...

MG: Oh yes, I remember Basil well, but he doesn't register in the same way – Ethel and Mike were the two big pillars, in spite of the fact that Abdul was the original spokesman, and Dorothy had done the same job. But how did Anti-Apartheid change? I think it simply changed by making it very clear that it was not exactly a single issue movement, but a single subject movement, and that it wasn't going to allow itself to be sidetracked and that if people came to it, they had to come to it on its terms and not on their own. And that was a significant change. It also – sometimes I felt – responded to events, rather than leading them. But nevertheless the response was always effective.

CG: There were other pressures in the '70s, for example the Adam Raphael exposures of wage levels and the parliamentary Code of Conduct, which AA sometimes felt was posing a somewhat different response. Do you remember what pressures that put the Movement under?

MG: I think it's very difficult for a voluntary organisation with extremely limited resources to cope with a whole series of external influence or pressures, developments that caused the Movement to take up a position. This obviously happened all the time. So as often as not, the Movement had to retreat behind the blanket insistence that 'We stick with the African National Congress. We stick with ZANU-ZAPU. We stick with FRELIMO', and we wish to go forward in comradeship with those people on the basis that they have chosen for their own liberation. And while we see some of these things as being important, nevertheless we have to see some of them as side issues and diversions from our main theme.

CG: Do you think it was correct to stick with sanctions, as far as getting grassroots support in the Labour Party was concerned? For example, at the 1976 conference, Bill Sirs [General Secretary of the Iron and Steel Workers union] talked about BSC and the pressure to get them to stop their new investment and he pointed out how this would damage his members' interests. It was obviously a problem.

MG: That's always been one of the contradictions intrinsic in dealing with bodies like trade unions, which have economic and personal interests of their members at stake. The short-term interests of their members and the interests of the Movement were apparently at odds. I think it was a measure of the maturity of the trade unions and of the movement generally, how far they were able to rise above that. At that time, for example, there was the famous case of the Lucas shop stewards, who were producing alternative uses for their factories and their technology, and there were cases where trade unions did rise above the short-term interests of their members to put out a new perspective. I think also that the Movement kept them on the right lines, because the Movement kept saying that by investing, by trading, you are strengthening apartheid. If you make a simple analogy of the human body – if you nourish it, it gets strong – and if you nourish apartheid, it's more likely to get strong than if you don't. It was in fact economic strangulation that eventually killed it.

CG: In 1974 there was a quite successful Labour Party conference where you chaired a discussion group and it was organised by AA and the Labour Party – Jenny Little. As a follow-up, the EC wanted to organise regional Labour movement conferences and you were on the subcommittee. Can you remember the good points or the difficulties in that?

MG: I can't remember a great deal about it. I am sure that regional conferences were undertaken, and continued to be promoted, but I have no recollection of a definitive outcome from their work. It wasn't at that time, but I spoke at a regional conference in Glasgow, so I know they did take place in subsequent years. But that was a manifestation of current goodwill in the Labour Party. What time of year was it in 1974?

CG: There was a June conference in 1974 and an event at Camden Lock that happened about the same time. There was another conference in the autumn of 1976, which was more for trade unions.

MG: That was probably the one at Transport House. I was at Labour Party conference in 1974. In 1973–4 I was a parliamentary candidate, so I went not as a representative of the constituency, but as a PPC [prospective Parliamentary candidate]. Certainly – was the 1968 conference at Blackpool? There were a number of conferences I went to in other capacities. 1967 was at Scarborough.

CG: 1968 was the one where they did pass a resolution on Rhodesia against the wishes of the NEC [Labour Party National Executive Committee] – a very strong resolution.

MG: I did attend that conference. I went up with Ethel and Roger Trask.

CG: It would have been Alan [Brooks]. Roger was later.

MG: I did once take Roger Trask up to Blackpool – that might have been '73 or '74. At that time I was also running the campaign for chronic sick and disabled people, so I went up to a number of conferences in that capacity.

CG: To go back – there was also the issue of the growth of the trade union movement within South Africa and the pressure that put on trade unions here to call for trade union rights and solidarity, and the Movement felt that we should still be pushing for sanctions and to some extent, there was a conflict. Did you ever come across that? I mean it was a matter of emphasis.

MG: It was a matter of emphasis. I think that in union debates that came across very clearly, that there were people arguing one point, and people arguing the other point. But I would have thought that the upshot of that, generally speaking, was that the trade unions went for solidarity.

CG: You mean solidarity encompassed support for independent trade unions in South Africa and for sanctions?

MG: Yes, they did support sanctions. But obviously they had to support independent trade unions in South Africa, they couldn't be seen to be doing anything else. The debate was over whether that would involve leaving those trade unions isolated from trade union money and contacts with trade unions elsewhere – over going out to South Africa and giving them support and assistance. Where that argument hinged was on the fact that the South African trade unions themselves were saying – 'Look, support us, but support the boycott and support isolation as well.'

CG: Going back to the issue of race in this country – you said that Anti-Apartheid was under pressure in the '70s. How did that manifest itself?

MG: All those movements that emerged in that period. I remember many anti-apartheid meetings where we had to mobilise to get rid of the National Front and throw out right-wing agitators and so on. At that time there were three or four small political groups in this country which were anti-black and I suppose they drew some of their inspiration from Enoch Powell. But they were marching through towns in this country and causing disturbances and provocation. In response to them, the Anti-Nazi League and other organisations sprang up. People who belonged to those organisations and belonged to Anti-Apartheid were saying to Anti-Apartheid 'We're doing this because it's necessary in this country, and there's no point in posturing about South Africa when the situation here is every bit as ghastly as it is in South Africa. Anti-Apartheid in my view quite rightly said to them 'We have to stick with our own particular campaigning position. And while it's perfectly open for individuals who are members of the Anti-Apartheid Movement to show solidarity and take part in your activities, the Movement itself can't'. I think that was absolutely right.

[break in tape]

[re Judy Todd and Rhodesia]

MG: . . . she came over here. When Judy Todd was trying to explain the situation, and having a miserable time going round the country in the UK explaining her position on Rhodesia, Heather [Mike's wife] and I supported her and we took her around sometimes and gave her the opportunity of speaking in our own part of the country.

CG: That was in the '60s?

MG: Yes, What I am leading up to is that there always were people coming from Southern Africa who needed to be supported and encouraged. There was Peter Katjavivi [representative of the South West African People's Organisation – SWAPO] as well.

CG: When did you meet Peter?

MG: 1966? I met him at an Anti-Apartheid National Committee meeting. He came and he spoke. It would have been soon after he came to this country. He was at that time very diffident, almost shy and found it difficult to speak. Ethel said to me that he had a one-man organisation and it was very difficult for him. So we befriended him,

in a way. He used to come out on the tube to Theydon Bois and he used to dictate his letters to Heather. So she was the SWAPO Secretary until Peter was able to get some more organisation together. Peter used to come once a week and she used to do letters for him. That's a parenthesis. There always were people coming from Southern Africa. Judy Todd was one of them and Peter Hain was another. Peter Hain came with the sports campaign which was terrific. In fact in a sense Anti-Apartheid had to react to that, because it had already got started. I think it also had to react to black consciousness. I don't think Anti-Apartheid saw black consciousness coming until it suddenly was there. By the time Steve Biko was murdered, it was very much in the centre of people's thinking. But initially I think we were taken slightly by surprise. These are examples of the new concepts that kept confronting the Movement and demanding not only a response, but some original thinking on the part of AAM.

CG: Do you think black consciousness was a problem for Anti-Apartheid in the Labour movement? Were there some people who latched on to it?

MG: Every new development – in the trade union movement and the Labour movement – is a potential problem, partly because there are those who can't or won't understand, and partly because when there are people who want to have an argument, it gives them another line for their argument. I don't think in the long term it was detrimental because now people look on black consciousness as a landmark in the South African struggle.

CG: Can you remember any particular high points, or incidents that stick in your mind, that would illustrate the achievements or the problems of the Movement?

MG: There are a number of small incidents, but I think the underlying and most important one is the influence that the Movement managed to engineer with international non-governmental organisations, with the United Nations and with academics throughout the world. That will always stand to the credit of the Movement and distinguish it from other movements. This is one that was always central and always keyed right in to the issues and knew what the issues were and what were the potential consequences of the various courses of action you could take. So I think that was the most important thing.

CG: Can you concretise that? Were there any particular ...

MG: The stopping of the Springbok tour in 1970 – that was a high point. The establishment of the British Government arms embargo. We all cheered about that.

CG: I meant personally – things that you were involved in, that you particularly remember.

MG: I was involved in all those things. I went with Ethel to Twickenham, when England played South Africa. We stood outside saying 'Don't go in' and handing out leaflets.

For me it was a completely worthwhile and permanently riveting exercise. I just wanted to do it. For me every little step forward was a pace that you could say – we've taken it. And there was always an excitement. I used to just find that whenever the government did something that we wanted them to do, whenever other countries did something we wanted them to do, whenever people actually showed that they valued what the Movement was doing, then I felt good that I was part of it.