

Interview with Brian Filling by Christabel Gurney, 29 August 2013, for the Anti-Apartheid Movement Archives Committee project Forward to Freedom <http://www.aamarchives.org/>

Christabel Gurney: Brian, can you just confirm your name and tell us when and where you were born.

Brian Filling: Brian Filling. I was born in Glasgow, Scotland in 1946.

CG: Thanks. And what did you, or do you now, do for a living?

BF: I'm the Honorary Consul for South Africa in Scotland, but I'm retired from full-time remunerative work. I finished as Vice-Principal of what is now the City of Glasgow College.

CG: Thanks. Could you just say when you first became aware of the situation in Southern Africa.

BF: I'm not sure about the answer to this, because it has changed over the years when I've been asked the same question. I used to say that I became involved really actively when I was a student. That was my understanding. But then I was having an interview with the BBC about people who had met Mandela. It was a discursive interview, so we walked about the places Mandela had been in Glasgow. So I had given the same answer, and then just in the course of that I said that my parents had been friends with Cecil Williams, who had driven a car that Mandela was in when he was captured and Cecil Williams ended up in Glasgow and became a friend of my parents. Of course the BBC interviewer latched onto it and said 'Well that's the reason'. So I've been reflecting since that that actually I probably became aware from a very very early age, because my parents were involved with anti-apartheid and so ANC [African National Congress] people passed through the house in the very early days. So in terms of well, for example, when I was a student, my maiden speech at university, which would have been in 1966, I think, was against sending arms to South Africa. But before that I had certainly been very conscious and quite active in school and so on. And debates were a big thing at university at that time. 1,000 people came to a debate, so it was quite a big thing. You had to be careful what you said. I learned a lot from the Tory questioning of my youthful opposition to sending arms to South Africa. So it was a combination of factors, but I really now think that it was due to my parents that from a very early age I was aware of apartheid being a very bad thing.

CG: How did you first become involved in the Anti-Apartheid Movement or in any anti-apartheid activity?

BF: Yes – it was certainly when I was a student, and quite involved. I remember we ran a Southern Africa Week, which must have been around 1968, so at university. And in fact during that week Amilcar Cabral was assassinated,¹ so it could be dated, but it's not in my mind as to when it was. And a representative of his organisation was there and of course took it very badly. And so there were meetings and events about all the liberation struggles in Southern Africa – Mozambique, Angola, Guinea-Bissau.

CG: That's very interesting. So it was the Southern African struggle at first just as much as South Africa itself?

BF: Yes, very much so. And then I came to London in 1971 to be editor of *Challenge*, the Young Communist League paper, and of course through that, being editor, I met a lot of people involved with Southern Africa – all the ANC people in exile and so on. And during the course of that we ran campaigns through the paper. Sean Hosey was one of the people who of course was doing some underground work in South Africa and he was arrested and we ran a campaign for his release. But of course there were many others in those days. But yes, it was very much about Southern Africa, not just South Africa, and then when I returned to Scotland ...

CG: When was that?

BF: In 1974. The Communist Party Glasgow Committee appointed me as solidarity organiser with Portugal and Spain, but it was around the time of the overthrow of fascism in Portugal and the collapse of fascism in Spain and Greece. And then when the South Africans invaded Angola and the Angolans invited the Cubans to assist them, it kind of drew me back into the South Africa and Southern Africa part of the struggle, and I then became the Communist Party representative on the Anti-Apartheid Movement.

CG: Was that in Scotland or in London?

BG: In Scotland. And there wasn't a Scottish Committee at that time, there were groups which came and went sporadically. But there was a Glasgow Group, the Secretary of which was John Nelson. I became involved in that. And then a number of us came to the conclusion that we really needed a much more coordinating all-Scottish Committee, and it took probably, I would guess, about 18 months, two years, to eventually create the Scottish Committee of the Anti-Apartheid Movement

CG: That was going to be my next question. Do you know how much anti-apartheid activity in Scotland was going on before the Scottish Anti-Apartheid Committee was formed? And also a contributory question – what were the influences in Scotland? Because one has the impression that Scotland was quite active early on about the boycott. So what was it specially about Scotland that was different from England?

BF: Yes, there were a lot of things going on quite early. I went to university in 1966 and in 1962 Glasgow University, where I was a student, had elected Chief Luthuli as Rector. Now they have the position in Scottish universities where the students elect a Rector who then chairs the Court. That's just one example, of course, but there were plenty of other examples. So there were groups who did things, quite small scale in those days, in the early '60s. It certainly wasn't co-ordinated on a Scottish scale until the Scottish Committee was formed in 1976, but there was quite significant activity early on. There was a network of student groups which came and went in the early '70s. And so when the Scottish Committee was formed – there was a meeting in Dundee actually when Abdul Minty was there as the main speaker. I was elected the founding Chair of the Scottish Committee and John Nelson, who had been the Glasgow Secretary of the Anti-Apartheid Group, became the Scottish Secretary. And we remained Chair and Secretary until 1994.

CG: *That's a tremendous record of continuity.*

BF: Yes, it didn't seem that long a time at the time.

CG: *What groups were specially active? I don't mean local groups – I mean students, trade unions. What were the special strengths of the Anti-Apartheid Movement in Scotland?*

BF: Related to that was various factors in Scotland that made it maybe a bit different. I think there was a whole range of factors which probably need a deeper analysis than I can give, or thought, but certainly there was a very long historical connection between Scotland and the Eastern Cape, where Scottish missionaries established mission schools, Lovedale, which became the most important. So for example, the first principal of Lovedale was William Govan. And Govan Mbeki, who of course was a Rivonia trialist was called after William Govan. And I'm glad to say that Govan Mbeki, after his release from prison, came to a conference that we held, he was the keynote speaker, in 1990. So that long tradition of church involvement with South Africa, I think, was one of the factors. I should say also that of course it wasn't all on the positive side, because it was Scots who arguably made the major contribution to the white supremacist ideology of the Dutch Reformed Church – Andrew Moray was the main character who did this. So there were good and bad influences from Scotland. But the positive side, the mission schools, were the longest lasting educational institutions in South Africa. And of course Lovedale, and the people who led Lovedale, eventually created the University of Fort Hare, where many of the African leaders studied, including Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Robert Mugabe and so on. So that connection that the church had went up and down over the years, but I think I would say there was a positive and negative side. You could still find that during the 1970s in the Church of Scotland and there were quite fierce debates. I'm pleased to say the positive side generally speaking won. And so the Church of Scotland took a very progressive stance against sanctions early on.

CG: *You mean for sanctions?*

BG: Yes, for sanctions – sorry. And at the same time the editor of the journal, called *Life and Work*, was against sanctions. So there was a struggle inside the church, so it wasn't all straightforward. So that was the historical side, the church connections and so on. Then of course there was the tradition of Red Clydeside, where the shop stewards movement and the trade union movement generally and the Communist Party have been very influential in radicalising the trade union movement, so trade unions were always a big influence. And in fact the Scottish Trade Union Congress took a position long before the TUC did – many many years. And so it had a very special relationship with SACTU [South African Congress of Trade Unions] and ANC, and so there was always these open doors and understanding in a way that I think was a bit different from elsewhere. There were political parties as well that we had a good relationship with, other than the Tory Party of course.

CG: *It's fascinating, especially the Scottish Trade Union Congress, because the TUC here took a very long time to get round to supporting sanctions. In what ways did that tradition play out in the work of the Scottish Committee after it was formed in 1976?*

BF: The Scottish Committee, you know, had local groups which we co-ordinated the work of and gave leadership to, and they would hold demonstrations, you know, we held them at a Scottish level, usually in Edinburgh or Glasgow, sometimes the other cities. But besides the local groups we had a very good relationship with the Scottish Trade Union Congress and also the individual trade unions, and a good relationship with the political parties. So, for example, I remember we held a fundraising dinner in the early 1980s and the secretaries of the Scottish Labour Party and the Scottish Communist Party were the two speakers, which I don't think would have happened in England at that time. So you had that kind of relationship at senior level with the political parties, trade unions, the churches, the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. But the other churches as well played a significant role – the Catholic Bishops Conference was quite important and in particular the charity wing, SCIAF – Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund – was very supportive. And in fact I did a book called *The End of A Regime*, which was an anthology of Scottish and South African writing against apartheid and it was actually sponsored financially by SCIAF. So there were good relations with organisations across the Scottish scene, which allowed us really to pull them all together, so that the Scottish Anti-Apartheid Committee provided a focus.

CG: Who made up the committee? How did it work organisationally?

BF: It constitutionally changed a bit over the years. But essentially it was delegates from local groups, delegates from affiliated organisations, which were mainly trade unions plus some others, and the officers, who were elected at an annual general meeting. And the officer positions grew as the Movement grew, so at the end I would guess there were 10 or 12 officers.

CG: Officers who were responsible for different areas?

BF: For different areas of campaigning.

CG: So what were the different campaigns?

BF: Well, there was a trade union, we always had a – the title changed – it became the religious liaison officer. We also had a youth officer, women's officer, student organiser and so on, so the different constituencies all had somebody responsible for the work in that area

CG: What did you actually campaign on?

BF: Well, of course there was the boycott campaign, which was central to the activity of the local groups, you know, which meant trying to publicise the boycott at supermarkets, usually on Saturday of course. So that happened in most cities and eventually we came to the conclusion it would be a good idea to focus on a particular supermarket. So we chose the only supermarket chain that was headquartered in Scotland, not very famous, William Lowe. But it gave us such a focus because they didn't have all that many shops so we could actually cover every shop. And eventually with a combination of work with USDAW, the shop assistants union, the shopworkers union, who would report on what was happening inside the stores in terms of the stock, when we were in negotiations with William Lowe's management and they would tell us one thing and we knew another, because of course they were eventually very worried and went into retreat and

began to disengage and began to deny they had any connections, and we knew they had. So it was quite a campaign, actually, and eventually they gave up and just gave up their connection with South Africa.

CG: Did they – that's very impressive. We never achieved that with Tesco or Sainsbury's.

BF: Yes, I mean I suspect they – I mean they put it in writing, but we knew they were still having South African goods so we kept challenging them and I think that eventually they just gave up.

CG: Can you remember when that was?

BF: It must have been in the mid-1980s, I think. Of course that was the State of Emergency in South Africa, so it was in the news. South Africa was reported, but it was in the news [*inaudible*]. There was the boycott campaign, which, of course, broadened into the sanctions campaign, which was a much more general political – so there were those kind of campaigns

CG: What about local authorities?

BF: Local authorities were quite involved and we established eventually a Scottish Local Authority Anti-Apartheid Committee, of which I became secretary, I think probably in 1985 or thereabouts. We had about 20 local authorities that came to that. The reason we established that was because there was only a few who could get involved in the committee of the UK Local Authority Anti-Apartheid, and this allowed us to get more of the local authorities to meetings, rather than just being affiliates at a distance.

CG: Twenty local authorities in Scotland must have been quite a high proportion.

BF: It was – a very high proportion, and of course it was all the main ones. It led on to fantastic campaigns during the ten days of action every year between the 16th of June to the 26th of June.

CG: So that was something you did every year?

BF: Yes, every year. This was a UK-wide thing. I think it probably ... it was very very effective in Scotland because we could do things at an all-Scottish level. And so during those ten days, which of course marked the Soweto uprising on 16th June and the 26th June was Freedom Day, we would rename streets and bridges, fly the ANC flag, hold meetings, concerts, you know, it really was a big big thing. We got a lot of media coverage because there was so many ... because it happened everywhere.

CG: And did local authorities disinvest and boycott South African goods?

BF: Oh yes. I know there's a difference of view as to which was the first local authority to launch a boycott, but Aberdeen used to certainly claim it. We did in it in 1964. Bob Hughes was of course a councillor then. He eventually became chair of UK Anti-Apartheid. But yes, they did a

lot – disinvested. I mean Glasgow actually produced the Glasgow Declaration against Apartheid, where it was the biggest local authority and it chaired the Local Authority Committee.

CG: The UK committee?

BF: Not at that point – it did later – but the Scottish end of it. So it meant that virtually everyone else followed this lead. So even small authorities would follow. It wasn't always easy. I remember sitting at a meeting, I think it was East Kilbride District Council, where they wanted to affiliate and the lawyer who was sitting there said, oh no, they couldn't do this, this would be illegal. And of course it was pointed out that a number of local authorities, including the very big ones, had taken this position, but he insisted. And a small council had a few councillors and I suppose got a bit frightened and were run by their officials. Whereas I remember a quite different situation in Glasgow, in which we were holding the launch of the Glasgow to London walk to free Mandela and a lawyer said 'Well, you can't spend all this money on this, you know, staging a concert, toilets, games for kids, marquees and so on'. And I remember the councillors saying to the lawyer, 'Look, we employ you to give us solutions to issues, not present problems to the issues'. And so they went ahead and I think they spent, I think it cost something like £50,000 to do this.

CG: So the council funded all that – very different from the English councils ...

BG: Yes, they really did spend a lot of money. It was because there was such support and understanding of the issue.

CG: Can we go back to the local groups for a moment. How many local groups were there and what sort of people were the activists?

BF: Groups came and went and it depended often on a few individuals. If an individual left an area the group died, that often happened, so they went up and down. But there were about 20 local groups, I would guess. They ranged from Aberdeen and Inverness in the north to Dumfries in the south. All the main cities were covered, Aberdeen, Dundee, Stirling, Glasgow ...

CG: Can we talk a bit about the Mandela campaign, because Glasgow was the first city to give him the Freedom of the City. And then there was the Freedom March in 1988 that started in Glasgow. How did giving Mandela the Freedom of the City come about?

BF: It began in 1979 or maybe even '78, when the then Lord Provost, David Hodge of Glasgow, hosted a lunch for the South African Ambassador at the time, Mathias Botha. And we called a picket and 1,000 people turned up. It got a lot of publicity. He was ostracised by the Labour Group on the council.

CG: Was he a Labour councillor?

BF: He was a Labour Lord Provost. He was eventually put out of the Labour Group. And then at the following election when Labour was elected again, the next incoming Labour Lord Provost, partly to make recompense for this, was persuaded to give the Freedom of the City to Mandela,

so it then happened in 1981. So there always was this – it was never – there was always this struggle, if you like, it was never straightforward, it wasn't as simple as that. But quite often these negative things would get this reaction, which then gave a platform to take things forward, and that's what happened. So Michael Kelly, the incoming Lord Provost, awarded the Freedom of the City to Nelson Mandela. And that itself was quite interesting, but it also showed some of the reticence – I spent most of the ceremony behind the scenes arguing that the ANC should be on the platform – they weren't invited to be on the platform.

CG: Who came from the ANC?

BG: It was Ruth Mompati, Ruth and I had a few laughs about this in later years. It was the then Vice-President of Nigeria, Alex Ekwueme, who accepted on behalf of Nelson Mandela and the reason for that was that Michael Kelly had been a lecturer at Strathclyde University when Alex Ekwueme had been a post-graduate student, so he had a personal connection. But it turned out actually very positive because we invited Alex Ekwueme to speak at an anti-apartheid meeting immediately after the ceremony on the same day. So he agreed, because he said it was important that he explained Nigeria's position because they had recently just nationalised BP because of the busting of sanctions against Rhodesia, and he wanted to explain this, but he couldn't really do this at the ceremony, so he happily took up the invitation to speak at the meeting. And the interesting thing was that Michael Kelly, who didn't usually come to our meetings, but because the Vice-President was there, he did. And then in the evening the Nigerian Vice-President held a dinner – but from the morning when Ruth Mompati and I weren't on the platform, by the evening both of us were at this dinner and Michael Kelly spoke in favour of the armed struggle, which he hadn't at the ceremony.

CG: Was that why they wouldn't have the ANC there at the ceremony?

BG: Aye, because of the reticence – the ANC was still widely treated by the media as terrorists. So then Michael Kelly was so moved by this day and the changes that had happened, not least that 16 ambassadors, high commissioners from the Commonwealth had turned up, so he – it didn't take much persuasion – Mike Terry and I discussed what the next stage should be and we came up with the idea that he should launch the Lord Mayors petition at the United Nations Special Committee against Apartheid in New York. So Michael was very pleased to take up this opportunity and he went to New York, launched the worldwide Mayors petition and therefore we then realised we could keep this on a roll. And so Glasgow then took the lead on a number of things, for example in 1984 the new Lord Provost, Bob Gray, led a UK delegation to Downing Street to petition Mrs Thatcher about freeing Mandela. And then in 1986 we renamed a street after Nelson Mandela.

CG: In the centre of Glasgow?

BF: In the centre of Glasgow. But the importance of that was that the street was where the South African consulate was, and it was on the fifth floor of the Stock Exchange building, so it brought together quite a lot of nice things. One was where we picketed, because there was a consulate, but given that it was on the fifth floor of the Stock Exchange building that also brought home to people the relationship between big business and support for apartheid.

CG: So the Glasgow South African consulate had to use the Mandela address?

BF: No, they refused to use it. What they did was they created a post office box for their address. But if they looked out of the window, where it is, it's Nelson Mandela Place, because of the nature of it, there's actually four street signs, so wherever they looked out of the window they couldn't avoid seeing Nelson Mandela Place. But they reacted, of course, and they set up a Scottish-South Africa club, a Scottish-South Africa society, which they got some councillors in Glasgow, who had boycotted, incidentally – Tory councillors, who had boycotted the Freedom for Mandela ceremony, who then became involved in this Scottish-South Africa Society, which had as its secretary the deputy consul-general of the apartheid consulate. But of course we claimed it was just a proxy for the South Africans.

CG: Like the Springbok Association ...

BF: Exactly. They took delegations to South Africa to convince them that things were changing and so on. But eventually our campaign to close the consulate was successful and it actually closed down.

CG: When was that?

BF: I think it was 1990, probably just around the time of the release of Mandela, it was round about then. But they had lost the argument and actually it became counter-productive for them, the Scottish-South Africa Society, because it gave us a focus to picket. And there were so few people involved, it really was counter-productive from their point of view,

CG: Can you talk about the Freedom March and how the Mandela campaign built up?

BF: Obviously, as I said, we were on a roll, thinking what next, Freedom for Mandela, deputation to Downing Street, renaming a street and so on. And then of course there were discussions at a national level. I should say in passing that I worked very closely with Mike Terry in particular, who was the Executive Secretary of Anti-Apartheid for the UK, about these kinds of initiatives, and of course I was aware of the concert and so on. So what was agreed was that the 1988 Wembley concert – the next stage would be launched from Glasgow – the walk to London. And Glasgow City Council was crucial to this because to hold that rally in Glasgow Green with a lot of people was going to cost a lot of money, so we needed their support. And we had a demonstration from Kelvin Grove Park, which passed through the city centre of Glasgow past the City Chambers, where a luncheon was held for the people who were coming, the main speakers and so on, by the City Council. The main speakers were Oliver Tambo and Trevor Huddleston and there were a whole range of others. And then we marched to Glasgow Green and there some 30,000 turned up. It was, unusually, extremely good weather on that day, which was just as well because we had such a range of speakers. We were very worried there were too many speakers, but actually the crowd stayed and heard them all. There was music as well, but probably the high point was Oliver Tambo, who wasn't that well at that time and had a punishing schedule. But the crowd really lifted him – and he was never the greatest orator, but that day he was fantastic. So it was a great launch of this march, a send-off to London.

CG: I was going to ask you something you touched on already. What was the relation between the Scottish Committee, which initiated a lot of activity, with the British overall AAM?

BF: We always had a very good relationship. I sat on the National Committee for a long time and we worked very closely. But it has to be said that the UK National Committee had a whole list of campaigns, a huge amount, and no local group could ever take up all of these, so they had to be selective, a bit, what suited their circumstances, and the Scottish Committee was very much like that, we were quite selective. And sometimes some things would work and others wouldn't. It wasn't always predictable. I referred earlier to the picket of the Lord Provost and this lunch with the South African Ambassador where we turned out 1,000 people. A week or two later there was a trade delegation going from the Chamber of Commerce to South Africa and we called a picket and ten people turned up. So actually it was more critical than a lunch for the South African Ambassador, but it wasn't what captured people's imagination. So over the years you learn what moves people and once you get what moves them, you can introduce them to the more serious issues, where often people were quite sensible – 'What can we do about trade?' and so on, it's more difficult, but we can do something about a lunch, an ambassador, embarrass him and so on. So we were quite selective about what we took up. That never led to any difficulties at a UK level, because I think it was always understood that local groups and regional organisations, even at the level of the Scottish Committee, could only do what they had the resources to do and what would work. But we had a very close working relationship over the years, I can't remember any, much, difference of opinion. There was always a debate about how much money should go from local groups nationally and how much should then come back to Scotland and so on. We must have debated this for hours, and I never remember it making much difference.

CG: Another area was that Anti-Apartheid didn't just campaign on South Africa, it campaigned on Namibia and up until 1980 on Zimbabwe and in the '80s on South Africa's attacks on the frontline states. Did the Scottish Committee work on the other countries of Southern Africa?

BF: Yes, it did. We did a lot about the struggle for the independence and freedom of Zimbabwe. We held conferences, we did a lot on Zimbabwe in the '70s. But we also worked on the other campaigns and usually when we held a conference we would always have the different issues on the agenda, so it was never just South Africa. And eventually in the '80s a very successful short campaign was when Sam Nujoma came.

CG: He was the President of SWAPO ...

BF: The President of SWAPO and later the President of Namibia. And it shows where we had got to in this, because we had a specially invited meeting with Nujoma, which brought together the leaders of the churches, local authorities, political parties, everybody who was anybody, at leadership level, the trade unions. Although it was a relatively small meeting, 50 or 60 people, it actually represented Scottish society and of course that made a huge impact. So probably over the years, we had speakers coming and a lot of SWAPO speakers came over the years, also MPLA and the other frontline states, FRELIMO, they all passed through. So it was never just South Africa, it was much wider than that, although South Africa was the centre of it.

CG: Towards the end of anti-apartheid campaigns, in the '90s, Anti-Apartheid launched a twinning programme, and Scotland then kind of re-invigorated its old missionary links with the Eastern Cape. I think it was one of the more successful twinning areas.

BF: Yes, that true. There was a discussion at UK level about which region should be twinned with which. And Scotland was twinned with the Transkei. Bristol was twinned with Ciskei, I think, and then of course as we moved into – and eventually it became the new provinces, Transkei, Ciskei and the old Eastern Cape, all became the new Eastern Cape. So it was a question whether Bristol or Scotland should be twinned with it. Bristol understandably were unhappy with Scotland – that it was decided should be twinned, and that did re-invigorate, as you say, the connection with the Eastern Cape historically. And the other twinings didn't happen so successfully, I don't think, elsewhere. I'm not sure why. In our case it wasn't easy or straightforward, and it was partly due to the fact that of course the South Africans were so busy with their own struggle. I'm not sure that all of them were – at every point – saw the value of it, but some did.

CG: Can I interrupt? Looking back I'm not sure what was the – was it originally twinning with ANC regions in the run-up to the 1994 elections and the idea was to support the ANC?

BF: Yes, that's right. So of course Mandela after his release had come to London a few times, but had never really been out of London, and then there was this invitation from the local authorities for him to pick up the Freedom of the Cities that had given him freedom. That led to a debate as to how this should be done. And of course each of the nine places that awarded him the Freedom of the City wanted him to come to their place. I suppose the principal position that we took as the Anti-Apartheid Movement was that really we wanted him out of London. We wanted a place that could put a lot of people on the street as well and it had to be a place that could afford to do this. So for these reasons, and I recall well the night before the UK Local Authorities Action against Apartheid Committee met in Glasgow there was a small meeting held between Sheffield, who was the Chair, and Glasgow, who was the host, and it was agreed that the proposal that would be put was that one day the Freedoms of the Cities all in one place, Glasgow, and the next day he should go to Sheffield for an assembly of local authorities from all over the UK. The next day at the meeting of the committee this was put, and somebody said from the floor, 'Well, Nelson Mandela can't go round the whole the country, you know. To save his energy, why don't we do everything in Glasgow?' Much to Sheffield's chagrin, that's what was agreed. So when Mandela came to Glasgow ...

CG: Was this in 1990?

BF: 1993 this was. Mind you it took two years to make it happen. I was appointed by ANC, the AAM and the nine local authorities to liaise with them all, which I thought at the time 'Oh that will be straightforward'. It took about two years to negotiate. ANC were fine, because they just wanted him to go to one city, rather than traipse round the nine cities. Mandela's office were fine and were trying to get the nine cities to agree. Understandably, they all wanted it to be in their city. Aberdeen held out the longest.

CG: Was that local rivalry?

BF: Well, it was a mixture of things. I remember at the Anti-Apartheid annual general meeting we had an off-piste meeting with Mike Pye, the Chair of Local Authorities Against Apartheid, Mike Terry, myself, Bob Hughes – you know who was Chair of UK Anti-Apartheid and who was an MP in Aberdeen. And I remember Bob saying one of the reasons why they wanted it in Aberdeen was that they didn't want their MP to be snubbed. And of course their boycott, as they claimed, was very early on, which was right. I was under a lot of pressure from some others to use the argument against Aberdeen that it was the only city that had given freedom to Nelson and Winnie Mandela and of course by this time Winnie Mandela was rather unpopular. I have to say that I refused to do this because I always had sympathy for Winnie Mandela as a victim of apartheid. But eventually Aberdeen were persuaded, and to slightly ameliorate the situation it was proposed that Mandela would greet and be presented by each local authority in alphabetical order, rather than the year in which they had given him the Freedom of the City, so Aberdeen were first. We were very concerned that Mandela was going to have to do each of these cities, they were allowed ten delegates each. This would take ages, handshaking and all that, and it would be tiring for him and unenjoyable and so forth. I then had to tell Aberdeen that each city was only getting five minutes and they nearly backed out again. However they came and so Mandela went round. There were three cities in each room – three rooms. And so he started with Aberdeen, and as I say, we had been worried about this. But in fact it really shows you what Mandela was like, he enjoyed it. He started – it was torrential rain that day – he went down each line, he started with Aberdeen in the first room, and he said 'Thank you for coming in this dreadful weather from the granite city'. He said something along the line that indicated – OK he was briefed, but he couldn't have been briefed to the extent that he understood. Because we told them some things of course, but there were things – I mean I was accompanying him, but I heard things that we never told him, and he then made an impromptu speech at the end and then moved on to the next delegation. After the whole ceremony, the Leader of the Aberdeen City Council said to me, 'I must apologise. That was the most wonderful five minutes of my life'. And I said 'Well, actually you'll see, it was only three and a half minutes'. That's true, it was a wonderful three and a half minutes. He did that for each of these cities. So I can say that the problems were actually pushed to the side, because he enjoyed it. He was very effective in terms of what he said and it galvanised the whole campaign.

[Break in interview]

CG: When Mandela visited Glasgow was there a big crowd?

BF: Yes, well after the – he did the nine cities and then they all gathered in the banqueting hall and others were invited, so there was probably about 400 in the banqueting hall, and then he was presented to all of them. So the nine Lord Mayors, Mayors and the Lord Provost sat on the platform. Huddleston made the presentation and Mandela spoke. Then after that we held a rally in George Square, which is the main square in Glasgow, in the afternoon. A huge crowd turned up. Dreadful weather all day, but no-one put up an umbrella because it would have blocked the view of people, so everybody was soaked to the skin. Tremendous reception, and then we held this local government rally at the Concert Hall later in the afternoon, and in the evening we had an anti-apartheid ceilidh in the City Chambers. So it was a great day – busy for Nelson Mandela.

CG: Great. What else – are there any other highlights or anything else you'd like to say?

BF: Well, I should say that I've mentioned the Freedom of the City to Mandela. There were four places that gave him the Freedom – Aberdeen, Dundee and Midlothian. So these were big occasions as well in each of these cities. And in fact Aberdeen held a demonstration every year to commemorate the Freedom of the City.

CG: Can you remember when this was?

BF: I think Aberdeen was the next after Glasgow in Scotland, and I think it was probably 1984, something like that. Then because Edinburgh could never get a two-thirds majority on the council because the Tories always voted against it, in some ways this turned into – a negative can turn into a positive thing, and in some ways this became a positive thing. Because they couldn't give the Freedom of the City, the Labour-led council decided to erect a statue, so there's a statue of a woman and child dedicated to the freedom fighters of South Africa in Festival Square in Edinburgh, and of course its tangible, its there, you can see it. You don't see – you can see Nelson Mandela Place in Glasgow, of course, but the point I'm making is that although we couldn't get the Freedom of the City for Mandela, we did something that actually had the same effect. So again that was a highlight. I should say that the statue was unveiled by Suganya Chetty, who was a South African exile, daughter of M P Naicker, who was the editor of the ANC's magazine *Sechaba*, and she played a very important role, actually, in terms of her day to day work in the AAM. Suganya is still living in Edinburgh.

CG: Scotland was one of the, well, the main place, where ACTSA, the successor organisation to the Anti-Apartheid Movement, has strength and is still campaigning. Could you say something briefly about the formation and the work done by ACTSA?

BF: Yes, in the run-up to the elections in South Africa in '94 there was obviously a debate going on in the Anti-Apartheid Movement at UK level as to what the successor organisation should be. ACTSA grew out of that. We were obviously part of that discussion, and we decided that we, in preparation for this, would take a delegation to South Africa and we took a delegation. The UK AGM had dissolved the Anti-Apartheid Movement and created ACTSA. The next day we took a delegation to South Africa and it worked in a weird way, because the first item on the SABC news was about the delegation, and of course these people saw themselves as extremely important.

CG: Who was on the delegation?

BF: There were about 30 people on the delegation. We had the President, the General Secretary and other General Council members from the Scottish TUC, we had a number of academics, some leading church people, and obviously people who were the leadership of the Anti-Apartheid Movement in Scotland, so it was very representative of all constituencies. And it meant actually that – I mean we had a great reception in South Africa. I mean it included having a – Mandela was out of the country at the time.

CG: Was this 1994?

BF: Yes, November, December 1994. And Mandela was out of the country and Thabo Mbeki was Acting President, so we had a special seat as invited guests in Parliament for the Acting President's question time. We had then a private meeting with Thabo which we had to – because of his schedule we had to hold back some of the delegates to meet him because we were going to three different places in the Eastern Cape to continue the twinning link. So some were held back, while the others went on the Eastern Cape, and we all joined up in the Eastern Cape and had a meeting with Raymond Mhlaba, one of the Rivonia trialists, who was now Premier of the Eastern Cape. And when we returned to Scotland, it actually meant that people wanted to come onto the ACTSA committee, and actually it broadened it compared to the Anti-Apartheid Movement committee, and I think I put it down a lot to that delegation, because I mean it was a fantastic experience. They all talk about it now, still talk about it.

CG: How long was it there?

BF: Probably about ten days. For example, we had a reception in Cape Town barracks hosted by the Minister of Defence, Ronnie Kasrils. And Ronnie was using it show – 'Here's all these white people from 4,000 miles away talking to the leading generals, who support us'. It was quite cleverly done. And of course from our point of view it also meant we were meeting people at the highest level, so you can see how it assisted us as ACTSA to show how influential – what our connections were – how influential we could be, and actually the ACTSA committee for a number of years was strengthened as a consequence. In terms of campaigns, well the campaigns which were most successful were the campaign against Cape PLC, because of the asbestos – campaigns where you could involve grassroots activity. But unfortunately I think some of the leading people in ACTSA actually saw it as an organisation that was more about lobbying at Westminster and Brussels and not about local group or grassroots activity. So there became quite a divergence about what ACTSA Scotland did and what happened elsewhere, except for Bristol, who took the same position of us that you could do things at a local level. So those campaigns were the most successful. Alongside that was this continuing link with the Eastern Cape, and in the new South Africa that opened up some greater possibilities. For example Glasgow City Council became twinned with Amathole Municipality in the Eastern Cape and got Commonwealth funding, which was repeated for some years, so it became quite a big link. Nosimo Balindlela, who became premier in the Eastern Cape, came on a visit and she really grabbed it and that led to the book appeal, which we run in conjunction with Community Heart at a UK level.

CG: Was that sending books to South African schools?

BF: Yes, mainly children's books to encourage reading and they sent containers. Of course it's quite a complicated issue because we've got a very strict criteria of what books we'll take – books that you'd give to your own children, not ones that are torn or in bad condition, nor should be they be racist. But also it means that you have to find storage, you have to sort, you have to pack. You have to find the money – it costs about £3,000 to send a container each time. so it's quite a big campaign. All the books from Scotland go to the Eastern Cape. Since 1994 we've sent, I think, almost half a million books to the Eastern Cape. Three million from the UK to South Africa go to other parts. So that's been a very successful campaign, which involves a lot of

people, of course, and we've often sent containers on special occasions. On Mandela's 90th birthday we sent a container as a birthday present. Now on the Nelson Mandela UN International Day we also do things about the book appeal. In fact the Scottish First Minister, who came in 2012 – Alex Salmond. And they've been supporting Nelson Mandela Day for the last two years financially, so we do a special event on that day as well as trying to encourage ...

CG: You mean the Scottish government?

BF: Yes, so it's been very successful. And of course ACTSA Scotland has a good relationship with the South African High Commission. And during the years that Lindiwe Mabusa was the High Commissioner we held Burns Suppers in the High Commission, which worked very well because we got quite a lot of the government ministers at the time to come to it, who were Scots. But given that one of them was Prime Minister, and before that there was, you know, they held positions like Minister of Defence and Minister of this and that, so they came. It was very useful for the South Africans, to give them that connection, and it also helped to increase the influence of ACTSA Scotland.

CG: Thanks very much. Is there anything else at all you feel you would like to say that we've left out?

BF: I suppose our view of ACTSA is that although apartheid is finished there is this terrible legacy of apartheid that continues. I mean, you don't overcome 300 years of colonialism and apartheid in 20 years. And as much, of course, as others will try and dismiss it and say all the problems of South Africa are of their own making now, this is not the case. The wealth and much of the power remains in white hands, and that is a difficulty in terms of the new South Africa. So we think we still have a continuing responsibility to assist in development to overcome this legacy, and so much of our activity is partly to develop an understanding amongst people and to win them to do things, to continue to do things, to assist. So the book appeal is a modest contribution to that. But in terms of the educational links, we've done a number of things. So, for example, between Glasgow City Council, the South African High Commissioner and ourselves we've established the Mandela-Tambo lecture series on the 25th anniversary of Mandela being given the Freedom of the City. And an inaugural lecture was given by Nkosazana Zuma, who was then Foreign Minister of South Africa and since then Denis Goldberg, Ronnie Kasrils, the High Commissioner of Mozambique and so on. I've mentioned about the UN designated Nelson Mandela International Day as a focus which has allowed us to get the Scottish government involved

CG: When is it?

BF: It's the 18th July, Mandela's birthday. So these things, I think, still give ACTSA a relevance, and it allows you to do the campaigns on other issues like Swaziland and the issues around Zimbabwe, or currently the case against Anglo American about the effects of asbestos and miners and so forth. So there is still a range of things that quite clearly work and involve people and, hopefully, are of some value in terms of overcoming that legacy.

CG: Thanks very much.

¹ Brian Filling meant to refer here to Eduardo Mondlane, President of FRELIMO, who was assassinated by the Portuguese secret police, PIDE, in 1969. Amilcar Cabral, President of the Guinea-Bissau liberation movement PAIGC, was assassinated in 1973.