

Interview with David Granville by Sam Parkin and Penny Capper on 2 May 2013, reproduced on the Anti-Apartheid Movement Archives Committee Forward to Freedom project website <http://www.aamarchives.org/>

Sam Parkin: First of all, I'd just like to ask you, how did you first personally get involved with the Anti-Apartheid Movement, how this developed and what made you feel inclined to initially get involved?

David Granville: Well, it was the political abhorrence of apartheid, an institutionalised racist regime supported extensively by the British Government and other western powers at the time. I wasn't in Sheffield when I first got involved with the Anti-Apartheid Movement, I was living in London. In fact I'd been working in Africa, although not in Southern Africa, I'd been working in the Sudan and in between periods in the Sudan I was out of work, so I started volunteering at the Anti-Apartheid office in London. In those days the head office was in Charlotte Street, parallel to Tottenham Court Road, and I started helping out there, just, you know, stuffing leaflets, roneo-ing leaflets. In those days there wasn't even too much photocopying, so if you wanted to produce anything en masse you had to get one of these roneo machines out and bang away at it for hours at a time until you had a pile of fairly blurred, at times, leaflets. But anyway that's how I first got involved and I stayed involved in London for a couple – I went back to Sudan for a period, and I was still involved when I came back the second time and I was one of those volunteers who helped build what was to become the new anti-apartheid headquarters in Mandela Street. It was originally Selous Street, I don't know if you know, but the Selous Scouts were a particularly obnoxious Rhodesian military unit, rather like the Marines, were involved in a number of pro-apartheid activities, but obviously for the Rhodesian regime. The office was built and Camden Council happily changed the name to call it Mandela Street. And I carried on with the volunteer work that I'd done previously, which involved a whole number of things, ranging from just mundane stuff just stuffing leaflets to joining anti-apartheid pickets outside South Africa House or days of action on Barclays or whatever it happened to be. And from that period onwards towards the late '80s I decided to move to Sheffield. My wife had moved here in November 1986, Kath Harding, she's also being interviewed, and I pitched up here on Christmas Eve 1986. And very soon in January 1987, one of the first things I remember doing, the first political thing I was involved in Sheffield, was I went along to the Anti-Apartheid Group. Now obviously, I knew some people here because of my involvement in the national office in the years previous, so I got involved with the local movement which was, as you know, the biggest in the country. I'm not sure if it was in '87, but it certainly became the biggest group in the country.

SP: And so where, further on from that, has your involvement taken you and how much time do you still devote to looking back at South African politics and looking back at that period of time?

DG: Well, to be honest I don't spend very much time at all doing it. I haven't had a day off this year, running a bookshop like this and keeping it going I'm afraid this has taken up an awful lot of the time that I would perhaps normally have for all the other things, so I'm not actually involved with the Southern African political solidarity work at the moment. I take an interest in it, in that I read the newspaper or if there's a programme on the television, but no I'm not involved in it actively at the moment.

SP: The reason we were initially asked to conduct these interviews was because Sheffield Council was the first council to announce itself to be officially anti-apartheid. Now what do

you think, first of all, what do you think it was about Sheffield that helped them to make this decision and meant that they could do it without opposition?

DG: Well, I think there were a number of factors: one, there was the key factor that there was at the time a Labour Council, a majority Labour Council, of which the majority of the members were very firmly in the anti-apartheid camp, no doubt about it, 100 per cent. But there was also the very active, the fact there was a large group in Sheffield. The fact that there was a group in Sheffield, that group had important people that were supporting it from within the Council, from within the local MPs. Richard Caborn, as you know, became a major figure in the national Anti-Apartheid Movement, became the national treasurer. But the other MPs as well, later Clive Betts, but Bill Michie before that, and all of the MPs were very supportive so in that sense you were pushing at an open door. But it was the activity largely of the group and the links it was able to make and the pressure that it was able to apply which ensured that things got done. There was always a very close working relationship between the Anti-Apartheid Movement in Sheffield and the City Council. The City Council in those days had an international office which dealt with the Council's international relations, such as twinning and such like. One of the officers in there, one of the main functions of that officer's job was to work on work on anti-apartheid issues. And that was a major plus, and you can't, you couldn't imagine that in the current climate of cut backs, you know they wouldn't have the luxury of having an international officer here. So there was the very close working relationship between a very active and very large local anti-apartheid group plus the City Council plus the trade unions. The trade unions were very important, some of them were within the City Council, others were not, but all the major trade unions had links, the engineering union in particular, again through Richard Caborn. Richard Caborn's background was in the engineering union and other key figures, someone like Derek Simpson, for example, who became General Secretary of UNITE, many years down the line. He was again an active trade unionist who was very much involved in supporting the anti-apartheid campaign and other trade union figures were as well, both from the teaching unions, from the university lecturers' unions, from the industrial unions, from local government unions, so right across the board. I think it was the combination of a number of factors that were pulled together in Sheffield. Certainly the fact that there was a very large active group here made a huge difference because it was able to, you know, it was able to lobby effectively. We made sure that the Council knew about particular issues, that local MPs knew about a particular issue or whatever, and they had key people from within their ranks, so to speak, so it made that easy.

SP: What was public support like within Sheffield and how far did the Movement get support from the public and how did this manifest itself? Were there marches and things like that?

DG: There were regular demonstrations and, you know, they'd mark significant events outside the Town Hall and whatever, but the main thing was around campaigning. There were key campaigns that the Anti-Apartheid Movement worked on at the time and one was the boycott campaign and companies like Tesco's, which was stocking large ... I mean, they weren't the only one, all the major supermarkets were stocking South African goods. But the Movement was able to go along to the managers and approached the companies and if they wouldn't, as they invariably wouldn't by the way, take the goods away, then we'd hold a demonstration outside, a peaceful demonstration outside. We'd hand out leaflets, we'd ask customers to do all sorts of things, go and fill their trolleys up and then take them to the counter and then say they couldn't pay, say they couldn't buy this because it was South African. So we made a nuisance of ourselves to some extent, but we also took the

opportunity to hand out leaflets, information leaflets, to inform people of what was actually happening both in South Africa and what the consequences were of supporting the apartheid regime, as we thought companies like Tesco and Barclays and Shell and others were doing. They said the Shell campaign – they were another major company, again a British company, with major investments in South Africa, making millions out of this apartheid misery. We used to picket Shell stations, I remember standing out on many a cold winter morning, getting abuse from drivers. So that's a part answer to another part of your question. The support was generally good amongst the population of Sheffield, but not everybody was thrilled about having their Saturday shop disrupted or having people outside the petrol station chanting slogans. Not everybody appreciated that, it's true, but that's part and parcel of political campaign work, not everybody is going to be impressed. But I would say, generally speaking, the people of Sheffield were very supportive. And as I say, it was a very diverse group. One of the groups that I forgot to mention earlier along with all the others was the church. The churches were very much involved in the Anti-Apartheid Movement in Sheffield. I mean all of the churches, in particular the Sheffield United Reformed Church, there were a number of very key activists, very important activists, in the anti-apartheid movement locally were from the church, but it wasn't just those churches. There were strong links with key sectors of Sheffield society, with the trade unions, with the councils, with the MPs, with the churches, and that was built together.

SP: People did work together?

DG: And it did work together, and OK, of course there were differences, political differences from different political groups that were involved, but that's just part and parcel of any political campaign.

SP: Of course, brilliant. And I mean, speaking of a generation, I was born after apartheid ended, now to me it seems social injustice, you could only see it condemned. Why do you believe that the Thatcher government took so long to support the ANC cause and do you believe that the Anti-Apartheid Movement helped to put pressure on the government to address the issue?

DG: Well, I think that the Anti-Apartheid Movement certainly put a lot of pressure on them, on the Thatcher government, but I don't think she was ever a supporter of the ANC cause. She got to the point where she couldn't call Nelson Mandela a terrorist any more, but I don't think that she supported Nelson Mandela or the ANC. It was a bit of real politique. I mean once it became clear what was going to happen in a post-apartheid situation, that the ANC was basically going to form a government, she had no choice, she had to stop condemning them. But Thatcher's allies were in the big corporations, were in the banks, were in the financial institutions, all of which had been really the mainstays in terms of support for the apartheid regime. So it was no surprise that they regarded the ANC as a bunch of terrorists as, you know, the vast majority, with some notable exceptions. There weren't ... not all Tories supported the apartheid regime, but certainly the Tory Party and the party leadership did.

SP: Was there active support, you say about a terrorist ... how did they make their point? How did they say this is right, this civil rights injustice is the correct way of dealing with it?

DG: Well, they'd often make bland notions or statements about not being racist. I mean, they wouldn't say 'We are racist', they didn't do that, but what they did do was they supported these organisations, who, like the Anti-Apartheid Movement, was attempting to put pressure

on basically to help to alter the circumstances in South Africa and they did nothing to help, you know, to help really at all in my opinion. Well, they did as little as possible, let's put it that way. Maybe they didn't do nothing, but they did as little as possible. If they were forced to, they would do something, but they – I cannot recall one instance where the Thatcher government really played a positive role on apartheid, without being, basically, forced into doing it by the pressure of opinion, not just British public opinion, this was world public opinion. And you know, obviously, there were strong anti-apartheid movements all over, including in the United States, the United States being a key ally, but again there were different perspectives there for some of the leading political figures. She was a friend of apartheid in the same way that she was a friend of Pinochet.

SP: It's quite prevalent the issue now, a couple of weeks after her death. It has been brought back into the public eye.

DG: Sure, but I don't think you'd have found many members of the ANC, who were active at the time, many of whom were imprisoned, tortured and on Robben Island and other institutions, many of them would not have had a good word to say for her. Some of them who are now in the diplomatic corps would no doubt be diplomatic, but I don't think many of them would have been mourning her demise.

SP: Yes, of course, you mentioned briefly Thatcher's economic interests, and she how she was interested in big business and trade. There is a lot of evidence that suggests that Britain had a lot of investment in with the South African corporations.

DG: Yes.

SP: ... mining, and that's not just at corporate level but that's also private businessmen, big businessmen, influential businessmen.

DG: Absolutely

SP: Do you believe that this probably was the most influential factor that Britain kept or that Thatcher kept this disregard for anti-apartheid?

DG: I think it was certainly ... she saw it in the interests of the people who she supported, and she is, you know, from her perspective that was in Britain's interest, in capitalism's interest as well, not just capitalism's interest but Britain's interest, because that was her view of the world. She didn't want to do anything that would harm that. And of course Britain did benefit from that, you know, whether it was involvement in these corporations, very close links with all these organisations, whether it was the big supermarkets or the industrial corporations or the mining interests or the arms trade. They all had a finger in the pie somewhere and she didn't want to do anything ... and that's what their greatest support was, by not doing, by letting them carry on, by not applying pressure on them. And we in the Anti-Apartheid Movement and others were attempting to apply pressure on them and these organisations, these institutions, and on the British government to adopt a different point of view, and in the end we did manage to do that. There were major successes in the boycott campaign, certain supermarkets did withdraw South African goods, some of them did it reluctantly, obviously they were not hopping with joy to do it, but it wasn't in their interest to have people outside their banks, outside their supermarkets all the time. And certain shops, like the Co-op, as you perhaps might expect, had a far better attitude and were strongly anti-apartheid. We promoted people who adopted an anti-apartheid position and we condemned those who didn't. It was just that there were so many, the links between Britain and South

Africa were so many, key targets had to be selected. And that was something that Anti-Apartheid, at a national level and through its democratic structures, worked out where it could best make an impact. And so things like Barclays ... all the banks were involved and most of the banks got a mention in various accounts, but Barclays was the one that we really focused in on because they had the major interest. Shell likewise, other oil corporations had an interest, but Shell was the main one and Tesco's like it is now was the biggest supermarket. So you had to focus in on what was likely to have the biggest impact and if you could make an impact, others along the way would perhaps join your side, and then that was more pressure on top of the really big players in the field.

PC: Do you think that because Margaret Thatcher didn't do much for the cause, it postponed the end of apartheid?

DG: Yes, but it wasn't just her, but her government, and I do think that it certainly more pressure, the British government had a tremendous amount of ... it was very important to the South African regime, very important because of the support it gave, the kind of credibility, but it really did shield them from some of the things they perhaps would have had to do at an early stage. The British government could have supplied support to the Anti-Apartheid Movement, could have supported the ANC. Partly the reason why they didn't was, again, was ideological. The ANC got an enormous amount of support from the Soviet Union and from other Eastern European countries and from other Communist countries. Now as far as Thatcher was concerned, Pinochet may have been on her team, but the Soviet Union was on their team and she took a very ideological stance on that. So the fact that they were an obnoxiously racist regime, where racism was institutionalised throughout the entire society, it wasn't just that there were racist attitudes about, this was institutionalised racism of a sort that the Metropolitan police authority have never even dreamt of in their wildest dreams in the baddest of the bad old days. This was on a different scale altogether and yes, definitely apartheid was ... I can't say how long apartheid might have been prolonged by, but certainly the British government could have applied a lot more pressure which could have aided the struggle against apartheid and it could have ended earlier.

SP: When did you see opinion changing and when did you see within government more pressure being applied to change, was it in the late '80s?

DG: Well, no, you know, the anti-apartheid campaign had been going a long long time, from the late '50s.

SP: 1959, 1960?

DG: Yes, like I say, the late '50s, and really it was a long haul, an awfully long haul. But I because of the institutionalised nature of racism in South Africa, it was something that people of quite diverse sort of political outlooks could coalesce around, people just found it objectionable, it's a bit of a trite saying, but common British decency. They didn't like it, even from within, you know, people who would consider themselves to be Conservative voters, so although there weren't scores of Tories within the ranks of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, there were some. There certainly were in all the other political parties, whether it be the Labour Party, the Communist Party, the Liberal Party, the Social Democrats, when they pitched up on the scene. All of the other parties that were around then, there was all the Left fringe parties, and what have you. It was a very broad coalition, and I think that was the success of the campaign. And it's often why, there's a similar situation, some people would argue, about the Israel-Palestine situation, there's been some working towards, and it's been

a long way, and perhaps they haven't quite managed to get that breadth of coalition that the Anti-Apartheid ... but that was because of the particularly blatant nature of the injustice that was being perpetrated by the apartheid regime.

SP: So this coalition you speak of, do you think this was vital? Was it a 360 degree from both ends of the spectrum, support for ending apartheid?

DG: Well to a degree, yes. Yes, but as I say it would be wrong to say that there were scores of Tories out picketing Tesco's, but there were people from a very wide range of backgrounds and all sectors of society, whether it would be, as I say, the church, the trade unions, the political parties, the majority of Britain, the white British population, different sections from the ethnic and minority communities, everybody did come together on this one. As I say, not everyone had exactly the same opinion about everything, but it was one hell of a coalition. And the point was that it was able as a result of that – I'm not always in favour of a coalition, I'm not particularly in favour of the one at the moment – but it was able to apply the maximum amount of pressure and to keep the issue of apartheid on the front burner. There were major national demonstrations held, there were major national events. When there were conferences, they were very well attended, we're not talking about 20 or 30 people, there would be hundreds. The national Anti-Apartheid Movement conferences, a number of which were held in Sheffield, you know, I don't know how many delegates, a few hundred delegates at least, representing groups from all around the country. There were groups active in Ireland, there were groups active in France, Belgium. There was work done across Europe, there were links with people in America and Australia and it really was things coming at them from all sides. Our focus had to be on our own government's involvement in supporting the apartheid regime, and that's where the focus was, the main focus.

PC: With so much worldwide support, why do you, personally, think that apartheid went on for so long?

DG: Well, because of the amount of support the apartheid regime effectively got from countries like Britain and to a certain extent the United States. Because it got caught up in the cold war issue, because what America particularly didn't want and Britain didn't want was another ally for the Soviet Union in an area where they had previously held a swathe of influence, which was also mineral and resource rich. So there were all sorts of partly political and partly economic reasons why various governments like our own backed the apartheid regime in preference to backing anything else. The point was, like all these things, there had been attempts, like there had been in Rhodesia when Zimbabwe got independence, to back moderate forces. But the point was they didn't have any popular support really and so they would try to find ways round it, but they didn't have any credence politically because this is not, you know they were down in South Africa, irrespective of any problems the ANC are having now, it's a complex situation. But at the time the ANC was the majority voice of the people, and there were other organisations, like the Pan-Africanist Congress, which had broken away in the early '60s, that were also significant, and the Azanian People's Organisation, but the majority voice was the African National Congress and that's who we worked with.

SP: Is there anything else you would like to add about how you felt the social factors should have outweighed these economic and political interests?

DG: Well, no I don't think there is anything else. I could probably add to what I've already said. But we in Sheffield, we played our part, we followed a model that was set out by the

Anti-Apartheid Movement nationally and we worked with all sectors of Sheffield society. We built links with them, and we worked towards a common goal of ending the racist apartheid regime. And it did cross, we had everybody from university lecturers through to factory workers would be involved in that movement. It was a very broad social coalition in that sense, as well as a very broad political coalition.

SP: Thank you very much.

PC: Thank you.

DG: You're welcome, thanks.