

Interview with Lord Judd, 29 November 2000, reproduced on the Anti-Apartheid Movement Archives Committee Forward to Freedom project website
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Christabel Gurney: Can you remember when you first became interested in the Southern Africa issue? In particular, in 1960 the Labour Party supported the first activity that was organised by the Anti-Apartheid Movement, which was a Month of Boycott Action in March, and you, I think, had just stood as parliamentary candidate for Sutton and Cheam. Why did you become interested?

Frank Judd: I just thought it was part and parcel of my general socialist commitment. I had grown up in a very internationally minded family and it was a basic issue. For me it was one of the litmus tests of what I thought democratic socialism was about.

CG: Was there religion in your background?

FJ: Yes, indeed there was. I am really a humanist in the church, and as I always say of the last Bishop of Durham, I am a bit to the left of him, theologically and certainly politically. But the two intermingling influences in my upbringing were very much church and politics. I grew up in a Labour family which was Christian. They didn't wear their Christianity on their sleeve, but their values were very strongly Christian. My mother was a university teacher. She was a Senior Lecturer at the LSE, where she ran a course for mature overseas students in social administration for more than 20 years and took her pastoral duties very seriously, so our house was always full of people from the Third World. And my father had been an international worker all his life. He had been the Education Secretary of the League of Nations Union before the war. He was the first Director of the United Nations Association in its heyday when it really was a force to be reckoned with. His last big thing before he retired – he was one of those mobilising resistance to Suez in 1956. So I grew up in that kind of exciting atmosphere. My grandfather on one side of the family was a Church of Scotland Minister who had been a missionary and ended up as Secretary of the Foreign Missions of the Church of Scotland. My grandfather on the other side had been a businessman but he had been a very committed Baptist. So these things came together. I don't know how they would all feel about my being a rather compromised, happy and contented member of the Church of England.

CG: So moving on to the 1966 Labour government, you were active in the opposition to any attempt at compromising with Ian Smith. How important was the issue on the back benches?

FJ: For some of us it was very important. But I think it's true to say of the Labour movement generally, as a whole, it was always really a committed minority who were very internationally minded. There was a lot of the Labour Party that wasn't really very internationally minded and that's certainly still true. But there was always a strong core of people who saw their socialism in international terms. For me it just is logical, from my interpretation which is from, as you've asked, from a Christian rather than a Marxist background. But my approach has always been that if you take those values seriously, then they're universal in their application. And you can't just draw national frontiers around them. In retrospect, looking back, certainly my closest

colleague in the House, and indeed friend in the years I was out of the House, was Joan Lestor. Joan and I were very very close. Joan is godmother to one of my children. We were great family friends as well as being political friends. In fact Ian Aitken wrote a piece saying that it was impossible to get a sheet of paper in between us in terms of our political orientation. Barbara [Castle] referred in her memoirs rather cheerfully to how she got on a plane in Nairobi and met Joan and Frank getting off a plane in Nairobi. But I think that, having said that, there were a core of us who worked very closely together. Bob [Hughes MP], of course, was terrific. Ben Whitaker was another person who was very central on these things – in his way he was always a bit, I hope he wouldn't mind my saying so, he was always a bit Etonian and elitist, but steadfast.

CG: Would you say that it wasn't so much a Left issue – this is a leading question – as a moral issue? How much did it overlap with the people who were ...

FJ: You're asking all the right questions ...

CG: ... interested in Vietnam?

FJ: It was a philosophical issue, it was a practical issue. I remember Joan saying that on race, on gender, all these issues matter, but that she didn't see them essentially as race and gender issues. She saw them as socialist issues – we are about people. And if we are about people in our socialism, all this follows.

CG: As far as the policy went in the '60s, where was the divide between Harold Wilson's attempts to have negotiations and the people who were suspicious of that? For example, at one point you did call for support for the freedom fighters, which was very far from what the government was saying. Was that the sticking point or was it full implementation of sanctions? How many of you were there who would have thought that what Britain should be doing was supporting the liberation movements?

FJ: Some of us were, perhaps, a little avant-garde. To be honest it seems to me that you have to decide where you are going to put your priority attention. Actually the person who got me thinking about this issue was a person called Frank Ferrari, who was head of the American African Institute. I'm sure there will be those, all real seekers after truth, who will want to know who Frank Ferrari really was and what his agenda really was and who was really behind him. We can't dismiss those questions. But I took his intellectual arguments at face value. I remember Frank arguing with me that in many ways the watershed in Southern Africa was going to be the Portuguese territories. The more I looked at it the more I became convinced about this. And of course at that stage Portugal was all caught up in NATO and so on and we were not taking the stand we should because Portugal was an ally in NATO and all the rest. And therefore I joined the Executive of the British Committee for Freedom in Mozambique, Angola and Guinea. While I remained committed to the Anti-Apartheid Movement, I put my efforts and my attention into that group.

CG: That was very much part of the same set-up.

FJ: Looking back, I always felt immensely privileged to have got to know Eduardo Mondlane before his assassination, and his wife Janet. I had a tremendous regard for FRELIMO, in particular.

CG: Can you remember when that was?

FJ: That was in the late '60s, beginning '70s. What I want to say is connected to my analysis about the liberation movements. I have got in my study in Cumbria a photograph – a lovely photograph – of Luthuli receiving the telegram telling him he was going to get the Nobel Peace Prize. I have this photograph because a very great friend of mine who was a South African journalist who had to get out of South Africa came to Britain and had it. Sadly, he died, and when he was dying he said he wanted me to have this photograph. I had immense respect for the courage and the endeavour and commitment of all those who had taken the road of non-violence. I thought it was brave and statesmanlike and wonderful. And I just thought it was terrible the way the world had betrayed them and let them down. And in that context it seemed to me that it had reached a stage where you had to understand that some people's exasperation had come to the point where they said 'The world's betrayed us. We have to take the cause in our own hands and we have to take action ourselves.' I went on record in the House when I said the real test was where we stood on the liberation movements. You have read the debate? Home was Foreign Secretary at the time, I think it says a lot about Douglas-Home actually, when he came to reply to the debate, he spent a disproportionate amount of the time with my part of the argument saying that if, of course, he had come to the same conclusion, that the future could only be influenced by the liberation movements, then he would agree totally with me, but he hadn't reached that stage, and therefore still believed in engagement. I was saying that the self-styled hard-headed brigade were anything but hard-headed, because they were not facing the political realities. If we were looking to the future of the world and the future of our relationships with South Africa – of course I cared about the humanitarian issues and the value of human life – even in terms of Britain's political self-interest and the future of our relationship with South Africa, the argument was 'Where do we stand on the liberation movements?' Were we saying that the only people who were for the liberation movements were the Communists, or were we able to say, as people who were not part of the Communist system, that we felt equally strongly about that. I did feel equally strongly. In the Committee for Freedom in Mozambique, Angola and Guinea there were certainly Communists. I was there because I felt 'Why should it be only the Communists? I feel as strongly on this and therefore I want to be there.' I must say that his perception says a tremendous amount about Harold Wilson as a person, because, with me doing that kind of work, Harold asked me to be his Parliamentary Private Secretary. He then asked me, my first shadow ministerial job, to be shadow Minister for the Navy and for my first job in the government, to be Minister for the Navy. He totally understood my position. But that took a lot of imagination. And I wonder how many people with key leading responsibilities these days have that kind of vision to see sometimes the value of the strategic approach as against the immediate pressures and the tactical approach.

CG: Can you remember in the '60s – it does seem as if the government, including Harold Wilson, didn't really see, both in South Africa and in Rhodesia, the liberation

movements as being a viable alternative. They talked about chaos and the disruption of the South African economy . . .

FJ: I never felt particularly courageous about it, I never felt particularly exposed. I think I felt at the time – I was so convinced about this, that we had failed the exponents of non-violence and we had to face up to this. And you have to understand that I – I wouldn't want you to have any illusions about this – I did come from part of that tradition in the Labour movement that felt very deeply and strongly about Stalinism and totalitarian Communism and the betrayal of the socialist ideal and I did feel, I don't know what your own position is on this, I was very much a NATO person, but I argued that within NATO itself we should be making these approaches because this was the logic of our position on freedom in the West. And we were playing into the hands of the other side if we didn't see this, as well as letting down the people who were fighting for their freedom. From all that standpoint I said these things, but I think people saw the context in which I was saying them. The other thing is that people are complex, and intelligent people are very complex. Harold Wilson and many of the leading Labour figures were very complex people indeed and I think that while you are right to say that my position was ahead of them – it might sound arrogant, but I think it was ahead of them on this – I think that they knew that this was a valid point of view. They were dealing with the practicalities. Britain, in those days, was very much a question of keeping the ship afloat, economically and the rest. I think they were primarily committed to that but could understand the position of people like me.

I think there's something about presentation and style. One of the things I always tried to do was to avoid polarisation. I took my position but I always tried to put it in the context of dialogue rather than the trenches. I know that there were people in the Anti-Apartheid Movement who were unhappy with my position on one other thing. We are talking about one side of my position, but there was another side to my position. The other side was that I was always unhappy with the tendency in the Anti-Apartheid Movement to say, for example, that if some people coming to Britain from South Africa were being financed by the South Africa Foundation we should shun them. And I used to feel quite indignant about this and say 'For God's sake, have we no self-confidence? There they are. We should see them, talk to them, argue with them'. I also made a point of going to South Africa when people said 'Don't go'.

CG: When was that?

FJ: I went to South Africa in the late '60s, early '70s. I made a point of meeting Nationalists, National Party people. I remember on one visit I started my visit by meeting Piet Cillier who was the high priest of Afrikanerdom, writing in *Die Burger*. I was always very interested in the Afrikaner intellectuals and I had a very interesting conversation with him. And I met all sorts of people, in business, the other parties and so on. At the end of my visit I asked whether I could see him again. And I went to see him again. And I said 'I just want to say to you – that I can understand your position, the position of the Afrikaners. The people I often have problems with are some of the English liberals here. Because you Afrikaners, it seems to me, are tribalists, you're white tribalists, you're out to defend the position of the white tribe and you're not squeamish about what you do to defend it'. And I said 'I am appalled

by the things you do, I think they're wrong and terrible, but it's a position I can understand. Many white liberals, it seems to me, want it both ways. They're doing incredibly well economically out of the situation here, and yet they want the luxury of a good conscience at the same time. That I find difficult.' I came to the conclusion in those years that when we got change, it would be from a combination of external pressure, the pressure of the ANC and the liberation movements and the rest, the really tough pressure. But I also felt that it would be the Afrikaners. They were a crucial element in the situation, coming to see that there must be change. And one of the things that began to grow in my mind, and I understood it because although having moved to a much more liberal position in the church myself, having seen in the church that sort of fundamentalism, I could see that the Afrikaners were believers, and if some of them came to believe something different, it would be quite strong. Later what I came to realise as another strong factor was that of course when business in South Africa began to realise that the future success of business required fundamental change, that was terribly powerful and I am afraid I had been old fashioned enough in my socialism not to have wanted to recognise that element. But pragmatically I came to recognise it later.

CG: Can you remember when you went to South Africa?

FJ: It must have been right at the end of the '60s. It's interesting because later when I became Director of Oxfam I found that Oxfam had had exactly the same experience. Oxfam said, 'We're going to go and work in this situation', and they came in for a lot of stick. Later they were at a premium because they had forged relationships with all sorts of people. And I remember in the run up to the changes, when the ANC was participating in negotiations, the ANC coming down to Oxford to visit us, the ANC leadership, in our offices, for talks, because Oxfam was respected for having got dug in and being involved. So I think in these situations that you do need playing at different levels. But when I look back on it, I think 'Yes, the Christian influences. Yes, that very strong democratic Labour socialist background, where there were people in the Labour Party who felt more strongly about totalitarian Communism than the Conservatives did even.' For example, Jan Masaryk was someone my father knew. I was 12 when he fell to his death – I can remember the atmosphere in my house when Jan Masaryk fell – it didn't matter whether he was pushed or jumped, my parents had been a year before that in Prague themselves. So all those elements were there. But I think in another sort of way, I am a political animal, and I think it was all quite hard-headed in another sort of way. You have to make judgements about how you actually influence, how do you actually make the relationships with the things of the future? If you're going to do that how do you get into play with the different parts. Because unless you're going to have a complete fight to the end, with God knows how much bloodshed, and total surrender, there's going to be in the end some sort of political settlement. So how do we understand this and relate to it? Just after I finished my time as Director of Oxfam, I was asked for two years running, by the Davos World Economic Forum crowd, to chair a conference on the economic and political future of South Africa in Geneva, to which Mbeki came and everybody. The PAC was there, the ANC was there, the Communists were there. I must say I gave WEF full marks for that. They had everybody there, and the business community, and so on. They got me to do that for

two years. I think that I was an acceptable person to do it. Can you see what I'm getting at?

CG: That's fascinating. But that raises all kinds of questions that interest me. One of them is, looking back to the '60s, you said you were much more involved with the Committee for Freedom in Mozambique. In the '60s and early '70s, how did you perceive the Anti-Apartheid Movement? I remember from my time in Anti-Apartheid – it was very opposed to the idea of visiting South Africa. Arising from that, looking at it objectively, in the '60s was Anti-Apartheid an influence among backbench MPs and in the Labour Party?

FJ: I think, to be very candid, I think there were always different elements. I think there were people, Bob Hughes was obviously one, and Joan Lester, for whom it was a real commitment. I'm not really making a value judgement there. It's a bit harsh. But there were others who felt they ought to be involved in it – your political credentials were somehow not going to be right if you weren't. I think in most things you get that sort of mix. But there were some for whom it was a real leading issue, Joan was one, as I keep saying. I think the Movement played a conscience role.

CG: Did it in the '60s? In the '60s the Anti-Apartheid Movement was very impressed by the way that Harold Wilson in 1963, when he was Leader of the Opposition, denounced 'this bloody traffic in arms', and it was very disappointed in what actually happened when Labour took power. Of course the '60s government wasn't interested, because of the economic situation, in sanctions. But at that stage was the AAM an influence?

FJ: Yes, I think it was. One of the questions you always have to ask in politics is how much worse it could have been without. I think it was an influence, it was a conscience. However, I think it could be misguided. I was 99 per cent with Anti-Apartheid but there was a 1 per cent reservation. What was that 1 per cent? It wasn't about [Mike] Terry. He was one of the most effective people, I had no problem about him. Indeed I have had friends like that throughout life, absolute open, honest comrades. For example, another great friend of mine was Peter Zinkin, who was the lobby correspondent of the Morning Star. When I became Junior Minister of Defence and was Navy Minister, I insisted that Peter Zinkin came and had tea with me in my office. I was very worried about the oversimplified confrontational approach and I just could not endorse the arguments that 'We don't meet white nationalist South Africans'. That just seemed to me wrong. It was either wrong, in terms of bad policy, or else it was saying 'We haven't got confidence in ourselves'.

CG: What about the call for total sanctions?

FJ: Perhaps there was an over-ideological position, instead of being big enough, self-confident enough, to say 'Well, how do we get into play?' I think there's been a quantum leap in the sophistication of the better NGOs these days. The better NGOs have got much more sophisticated in how they engage in the political dialogue and take people on at their own intellectual level and get them to see their own inconsistencies and so on. I have been involved in a lot of NGOs now, particularly ones working on arms control and the arms trade. I have always been worried about

ideological intransigence. Yet with Mike [Terry] – I didn't feel that about him. I always felt that he was more flexible than some of those around him, that he was much more open.

CG: The two fundamental things about Anti-Apartheid which distinguished it, the sine qua nons of its policy, were its support for the ANC, although it wasn't only supportive of the ANC, and the call for total sanctions. How did you feel in the '70s about support for the ANC?

FJ: The first night that I was working as a PPS to Harold – he was Leader of the Opposition – I had a long-standing date in my diary to go to a South African meeting which was organised by the ANC and they had asked me to speak. I remember starting 'Comrades and ladies and gentlemen' or something like that 'and members of the Special Branch'. The ANC weren't altogether my politics, but they were tough. The other person we haven't mentioned in all this, a person who was very dear to me was Ethel [de Keyser]. Ethel was a very good friend, I think Ethel was one of the unsung heroes. There were whole periods of time when you never went into the Central Lobby without Ethel being there, she really worked at it. I never resented Ethel, ever – I always felt Ethel was my conscience and challenge. When I saw her I thought 'I'm not doing enough' or I would see Ethel and I would immediately feel on the defensive. I always have felt that – always when I am with Ethel, I feel inadequate.

CG: Can you say something about David Owen? In his memoirs he says that he did move towards thinking that we should dissociate ourselves from South Africa economically. And, of course, he was the Foreign Secretary who went along with the UN mandatory arms embargo.

FJ: He hadn't been involved in dissent on the things we've been talking about at all. But I think he is a person who looks at things analytically, both from what people choose to call a real politik position but also ethically. I think he does have ethical struggles. But I think it was important to him to be able to demonstrate that you were hard-nosed. I think sometimes that people of whom that is true are people who feel the issue very deeply indeed and can't open up because they do. I think David had conflicts which were not just emotional, but also analytical.

CG: You mean he could see the way the future was going ... ?

FJ: I was his Deputy at the Foreign Office and my main portfolio was Europe, the Middle East, North America, defence and the economic side of foreign policy. He very definitely did not give me Africa. I remember vividly at some conference where we found ourselves together, when for some reason David just wanted to open up. And I had one of the best conversations I ever had with David during the two years I was working with him as his deputy. It was on Southern African issues and South Africa. It was a very good conversation. And I felt a lot of sympathy. He was a prisoner, I felt, of the situation. There was a meeting of minds. It was also as though he was looking for reassurance on some of his instincts from me.

CG: What did he say?

FJ: But there was this macho element and he had other political agendas. I think he did struggle on the issue. David was quite radical. Does that surprise you?

CG: No, I think that it raises important issues – it's very interesting how Southern Africa and moral issues relate to the Labour movement and the Labour Party. It seems to me it wasn't always, or sometimes not at all, the Left, it was a mixture – there was another dimension to the people in the Labour movement who were involved ... There were other people in the '60s who disappeared from view, who were very involved on Rhodesia.

FJ: Alex Lyon?

CG: Yes, and John Lee and Paul Rose.

FJ: Yes, and Ben [Whitaker]. You are talking to Ben, aren't you?

CG: I would like to. And David Winnick. But John Lee and Paul Rose disappeared from political view. Were they on the Left?

FJ: And Peter Archer.

CG: And then there were other people like Michael Foot who were much more ambivalent.

FJ: No, they were not [so involved]. I'd say that the nonconformist ethical tradition was a very strong one in this.

CG: It happens also in the trade union movement. ACTT was very involved in the formation of Anti-Apartheid – George Elvin [ACTT General Secretary] was a Methodist.

FJ: I do think that there was – in terms of conditioning – those of us who had been through that sort of mill. Whereas the more ideological, intellectual types didn't feel it so strongly.

CG: So just to go back – about the arms embargo in the '60s, can you remember about that December '67 crisis when Harold Wilson was said to have stirred up opposition on the back benches [against the lifting of the South African arms embargo]? Was there genuine widespread opposition to the lifting of the embargo?

FJ: Yes I think there was.

CG: And do you think Harold Wilson was temperamentally opposed to lifting the embargo?

FJ: I am sure Harold was on the right side on Southern Africa. I am absolutely certain of it. Aren't you?

CG: Yes. I want to believe it.

FJ: He was an incredibly complicated person. But I have always said that if I drew the short straw on the Day of Judgement and was made Counsel for the Defence I would welcome it because ... there were a lot of wonderful things about Harold.

CG: Thank you very much. That wasn't quite what I thought I was going to ask you and what you were going to say, but it was more interesting and wide-ranging.

FJ: Can I say one other thing? When I was Director of Oxfam I went to South Africa before the changes had happened during the State of Emergency. We had to be very careful because we were very close to people and we didn't want to put them at risk. So when we had visits, for example, we would change cars and so on. At one stage, right at the end of our visit, I was absolutely convinced that from the moment we set foot in Jan Smuts [Airport] we had been monitored. Right at the end, when we were at Durban and just going to fly to Johannesburg, we were taking some refreshment in the airport and someone came up and said 'Mr Judd?' and I said 'Yes'. And they said 'Mr Barber?' And Chris said 'Yes'. He was our Chair, a lovely Quaker chap. They said 'Would you mind stepping this way. We would just like to speak to you for a moment.' And they took us into this locker room. And they said 'We are just asking you to stay here, because there are some people, Special Branch, coming out from the police station who want to talk to you.' In Durban we had been in the building in which the ecumenical movement and all sorts of other organisations had offices. There was one person with whom we had a long talk, who was dealing with deserters. As we came out of the building I can remember noticing down the road there was a car with the door open and I could see a chap sitting there watching us. I think it was one of those cock-ups and we weren't supposed to know. Two chaps turned up in civvies at the airport. And it is where that Quaker culture is marvellous. Chris Barber, who is slightly shorter than I am . . . as these chaps came in they were extremely nervous. They came in and Chris stepped forward and said 'Chris Barber, Oxfam' and held his hand out. And the chap, before he said anything, shook it. And then they had to go through a rigmarole. But we got the impression that they couldn't get us on the plane to Johannesburg fast enough. I was sure that they weren't supposed to have revealed they were watching us.

Anyway, later, nearer the time of the change I went again to Pretoria and I nearly missed my flight home because I was talking to the man who had been Chairman of the National Party. I think he was Minister of Education at the time. Later he had a breakdown. But we got into this deep discussion. I got on to that plane elated. Why? Because after we had been talking for quite a while, he had suddenly said: 'Mr Judd, if you decide to jump and the gap is 14 feet there is no point in jumping 12'. He had made his mind up. And I thought these toughies – or some of them – have decided for change.