

Interview with Mike Pye by Jeff Howarth, 19th September 2013, for the Anti-Apartheid Movement Archives Committee project Forward to Freedom
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Jeff Howarth: Right, this is Jeff Howarth, interviewing Mike Pye. It's the 19th September 2013, as part of the Forward to Freedom Anti-Apartheid Movement History project. Mike, if you could give me your full name?

Mike Pye: Michael Pye.

JH: Could you tell me when and where you were born?

MP: I was born actually on that bend in the river called the Isle of Dogs in East London, so I am a true born cockney.

JH: And when?

MP: 4th September 1937.

JH: Can you tell me what did you do as a living?

MP: I started work in an office in the City of London and then as a laboratory assistant in a local oil company, following which I did three years service in the Royal Air Force and when I came out of that I was hoping to go into the police force, but at that time they didn't take people with glasses. [Laugh] So I went into the local employment exchange and said, 'I'm on terminal leave, have you got anything to offer me?', and they said, 'What about coming this side of the counter?' And that started 37 years in the civil service in one department, which started off as the Ministry of Labour and National Service, and I think is now the Department of Work and Pensions. I retired as a Senior Executive Officer dealing with the Community Programme.

JH: These are just some general background questions before we move on to some more specific ones to do with the local authority. Have you been involved in any political campaigning activity apart from the Anti-Apartheid?

MP: Yes, the Labour Party.

JH: For how long?

MP: Fifty years or more. I mean I was in the trade union movement when I was in the civil service. I started off in what was then the Ministry of Labour Staff Association (MLSA) and I was the branch secretary and then I was the MLSA's London and South East Region chair for a number of years, by which time it was the Society of Civil Servants (SCS). When I got married, which was in 1973, I moved from London to Hoddesdon in Hertfordshire. I then started getting more involved with the Labour Party, simply because my wife was involved in the Labour Party locally. Prior to that I had been more involved with the trade union movement, then with the Labour Party. Although Poplar Borough Council, as it was then, was very heavily Labour I didn't get

too involved, apart from a few local items and they weren't party political in the accepted sense, they were local community issues. But when I got to Hoddesdon I was a member of the Labour Party and I got involved with a local party branch. I became its secretary, and then its chairman, and chairman of the Constituency Labour Party, and we got involved in political campaigns, and that's the start really. But I have to say that as East Herts Constituency was the biggest constituency in the country at that time, it was massive. And it had an inbuilt Tory majority of 40,000, so to say that when I stood as a councillor I didn't get on. Then we heard that the then government were dispersing head offices out of London and MSC (Manpower Services Commission), as it was then, was destined to come to Sheffield. My wife and I discussed this and we felt that that was good, you know, to come up to Sheffield. It's a nice city and all the rest of it, so we then moved to Sheffield in 1980 when the department moved up, and I then just carried on, got involved with the local Labour Party, became its secretary, and then after two years, people said, 'Well, why don't you stand for the Council?', and I did and I got elected on the Council in 1984, and I retired from the Council in 2010.

JH: Can you tell me when and how you first became aware of the situation in Southern Africa?

MP: Probably just after I had come up to Sheffield. I mean I was generally aware, but more when we came to Sheffield. I then got to know Paul Blomfield and Richard Caborn, who were involved not only with the Labour Party of course, because Richard was the chair of the district Party, which was the main controlling party within Sheffield, or was at that time, and both of those were active in the Movement, and I got involved and obviously was well aware about what was going on. Plus this issue of Thatcher and sanctions and she was banging on that Mandela was a terrorist and a crook and everything else, and we shouldn't have sanctions because that would harm the South Africans, blah blah blah. So, you know, you got more involved with it then or more knowledge of it then.

JH: So those are the main reasons why you thought you should do something about it?

MP: Well, yes. Sheffield is a very radical and nonconformist city, and it was actually the first city that took boycott action in the 1700s, against sugar, against slavery. And so we thought we could – because we had a very strong Labour Council we thought we could influence them, and certainly the UN blacklist was the one we went for, because Sheffield City Hall were getting people in like Shirley Bassey, that were also on the UN register. And so we started doing things to raise awareness and talked about boycotting. But then I got elected to the City Council. In the same year, there was a discussion about what local authorities could do generally, and Sheffield took the lead in that. And they convened under a councillor called Jim Moore a conference for local authorities, and I think that was in 1984, the end of 1984. And following that, there was a decision that what we would do is that they would form a National Steering Committee of local authorities, and they would look to produce a model resolution for local authorities to send around to the all the other local authorities to see how many we could get in. Which was primarily and basically saying and I think there's a copy in the archives, saying, 'We will not buy South

African goods', sort of the standard one. I mean I can't fully remember the exact details but I think it had been drafted in conjunction with the Anti-Apartheid Movement with Mike Terry and others. I was then asked by one of the senior members of the Labour group, would I take over because I had been involved with Paul on a local basis with the Movement, would I take over as the Council's lead. And I did, and that's what started years my ten years of being chair of the NSCLAAA.

JH: Brilliant, let's get some more detail about that. What action did Sheffield Council take in relation to South Africa? You've talked about the boycott of goods, but any other ...?

MP: It did a number of things over the next few years. First of all, it granted the freedom of the city to Nelson Mandela. And I can remember getting up and proposing that in council. The rules are such that you propose a motion that says that you ask the Lord Mayor to convene a special council to consider the ... and the Lord Mayor then actually moves the motion, and we got that and I can remember some of the Tories, because at that time you had 88 councillors on Council. We were 60 or so, the Tories were about 14, 15 and the Liberals, as they were then Liberals, were about eight or nine, mainly from the north of the city. And they came in with us and they supported us. The Tories didn't, but there were two or three, and really only two or three of those that were true Thatcherites, didn't believe in sanctions on South Africa, certainly didn't believe in the Anti-Apartheid Movement and so had a little go. But we did that and then we considered, I think probably about '86/'87, we considered a total boycott, and as you know Thatcher was not keen on local authorities taking action. We had discussed this at a meeting at the NSC, and a London Council, whose representative was a bit gung-ho about it, 'Well, we're going to do it straightaway', and they put through a motion of his Council to disinvest from Shell, because that was a big one at that time and when, quite frankly, bull in a china shop, and it just went through, 'Oh we're going to disassociate'. And needless to say, Shell took them to court, and they lost. We then talked about it and how we could impose sanctions without being legally challenged. Sheffield had been involved very strongly with the nuclear free zone and we had a legal chap, one of our legal officers, who had been very much involved, I think he was secretary of the nuclear free zone. And I talked to him about it, and he said, 'Well, what we'll do is we'll construct a report that will include everything. It won't be just saying, we're opposed to Shell because they invest in South Africa, we have to make it legally watertight and all the rest of it, and it can't rebound back on us.' Because I suppose we only had, we had a contract with them for a little over a million; it wasn't a big contract, compared to our overall costs.

JH: Is this supplying oil to council offices, to sort of local government ...?

MP: Yes, well they did, and you had a number of contracts, and the London authority's contract was quite small, as far as I can remember. But as I say, its representative (who is now does most of the freedom stuff,) was, I mean I don't think he was listening, it was 'Let's do it', you know, bang bang bang. And you can't do that if you're a local authority. You have to take precautions, you have to make sure that no one is going to turn around and say, 'This is a political move', because councils can't be political, certainly can't be party political. And it's more difficult

today, you couldn't do it, but this was prior to the Thatcher Act that changed the rules. And we got together and our officer went out to all the local community groups, we have a very large Asian group and a very large Afro-Caribbean group, we've got large Chinese associations in this entire city. So he went out to all of them, and he asked their comments and whatever they felt, and we took action on the grounds of, oh god it's section something of the Local Government Act, section 42, I don't know, I can't remember the actual title, but it was the one to encourage good race relations. And the report was not about boycotting Shell per se, because they dealt with South Africa, it was to improve race relations in the City of Sheffield, which is what, you know, you get to the same object. And we produced a report that was 100 pages long, it was thick, and that went to our policy committee, who discussed it properly, and the policy committee was made up of all parties in the City Council but, of course, the majority party (Labour) had the most members. And it was carried, came to Council, and Council of course carried it, and we then waited to see what would happen. And clearly, well, the Tories or whatever, I don't know, but it got to Shell, and I remember getting a letter from the Chief Executive of Shell, the chief legal officer from Shell, and saying, 'We note that you have cancelled our contract, but we also note you have been very well legally advised, therefore we will not be taking action'. [Laughs] Good. We did what we wanted to do. I mean it was limited, but it got over that point. The next battle we had to some extent was that we have a City Hall, that was then controlled by the City Council, it was run by the City Council, and they used to get people in that were on the UN register. And I took it to my group, the Labour group, saying we should implement the UN register and therefore we should say we will not have these people. There was some opposition, in particular the chair of the committee that ran the City Hall said, 'You do that then everyone will not come here'. Because most large organisations are run by groups of management, and those managements are the same. What I said was that this is in accordance with our political philosophy, but it's also in accordance with our policy of the Council. Look, we should not have people that will be on the UN register, that will go to South Africa in defiance of the UN. So we were then advised that if you do this you might lose all the people coming in, the stars and stuff like that, which of course is an impact on the income of the City Council, it's a cost. But what we then said was, we would not stop them coming, but we would support the local Anti-Apartheid Movement in hanging banners inside the hall and having demonstrations outside the hall. We would also have a leaflet both from the City Council and from the Anti-Apartheid Movement on every seat in the City Hall saying why we were opposed to this and why we think X should come off the register and give the undertaking as required by the UN. And we would have banners put up – you don't know the City Hall, but the City Hall is like – there's the stalls there and then there's a circle and then there's a balcony, and of course around the circle is sort of shelving and stuff like that. We were going to put notices all around, banners all around so they were facing the stage. And we said, 'Yes, come in, by all means you know we're not going to go against your contract', because we were told the contracts had already been signed off, so there was little we could do legally, apart from pay considerable costs, and so we said no you can go ahead, but this is what we will do. And Elton John was one, perhaps [inaudible] was the other one, and both of those gave the undertaking just before they appeared. So we said, 'Welcome' and we were then happy. Well, there was a demonstration outside, but it was more to the effect of 'Thank you, Elton John for signing the register', you know, giving the undertaking. And so that was, you

know, we got round what legally we were able to do within the law, but to the benefit of good race relations within the city. And that's the thing – you could get round a lot of the rules by using the law to your advantage, and certainly by using the ability of, as it then was ... It's more difficult these days, of using the Race Relations Act to your benefit, and to the benefit of the local people. So that's everything we got, we got the boycott of Shell and everybody else, and I have to say that I think no doubt the following year when Maggie brought in the amendments to the Local Government Act that said you couldn't do that, even under section 73 I think it was, of the Race Relations Act, they amended it, and I think they amended it because we had started that and you know it's funny that a year later they're bringing in an Act that stops local authorities from using the Race Relations Act to support a boycott against South Africa, or anywhere else. So we got the boycott against Shell, we got the boycott, the UN register thing, and we got at least two people coming off and giving the undertaking required by the UN. So we were able to say to the NSCLAAA and to colleagues that came in from other councils, 'This is the way to do it'. We had the model resolution, we changed that slightly, so it covered all the points and we were reasonably happy, I suppose, and we then went on to the NSCLAAA. What we also used to do was, we insisted that we would fly the flags of all nations, but of course we did deliberately go to certain nations, on their national day, so the ANC flag was raised and the SWAPO flag on Namibia Day was raised and a red flag used to be raised on the 1st of May as well, but we were able to do that.

And then the next big thing that occurred in Sheffield was the visit of Oliver Tambo, because he had come up to talk to the Labour Party conference. Kinnock, who was the Labour leader, had got him to come to the Labour Party conference, and Blunkett, who was then the leader of the Council, had sort of persuaded him to come up to Sheffield. He'd come back from the party conference and said to me, 'I've agreed that, got him to agree that we will host him for a day'. Because Oliver Tambo was the President of the ANC, he was in effect Nelson's deputy outside prison and all the rest of it. So he was a big thing, important, so I contacted the ANC and I had links in the ANC in London, and they were happy for him to come up. And just before that we had taken the decision to name a road in Sheffield Nelson Mandela Way, and that was on the Manor (it's a big sprawling estate over the south-east way), and they'd been rebuilding around there. And so I put forward a motion that we would name this. And that was agreed and we got it named Nelson Mandela Way and I'm trying to think, I've got a photo upstairs of it. I think the deputy ANC representative in the UK came up and with the Lord Mayor and I, we did the unveiling bit and renamed it. And as I say, following that we then got the thing that we would have Tambo come. And I went round organising things and we wanted to take him to a school, which was a bit difficult because it was a school holiday, but I got a couple of friends of mine that I knew were in the Movement who were teachers at Abbeydale Grange, and they were very keen. And they got an agreement, I presume, from the Head and the rest of it, that they would bring in the pupils on this day that Tambo was coming up, even though it was in the holidays. And then I got a request which we thought was a bit strange, I had to talk to Paul about it, it was from the Chamber of Commerce, who wondered whether or not Oliver Tambo would visit him. And as they were due to go out on the trade mission to South Africa, we'd been canvassing against this. We thought, oh well, we actually talked to his office, and his office was actually happy for him to go. I went down to see him off the train, and as I say I'll show you some photos afterwards, he came in and I mean it must have been late

'70s then, and he came round and I met him and we went for a bit of lunch and we then went to the Chamber of Commerce, because he said he would go. We spent about an hour there and we saw their President and their Chief Executive or whatever, and he did a 'Why they shouldn't deal with South Africa' speech. And then we went to the school and the kids were, the kids had come, had been picked to come and meet him, were excited and all the rest of it, he did his bit. He then came back and met the Council. Just before he'd come up, I'd said, 'Well, the Lord Mayor should lay on a reception for him in the evening and a dinner', because the President of the Anti-Apartheid Movement locally was the Bishop of Sheffield, David Lunn. He was very keen, and very active. And I said to the bishop, would he agree to speak at the dinner but, problem, the Lord Mayor at the time was a strange woman. She said, 'Why should I give a reception, why should I give a dinner to him?', and we said, 'Because he's coming up as a guest to the city and he is the President of the African National Congress and he is in fact therefore to our minds the president of free South Africa. And that's why you should give it.' [Grumbling sounds] 'I don't feel I should spend the Lord Mayor's budget on that'. I had a little word with David Blunkett, who was the leader of the Council, who said, 'We will have it and we will put it on and the Lord Mayor will do it'. So there was no doubt. So we get to the dinner that night, oh in the afternoon I'd wanted him to come elsewhere, and his staff, his aides, had said, 'No, he must have at least two hours rest'. And I thought, I don't blame him really because I was beginning to feel knackered, I don't know about him, and he was a lot older than I was. And so he had that break, three hours, I think, in the afternoon so he could rest. But then he came to the dinner and I was sitting opposite the Lord Mayor and him, and she'd said to me, 'Well, what do I say?' And I said, 'You just welcome him, nothing else'. Wrote out what she should say. 'Hello sir, welcome to the city', and then you sit down because David Blunkett's going to do the political speech, David Lunn, who's bishop of Sheffield, is going to do the anti-apartheid speech, and therefore you don't need to say anything, other than, 'We welcome you to the city', just do that. And we got to the dinner and we got through, she said, 'Welcome to the city and we are pleased to see you and then she sat down'. And David did his bit, the two Davids did their bit, and then she got up and she was going to do the toast, you see. Apart from the fact that she toasted the President of South Africa [laughs]. I was sitting opposite, the Bishop of Sheffield on one side [laughs], it was funny. But it got over because Tambo just didn't take any notice. And she then, as is the tradition with the city, we always give somebody a gift. And if they are a very important people, we would give them knives or something like that that had been made in the city. And sure enough, she got this gift of carving knives, and she says, 'And this is a gift on behalf of the city to you', and she goes to hand it over to him, 'And the tradition again is that if I give you a gift of a knife, you give me a penny or a copper coin, so that you don't cut our friendship, because that blunts the knife that would cut our friendship if you don't'. And with all the bugging around I'd forgotten this, and I'd forgotten to give him a penny and say, 'Pass this over'. And she went like that and he went out, and she pulled back the thing [laughs] and I thought, 'Oh Christ, I've forgotten the penny'. And so she said, 'We have a tradition that you have to give us a copper coin so not to cut our friendship'. 'Ah', he said, and then he put his hand in his pocket and he brought out a copper medallion, and he said, 'This was given to me by Nelson Mandela before he went into prison, and therefore it's for you, so it doesn't cut, you know. And I thought, 'Ah' [gasps]. I felt terrible, it was really, I thought we've now got to take that back off of her. Because she wasn't the world's

brightest of our Lord Mayors, and I thought there's no way, because it would disappear. If that's direct from Mandela to Tambo, it's a very important medallion, but it passed over, she gave the thing. I then took him back to the hotel, and I was knackered and this was about 11 o'clock and he'd been going for almost 12 hours, apart from the break in the middle. And he was fantastic, and there were two little asides from that. One I went to the – it must have been ANC – conference they had in Harare. And when did Mandela come out of prison, '91 was it?

JH: '90?

MP: '90 or '91. Yes, it was the year after Mandela got out of prison, or was getting out of prison. And the ANC had a conference; they had it in Harare. And I went there as a representative from the ANC, no sorry representative from the National Steering Committee, and we were waiting when Tambo was coming through, to you know address the conference, and I sort of wangled myself up to the front and he was stopping and shaking hands as he was going in, bit like, you know they do, and so I got in and I said, 'You know, I've come from Sheffield'. And he said, 'Oh yes, I remember you'. [Laughs] You know, the number of people he saw yet he said, 'Oh yes, we were there and you know, the Lord Mayor gave me a knife set'. And I couldn't believe it, I thought well bloody hell that is something. But the other thing was the medallion. I'd said to the Lord Mayor about it, and I said we should take it and put it into the council archives. And 'Oh yes, I'll give it to you'. And of course lord mayors are only in office for a year, and then she changed parties and she went to the Liberal Democrats, because I think her ward didn't want her any longer and she went to the Lib Dems to stand against them. And I kept on saying to her, 'That really should go into the museum or into the city archives'. 'Oh yes, when I get round to it.' And then she died, and by the time we got to the family and said something they said, 'Oh, we don't know anything', so it probably got slung out.

JH: Oh dear ...

MP: And the only thing I'm really uptight about is that we didn't keep that. And that's simply because she was bloody useless. But it would have been nice to have had that so we could have put it in with other things that we've got. It could have been kept as part of our historic achievements. So that was, we'd got through that.

Other things were clearly the Freedom of the City ceremony, because when Mandela was actually released, the interesting thing, that was in the middle of the Labour Party conference, and because we knew he was getting released in the afternoon British time. I knew Mike Terry then quite well, I'd been serving on the National Committee and Mike saw me there and said, 'Oh well I think you should come in as the chair of the National Steering Committee, come in with the Kinnocks party'. So I was in, and I'd just ... was it after, yes I think it was after, we'd gone to a conference on children's poverty that was hosted by the ANC, but at which Neil's wife had spoken and we were in a small British contingent, so had got to know each other and the rest of it. And she said, 'Oh no, you must come in'. And so I saw Mandela getting released on television in the company of senior members of the Anti-Apartheid Movement and the leader of the Labour Party, the then leader of the Labour Party. But we then said, 'Well, what we need to do is we want Nelson to come and receive

the freedom of the city'. And I have to say both Clive Betts, who was the Leader then and Mike Bower, who was Clive's successor as Leader of the Council, wanted him to come to Sheffield to receive the freedom. And as I say there are six cities giving him the freedom and we discussed it with the National Steering Committee. And although I wanted him to come to Sheffield for obvious reasons, so did everybody else [i.e. the other local authorities wanted him to visit them]. There was some discussion, I mean Camden wanted him to come to Camden, they were Deputy Chair of the NSC, and this London-centric bit, and I said, 'No, we need to find something that is, if you like, politically neutral, inasmuch as you can't be seen'. So we had a look and Glasgow came up. Glasgow had been the first city by far to grant him the freedom some years before ourselves or anybody else. And Glasgow were very keen to have him up there, so we agreed that what we would do is we would have a day, a day's conference organised by the NSCLAAA, but the morning would be six separate cities giving the freedom¹ and the afternoon would be the conference of the NSCLAAA. And we worked out a programme that saw Mandela come and get greeted by the Provost and the rest of it at the City Hall, City Chambers, and then to be taken in alphabetical order, which meant that actually Sheffield, was last, in alphabetical order to give the freedom of the city. So the City Chambers agreed to set aside six committee rooms, which for that morning become the cities of Sheffield, Glasgow, whatever, and we did this and following the granting and, as I say, I've got a video of it, following the granting of the freedoms he then went into ... I think we did it in the main hall of the City Chambers and he spoke to all the six cities and sort of thanked them all. He then went outside and did a public speech in front of the City Chambers, St. George's Square. I don't know if you know Glasgow, but it's a massive square, it's a beautiful square, right in front of the City Chambers. And it was packed, as it would be, and Mandela did his bit, and Brian Filling, who was the Chair of the Scottish Anti-Apartheid Movement, spoke and Mike Terry also did a speech. And then they left and they walked to ... I'm not quite sure where the conference centre was. I then wanted the members of the National Steering Committee to meet Mandela. There was some who didn't want this to happen, I don't think the Provost was happy about it, she wanted to keep him to herself and to Glasgow, and I said, 'No, you know it's right, that these people have been working all the time, that the individual members should have a chance to meet him'. And I talked to, I can't remember his name but he was the ANC's chief representative, I mean I think he's now a member of the South African government. And he was the first South African ambassador to the UK after freedom, after the election. But he agreed and he obviously pulled some strings with the Mandela camp. And it was agreed that they would come, they would then meet the NSCLAAA representatives for half an hour, and then he would come onto the stage, and we would go into the conference, which he did, and he come in and he went round and he shook hands with everyone, my colleagues, and I actually shook hands with him three times that day and I haven't got a photo of it. And I'm bloody annoyed ...

JH: Yes, very disappointing.

MP: [*Laughs*] You know, I've got photographs of other hand-shakings, but not with Mandela.

¹ Nine British local authorities conferred the freedom of the city on Mandela.

JH: You've got the memory ...

MP: Because someone I was standing in front or behind me or whatever, but we then took him and he did his speech and all the rest of it, which was absolutely packed. And then sort of got rushed away and did it. So we then got to the point just after the free elections, we discussed what we would do and we discussed that with the Anti-Apartheid Movement and they said, 'Well, we're changing our name to Action for South Africa and perhaps you should do that, and certainly you should still continue'. And as I'd done ten years as the chair of the National Steering Committee, I was more than happy to say, 'Right now we're changing mode and going into something else we should have a new Chair'. So Nirmal Roy, who was councillor in Camden, and had always been keen to become the chair, we said yes, why not become the chair of a new organisation. And we held a final conference where we changed our name, it was in Manchester. And then Nirmal became the chair and I stayed on for a while, but as the representative from Sheffield. And we then changed the name and the impact to, you know, to follow what the Anti-Apartheid Movement wanted to do, so that was that. I mean, a couple of years prior to that we'd had some comments about how we could influence other local authorities. And following Thatcher changing the laws, it made it much more difficult for local authorities to take action. We'd considered how we could take that forward, and what we needed obviously was some professional advice, because it's sometimes difficult to ask a local authority officer for political advice because they're not like the civil service, they're not allowed to give political advice. They give you legal advice and all the rest of it, but they have to be careful. And we didn't want that, we wanted some issue like political legal advice, and so we felt that what we would do is set up an outside company, the Local Authority Resource Unit on Apartheid. And we set this up and we said, because it had to be funded, Camden and Sheffield got together and our officers got together and I got the ... our head, the legal solicitor, together with his colleague in Camden to draw up articles and memoranda of association for the company, which we did, and Sheffield and Camden become the initial subscribers. We then opened it to all local authorities. If they wanted advice and guidance, they'd have to join the company. And we set a fee which was reasonable, and we had ... they then became directors of the company, so they could influence and we could have a meeting and so on. And we tried to get every member of the National Steering Committee that was elected, because you had elections every year to the National Steering Committee. And I think we had about 21 members that were the National Steering Committee that represented ... because we broke it down by ... there were four from metropolitan authorities, four from district authorities, you know that sort of breakdown. And we then said to those that were elected to the National Steering Committee, 'We would want you to become part of the Local Resource Unit, part of that company, but you have to pay'. But it was open also to other local authorities. And in the end we got quite a few in, and we were able to employ Di Meade, who was involved with Sheffield. But she'd been a local authority officer before, so in effect we were getting a good officer, and she became the sole employee of the Local Authority Resource Unit. But she could talk to the Anti-Apartheid Movement, she could talk to SWAPO, talk to ANC and all the rest of them, and produce the lawyers and get up information, which we did. But she also did the issues like the consultative work with local authorities about the National Steering

Committee's work, so she used to produce a newsletter and all the rest of it, and all the issues like the administrative work connected with running an organisation like the NSCLAAA. And that went on until just after the free elections, it was an ANC government and all the rest of it and AAM said, 'Well, you know, we now need to look at differences'. They changed their rules and we changed ours. So at that time we disbanded the Local Authority Resource Unit because it wasn't needed in that respect, it had done its work. So that was the end of, certainly my tenure as chair, apart from the fact that I'm a member of the new organisation, the successor of the Anti-Apartheid Movement. I mean I don't really do much other than pay my subscription, but then I suppose a lot of people would.

JH: It's very welcome.

MP: But I mean that's really about it. It was an interesting time and I think we did, well. Mandela has accepted that the British local authorities did do their part, and I think they did. They raised the issue to their local constituents and to their local cities and towns and boroughs, and I think that did some good. And certainly they opposed HMG as much as they could, which is difficult for local authorities, because whatever you say, you know, the government controls what local authorities do, even more so now. I'm not sure now you could actually have the same campaigning that local authorities did in the '80s. It's impossible now, simply because government controls what goes on much much more. People don't realise that and I think that's a problem. I mean my colleagues who are still on the city council – it's bloody hard work to get what they want over.

JH: Can I ask some specific questions that have come out of that? How many local authorities were involved in the action against apartheid? Did you say 28 or ...

MP: Well no, there was, I don't know, I think it was over 100 who were ... had said ... that they would do it. We had a fairly large committee of 28 local authorities, but they weren't the only ones who took action because we used to have a conference, a yearly conference, and then a bi-yearly conference. And those were large events and we probably had 100, 115 members, either members or officers, coming from various authorities. And we had a lot of top line speakers. And certainly all of the front line ambassadors come, so it was serious business.

JH: Can you tell me a bit about the first conference in, was it 1983 you said?

MP: Not a lot, because I wasn't actually there, because although I'd just got elected as a member, Jim Moore took the Chair, and I think it was run probably by David and Paul, he might remember more about the first conference. But the first conference of the National Steering Committee was the following year, really. And it was a fledgling organisation, and we brought up the question and the big debate was about the model resolution that we were proposing, which as I say was fairly large, but covered all of what we felt local authorities should do, And there was a full discussion. I mean the conference itself probably only lasted half a day. It wasn't until later that they tended to extend. So it was, I won't say mundane, because that's not really fair, but it wasn't sparkling or anything like that, there wasn't any fireworks. We got people there, we produced the model resolution, we had to debate about what was in it and

all the rest of it, and why we should do it and there was certainly ... we'd brought along our legal officers to sort of give an advice note.

JH: The model resolution was on the boycott?

MP: It covered, you know, what a local authority could include in a boycott. And it was based on the ideals of the Anti Apartheid Movement. As I say, Paul would have had a hand in writing it as well as Mike Terry from the Anti-Apartheid Movement, because we were following what they were saying. In effect, I mean if you like, our officers were the officials of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, and we were taking their advice but then sort of working it into a local authority format.

JH: Were all the councillors that were involved Labour councillors or were there any other ...

MP: No, I think there were a couple of Tories as well, I would you believe it. I can't remember, I mean the majority, the vast majority, were Labour. I think there might have been a couple of Liberals and I think there was at least one Tory. So it was a cross-section but the 90-95% were Labour authorities, as you would expect.

JH: Was there, I mean you said there were a couple of Thatcherites on the Council, I think you described some opposition. Did you come across much opposition? Was there popular opposition?

MP: I mean there was ... The Tories opposed, but there was only two of them that were shall we say nasty opposed rather than 'Oh, we're opposed because we're Tories'. And I'm trying to think of his name, and he was the one that got up and you know basically said exactly the same as Thatcher. But the other Tories voted against the motion, but didn't do anything else. So I wouldn't have put the Sheffield Tories as Thatcherites, probably more Macmillan-type Tories. But we did have probably about three that were right-wing. One was a young fella that wanted to become a Tory MP. I don't think he ever did, but he left, he was very bright. We did have one who didn't say anything, although she might have come on after that, Angela Knight, who was Chief Secretary of the Treasury, under Major's government, but she was very bright. But I don't think she was on at the time we were doing this. And I wouldn't have thought that she was, I mean she would have voted against it, but I wouldn't have thought she would have spoken particularly hard against it. But a Tory Councillor called Thompson, well, he used to serve, because we set up an anti-apartheid panel, which was a panel of the policy committee, which was the main committee. And as it is, you've got to have a representative from all the parties on it. We had the vast majority, but the sole Tory on that committee was a bloke called Thompson, who supported our motion. He didn't support it at Council because he was under a whip not to, but in the panel he was and I used to say to him, 'I don't know why you're on that side, you should be with us', because he was that sort of left of centre Tory. But we, as I say, the other, we had one that was, but he was rabid, there was probably only one other that was anti, I mean to the extent of actually saying something. Because most of them kept quiet, just voted against it, even the leadership. I mean they used to come up, do the almost standard ... we don't agree with this sort of thing, not get violently opposed but just opposing.

JH: Was there any cost to implementing an apartheid free zone policy?

MP: Not really. I mean there was a cost, I mean we had ... we employed an officer. But what we did was we linked it in with our town twinning. So our town's twinning officer was also our anti-apartheid officer, that's part of his brief. But yes, there was a cost. But remember we were able to say the reason we were doing this was to encourage section 73 of the Race Relations Act, to encourage good race relations within the city of Sheffield. And so therefore that was the cost. And it wasn't illegal, because we wouldn't have been able to get it through the officers; I mean you wouldn't be able to get it through. So there was a cost. And when Maggie then started decimating local authorities by saying you can only spend so much and we had to save something like about 300 million from our expenditure over five years or so, fortunately it was after the free elections, we lost both the international officers and cuts came in. You had to take that into consideration. Schools and social services and libraries come in front. So yes, there was a cost originally and that was borne, because we were able to contain it within our expenditure. When government changed the rules and stopped local authorities spending what they wanted to spend on, yes it did make a difference and it did stop. And we wouldn't, you couldn't do it today because there isn't the money there. The government will not allow you to spend it. Whatever you may want or not want, I mean Sheffield had to save something like about £150 million in the last couple of years. You know, they've had to cut that from ... not save, they've had to cut it from their expenditure. And the new PSBR means they've got to save something like about £70 million. So since the coalition government started and the Lib Dems have gone along with this, this government, this period of government, this five years will see something like about 25% of Sheffield's resources disappearing. You know it's not – OK we'll raise the rate because it doesn't matter. You can't, you know, even if you raise the rate, and we're allowed to, you couldn't spend it. Which is the rules that Maggie changed, you know not to the level of rates, rate capping was all about that. It's the level of expenditure and it's very clever that she brought it in. And I have to say, ten years of the Labour government didn't change that, because governments don't want to change. They can blame the local authority and they can say how much the Labour government actually allowed us to spend, rather than cut what we can spend, so that's a big difference. But this government certainly has affected the northern authorities more than the southern authorities. But we have had to cut in Sheffield, as I say, I reckon by the end of this five-year period, they'd have had to cut more than t 25% of the money that they can actually spend. So there's no way you could do, I mean apart from the other laws that have changed, there's no way that ,local authorities could afford to spend

JH: Great – was there much negative media coverage?

MP: There was some. I actually think we got into *Private Eye*, I seem to remember. We were lefty of course, we were called leftists, definitely. The Local Star – it would be interesting actually to look back in the papers because I can't – There was some, certainly, and there was some yes the normal knocking criticism you get about left councils and you know. We did get some coverage about the cultural boycott. I can remember that we certainly got some coverage when Elton John was up and we

were saying no. On the whole it probably wasn't supportive, but it wasn't violently anti. It was negative rather than, certainly I can't remember, Paul might better, I can't remember there being any sort of positive coverage. They did cover the things and, as I say, we had the bishop involved and he was seriously involved. Because the Bishop of Sheffield is a member of the House of Lords, he's one of the bishops. He moved ... we got him to put forward a motion in the House and Mike Terry and I with Paul went to see David Lunn because he was dead worried. He was a lovely fella and generally he'd just sit there and he didn't do anything. But yes, because it was the Anti-Apartheid Movement, he got up and moved an amendment supporting local authorities in using the Race Relations Act. However, he was worried he was going to do something that was going to get him into trouble, not with the church or anything, but with the authorities you know. He made a joke about going into the Tower. So we gave him a briefing and Mike Terry took him through and all the rest of it. And he got up in the House and he moved the amendment, which was on boycotts, the local authorities' boycotts, and he then got attacked, he did get attacked by of all things a bloody Labour peer. And when we complained because I said to Paul we got Richard to complain. And the Party's answer to that was that it was well known he was an idiot. Well, we shouldn't be in the bloody Party! I read the Hansard and David come up and did all the right things, then this bloke came in you know, right noble Bishop blah blah, then went off a tangent attacking the Bishop for saying such things. I think that upset David Lunn because he wasn't expecting it, and it was quite vehemently attacking. And I think the Bishop got a bit uptight, because he said after, I didn't expect that, he's a Labour peer! I know, don't worry about him. As we were going to do his anti-apartheid briefing, one of my other colleagues said, because I think on the same day section 20 was coming on, can you get him to do something on section 20. So we raised it with David Lunn and he said mmm. I'm going to move this thing on anti-apartheid, but I will be otherwise engaged. If they come on to Section 20 I won't be there, so I won't do anything. He was very left wing when it come to anti-apartheid and he was very right-wing when it came to section 20 [laughs] it's quite funny. And it wasn't any ... there was no sort of hesitation. I am not going to be there, and no way am I going to be able ... I mean he made it pleasant that he had other things and he wouldn't be there, but therefore he couldn't intervene. But it was clear he didn't want to. And he supported section 20. But he was very good, on the anti-apartheid thing he was very positive. And he actually spoke in the house and got attacked for doing it.

JH: Did anything positive come out of him raising it in the House?

MP: No, I think they were talking about it and the government just said to sod off. They don't listen to their lordships necessarily. I can't remember ... Richard or Paul may know a bit better or can remember a bit better, but I don't think the motion was carried.

JH: You talked quite a bit about working with the local Anti-Apartheid movement and with Paul. Was there a good relationship?

MP: What – between ourselves and AAM?

JH: Yeh

MP: Oh yes. Well, I mean our committee meetings always had Mike Terry and Paul come along technically from Sheffield but was a member of AAM ... our conferences always had either Mike or Bob Hughes or both, so yes, we worked together and yes, we are the Movement, and without their sort of advice and guidance it wouldn't have been as good.

JH: And at local level as well?

MP: At local level yes, oh yes. Well we were all in it, sounds like David Cameron; we were all in it together [*laughs*]. No we were, we operated certainly locally, we didn't have any problem. Because we had such a large majority, to some extent it didn't matter about whether there was opposition. I think there might have been some opposition, they wouldn't have pushed themselves. And certainly I was a local member of the Anti-Apartheid Movement. We just worked together.

JH: Great. So sort of if we take you forward to the '94 election. Did the council help in training election observers?

MP: I think there was somebody that did go there, yes. I can't really remember ... I don't think anybody from the Council as such, i.e. an official representative of the Council. I'm not sure, I don't think so. Because that might have been more difficult simply because ... but I honestly can't remember.

JH: Could you describe if you haven't done already what the high points and low points were?

MP: The high points were clearly, well the highest point I suppose was meeting Mandela. The high points were those, meeting Mandela and meeting Tambo, meeting the chief executive of SWAPO and that and getting them into the city. The high point was seeing Mandela walking out of prison next to the leader of my Party and the rest of them. And the freedom ceremony. I mean there were some high points; there were a number of high points. Of seeing the people, we did go during the year that Tambo come up, we took local authorities. Again from the NSCLAAA we produced a petition that we took to number 10. And it was with the same Lord Mayor as ... but she, because we'd said it would be lord mayors and all the rest of it. And we went to number 10 and I handed in the petition. And there were quite a few mayors and lord mayors and that, so it made a good bit, and I think it got into it, certainly got into *Anti-Apartheid News* and it got into some of the press about delivering, I mean it was a standard petition and you know what happens to those. But I mean there were, there was a feeling that we were doing something and I suppose those were the high points. We could see something happening.

JH: Do you remember what year that was?

MP: I could, I'll find out for you if you like, I'll go upstairs and get an old diary and find out when Dot was Lord Mayor. [*Laughs*] So it would have been June that year.

JH: Low points?

MP: Well I suppose the Thatcher sort of era, certainly at the beginning, where she was so anti it got ridiculous. To put some of the discussions in Council where we had, where there were a couple of occasions, freedom of the city discussion or naming of the street or something like that, where you got anti feelings. To some extent there weren't a lot of low points, because we were seeing that it was benefitting. And so no, I wouldn't say there was many low points as such because we felt and we still feel I think that we were on a roll. It was continuous and then you know, when he got released that was a good thing, and that was a high point. So I don't know. I had very few, some funnies, they weren't low points, they were funnies, I mean the one about our dear Lord Mayor raising a toast to the president of South Africa when the president of the ANC is sitting next to her. *[Laughs]* And the other one was we held a National Steering Committee in Milton Keynes because we used to go round ... didn't hold them in one place, we held them in the local authorities that had links with us. And I remember that we went into lunch and we had the SWAPO Chief Exec and someone from the ANC, which we always did, and I saw the oranges and the oranges had Cape all over them. And I have to say the Chief Executive from SWAPO just picked it up and peeled it and ... *[laughs]*. But if they were low points, they were more jokey low points. No I mean I think we were, I can't remember particular low points as such other than, as I say, when you got Thatcher deciding that right, yes, we'll make it more and more difficult. But you found a way around them. When she brought in the laws after we'd done our Shell bit, she changed the law to make sure that we wouldn't. And yes, a low point but you try and find a way around that.

JH: Great – a broad question now, looking back, what are your feelings about your involvement in the Anti-Apartheid Movement?

MP: I was very ... I did feel honoured to take the part I had, which was great. And I used to go to not only obviously to the NSCLAAA, where I chaired, but the general Anti-Apartheid Movement meetings and the national meetings and yes, I was proud of doing that. I was also involved with the arts and other things. But certainly for the ten years or so that I was more actively involved than ever, it was a good ten years.

JH: I haven't any other questions, apart from is there anything you want to add to?

MP: No, I don't think so. I've probably missed quite a few things, but I'm sure Paul will add some. It was the first time I suppose, it was the time I got to know Paul much more and that was the start of a good friendship and a lasting one. But we did work together very well both in the local anti-apartheid thing but also for the National Steering Committee, because he was actively involved in that. So it created a bond that was based purely and simply on working with him in the main on anti-apartheid work and he makes a good MP now.

JH: Thank you very much.

