

Interview with Simon Korner by Matthew Battey on 23 September 2013, for the Anti-Apartheid Movement Archives Committee Forward to Freedom project, published on the website <http://www.aamarchives.org/>

MB: This is Matthew Battey, interviewing Simon Korner for the Forward to Freedom Anti-Apartheid Movement History project, on the 23rd September 2013. Could you give me your full name and your background?

SK: Simon Korner, I was a member from 1985, and I'm a lecturer in a college in Islington, and have been for 27 years, City and Islington College, where I run an Access course, which is a second-chance course for adult learners to go to university. I live in Stoke Newington, and I've lived in the same housing co-op flat for about thirty years, so you can see I'm a fairly stable person in that respect.

MB: Ok, thanks. So, when and where were you born?

SK: I was born in Cambridge in 1957, the son of a scientist, so I was brought up in that sort of academic milieu in Cambridge for the first ten years of my life.

MB: Before you became involved in the anti-apartheid movement, was there any other kind of political campaigning group that you were involved in?

SK: My first political awareness - I mean I was always probably a bit of a Labour Party person, in teenage years, I did a bit of canvassing, but I wasn't very political, and then feminism hit me; I was of a generation when men started getting hit by very angry feminist movement - women we knew closely, so that was actually the thing that radicalised me more than anything else. That there were very angry people who felt that men were the problem, and I felt as a man I took it on board, and felt I had to sort of deconstruct my entire masculine persona in order to be acceptable - and that was very important to me, because I realise there were limitations to that view. After two or three years of taking it absolutely to the extreme, living a kind of chaste life, I realised that that wasn't going to politically emancipate, or help emancipate, the world, it was only part of the problem. And that led me to a broader Socialist view, where I felt that women's oppression was part of that. Feminist theory wasn't the entire explanatory framework, I realised.

MB: So were you involved in the Labour Party throughout?

SK: Not very, no - I voted Labour and I still do, but it was only in my late teens that I was involved, in my twenties I wasn't involved in active politics, apart from what felt like active politics, which was this sort of 'thinking about' men's relationships with women.

MB: And so what what made you go from that to being involved in the anti-apartheid movement?

SK: Well, I suppose after I realised that feminism was not the absolute answer and I couldn't kind of progress, in other words, as a man all you could do was withdraw from women and not do them harm, it didn't feel like a very positive way of helping change things, and I then started reading Marxism. And I read Isaac Deutscher's biography of Trotsky, which weirdly Blair also read and thought was very influential he once later said, which I found a really brilliant book, and it took me into the idea of revolution, and I found that - it's a really readable and well-written book. But then I had to think well, I had a big debate about 'was Trotsky right?'. Because at the time, and of course there still are, but there were even more ultra-left groups like Militant and SWP, and the Communist Party, and I didn't know where - I knew I was sort of becoming a Marxist, but I didn't know what kind of Marxist - so I had to have a lot of, again, internal, bookish internal debates about whether to go with - where to go, actively.

And then the miners' strike happened, in 1984-85, and that was what really pushed me. So I was already on the path to becoming a Marxist of some sort, and then the miners' strike sort of brought history into me, or me into history, and I suddenly realised this is not a kind of forum for thought,

these are actually people's lives. I went on various demonstrations and pickets and collected money for the miners up at Stamford Hill, and it became a kind of real thing, and very angry. I suddenly became aware of the state and its forces, the police and the courts, and the way all these things interact in a capitalist state. So that really - I then determined I have to now become some kind of an active member of a party of some sort. I was also at the time a member of a men's group, I've just remembered, which was my attempt to think with other men about feminism, but it didn't really - it was quite interesting and enjoyable, but it wasn't - it was more therapeutic than anything else. So the miners' strike was the thing that did it. And then by the end of that I decided I was going to join the Communist Party.

And that - I'd done a lot of reading of whether Stalin was a monster, or whether Trotsky had been right, etc., and I concluded that Stalin isn't or wasn't what he'd been made out to be, and that what had happened in the Soviet Union was understandable, and was something that I could argue for. Not to skate over everything, but that I would defend it as the basic better good, greater good than a lot of all the other, than imperialism etc. - for all its faults, and I became very passionately involved in the CP in 1985, just as that party was undergoing incredible internal divisions, and had done already, and was about to die six years later, or liquidate itself. I became involved in that party.

MB: So that's all part of a broader political..

SK: It's all part - and then anti-apartheid fitted into that because I joined the Party and was looking for something, apart from being a political member of the Communist Party, I wanted to do something in a broader way, and we were encouraged to do broad, you know, some people worked in peace, and some worked in anti-apartheid, some people worked in housing or whatever. So there was an element of organisation by the Party still, although not very much, where you sort of reported back from your activities in the broader movement and you discussed them. And it's a brilliant, potentially brilliant system, although it no longer worked fully at that time, but the democratic centralist system can be really - when it works, and it only does on occasions or did in my experience - it's very very powerful. Because you're collecting all this disparate experience and then sharing it with an organised group, which can then help each person think about they're, what they're doing out there, and solve all the problems - or not solve them, just help discuss them.

MB: I suppose there's a kind of flattened hierarchy isn't there.

SK: Yeah.

MB: So were there any specific instances you can remember that awoke your interest in southern Africa specifically?

SK: When I was about eighteen I went to see 'Sizwe Banzi is Dead' by Fugard, and I wasn't political, but I remember it still, at Sussex University, I was living - we lived in Lewes by then, my family, and I was an upper sixth former I think, in the local comprehensive, and I went with another boy, and I didn't go to the theatre on my own. And we went to this sort of, what seemed like an avant-gardeish sort of play, and it really blew me away as a sort of critique of apartheid. I remember it as a two-hander play, two men - but I can't remember much more about it. It was a very bitter experience, and that was very influential. And then... was there anything else? Generally I was anti-racist in the sense that I'd grown up in, I'd had a year in the Sixties, 1964, in America during the Civil Rights movement period and I remember Joan Baez and 'We Shall Overcome' and all that, and Pete Seeger, and that was the milieu I grew up in, with my sort of Liberal-Labourish type, secular-Jewish parents. So I was kind of fairly used to all that. But there was nothing specific - before I joined the Communist Party I didn't, hadn't been active in anti-apartheid. And in a way, it was joining the Communist Party and then thinking "right, what am I going to?" and I was quite a dedicated to this by then, I thought: "I'm going to be a Party member and do broad-movement work" as we called it. So I was looking for what I wanted to move into, and so I moved in that way, from the Party to the broad movement, rather than the other normal way, which is that you get caught up in some broad movement and then you may find yourself

politicised.

MB: Do you think that the politics of the time as well, with Thatcherism and stuff, influenced you in the sense of having something to press against?

SK: Yes, absolutely, I mean I really was very angry - not in a sort of out of control way - but I was very angry, and I knew that I had to dedicate my life as it were to some kind of action, not just words, not just kind of armchair complaining. And so that, and her, particularly against the miners, had woken me up, and then I saw what she was doing, the way she supported apartheid, among other things, and I thought "right" and it was a very obvious enemy, yes. Though at the time we held that Thatcherism was basically capitalism – in a form that aimed to take back the gains of social-democracy.

MB: So, when you became involved in the anti-apartheid movement, were you involved in a specific local group?

SK: Yes, Hackney. So I joined Hackney, I think it was winter of '85. In the Town Hall, I remember the first meeting I went to, there were about a dozen people sitting around this very, rather nice wooden table - kind of a council room, actually - so it felt rather posh, all seated with leather embossed blotting pads, rather comfortable chairs. And the Chair sitting on almost a throne, and yet they're ordinary people, you know. Because we had access to that town hall, because the group was very much in with the Hackney Race Equality Unit, which was very supportive and the Labour council. So that was my first experience, was entering the rather nice 1930s town hall, and going to this meeting and being aware of how kind of 'in with', intertwined with the local council it felt, rather than some kind of fringe group. It felt welcomed in by the local - at least the Labour council.

MB: Did you have members that were also Councillors?

SK: Yes but I don't think they were at that meeting and actually no, I don't think we had active Councillor members, as far as I remember. There was general support from the Mayor etc. but we would just get the Mayor along, phone the Mayor up, whoever it was, and say could you come with your chain and stand here for a photoshoot, it was that kind of thing - it wasn't really that we had active councillors - they might have done before my time because it had been active before for quite a long time, I don't know how many years, but I joined kind of at the height of activity, and the first thing I did, the first meeting was discussing I think Winnie Mandela coming to speak in Hackney. And I remember taking posters up Church Street to try and put them up in shops. And I knew who she was but she was the great famous person she is now - she was a figure, people knew who she was but she was no where near the kind of figure that she became later. It's interesting, the growth of Mandela as a personality cult, which I think had been a deliberate campaign by the ANC as part of their, as a useful thing to do, was still in progress at that time.

MB: So Hackney Council was on board, by and large?

SK: Yes, they were on board, I mean, we got them to twin with Alexandria, a township near Soweto, and that was - I can't remember what date exactly that happened, I think it happened during my time, but I wasn't involved in setting that up but that was about in the mid- to late-1980s. So that became quite a big way that the council could interact with the struggle in a legitimate way, twinning with another town. It also hosted all our meetings - all our anti-apartheid meetings were downstairs in the town hall, we had regular contact with their Race Equality Unit, which was very progressive and helpful - we stored our posters there, paraphernalia, we could just dump stuff - it was almost like an office for us.

MB: Can you remember anyone that was involved in the Race Equality Unit?

SK: Yes but I can't remember their names properly, there was a guy called Dan something - the Kenyan guy who ran it - and I can't remember his surname, so...I'm sorry, that's not going to work.

And there were various councillors who were to do with it but I can't remember their names either. I probably could - there are people I could contact but I haven't done that homework.

MB: Did you have a role in the local group?

SK: Yes, pretty quickly I was an activist from the beginning and within about a year I was the secretary, it was quite a small group and because I was quite active I became Secretary within a year. About 1986 I think, and then later on I became Chair of it, because I was basically on the committee or leadership of it from 1985 - 94 or whenever it stopped being active. After 1994 it disbanded as a group - we had a party I remember to celebrate the election then it pretty quickly dissolved as an active group. Some people went to go on and work in ACTSA but I didn't really, I don't know why - I kind of, I think I was very used to working in opposition and the idea of working - I found it difficult politically to get my head round what you did now - were you now a lobby group for something, were you trying to help sell South Africa? I was a bit inflexible politically I think and I couldn't really work out how to be very useful, so I stopped for a bit and became actually a bit less political generally. Not that I've ever stopped being political but I became less of an absolute 24 hour a day, seven days a week activist, and I probably haven't been ever since. Although I'm still involved and still consider myself an active socialist, but not nearly on the level that it was. I feel slightly guilty about it, but at the same time I had a young child, and wrote short stories, and tried to write a novel, and there were - it was a time when, because the Communist parties in the world had collapsed following the fall of the Soviet Union, there was a kind of opportunity in a way for quite a lot of people who'd just been hidebound but going to meetings, almost like a treadmill of activity, to stop and go "oh yeah, I quite like shopping actually", and other things, and I quite liked my life as it were outside politics. So now I've got a more balanced life, no longer so purely political which it was for a few years.

MB: You mentioned resisting the kind of Thatcherism part of the whole political struggle - what about other factions that you were also trying to get on board, within British politics.

SK: Do you mean people we were trying to get to support anti-apartheid?

MB: Yes, what were the difficulties you faced.

SK: One of the most - one thing was Trade Unions - I mean trade unions would definitely support it, trade union branches, so in Hackney we had good trade union links, the Trades Council, all the official bodies would say yes and they'd sign their name to it. But actually getting *active* support was quite difficult and it's partly about what could you ask trade unions to actively do apart from raise money. So that was one thing, and the other thing I was very aware of was how white as a group we were. We had about two or three black members and then the rest of us were white, and that felt problematic on a campaign so clearly to do with race. We did our best but it was clearly not going to happen. And probably in the anti-apartheid movement as a whole, I would say, that didn't happen. In other words, as a movement, although it brought in a lot of black and Asian people into the movement, onto marches and things, it generally didn't - it wasn't a sort of campaign, certainly in Hackney which a pretty mixed area, it didn't kind of galvanise the local community to take it on board as if "this is our struggle" particularly. And maybe we didn't do enough, I mean we did go to the, various meetings I remember addressing, Africa...I can't remember the exact name, but an umbrella organisation of various community groups, African and other minority community groups where I did speak on various occasions, and they were very very receptive and friendly, and always fine, but it didn't go any further - and that felt like a limitation actually of the movement.

One group that was really active was the Turkish community, which was fairly new in Hackney at the time, and pretty left-wing, by and large - I don't think it is so militant any more, but in the '80s it was, and there was a big community centre called Halkevi which is where the old Simpson's factory is - it's now trendy yuppie flats - on the way down to Dalston. And they had a really well-organised community, so on the way to those huge demos down at Trafalgar Square, fifty or a hundred Turkish activists with drums and various instruments would get on to the bus and we'd just

go down to Trafalgar Square together. And suddenly we'd be a big delegation. Or at our Shell pickets, we had pickets of the Shell garage on the Upper Clapton Road - they'd turn up, we'd ask them, and they'd provide a lot of numbers, so that was very successful. I don't really remember other interactions - we had hustings, election hustings, with I remember Diane Abbott - I can't remember when she first became MP, first female black MP. And we had election hustings in the town hall with her and I think - I can't remember if the Tories came, but the Liberal Democrats and I can't remember who else came, and basically I chaired it and it was a sort of propaganda for anti-apartheid really, but that was quite useful. But...and the Communist Party, well various members in Hackney were quite active in it but there were so many divisions within that party, people were quite suspicious of each other actually even though they were all fighting on the same side against apartheid - I was just looking at various names and thinking 'yes, some people didn't like me and I didn't like them, even if we worked together'. I don't know if that answers your question - I don't quite know what your question was aiming at.

MB: No, that's great. What about within political parties - do you remember if there was by and large support for what you were doing?

SK: Well, Labour generally did, Liberal Democrats - I'm not sure if they officially did but a lot of their members did. They were the Social Democrats and the Liberals until...I can't remember when they merged. Those people were what probably would now be called the leftish members of the Lib Dems, and there always has been that kind of current and they were supportive, yeah. But I don't remember much truck between Hackney Anti-Apartheid for instance, and these parties as parties, there would just be people who were members.

MB: So what kind of tactics did you use as a group?

SK: As a campaigning group? Well, I mean it was very well organised actually, Anti-Apartheid, and I think that was because it took its leads so much from the ANC which was so closely entwined with the South African Communist Party. So it had a very good tradition which was sort accepted as part of it of tight organisation - you go out and you send your people out on democratically agreed targets, as it were. So you say 'right, let's all do a campaign against Sainsbury's, or South African food, or against Shell, and these campaigns were sort of centrally agreed by democratic decision, at conference, and then dispersed, diffused, and then you reported back at the next conference to see how they've gone. I was also involved, by the way, at London Region, which I'll tell you about in a bit, so there was work like that. So in that sense, it was a very effective campaign because it wasn't just a collection of ginger groups doing their own thing, although there was an element of that, but it was pretty, there was a lot of good focus.

So one of the first things we did was, and kept up, was standing outside Sainsbury's in Dalston, telling people not to buy South African food, leafleting, petitioning just to get their attention, and sometimes - I don't think we did it officially, but sometimes people would, we heard - maybe we did it once - loading up trolleys with South African stuff and then going to the checkout and saying 'Oh, I'm not going to buy it' - I can't remember how we did that, I'm not sure I ever did it actually, because I didn't want to alienate the staff in the store - there was a bit of a debate about how and if that was a bit childish and a bit alienating - you know, you were trying to win partly also the shop workers as well as the shoppers. But I think that did happen once or twice - I certainly heard about it with other groups, where you'd do this disruptive thing and the whole queue would be brought to a halt, and you'd have a stack of South African wine and fruit in your trolley and then not pay for it. I think you'd put it right through and then not pay for it, something like that. So it was a - but that was a minor one. Mostly you were just standing outside and talking to people, getting barracked sometimes by some of the stallholders on Ridley Road, some quite right-wing little crooked guys - lots of criminality going on around you, and getting some hostility but a lot of support, and a lot of indifference as well. Again you're trying to approach people who are sympathetic but not especially interested. Right at the height of what you think is a great struggle, there was indifference - though of course also an awful lot of support. At the time you're feeling like 'why doesn't everybody get on board?' but actually if you think about it in slightly calmer historical view it was actually very well supported.

And the other thing was Shell - we had regular pickets on Saturdays, and we'd go to the Upper Clapton garage, the Shell garage, stand outside, sometimes with about five or ten of us, sometimes with fifty if the Turkish Halkevi community group came along, and just - people would hoot their support, we'd say 'hoot if you support Shell' and we asked people to turn back and go to the Esso garage down the road, not that we supported Esso but we had decided to target one as an example, because they were particularly complicit in various apartheid campaigns. I joined really after the Barclays campaign which had been a big one - that, and the rugby - I did go to a rugby protest very early on but I wasn't involved in the sports particularly, or the Barclays, which were a bit before my time.

MB: So it sounds like the campaigns were quite well co-ordinated..

SK: Yes, nationally I think they were because, I mean, I remember at the London Committee, which was the regional group, all the 12 -15 London groups coming together once a month, you'd hear reports about what they were doing, for the same campaign, so it actually worked quite well in that way. And an element of healthy competition – that other group had *this* many people, they've managed to raise *this* much money...which was quite good. So you're always learning from what other groups did – Haringay, for instance was quite a successful group - I remember feeling quite sort of envious of their ability to recruit, whereas Hackney should have had a thriving group and at times it felt like slightly pushing things uphill. I mean there was a core but wasn't ever really massive. I can go on about that - there's lots of other individual things we did - we targeted, as part of the Shell campaign, we asked Hackney Community Transport - which was a sort of co-operative hire of vehicles - not to use Shell and we had to argue that and lobby that quite hard in the end, they were worried, because they were a charity and they didn't want to be seen to be political so they resisted but I think we got them to agree, not to state that they weren't going to but they moved their account - they had an account at the Shell garage which we were picketing - so we got them to remove that; there was a speedway thing I'd forgotten about, Hackney had a speedway track and they were going to do a tour, the Hackney Kestrels I think, and we got them not to and to pull out of the tour, and that sort of thing. And other things were, we organised a demo, this was '87, the 75th anniversary of the ANC and we had a demo from Church Street down to the Britannia leisure centre, and we marched probably with two or three hundred people through Hackney - you don't get many demos locally - where we had a sort of cultural event all day, poetry and singing, which was quite nice, and we put - I remember flyposting all these. Later we had a sponsored swim, which in...at Haggerston, Whiston Road swimming pool, and we did a, swam a mile and raised money I think for the election campaign, 1990 that was, no I don't know what that was for actually - it was to raise money anyway. So we did that, we also did a - sorry I've gone backwards - in 1988 we did a, as part of the big demo on Mandela's 70th birthday I think, this was the national demo which was a huge one, and then met up and walked down to Trafalgar Square, I remember that - very, very big. And the day before, we'd organised a kind of event outside the Town Hall in Hackney, again I think with the council's permission. They flew an ANC flag by the way, above their building, for years, and the SWAPO (Namibian movement) flag, so that's another example of how on board they were. Again these things were quite - you think oh well it's an easy thing to do that, make a gesture, but these things count to some extent, it influences the flavour of local politics and what people feel their local representatives are - you know, which side they're on.

MB: And that was something I think the government was quite against wasn't it - local councils being overtly political?

SK: Yes, well - talking about Thatcher, she tried to limit their ability to raise money, to deal with their housing stock, and that's why Ken Livingstone when he was in charge of the GLC had this 'number of unemployed' poster up on County Hall which was right opposite Parliament in those days. And it was 'this number of unemployed in London', and it was an embarrassment, because you could see it big letters across London - that kind of - so a flag above the town hall was of the same ilk. And we had a huge birthday card where everybody came and signed, like a petition to say happy birthday to Mandela, so that was quite a nice event, and we also did...because we have the Hackney Empire in our borough, we did a couple of big events at the Hackney Empire. One was

called 'Stand-up against Apartheid' in 1991, and it had very early performances of people like Jack Dee and Mark Steel and Eddie Izzard - they weren't unknown but they'd been performing in slightly lefty - like the Red Rose club which had been in Islington - slightly left-wing clubs but they weren't big names at all and so they did it for free. And we fly-posted and put a hell of a lot of work into that actually, and that was a great success and filled the Empire and made money. And later the second event, we put the Pogues on in 1994 as part of an election benefit and that sold out as well. We had motorcades to advertise that - we'd get our members to dress up their cars in big posters and go round Hackney announcing these events. So that was quite fun and gave the groups - got our teeth into quite big things. so we were able to host quite big events.

We also had a regular - I've only kept one example - magazine which we put out called Nelson's Column . Crap name but anyway - we had it out wherever we could - probably printed about a thousand of these every - probably about twice or three times a year - and it would be just what we're doing, and...like you know.. and what's going on in South Africa, we had a sort of political bit about information within South Africa and then the local 'what we're doing'. So we put work into that as well. And I'm just looking at the 'Action Diary' for October 1991 and how busy we were - the 5th November, OK, nothing - 9th November - making campaign materials in preparation for later things. 12th of November, group meeting for - I don't remember this actually - but there was an East London group's meeting conference. Then we had a national Shell day of action, anti-apartheid's national conference, all seems to be within one month, then our local meeting, sponsored swim, leafleting, a stall at Dalston, group meeting, Shell picket once a month, a day-school we'd been preparing for up here actually. That day school took three months to organise. So we had about a dozen active members. I mean I don't want to part with that but I can photocopy it - any of this stuff. So that's that - I'm just trying to think if there was anything else locally - we had a vicar on board up at the church at Clapton Common, I can't remember his name or the name of the church but he was pretty good.

I think that was - yes - for me personally, I also organised, I was part of London AA, which met in Camden Town Hall, and that was, so I - one of the first things I did - I didn't have an officership in that I don't think but I was an active member representing Hackney, and I organised - pretty much single-handedly at the time I think because that's how you did it actually, just one person, just to get on with it, and you were given a task - a big picket of Shell, Shell Mex House, which is a - no longer owned by Shell anyway - it's in the Strand, near the Savoy. And I spent two or three months organising that, pretty early in my association with AA. And I got about 100 or 200 people and I think Dawn French turned up, you know you tried to get a celebrity, to just sort of stand outside in lunch time as a sort of demo against Shell. Also for London committee I organised or helped organise a couple of day schools. Because I was a Communist I also had this idea that it was important that people understood what AA was about, it wasn't simply a moral struggle, white dominating black, it was an economic struggle as well, of colonial oppression and the fact that colonialism, the special type of colonialism where the white oppressors didn't live in another country, they lived there in that country, which the ANC described as 'colonialism of a special type'. I wanted to get that across so people would understand why it affected it you in Britain, why it was part of imperialism really. And that was a role that Communists tried to play, trying to link the struggle in South Africa - rather than making it a charity type of feeling - more of a solidarity feeling, where it worked two ways. So we organised a day school on the national question - somehow this was a little pack we gave out, we sent out, which was the freedom charter of the ANC and then this is NALGO which became UNISON, opposite Euston, it's no longer the same building but anyway. We had speakers and plenaries and breakout rooms and I wrote these notes, just a quick history of it so that people - the idea was a quick educational blast so they could come to the day school prepared. That was quite successful. And another we had on the front line states, as they were called, Angola, Namibia and Mozambique, where there were these apartheid-orchestrated civil wars basically.

MB: So what would you say were the high and low points of your campaigning?

SK: I think going on these massive demos as a big group with Halkevi drummer, these Turkish drummers and sloganising through a megaphone, which I remember doing, was very enjoyable

and also very inspiring, and I remember hearing Joe Slovo, a leader of the South African Communist Party, at Conway Hall in about 1989, Slovo had come over, his wife, Ruth First, had been murdered in a bomb attack and he was quite an impressive speaker, in this hall packed to the absolute overflow, and it was a very impressive political speech about the struggle in South Africa. That was very exciting and very important thing for me, not that I agree with everything Slovo says by the way, certainly his attitudes to the Soviet Union I didn't quite agree with, he was more critical of it than I am, but he was - it was incredibly important to hear an actual - somehow we revered or I did anyway the SACP as a party unlike ours which was actually able to be part of a struggle - there was a kind of hero worship, but a useful one. And they produced African Communist every quarter, which I remember reading from early, '85, it's still going, which was sort of a theoretical magazine of Marxism-Leninism as they called themselves, and that was very important for me and other lefty activists as a sort of guide to know what you're grappling with - the big debates. For instance, when Inkatha, which was Chief Butolezi's Zulu group, began what was called 'black on black' violence against ANC people in Zulu parts of South Africa, it was clearly divisive, as the ANC was making headway - as a last-ditch attempt by the regime to divide the movement by tribal means. And so we had to try and understand that, and again those African Communists would write very very good informed essays and interventions on subjects like that. Which then you could argue well. And so I would always speak, for instance, at the annual AA Conference as a speaker, I spent hours making and honing a three-minute speech in order to make my point. And various other people would do that as well, and that was part of the whole - the Hackney delegation and the London lot - would go up to Sheffield or Camden Town Hall or London or wherever it was, and be actively participatory in those conferences rather than just sitting there and making a point. So, that kind of political intervention.

The one thing that I remember being a frightening bit was at the Camden Town Hall I think it was, the annual conference of I can't remember which date, when the City of London AA group, which was this sort of - had very successfully actually - run what they called a non-stop picket of the South African Embassy in Trafalgar Square, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and it was always manned, and it was actually quite a successful tactic. But the AA group didn't support it - our main movement - because, not because of the tactic - but because this group was actually run by a sectarian little Trotskyist group, I think it was called the Revolutionary Communist group, I can't remember who was in charge of it, but they didn't - were very oppositional to the ANC, they thought Mandela was a bourgeois sell-out, that the SACP was Stalinist, they didn't like anything about the movement and they wanted to support what they thought were the true revolutionaries in South Africa, which was some very small group there. And there were other Black consciousness - they aligned with some of the Black consciousness groups. In other words, they were generally divisive because normal people would just go: 'Well why are they arguing against AA - why not just be all against apartheid?' and so the effect was divisive. And the worst moment I remember was one where they tried to break into the meeting, a proper annual conference, and I was one of the stewards, I was often a steward at demos and these conferences, partly organised by the Communists as we felt it was a duty to put ourselves in the front line in a way and expose ourselves to danger, and it *felt* dangerous. And suddenly these guys, a big group - I don't know how many - there was barracking within the hall but there was also an attempted break-in and rampage from outside. Quite frightening for me, you just an ordinary little person and not very physically robust, suddenly seeing fist-fights, but we shut them out, successfully. But I remember having to flank Brian Filling who was the head of the Scottish AA, because he was one of their main targets because he was quite a good speaker etc - I was a kind of a bodyguard as it were, with about four of us walking with him in the middle. Just from the back of the hall to the stage, because there were people from these groups inside, not only shouting but wanting to possibly hit him. And we were also frightened of assassination, so there were body searches at this time, because there had been from BOSS, the South African secret police there had been. So it was actually quite serious so I remember that being a kind of low point although it was quite exciting actually in retrospect, but it was frightening because you felt this is real, the enemy really is out to possibly kill. And there are some of these guys in the hall shouting, they were ultra-left but you didn't know whose side they were on, whether they were 'plants' or not. Obviously, some of them may have been, there were presumably spies everywhere in the movement, in our AA group, I have no idea, but it didn't matter if they did some work you know. But that was probably a low

point.

I saw Mandela when he came over to London straight after the election and that was very moving, in Trafalgar Square when he came out on the steps on the balcony on the embassy - that was a high point for thousands and millions of people.

MB: Did you have much contact with the South African AA movement?

SK: Yes, they were very very important actually. There were ANC guys and South African Communists who were also ANC, they weren't divided up - these Communists from South Africa were also ANC members and they were very dutiful ones. But we didn't distinguish whether they were Communist or ANC but a lot of them were living in London, exiled. And they were very important in guiding the AA movement as a whole, keeping it ideologically - not veering off, again it's very easy to veer off and start thinking that, or make mistakes. And there are lots of divisions, it's happening right now in the movement in South Africa, there are lots of divisions, and so anti-apartheid was very much guided by them and found it terribly useful to have, at a conference for instance, you could get ANC people to put very authoritatively and well and calmly their point of view, to argue against workerist types saying: 'No you're selling out, you need to be concentrating on the workers!' There were other ultra-left arguments like 'Why are we calling for sanctions in South Africa? This is asking a bourgeois government in Britain to campaign against another bourgeois government, this is a sellout' - that was the RCP's line I think. So you had to defend your tactics and your campaigns, and that was our role - I felt that was particularly one of mine, anyway, ideologically, to try and keep clarity. So even at our own group meeting we did - occasionally you'd get a kind of person trying to come in and say this stuff, and you'd think 'Here we go again, that old argument' and you'd come out with the old arguments against and the group would rally round and defeat them, democratically. That was always there, so having the South African movement in London, exiled was really crucial. And it gave it a sense of electricity, sort of life, so it wasn't just a sort of do-gooding body, it felt like you were actually part and parcel of their struggle.

MB: Is there anything else that you would like to say?

SK: Well, I just think it was one of the most, certainly for me, it was the most successful, an example of an anti-imperialist movement that was really well-run and very successful in its time. And it was so broad, I mean that was its great strength - it really had huge support from all the religious groups, all the political parties apart from the Tories, and even some Tories supported it. It was very very difficult for people not to support it, because it was such a moral issue - although Thatcher did come out and call Mandela and the ANC a terrorist organisation, she was - it didn't do her good, doing that. And it was an example of how you can organise on a very important issue, and how much it can radicalise people in terms of their own society as well and your own politics. So that was just its size and success and the ability to mobilise. Also just for me, realising that things go up and down, and so you have a huge demo and the next one is rather small, and instead of being defeated and depressed, you take these things in your stride and it's the experience of that actual work means that some of these things work and some of them don't, for various reasons. And you are not defeated or demoralised easily by setbacks, you see it as an ongoing campaign. And for me also, the way it reached out as a movement to the unions and the churches and other groups in civil society - it just felt like a model of an attempt to think as broadly and as roundedly as you could, to get something done. So there was that huge gig in Wembley which I didn't go to, which harnessed - a bit like Live Aid - I think Mandela turned up, I can't remember if he was there - anyway, that was a real massive gig and it had mass appeal.

I think that will do, probably.

MB: Yes. Well thank you very much, that's been very interesting.

SK: Good.