

Interview with Vijay Krishnarayan by Ellie McDonald, 17th September 2013, for the Anti-Apartheid Movement Archives Committee project Forward to Freedom
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Ellie McDonald: OK – it is the 17th September 2013. I am Ellie McDonald interviewing Vijay Krishnarayan and this is an interview for the Forward to Freedom Anti-Apartheid Movement history project. Could you please give me your full name.

Vijay Krishnarayan: My name's Vijay Krishnarayan.

EM: Yes, and when and where were you born?

VK: I was born on the 2nd September 1963 in London.

EM: What did you do for a living?

VK: I'm currently the Director of the Commonwealth Foundation. The Commonwealth Foundation is the Commonwealth's agency for civil society organisations.

EM: Did you work at the Commonwealth Foundation during the time of your activism with the Anti-Apartheid Movement?

VK: No, I did not. I was a student for much of that time – at Oxford Polytechnic.

EM: Other than the Anti-Apartheid Movement, were you involved in any other types of political campaigning?

VK: Yes I was. I went to Oxford Polytechnic to study town and country planning in 1983 and my first year was spent in a not very political manner at all, actually. I did some studying, but much more enjoying myself as a first year student. But during that time – this was a very interesting moment in British and international politics – at that time we were just getting to grips with the miners' strike, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament was in full swing, there was a strong international solidarity movement, with Chile, with Nicaragua. But of all these I would say the challenge of confronting the apartheid regime was uppermost in most people's minds. So during that first year in college – in between having a good time as a first year student – I began attending meetings of students, listening to visiting speakers and forming some opinions. It was in my second year, so that would have been 1984, that I really got involved in a range of student campaigns, particularly around the Anti-Apartheid Movement, but not exclusively. I was also active in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and in a support group we'd set up as polytechnic students for the striking miners.

EM: How would you describe the difference – or perhaps the similarity – between these different political campaigns?

VK: That's an interesting question because I think based where we were, at Oxford, there were a number of American bases in close proximity. There were bases at [Upper] Heyford for example, so it was relatively, well it was uppermost in most of our minds, and we could go to the bases, we would have demonstrations outside the bases and so on. This was focused around the arrival of Cruise missiles, the location of Cruise missiles in Britain. So there was kind of a – it was a local issue, as well as being an international issue of nuclear disarmament. With regard to the miners' strike, we were mobilised around an arrangement whereby the student group at Oxford Polytechnic, and in fact students at Oxford, whether they were at the polytechnic or the university, were twinned with a number of specific coalmining communities around the country. Our twin was in Wales, the Mardy colliery, and

so every now and again a speaker from that pit would come to the college to give a talk. Now that made it very immediate, very obvious, what the connections were, it was a very tangible, if you like, connection with both of those campaigns, both of those campaigns around the miners' strike and the campaign around nuclear disarmament fronts. The Anti-Apartheid Movement was slightly more abstract. We'd receive materials from the Anti-Apartheid Movement at Mandela Street, and every now and again we'd get a speaker, but obviously the issues were removed from us and so we relied very heavily on what we could read and materials that were displayed, and some of the in-house discussions that took place, amongst and between students. So it was different to the other campaigns I would say.

EM: Why do you feel that the – I think it was three or four political campaigns that you mentioned – resonated particularly strongly with you?

VK: I think for different reasons. I think, you know, as a student – you're at a stage of life where your mind's opening up to ideas. It was a new experience to be exposed to those kind of political thoughts for me, and I enjoyed the debate and the exchange with fellow students, who were coming – they were making up their own minds about these issues. I think of all the issues I was taken with the anti-apartheid struggle because I thought it was important that black people became involved in the campaign. For me it wasn't just an issue of equity and social justice in a place far removed from our own lives – this was an international issue that had resonance for anyone. At that time in Britain of course the climate for race relations wasn't *that* good – the government of the day, I think, *did* play a race card, did play a strong race card actually. We had the Nationality Act and immigration laws reviewed in the early 1980s. There was also quite a lot of discontent in London's urban centres, during the early '80s as well. I think that was in part a reaction to some of the rhetoric that was coming from politicians of the day. So for me, participation in the Anti-Apartheid Movement was a manifestation of – not just a desire to see social justice and equality prevail in South Africa – but by participating in that activity I was making a statement about the need for racial equality more broadly.

EM: Using five words, how would you describe your sentiment towards the anti-apartheid struggle – in five words?

VK: [Long pause] Passionate, progressive [pause] people-centred, [pause] political, [pause] pluralist.

EM: Thank you. Could I ask you to recall one of the first anti-apartheid events that you went to in 1984 – or around that period?

VK: In 1984–1985, the events that I would have been involved in regarding the Anti-Apartheid Movement would have been demonstrations – demonstrations mainly in Oxford, but there was a demonstration that took place in London, a large demonstration that took place in London. We took a couple of coach loads of students up to – that passed off generally speaking, peacefully, but there was some trouble. It was the first time I'd seen protestors and demonstrators coming into conflict with the police. It wasn't *very* violent, but there was certainly, you know, there was some low level violence, and that was disturbing, but it did make an impression on me, it made me more determined to play my part in standing up for what needed to be said, or it would seem that others in Britain seemed to see it as important as we did. So it was largely demonstrating at a national level and a local level, because there were demonstrations held in Oxford as well. There was also some very local activity, mainly around boycotts. So we were very keen on making the point to say, for

example, to local supermarkets that they should not be stocking South African branded goods. So there were demonstrations, pickets and so on outside supermarkets. [Pause] The big boycott of the day though was against Barclays Bank. The two main targets of action at that time were both Barclays and Shell, both of whom had been identified by the Anti Apartheid Movement as key agents in propping up the apartheid regime. So as students we would – and as part of the Oxford Anti-Apartheid group – we would take our turn standing outside Barclays and Shell petrol stations, handing out leaflets, getting people to sign petitions.

EM: Just to return to the demonstrations that you spoke about – do you remember there being any music at these demonstrations?

VK: Yes, and I think if were forced to think of a sixth word regarding the Anti-Apartheid Movement, I would say fun. Entertainment was always an important part of the Movement, if you like, and I think, you know, it's *through* the work with the Anti-Apartheid Movement that many of us for the first time became exposed to, for example, world music – and there was always a strong emphasis on Southern African musicians and so on. So yes, that was an important part of the work.

EM: Do you remember any particular smell – or foods – that would be at these protests?

VK: I do remember being very cold at them, so I must admit the food didn't make an impression on me, I was always desperate for a cup of tea. There was nothing that would have been finer [laughs]. You obviously would have got up early in the day to get to London – and you were campaigning outside in all weathers, usually shouting some slogan or other. You'd be parched as well as cold, so a cup of tea was definitely the order of the day.

EM: And do you remember the general atmosphere of the pickets you took part in outside the supermarkets?

VK: Always friendly, always friendly – there was very rarely some confrontation with a member of the public. Every now and again you would get someone who would come and insist on making a point very directly, but it was all part of the deal really. The point was that we were there to engage the public. Now I was struck by the extent to which any and everyone would come up to us and say something really good – what we're doing, very supportive of what we're doing. 'What is it we can do?', kind of thing. So it was, I guess, a thirst for information, of course bearing in mind that Oxford city centre – you know, generally speaking urban centres though, you would factor into that, that most people there would be, at the very least, aware of the issues, and have a vaguely progressive outlook, bearing in mind that both constituencies in Oxford – Oxford East and Oxford West – I think at that time – Oxford East went Labour in 1987, but Oxford West had a long liberal tradition. So you could say there was a strong progressive streak in the community in Oxford, which made our work, I would say, relatively easy.

EM: You did speak of the people who did comment occasionally, say something negative. What were the things that people who opposed the movement said at this time?

VK: It was caricaturing ANC [African National Council] as a terrorist organisation. There was a reference to this practice of 'necklacing' – is what they referred to is as. There were some isolated incidents, it was reported quite widely in the press here. It was alleged that people who'd been disloyal to the movement in some way had been caught and hand-bound and had a burning tyre around their neck. This had outraged public opinion, but it was cited very often by critics. Mandela himself was caricatured as a terrorist. Not – I think that was

beginning to fade as a position, but clearly people who opposed the Anti-Apartheid Movement took issue with the ANC and its positioning, in their eyes, as a terrorist organisation.

EM: Could you recall a typical day of picketing outside a supermarket?

VK: It would be usually a Saturday, so there'd be a rota organised, so you'd know which time you were supposed to be there. So you'd turn up, you'd take your place at the appointed time, you'd have a chat with the people who were there before and you'd do your hour, or your hour and a half or your hours or whatever, then there'd be some friendly banter with the guys next to you that were from the organisations selling newspapers, political newspapers. So there was banter with them because there wasn't always, we wouldn't always politically see eye to eye, with other colleagues on the left, shall we say – so maybe colleagues from the Militant Tendency or the Socialist Workers Party would engage you in a political discussion.

EM: Did you enjoy those discussions?

VK: Oh yes very much, very much. It served to consolidate my own political world view, and actually made me respect the position of the Anti-Apartheid Movement and its approach to confronting the apartheid regime even more.

EM: In your involvement with the Anti-Apartheid Movement, were you on a local group or a committee? What kind of group were you involved in?

VK: So I was involved in the Oxford Anti-Apartheid Group, and this was in the early 1980s. As I said, I was a student in '83 and '84. In '85 I became a lot more political, mainly on the back of my engagement with the Anti-Apartheid Movement, but not exclusively. I became involved in student politics and I stood for the post of president of the students union, which was a sabbatical post. At this time I'd achieved some local notoriety for campaigning work, and I won. So I was a student union president from 1986 to 1987. Now this meant I had some power over the way in which the student body interacted. We used our investments, for example, and so my focus shifted from engagement with the Oxford Anti-Apartheid Group as such towards focusing on the ways in which the student body at the Polytechnic itself could make a contribution to confronting apartheid. So for example we were looking at making sure that none of our investments, as a union, were touching Barclays. There was a Barclays branch on the premises of the college. We campaigned vigorously to have that removed. We made good progress in helping the college as a whole – not just the student body – take issue with Barclays and got various motions passed at various student councils. As the president of the college [students union] I was also a governor of the Polytechnic, so I was able to bring that perspective to governors' meetings as well, and that was also an opportunity to make common cause with the progressive governors on the student council, on the Polytechnic's governing council. So we'd make alliances with, for example, the teachers' unions, the lecturers' unions, with the trade unionists, the community representatives that were represented on the governing body as well. So that's what happened in 1986–87. So that was a year spent really campaigning against Barclays, and then Shell. Then the Shell mobilisation, I would say, that was more national work than Oxford focused – every year outside of course the Shell shareholders meeting, anti-apartheid colleagues would convene with placards and leaflet shareholders as they went in on Shell's involvement with apartheid regime. So on the back of my being the president of the union in 1987, I was elected to the National Council of the student section of the Labour Party in 1988. So in that capacity I was responsible for liaison between the Labour Party and

the National Union of Students, and that gave me further opportunity to help advance the Anti-Apartheid Movement agenda with the national body across Britain. So that's kind of a transition from local campaigning at the outset through to national campaigning, as we went through the '80s.

EM: You've spoken of many links between the separate groups campaigning against apartheid. Did you consider it quite a homogeneous movement as a result? How would you describe the dynamism within the Anti-Apartheid Movement?

VK: It was incredibly dynamic, one of the five Ps that I mentioned was pluralism. I think the great success of the Anti-Apartheid Movement was its ability to build a broad front, bringing cultural activists, bringing students, bringing trade unionists, bringing older people – anyone with a perspective, there was room for them within the Movement, and I think that was one of the great things about it. I think there was undoubtedly a lot of cross-fertilisation between liberal political traditions. At that time, sometimes it worked well, sometimes it was comic – and there were a couple of incidents that still make me smile about those days, and this cross-fertilisation of progressives if you like.

EM: Could you elaborate on one of those incidents – a particular anecdote?

VK: OK – one of the highlights of my time, my engagement with the Anti-Apartheid Movement, was when I was on the National Council of the student section of the Labour Party. I was asked by the Labour Party to represent the Party at a big campaigning event held in 1988. This was the Mandela Freedom March. At that time, in 1988, Mandela had spent 25 years in prison, and the Anti-Apartheid Movement wanted to mark the event with a large concert to draw attention to this fact, and to make the demand that he should be freed, so the concert was called 'Freedom at 70'. To sustain the campaign, and to make sure that it didn't just begin and end at the concert, the Anti-Apartheid Movement asked 25 organisations to nominate one person to represent that organisation in a march that would take place immediately after the Mandela concert. We'd go up to Glasgow and we'd walk all the way down to London. Of course there'd be a big launch in Glasgow, and when we arrived in London there'd be a big rally as well. So 25 organisations, one of which was the Labour Party, but it included organisations like the Woodcraft Folk, for example – and I think that's another manifestation of the fact that the Anti-Apartheid Movement was always keen to build a broad front and making the alliances between sectors. So it included, amongst our number, was a colleague from the ANC and two colleagues from SWAPO – I think this is another important dimension of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, it wasn't just about freeing Mandela it was about liberation of Southern Africa [*pause*]. So we set off from Glasgow on the Mandela Freedom March, covering about 610 miles in about six weeks, trying to cover about 20 miles a day, and the idea was that every time we'd stop we'd be hosted by either a local authority or a trade union group. They'd have a reception for us, they'd get one of us to speak – and that would act as the focus for local people to come and hear about the struggle. Many times we'd be put up in peoples' houses – and on one occasion one of our SWAPO colleagues came back to rejoin the group having spent the night at one of the local people's houses. The local person had fed them, entertained them, offered all hospitality – people were very, very generous. But he came back and he said, 'I really don't understand these people, they greet us, they welcome us, but when I got to this house, there was no meat, they were vegetarians, and you could never be a vegetarian in Namibia'. And he proceeded to explain the importance of meat eating in a meat eating culture in Namibian society, but it was an excellent example of where, in that progressive group of people who were involved in the Anti-Apartheid Movement, there included a number of progressive

traditions – and vegetarianism, and a growing ecological movement was part and parcel of that. But to explain that, and reconcile that, for a Namibian colleague, where you had to have beef on the table every night, it was important, *particularly* when you were hosting somebody – it was entertaining, I have to say.

EM: Just before I carry on in that vein, can I ask you to spell out ANC and SWAPO?

VK: OK, so ANC African National Congress, SWAPO South West Africa Peoples Organisation.

EM: Thank you very much. So you mentioned your colleague from Namibia. On a similar note, were there many other strong characters that you remember from that period – several that you'd like to talk about?

VK: I mean the characters were, they were almost legends for us – as grassroots activists, we'd really look up to the national organisers in particular – but they all had different styles, and different personas, if you like. Karen Talbot was a national organiser, very very efficient, quite quietly spoken, understated in many ways, but absolutely tireless, *heroic*, in the work that she did in mobilising students, but actually the Movement as a whole – I really admired Karen. Then there were people from South Africa, who clearly made an impression by virtue of having lived through parts of the struggle. Alan Brooks, was the Deputy Secretary-General of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, and he led the march, so I got to know Alan very well during the course of that six weeks trekking down from Glasgow. Again, quite an understated guy, but immense power, authority, exuding from him – just by virtue of what he'd lived through in South Africa. Mike Terry – just a lovely lovely guy, really self-effacing, humble, but quite strong when he needed to be, and very good at mobilising the troops by speaking publicly. And then there were the politicians around us, from whom we drew strength. Richard Caborn, for example, in particular. But it wasn't just Labour politicians – David Steel was quite a supporter in those days as well. So those are some of the characters. Then there were the individuals from ANC headquarters as well, based in London at 28 Penton Street, who would also come and inspire us with their words and their perspective from the field. That would always be good for us, very good for morale, and actually make the struggle real for many of us. Indres Naidoo was the ANC's delegate, if you like, he participated on the march. Essop Pahad as well, he took a particular interest in me and my work and encouraged me a *lot* to participate in the Movement.

EM: So organising such a big event – of the one you've just been speaking, there must have been some organisational difficulties. Can you recall any of the troubles that you had during that experience?

VK: I think some of the troubles would have been not so much organisational, because Karen, Mike, did a fantastic job. they'd appointed a guy called Oz, I can't remember Ozzy's name, but Oz, he was the anti-apartheid's logistics person, but also kind of led the march from an Anti-Apartheid Movement type of view alongside Alan Brooks. He really made it happen – Simon Osborne, that's it. So he had everything in hand, and the work that had been done by colleagues on Mandela Street made sure that there was a host waiting for us, local authorities had planned in advance for our arrival and local groups as well had taken ownership of hosting us as well. So it wasn't so much – I didn't really feel that there were logistical challenges, there were political challenges, not least of all, we did come up against some opposition. We weren't always walking through lovely metropolitan cosmopolitan Oxford, there were some rural settings where people really did rush to their gates to shout abuse at us, and there were indeed other urban settings where other people who took strong

exception to the work of the Anti-Apartheid Movement mobilised, greeted us in pretty hostile terms. Oldham in particular, I remember, stands out as a place where we were greeted by what I assume was the local branch of the National Front – and that was intimidating, but it really did fire us up, actually at exactly the right time, because by the time we'd reached Oldham we were beginning to flag a little. But actually the timing couldn't have been better, and it really did give us a pep, and helped speed us on our way.

EM: Do you remember any particular challenges you faced personally during the march?

VK: Personally, I have to confess, I wasn't the fittest, going into the march – when I knew I'd been selected to represent the Party, I'd started to train beforehand. Twenty miles a day for six weeks is quite a tough regime. By the time we'd reached Bedford, I'd begun to develop shin splints, so there was a kind of hairline fracture in the shin – and I was devastated at the fact that I might miss even one day of walking, but it couldn't be helped, I had to miss four hours – so they took me to a local physiotherapist, I had radio sound therapy on it and the next day I was right as rain. So I did miss one day, that was devastating for me but nevertheless, it was part of the deal, I would guess. I was never confronted personally – but we were hard to confront on an individual basis because we were a very close collective group, very tightly knit, and one of our slogans was 'An injury to one is an injury to all'. And so we had a very, very strong camaraderie among those 25 people. It wouldn't have been easy to take any of us on individually.

[Long pause]

EM: Do you remember any of the particular houses that you stayed at during that period?

VK: There were a number of really – the people that hosted us didn't have much, but they were committed to the Anti-Apartheid Movement, so they had opened up their houses. So we stayed in the houses where, clearly, people had room to spare, but also there were houses where people didn't have anything, and you'd sleep on a couch, and these families would have been families that were involved in some other political struggle of their own, for example, a labour dispute or – so you could see that, particularly in northern England at that time, people were hard-pressed to host us. But they did, in fine style as well – they treated us like heroes, you could describe it, it was a deeply deeply humbling experience.

EM: Just carrying on from that, you've spoken about the political climate in 1983 and 1984. During the march, what had altered or what had stayed the same?

VK: I think the concert had done a lot to bring concern about apartheid into the mainstream. Up until that point, you really had to be a member of the Anti-Apartheid Movement – or at least associated with it in some way – to be concerned enough to write a letter, or campaign, or join a picket line, or whatever. But the concert I think had a huge impact on just mobilising popular opinion, and not only did that mean that we had a much wider audience for our – a wider and more receptive audience for – the campaigning work that took place in 1988, but of course it also meant that the political stakes were raised as well. So it was interesting to see the reaction of the opponents of the work that we were doing, and as I say that ranged from the kind of casual abuse, if you like, to the more outspoken, outright, 'What the hell do you think you're doing?' kind of thing. 'This is wrong' – a strong kind of white supremacist critique coming to the fore in some of the more outlandish and outspoken opponents that confronted us.

EM: Do you remember which opposition – a group or a person – that you found it particularly difficult to deal with?

VK: *[Pause]* I would say that it was that moment in Oldham, when we came up against National Front, British National Party, types. There's no dialogue there, there's no exchange – it's pure hatred. In that climate it's hard to convey a cogent, political thought – it's just shouting at each other really, violence, which is an anathema to what we were trying to achieve. That was what we walked into. I'm just grateful it didn't turn violent, as that would have completely detracted from the kind of work that we'd done beforehand.

EM: You've mentioned many of the campaigns that you were involved in at a local level, with Barclays and Shell, the Mandela march of course. Within the groups that you worked in, how did you decide which campaigns you would focus on the most?

VK: I focused on the ones that spoke to me as an individual. So after the Mandela march, I offered myself to the Anti-Apartheid Movement – whatever I can do, please let me know, how I can help in any capacity. And I've a love of cricket, and at the time – it would have been 1989 – there was a plan to take a tour of an England cricket team to South Africa, and this became a target for a 'Stop the tour' campaign, echoing the 'Stop the rugby tour' campaigns that took place in the '70s, led by Peter Hain. So I was given responsibility for taking up this campaign of 'Stop the tour', and so I co-ordinated the collection of petitions to present to the MCC [Marylebone Cricket Club]. I organised the collection of signatures, and I also played a part in organising little events to draw attention to the fact that these tours were taking place. So, for an example – I lived in London at the time – in North London we organised a cricket match that was attended by various sports people and celebrities to draw attention to the fact that the tour was going ahead. So yes, I chose campaigns that spoke to me, where I thought I could add something.

EM: You've mentioned the specific techniques that you used in many of the roles that you took during that period: petitions, marches, boycotts. How would you describe the difference between techniques used in political campaigning then, to the ones we use today?

VK: I think we had to work a little harder in those days – we didn't have 38 degrees, or Avaaz, these online vehicles for capturing public opinion on particular issues that are quite effective today. Also I think the web has completely transformed campaigning. Today, if you can get together 10,000 signatures, you will have your day in court, you will have your motion at least presented to Parliament, the House of Commons, whereas in those days we didn't have that kind of direct access to the public, let alone institutions. So I think what's disparagingly called 'clicktivism' today has completely changed the political landscape for campaigning and advocacy orientated groups. We had to take our clipboards out and ask people to physically sign something, and before doing so we'd have to have a conversation with them about what it was they were signing, and ask questions and engage with them. So there was a slightly deeper, if you like, engagement with the public on the issues of the day. Whereas I think today there is engagement, but it's a much *thinner* engagement, if you will, because there isn't that direct, at-length interaction between the organisation that's trying to mobilise people and the people themselves. I think that's the main difference.

EM: Would you describe this as a positive change?

VK: I think it is. I think it is a positive change, because I think there is scope for many many more people to express themselves politically than was the case when we were organising campaigns. I think the trick is to complement the online activism with other forms of public engagement. But those are emerging as well, consumers are more aware than ever now of what it is they're buying and issues of fair trade, of provenance of food, of labour conditions – these are all uppermost in the minds of many consumers now. You complement, you use

those avenues alongside a more online 'clicktivist' approach. But I think there is still a role for face to face dialogue and local organisation, as a complement to people clicking – and being somewhat removed from the more in-depth engagement with the issues.

EM: Within the campaigns that you were involved in, particularly the campaigns on Barclays and Shell, how did you feel the general awareness was at the time, among the public?

VK: Amongst the general public, I would say, relatively low, actually. I think it was fair to say that we'd like to think that more people were aware of the issues, but actually I think with the benefit of a few years retrospection I would say that most people were ignorant of the issues, weren't aware of (a) the fact that Barclays and Shell were active in South Africa, and (b) the role of those corporates in supporting and upholding the institution of apartheid. People just didn't know that stuff. I think it took things like the concert – those mass events, complemented by local campaigning, the work of local organisations, local groups in particular – to change that climate, as well as the fact that a lot of organisations, progressive organisations at the time, had the issue of challenging the apartheid regime on their agenda, whether they were student groups, whether they were local councils for racial equality, whether they were trade union organisations, or whatever. It was uppermost on the list of concerns of most progressive organisations at that time.

EM: Returning to the Mandela concert that you mentioned, did you yourself attend?

VK: I did, I did. I'd never been to anything like that before, and I, it was obviously a lovely event, the music was fantastic, but what was as inspiring was getting a chance to meet some of the leaders of the Movement. It was inspiring, absolutely inspiring.

EM: Do you remember the particular evening well?

VK: I do. There was one moment though that I do remember particularly well, and that was when I was introduced by Julian Eccles, who was the assistant to Neil Kinnock, the leader of the Labour Party at the time, and Julian said, 'Vijay, you've been working with the National Organisation of Labour Students, you've been representing the Labour Party, you must meet the leader'. So Neil Kinnock was there, sat in the royal box concert, and Julian said 'Why don't you sit next to Neil?'. So Neil Kinnock and I sat down and watched the concert together – a good half an hour, and just chatted about stuff, not all of it political, but it was just lovely having a conversation with him, and understanding him as a human being, not as the leader of a political party, and a prospective prime minister, but just as a guy. And that made a huge impression on me.

EM: And what was your impression of him?

VK: Very personable, great sense of humour, wicked sense of humour – but very, very committed, but not in an overstated way, you could see it was part of his very being. These weren't political statements or pronouncements for him, he really felt it – that came through very, very strongly.

EM: At the time of the concert, what was the climate like within the Anti-Apartheid Movement? Was it resoundingly positive, or were there still fears and reservations?

VK: Well it was a huge gamble, financial gamble, so there was that kind of critique – bearing in mind there was still this prevailing view in the country, 'Mandela: terrorist. ANC: outlawed organisation'. So it was a bit of a risk, but I think a calculated one. I think the other thing to say is that, politically, there were issues within the Movement, I think, about whether the concert would be an appropriate use of resources. Opinion in the Movement was certainly

not homogeneous, and there were colleagues, there was one element in the Anti-Apartheid Movement, in particular, that was very outspoken, long-standing critic of the directions that had been taken by colleagues in Mandela Street – this was the City Group, City of London Anti-Apartheid Group. And they were very outspoken in their criticism of the concert, they portrayed it as the commercialisation of Mandela's personal struggle, and criticised the use of money in this way.

EM: How did this opposition from groups like the City of London Group that you've just mentioned affect the progress of the Movement, and the dynamism, which we've spoken about before, of the Movement?

VK: Yes, I think it was a distraction, more of an irritant I think, other than anything else. I don't think it posed any major difficulties, it did take up some energies, organising and dealing with the need to maintain the broad front – but I wouldn't say it was debilitating in any way – and if anything, certainly from my perspective, it reinforced the need for coherence across the Movement, a need for discipline across the Movement, if we were going to maintain our broad front and achieve our objectives.

EM: Do you believe the techniques used by the Anti-Apartheid Movement were quite consistent throughout the period that you were involved?

VK: Yes, I think they were, I think they were. But I think they were also savvy, they responded to the changes in the climate. So there was always a combination of the local with the national, working that out – when to bring a national focus or to provide a national perspective for campaigning that drew on the work of local organisations. I think that worked very well.

EM: When you reflect on your time working with the Anti-Apartheid Movement, were there any particular interactions or incidents that stand out to you? Perhaps not the larger events that you were involved in, but the ones that really informed your political view?

VK: I would say the first national demonstration that I participated in, the one I talked about at the beginning of this interview. That was the largest demonstration that I'd been on, and I found it quite inspiring. Also the things that I saw there made me quite angry and encouraged me to become political. So it was really the way that I observed, and the impact of the things that I observed on me, rather than one single moment, if you like. But it was that period during the early 1980s that was a culmination of the struggle against apartheid, the struggle of the mine workers, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, solidarity with the progressive movements in Nicaragua and Chile – all of those things helped to form my political world view, reinforced upon me at that time the importance of solidarity and people-to-people linkages.

EM: You've emphasised the importance of both the local and the international within the Anti-Apartheid Movement. So did the Movement often feel very international to you, despite the fact that the marches and demonstrations you took part in were in England largely?

VK: The international dimension of the Movement's work didn't become apparent to me until I started working for the International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa after my time on the Mandela march and after I served on the National Committee of the student section of the Labour Party. Essop Pahad had asked me to join the International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, which was an organisation which was established here, or IDAF we used to call it, an organisation based in Essex Road, 64 Essex Road, that was concerned with the welfare of ANC and SWAPO exiles based in Europe, raised money for

their welfare and was also active in making sure that solidarity and support was maintained. So I worked for IDAF for about six months in the late 1980s, so my boss there was the director of IDAF at the time, Horst Kleinschmidt. Horst was another inspirational character, and anything I know about management and leading an organisation, is derived strongly from my brief experience with him as a young person working in that organisation. I was asked to help Horst develop the early thinking on what would later go on to become the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, so we were beginning to identify the form that such a commission would take. We didn't call it the Truth and Reconciliation Commission at the time, but we knew that there needed to be some kind of mechanism that would bring about healing, and so I'd been asked to work with Horst to do some of the early thinking on that. So Horst did all the thinking and I did some of the administration pieces as required – and it was when I was doing that work that I understood very clearly the international nature of the struggle and the support that we were getting, particularly from colleagues in Scandinavia, and the strength of the Anti-Apartheid Movement in the Netherlands as well.

EM: What were particular administrative tasks that you would do during your time working for IDAF – is it the International Defence Aid Fund for Mandela?

VK: For Southern Africa.

EM: Thank you. So what were the particular tasks that you would do?

VK: So I would be identifying potential resource people that would participate in the work of any tribunal or commission that would be held on the crimes of apartheid. So this would mean looking at people that were either prominent cultural practitioners or prominent jurists, that would be prepared to speak on the issue of crimes of apartheid. Then there were missions that needed to take place, particularly to Zimbabwe to build solidarity there, and to identify contacts, in Harare in particular. So that was my job, to organise trips and missions and so on for Horst and other colleagues there. Then there were the actual linkages with other trusts, foundations, networks in Europe, which I would be responsible for going and speaking at, alongside other colleagues.

EM: So your knowledge of the Movement really branched out this time, as you have previously said?

VK: Yes.

EM: And could you elaborate on the particular parts of the Movement which you learnt more about, how that made you feel about the Movement?

VK: During my work with the International Defence and Aid Fund, I came into more direct contact with ANC and SWAPO colleagues – much more direct contact with both missions, based at Penton Street and Gillespie Road, which is where SWAPO were based. And that made the struggle even more urgent in my own mind, because I was not dealing with a solidarity movement, but dealing with the liberation movement and working with the liberation groups themselves directly, so you were interacting with heroes from both of those organisations on a daily basis. I talked with Denis Goldberg at the ANC, he was an incredibly lovely guy, just lovely, nothing could be too much for Denis, very generous with his time, very supportive, very encouraging. And to realise what he'd gone through, and to realise he still had that time for you as a naive near 20 something, running around, running errands for people was quite moving actually, now I reflect on it.

EM: Could you describe one of the high points of your work with Anti-Apartheid Movement?

VK: So there were a couple of high points, one of the big high points was the day that Mandela came to London first. He had been invited to attend a reception at the headquarters of the Royal Commonwealth Society on Northumberland Avenue. And I didn't think that we'd be invited, any of the marchers, but I was wrong, we were all invited. The only thing was, we couldn't get in, because the place was just packed, you could not get in the front door. But the fact that I'd been invited was enough for me, that was amazing. The other high point, which is not a political one but a personal one, was during the Mandela march. We had just got to near the end of the march, around Bedford – it was around the same time as I had the shin splints – that my then girlfriend returned to the country, having spent a year travelling around the world. After college, when I'd explained to her that I wanted to do some political things, she said that's fine – you go and do your political things, I'm going to travel round the world. So she travelled round the world, and we met up again just outside Luton, and that was the first time I'd seen her for a year, and that was very special. And I'd also like to think it made an impression on my fellow marchers as well, as they knew how much I was looking forward to it. And we were very, very happy, very very happy, we got married, we're still married.

EM: That's lovely – did you make many strong connections?

VK: Yeah, it was 25 years ago now, so I don't know where many of them live, and we didn't have emails in those days, so we didn't have e mail addresses. But every now and again, someone will tell me; 'Joni McDougall's in town' – 'Oh Joni', I'll pick up the phone, we'll have lunch, Joni and I would have lunch. Simon Osborne, I know Ozzy, he was doing some work for the Electoral Reform Institute and he was based in Uganda for a while – so I know where Oz is, although I haven't seen him since those days. Paul Brannen, I know Paul's an international and political superstar somewhere – last I heard he was in the upper reaches of Christian Aid, but I don't know where he is now. Indres, I don't know, I lost touch with Indres and the SWAPO colleagues, but I would dearly love to meet up with him again, we'd have one hell of a hangover the day after we'd met up again.

EM: If you would describe the Anti-Apartheid Movement, to a 10-year-old for example, what would be the things that you would really want them to take away from your experience?

If there's something wrong happening in the world, no matter how far away it is, you need to do something about it.

EM: And finally, just to return to some of the things we were talking about earlier, what made you feel so compelled to act in all the capacities that you did against apartheid?

VK: It was wrong – it was a manifest injustice, but it was more than that, because there are injustices all over the world, but this injustice had been institutionalised, you had the full weight of a country behind, entrenching, racial inequality. And I thought, if I was prepared to just let that pass without lifting a finger, what right would I have to have a say about racial equality, and the need for racial justice, in this country or in any other setting. It was a personal thing for me, as a black person, it was absolutely essential that I, and other black people, got involved in the Movement. I also understood very clearly that there was a risk of the Anti-Apartheid Movement being caricatured as the sole province of comfortable middle-class, white people – and that would have been fatal for the organisation. It was absolutely essential that black people were visible and active in that Movement. The Anti-Apartheid Movement themselves, they understood that very clearly – any look at the governance structures, the board, staffing, would demonstrate, that they were committed to addressing this perception. In a sense this was my contribution.

EM: Before we finish, is there anything else that you'd like to add to the discussion, any last anecdote or memory, or anything else you'd like to explain?

VK: The Anti-Apartheid Movement had a profound impact on my life, it helped form and crystallise my political worldview, which holds true today. That was 25 years ago – ever since that time I've worked with civil society organisations, either on a local, national or international basis, around the issues of people-to-people linkages. That's what I do now for the Commonwealth Foundation. I made some really good friends and it's a time of my life that I'll never forget.

EM: Thank you so much, I will stop the recording now.

[Microphone was turned back on as Vijay wanted to add something].

EM: So you just added something.

VK: Yes, I mentioned that the Mandela Freedom March took place immediately after the Freedom at 70 concert which took place at Wembley. How it worked was, the 25 nominated marchers took a train from Wembley up to Glasgow. It was a sleeper and we were to start with a rally at a big park in Glasgow. Now one of the main acts at the big concert in Wembley was Simple Minds, a huge band in the 1980s. They had gone up to Glasgow the day after, to be with us as well at the start of the Mandela Freedom March and they brought out a single, called 'Mandela Day', which was launched on that day as well. But the thing that really made an impression on me was not just the fact that they'd made the effort to travel from Wembley to Glasgow to make sure that they were there at the concert – but as well, at the beginning of the march, it was the fact that they really wanted to make a contribution to the campaign, just by interacting and finding out about us as marchers, and they were very, very open, there was nothing prima donna-ish about them at all, and we spent a really good couple of hours just talking with Jim Kerr, the lead singer, and other members of the group – just about the campaign and about their plans for the year as well, their tour dates. That was an important moment for us all, I think.

EM: That sounds wonderful. Were there any of the other acts that you remember well and would like to mention?

VK: Hugh Masekela, an absolute icon, and actually there's some interesting issues there around the cultural boycott, around whether you would be promoting and supporting South African artists in particular. So there were some tensions within the Movement and Hugh Masekela, he was amazing at the concert, and actually I'm pleased to say that two years ago, the Commonwealth theme for the year was connecting cultures – this was in 2011, sorry 2012 – and we had a concert, the Commonwealth Foundation put on a concert at the Barbican, and Hugh Masekela played at the concert. So that was a nice little book-ending to my time.

EM: Brilliant, thank you for that.