Interview with Mike Terry by Håkan Thörn, 28 February 2000, reproduced on the Anti-Apartheid Movement Archives Committee Forward to Freedom project website http://www.aamarchives.org/

Håkan Thörn: When were you born and where?

Mike Terry: I was born on 17 October 1947. My parents were living in London, but I was born 20 miles or so north of London and have spent most of my adult life in London. I first became involved in Southern Africa because I worked for nearly a year teaching in a mission school in what is now Zimbabwe, in 1966, before I went to university.

HT: Any connections with your parents there?

MT: No.

HT: How did you end up there?

MT: I don't honestly know. I was conscious as a school student about social and political issues, and so I was aware of the growing crisis in Rhodesia before UDI [Unilateral Declaration of Independence, 1965]. I had almost a year off between school and university because I had taken my final school exams a year early. There was a school travel prize, which paid some of the costs to get there. My mother was and is active in what was then the Congregational Church, which is linked to the London Missionary Society, which was quite active in both South Africa and what is now Zimbabwe. I just wrote to somebody in one school, who had been over here I think, and who knew some people here, and they passed the letter over to somebody else. They wrote and said that if I could get there I would be welcome, so I just worked as a volunteer. I got paid £1.50 a week. I was very young, very naive, but I had some idea of what racists or white supremacy meant, and because it was 1966 this was when there was a crisis about oil getting to Zimbabwe – the first oil sanctions were being implemented. It was when ZANU [Zimbabwe African National Union] started their activities. I hitchhiked through [place name inaudible] just after the first ZANU military activities. I saw a lot of things happening. I hitchhiked back up north, the route that the oil tankers were using to come to Zambia, because Zambia was being blockheaded by [Ian] Smith. So I was exposed at a very young age to these things.

Then in 1969, for reasons not to do with South Africa, I was elected president of the students union in the university where I was, Birmingham. That was the year of the big Springbok rugby tour demonstrations, so suddenly Southern Africa became a big issue among students. This was the year after Vietnam, after Paris, after Prague, so I got involved in a number of anti-apartheid activities. The university recognised degrees of what was then the University College of Rhodesia in Salisbury [now Harare]. Birmingham University had big investments in companies operating in South Africa, so obviously I felt strongly about these things. In 1970–71 I was a lay member of the NUS [National Union of Students] Executive, and then in 1971–73 I was NUS National Secretary, and I was responsible for international policy for NUS, and before that I was the NUS spokesperson on Southern Africa. I linked up with AAM and ANC [African National Congress] – this was with Thomas [name inaudlble]. We had contact with the students in Salisbury, so we were doing quite a lot of work on Southern Africa. So when I finished my post-graduate work in Birmingham I did two years full time in London [with NUS] and when I had finished that, I worked for IDAF [International Defence and Aid Fund] for two years, because I had by that stage got quite involved in Anti-Apartheid and work on Southern Africa and I was on the Executive of AAM as an elected member.

HT: When was that?

MT: I suppose 1972, so I was a member of the AA Executive for three years.

HT: And at the same time working with the IDAF?

MT: Yes, I think I got onto the AA Executive while I was still in the NUS. Then I worked at the IDAF Research Department. Then Ethel [de Keyser] left AAM because her brother was coming out of prison. We appointed somebody else and that didn't work out. There was a vacancy, and that's when I started working, in 1975, as Executive Secretary of AAM. I continued until 1995, so I was there full time for almost 20 years, quite a long time. That's the basic background.

HT: I am interested in early images of Southern Africa you might have had.

MT: Certainly I was aware, as a school student, that there was something badly wrong with South Africa. I remember Ambrose Reeves, Bishop Reeves, came and spoke at our school and I remember we read *Cry the Beloved Country* as a set book at school. I imagine I would have been reading the *New Statesman*, my parents had the *Manchester Guardian*, now the *Guardian*, so I was reading about Southern Africa and clearly thought about what was happening – that Smith was wrong. That must have been influenced mainly by reading and by listening to people talk, because I don't think at that stage television had a very major impact on people. I don't listen to the radio very much, so listening to one or two people and reading meant that in a very liberal naive sort of way, some sort of political consciousness was arising, which I think was shaped by things that I read in the newspapers. I read the *New Statesman* regularly when I was at school. Then I had two terms free – I suppose it was just an opportunity to travel. My parents were incredibly worried, because it was such a fraught situation at the time. It was also just after the Congo, so it was not seen as being very safe. My mother's sister's son, who was older, had gone to a UN project in Tanzania and tragically died in a swimming accident at the same time that I was in Rhodesia. Now when people fly around the world you take travel for granted, but that wasn't the situation then. I went out by boat, I never dreamed of flying, it was beyond the means of ordinary people.

HT: Do you remember the Sharpeville massacre? Did that make an impression on you?

MT: I can't honestly say that it did. I would have been 12, so I can't remember. I do remember I went to London once to an anti-apartheid protest when I was still at school.

But what that was about and when it was I don't know – I do remember going once, but it might have been a CND thing and I might have got some AAM stuff. Those were the two main issues that were prevalent at that time.

HT: Did you have any early experiences of racism that were more direct than reading about it?

MT: You mean in Britain? Before I went to Zimbabwe, no. This area [Finchley, North London] now is very multicultural. But I think in my primary school, there were a couple of kids that might have been African or Afro-Caribbean. It was a white area – most of suburban London was all white then, you didn't have large Asian or Afro-Caribbean communities. What you did have in this area was a lot of anti-semitism. There was a large Jewish community and if there was any racial issue here, it would have been anti-semitism rather than racism against Afro-Caribbeans or Africans. There was only a significant change in the '60s and by that time I was at university.

HT: You didn't go to South Africa during that first journey?

MT: I went to South Africa and then up by train from Cape Town to Bechuanalaland, to Botswana, and I hitchhiked down to Beit Bridge and walked across the border and just walked back. But I wasn't particularly attracted to going there. On a holiday when I was in Rhodesia, I went to Zambia, which I was much more attracted to because they were independent. I met some people there and then I went down to Mozambique and just hitch-hiked around up to Victoria Falls and up to the Copper Belt, back across [place name inaudible] and down through Harare. Basically I was a kid, but I experienced a lot of frightening, incredibly difficult hitchhiking, because every driver was white and we ended up having rows and they would drop you off in nowhere. One guy drove me around in what was then Umtali, and swore at me and said 'It's bastards like you that will hand us over to the "mints"' (which is just like saying 'kaffir'). It was a quite frightening experience, white racism, which was really frightening. I had no idea that racism could be so brutal. I also came across a lot of white hypocrisy, especially working in the missionary area. I found that a lot of missionaries were very patronising towards the African community. It had quite a big effect on me, because I think it helped me, when I was working for AAM, not to have a patronising attitude towards the liberation movements, or to people involved in the struggle, because I had seen how paternalistic, not all, but a lot, of white missionaries were. Under the surface there was a lot of prejudice, which wasn't that different from the white Rhodesians.

HT: So as an activist, did you travel a lot to Southern Africa?

MT: You mean once I worked for AAM? Not that much. I think I went to Lusaka for a big conference in May 1979, and I went to Angola in early 1991, and then I went on to Mozambique. Next time it would have been 1992, for the Boipatong massacre, and then again in 1993, for the ANC international solidarity conference. But it was partly because of the nature of the job that I was doing. My job was to keep the machinery of AAM going, so if there were conferences or activities in Southern Africa, it tended to be other people from the leadership of AAM that went rather than me. I went to Tanzania in 1987 as well, but, mainly for financial reasons, we didn't have delegations going off to visit the region. Effectively, with some exceptions, it was impossible for people in the leadership of AAM to go to South Africa or Namibia or to pre-independent Zimbabwe. We tended to rely on feedback from other people that went, and we had a good relationship with the frontline states – with governments and government parties and other people – so in a way, we didn't need to visit to convince ourselves about what was happening. I think it potentially was an area where we could have done a few things differently, which might have helped us with more publicity, more media coverage and better mobilisation, especially when the South African aggression against the frontline states started with a vengeance in the early '80s. Trevor Huddleston, who was our president, and Abdul Minty, did a tour in the frontline states in 1983 and that was very valuable. I think there were more things that we could have done, but to be honest the main factor was finance. We might have been able to get financial support for things like that and got more benefit out of it, but we didn't. It wasn't a major factor in how we raised people's consciousness. Does that make sense?

HT: You mean through travelling?

MT: Through travelling, yes. But it did shape the views of quite a lot of people who were involved in anti-apartheid. Paul Blomfield was on our Executive for a long time. He comes from Sheffield. He was on the NUS Executive at the time of Soweto. He was sent by the NUS, in consultation with us and with the ANC, to meet student leaders in South Africa, and that clearly affected his attitude. One of the Vice-Chairs of AAM [Rachel Jewkes] for a long period was on our health committee. She went to the Transkei and worked there. We were actually against that happening, but it had an impact on her, so there were quite a lot of people who one way or another had visited South or Southern Africa, and that experience made them into people who were committed to what we were up to. But it wasn't done as a political education once people were involved.

HT: In terms of you own commitment it seems as if that first journey was important.

MT: I think it was a mixture of things. It had two elements. Even if at the time I wasn't conscious of it, I think it helped shape my views and so when I was older and, if you like, more politically conscious. It helped me to have a clarity about why I was working for AAM and what we were doing. The other aspect of it was it gave me a sort of personal legitimacy, because people argued about different things. So I knew from my own experience that despite the fact that Rhodesia was meant to be slightly more civilised than South Africa, I remembered all the day to day experiences of what racism meant to African people, the misery and deprivation, all those kind of things, and how the structures of white supremacy and colonial rule were denying Africans their basic rights. I had experienced all that, and so I didn't have to question it, whereas if I had been in what was a comparatively exposed position – I was the front man as far as the staff was concerned – it just meant that I didn't have any self-doubts about what we were doing, in the sense that I had that experience. But I think the reason I ended up working for AAM was different. It was much more because I had been involved in the student movement, in NUS, and the experience I had of campaigning, and having been in a senior position in NUS, when it was a quite major force in Britain. It was that experience that led me to think that working on Southern Africa was something that I had got the skills to do and that I could contribute. To be fair I also thought it was something out of which I would get something as well. So I think that that was much more important. I don't think that just having worked in a mission school in Rhodesia was what led me into the AAM. It was other political experiences that shaped my ideas. But I think that I would have been less effective. And certainly when I was on the NUS Executive, because I had been in Zimbabwe I was an obvious person to have that responsibility [for Southern Africa], so it did have an effect, but it wasn't the crucial factor.

HT: Yes. What about meeting exiled South Africans? Was that important in forming your commitment?

MT: Yes, we had an ANC student who was on a scholarship in Birmingham and when I was at Birmingham we had people from ANC come up and speak. During that period I got to know quite a lot of ANC people in exile, so I began moving in those kind of circles.

HT: What kind of experience was it to meet these people?

MT: In NUS we were also meeting people coming straight into exile. There was an emotional side of it, that you were meeting people who had experienced incredible pain and suffering. They were carrying on and wanting to do whatever they could. So this was an encouragement, inspiration, stimulus. A second aspect of it was that it gave me an insight into the nature of the struggle. I suppose I was influenced like everybody else about the ANC, the Communist Party, all those kind of issues. I remember this guy, I think he was an ambassador – Steve Gawe. He was the ambassador in Norway for a period, still is. He comes from a very Christian background, and I remember just talking about the ANC, and he explained to me the nature of the ANC coalition, and why it was that he was a committed Christian and had no problems working with people in the Communist Party, and couldn't understand why people made such a fuss about this. He said, 'You were allied with Stalin during the second world war'. It's a rather crude example, but there was a lot more insight into the nature of the South African political struggle, the history of that struggle, so a lot of that came through social contact, because you gradually got to know more and more, not as it is in a textbook. Some of these things have only been written about now. Rusty Bernstein has written a book which explains the complications between even the ANC and the Communist Party, and the tensions between people in Johannesburg and the Cape. I recently went to [name inaudible]'s funeral. He used to live near here, so I got to know him. He was Luthuli's secretary, and would talk at length about meetings with Luthuli, what he was like. It was a very privileged insight into the history of South Africa, as perceived by the ANC. I think there was the sense of being won over to their political perspective. When I was at college I had a lot of empathy with ZAPU/ZANU in Zimbabwe. ZANU was linked with PAC [Pan-Africanist Congress], and I found those Africanist politics quite attractive; that contrasted with the non-racial approach that eventually emerged with the Patriotic Front, and with ANC and SWAPO [South West Africa People's Organisation]. So there was also that kind of contact, which helped me understand why they didn't perceive their struggle as being a purely African struggle, that it was a non-racial struggle, and the dynamics behind that, which I think also was very important. I think it was important for a lot of people – hearing speakers from the ANC who went to trade unions or churches or local AAM groups – it led people to understand what the struggle was about in South Africa, that it wasn't a black versus white struggle.

HT: Were you ever a member of a political party?

MT: Yes, I am now in the Labour Party. I was in the Communist Party for four or five years, just before I became the Executive Secretary, in the late '70s. That was also when I got to know a lot of people, South Africans who were Communist Party people.

HT: Did you leave the Communist Party when you started with the AAM?

MT: No.

HT: It was later?

MT: Later. But I wouldn't do anything publicly, because when I had been in the NUS leadership, I was known as not being in the Communist Party. So it wasn't terribly widely known. People felt, and I agreed to it, that if I was to be Executive Secretary, I shouldn't then be doing things publicly for the Communist Party. A lot of the people I was working with didn't even know – it wasn't as if I was hiding it – but it was important to make sure that people saw me as someone who was employed by the AAM, not acting under the instructions of the Communist Party.

HT: The AAM was a very broad movement, including – do you know how many organisations? I mean I could check, but just for me to get a picture now.

MT: I think at a maximum we had about 2,000 or 3,000 affiliated organisations locally and nationally. We had support from the Liberal and Labour Parties and senior people from both held office in the AAM. David Steel, who was Leader of the Liberal Party, was president and then vice-president. Barbara Castle was a Labour Cabinet Minister in the '60s under Harold Wilson. She was the president of AAM in the early '60s, and then we had support from the nationalist parties, Scotland and Wales, and from the Communist Party and some, but not all, of the other leftist groups, because you know left politics can get complicated, so sometimes there were differences, which were not so much with us, but with the ANC, between some of the Maoist groups and some of the Trotskyist groups here. Sometimes they would support us, and sometimes not, and quite a lot of black organisations, both Afro-Caribbean and African organisations. I suppose the biggest group were the trade unions, most of the trade unions were affiliated to us.

HT: So what were the important tensions and conflicts within the Movement?

MT: It depends on what you mean by within the Movement. In the leadership, in the Executive, it would tend to be about priorities, about where to put resources, about how do we best respond. We were trying to do work on military and nuclear collaboration, on sanctions, on political prisoners, Nelson Mandela, on death row, on Zimbabwe, Namibia, on the frontline states, so you had conflicting priorities and pressures. So it was handling contending pressures, because there were a myriad of groups and interests who were concerned about Southern Africa. The AAM was pre-eminent among them and therefore to a certain extent what we decided to do set their agenda. If we decided that we were going to focus on Nelson Mandela, then by and large the trade unions, the political parties, our local groups, would take that up as being the issue. So there were pressures within the anti-apartheid movement in the broader sense to take up different issues. I suppose the area where there was the biggest problem, at the time when Zimbabwe was an issue, was that quite a lot of people lobbied for us to be allied exclusively with ZAPU. There were also groups who argued, with not such a strong voice, that we should treat AZAPO [Azanian People's Organisation] or PAC on an equal basis with the ANC, although our support for ANC was not exclusive – it was not that we saw the ANC being the only force in South Africa, but we saw it as the major one.

HT: Who argued for supporting the PAC?

MT: Some black groups in this country, for some period some of the Trotskyist and Maoist groups and some of the liberal ones. Some people didn't like the ANC's relations with the Communist Party, so certainly there was a lot of pressure from the Labour Party at one stage for us to give more support to the PAC.

HT: Was that some kind of anti-communist …?

MT: Yes, it was anti-communist.

HT: I am interested in conflicts reflecting ideological differences.

MT: After the Socialist International visit that Olaf Palme led to South Africa in 1976–77, which came out very much as seeing the ANC as the predominant force, there was a lot of hostility towards the delegation's report.

HT: Was that not in 1975?

MT: Was it '75? I thought it was post-Soweto, but I may be wrong.

HT: He did another journey to Zambia …

MT: There was a Socialist International visit to the region, and there was a very big Socialist International report which came out saying that the ANC was the major force. That met a lot of hostility on the International Committee of the Labour Party, a lot of hostility. I think it was motivated by an opinion that the ANC was pro-Moscow, and there was a kind of battle, if you like, between the Soviets and the Socialist International. It was a very unhealthy situation, and we got caught up in the middle of it, so it would be wrong to see support for the PAC in this country as coming exclusively from black and ultra-left groups. Some of the churches and some of the people involved with Amnesty were quite sympathetic to black consciousness politics and AZAPO politics in the late ’70s. There was an attempt to set up a BCM [black consciousness movement] external mission that got quite a lot of support from the churches here. Some of it was well-intentioned, people said the ANC had not been not particularly active from Rivonia onwards and some of the people allied with the black consciousness movement had good links with people in the churches in South Africa. Church people here consulted them and asked if they should support these people. They were being told by very genuine church activists in South Africa that, yes, these are the people that we should be supporting. That was a problem for us in the late ’70s, early ’80s. Then after the UDF [United Democratic Front] and COSATU [Congress of South African Trade Unions] were formed, it was pretty clear what the dominant political forces in South Africa were. But you couldn’t say that at the time of Soweto, it was much less obvious.

Then there was pressure on our relations with trade unions in South Africa. Some of the British trade unions had links with South African trade unions, and it was complicated by some of the ideological differences within the South African trade unions. We had a link with SACTU [South African Congress of Trade Unions] and on occasions we advised SACTU to [inaudible] the British trade unions, who was not particularly helpful, so that complicated matters, because I think there were too many people in exile, in ANC and SACTU, and even in the Anti-Apartheid Movement, who underestimated the strength of the pro-ANC forces in the trade union movement, and looked at some of the initiatives that were being taken by the ICFTU [International Congress of Free Trade Unions] and some of the trade union secretariats, and thought that they were just trying to build some alternative force in the trade union movement, so that was an issue, a quite complicated issue.

Then there was the relationship with British politics; for example, when CND [Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament] was campaigning for nuclear disarmament, Greenham Common was a very big issue and it was felt that we should be supporting them. It was quite a difficult argument to say: ‘No, the AAM exists for a different objective’. These kind of problems were particularly acute about how we related to the anti-racism struggle in Britain, with some people saying that we were indifferent to racism in this country. Some people were arguing that we should be in the forefront of any anti-racist activity in this country, that the AAM should be stuck in there. The mainstream position was that we were opposed to racism in this country, that we would give support to anti-racist initiatives, but that we weren’t ourselves a British anti-racist movement. That was not what our mandate was; but obviously there were people in Britain who had their own political agendas, and who saw the Movement as being an avenue where they could advance those agendas.

HT: What did you think about that?

MT: We were against it, but we couldn't always handle it. It happened in different ways. I mean if a Labour Member of Parliament joined our Executive, were they doing it because they wanted to support AA or to get them further up the Labour Party ladder? How do you handle that? Does a rock star that wants to play in a Wembley concert do it because they want to get a profile to sell more records, or do they do it because they want Nelson Mandela to be free? You also got more politically thought through groups who were saying: 'Yes, we can change the AAM agenda because we want to expose British capitalism or racism or whatever, and this is what AAM should be doing – they should be dealing with British capital, not British investments in South Africa, because our job should be to explain what capitalism is. The fact that capital is involved in South Africa is just a symptom of capitalism, we should be fighting to destroy capitalism.' I'm saying is these people were trying to …

HT: Hijack?

MT: Yes, or take advantage or the Movement. There were other people who did the same thing – people from the churches who wanted to show Desmond Tutu or Trevor Huddleston in a good light, because if they did, it was a way that they could persuade people to become Christians. There is a perception that these problems only came from what you might term the ultra-left, but they were there right across the Movement – not in a big way, but they were there. One of the things we had to do was to try and make sure that we didn't alienate church people who wanted to do things, or when we wanted members of parliament to be involved – we didn't want to start questioning the motives of everybody. But at the same time it was important not to be naive, and to appreciate that people would sometimes have an agenda that was slightly different from the AAM's agenda.

HT: But couldn't you link to anti-racist movement in Britain, with both agendas benefiting from being articulated?

MT: If you look at the history of the Movement, it existed through very big changes in Britain, where at some stages racism was almost all-pervading, and ran through every aspect of life. There were times when racist ideas were very much on the offensive, either through racist organisations, the National Front, British National Party, things like that. But it can also become mainstream – it did in a way under Thatcher. There was an element of Conservative Government layer, which was really very close to being pseudo-racist; there was a lot of racism in what they thought and how they approached things, and there would be people who could argue that today, immigration policy … There were some periods there was a very constitutional approach; at other times areas like Brixton or Toxteth in Liverpool were on fire, because there were riots. Now how could the AAM – the AAM was not really in a position to get engaged in that.

HT: But it was still a kind of context for the movement.

MT: Oh yes. There were some people who would argue that you could ignore the racism in our society. But that was never the predominant view in the Movement. The leadership view was – yes, we are in this society, racism is in this society, we are opposed to it, we cannot be against racism in South Africa and silent about racism in Britain. But it wasn't our task to promote campaigns, but we would support campaigns. But again, then you got into difficulties. If you support campaigns against racism, how do you pick and choose? How can you decide? What criteria do you use? If people feel so militant about the situation in Brixton that they start burning down the police station, do you say 'We agree with that'. So there was a difficulty in translating policy into activity, because most of our supporters wouldn't agree with that, although they might have some understanding about why people got to the state of mind that they did it. So it was a difficult issue. Ironically, in the main it wasn't black organisations who raised this issue: it tended to be white people. Some black organisations had differences with us over the PAC or black consciousness, but I think most of them they saw that what was happening in South Africa was on a different dimension to racism in this country and they saw the necessity for support for the liberation struggle.

I think they also recognised that if we were able to convince what was still a majority white society that it was legitimate for people to take up arms, to overthrow a white minority system in South Africa, that that in itself was going to change attitudes towards race. So I would argue that our work objectively played a very important role in countering racism in our society, precisely because we couldn't do our work without projecting positive role models of black people, showing how black people were prepared to resist. We were asking people to respect the legitimacy of their struggle, of their decision to use armed struggle, and telling them about the history of non-violent struggle. All these things countered stereotypical white attitudes towards black people. If you look at opinion polls, a third of the people in this country supported the armed struggle. That's quite incredible, if you think back. At the time we were disappointed with that, but on reflection to say that one-third of all people, or whatever it was, accepted the legitimacy of the armed struggle against a white minority regime – I mean there were all sorts of links between Britain and South Africa, which weren't there, possibly with the exception of the Netherlands, in any other European country.

HT: Would you say that the way that the struggle was defined was in terms of anti-racism? In Sweden in the early 1960s, the struggle against apartheid was defined in terms of anti-racism, while in the '70s, when the Africa Groups dominated, it was defined as an anti-imperialist struggle, and then again in the '80s, when ISAK came, which had a broader platform, it was once again defined in terms of anti-racism.

MT: Yes, yes. I think if you track through, say, *AA News* and our annual reports and documentation, you will see that that Africa Group kind of approach was quite dominant in the kind of literature and material of the movement in the late '60s and early '70s. There was much more talk of imperialism and capitalism and what have you, which had a lot to do with the influence of some key people in AAM, who had that kind of perspective.

HT: Was that a conflict? Was that an issue?

MT: I think, not. I think that things were influenced a lot by the rhetoric of the liberation movements at the time. They were also influenced by the international climate. This was at the height of the war in Vietnam, there were the struggles in the Portuguese territories, the fight against fascism in Europe – in Spain, Portugal, Greece – which was seen as being partly against the Americans. Greece, especially, was in NATO. Those were the kind of questions – NATO's role – it was very difficult to talk about Portuguese colonialism in Africa, and ignore the fact that Portugal was in NATO. Portugal was being armed as part of NATO, so those broad issues were very high profile at that period. As I say, if you were to listen to speakers from FRELIMO [Front for the Liberation of Mozambique] or from MPLA [Movement for the Liberation of Angola], or PAIGC [Party for the Independence of Guinea Bissau] or from the South African, Zimbabwean, Namibian movements, that was the language they talked. So it was replicated in AAM. People like Ruth [First] and others were writing in that sort of mode, so it was very dominant.

I think in a way it changed in the post-Soweto period, not because there was a big political argument about it. I don't know – I think at that early stage – there was a big conference that we organised in 1969 on the theme of British imperialism in Southern Africa, or something like that. I don't know how much argument and debate there was, but I think it was a gradual process from the late '70s, certainly by the early '80s, where that language just didn't make sense. It wasn't that anybody got up and said, 'We should stop doing it'. I think it was that the Movement put down deeper roots in the British movement. I think that in the late '60s, it was quite isolated as an organisation. It did incredibly important work, but it couldn't turn out the kind of numbers that we were turning out in the 1980s. And some personal factors had an effect. Bob Hughes became Chair of AAM 1976 and then in1980[1] Huddleston took over as a president. Trevor Huddleston wouldn't use that kind of language, so the people in that kind of leadership position would use different language and talk in a different way. I think also that the liberation movements abandoned some of the rhetoric of that period as well. So I think that was more, essentially, the Movement in the late '60s, early '70s.

You need to talk to Abdul Minty, but my impression is that it was a small group of people, very dedicated, very committed, who, if they hadn't done that work, I think personally that the whole history of South Africa would have been very different. After all, who supported the ANC? A handful of African countries. The ANC had lots of problems with most African states in the late '60s and early '70s. Zambia and Tanzania were having lots of problems with the ANC; Nigeria was way in a different world, in reality. So you had the ZANU-Soviet split, with the Chinese very anti-ANC. So there was the Soviet Union and the East European countries; there was Cuba. What made a difference was that you had, not just in Britain, but also in the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries, groups of people who were very committed to the South African struggle and understood the role of the ANC, and understood that, despite all the problems, the ANC was the only force that could keep all this together and somehow create something new. I think that if those people hadn't been there, then you could easily have got a change in the OAU [Organisation of African Unity] and the UN, and that the whole history would have been different, so that come Soweto, come a new generation, looking for something, the ANC would have found it very difficult to respond to that new challenge.

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[1] Trevor Huddleston became president of the AAM in 1981.

HT: It was a bit different in Sweden. The ANC representative in Sweden had conflicts with the Africa groups being too sectarian, in the sense that they were very hard-line and anti-imperialist.

M. But that's much more in the mid- and late '70s?

HT: Yes.

MT: That also has to do with the fact that, as I said, the ANC dropped a lot of this rhetoric.

HT: Oh, you mean that's a change for the ANC as well?

MT: It wasn't the only factor. There was the Socialist International mission when Olaf Palme took a renewed interest. He had been involved in the early '60s – in one of those two big conferences that the Movement organised.[2] Then he re-emerged as a very important figure, well-respected in Socialist International circles. There was a kind of crisis in Southern Africa – the ANC got very near to having its office closed down in Lusaka, because it was pro-MPLA. There was a crisis period in the mid '70s, and I think by that stage, again, I am just going on my personal impressions and recollections, the ANC had been in crisis since 1969 and then gradually Tambo and other people were rebuilding the organisation. So that by about the mid-'70s it had become much more coherent as an organisation, and therefore had a clearer strategic view as to where it was going. In that late '60s and early '70s period it was armed struggle, armed struggle, armed struggle. There was nothing else going on. But it was evident working with ANC people, that there was another dimension to what was going on. There were the Durban strikes in the early '70s; other organisations began to be formed; there was Soweto; and there was a recognition that the kind of popular mobilisation inside the country was going to grow. I think that that meant that the ANC refocused itself within South Africa, and its approach became more sophisticated, more mature.

Certainly I am not aware of any formal exchange of views or differences of opinion between us and the ANC at that stage about that issue. I think if there was a change of language it was because, first of all, the liberation movements were talking in a more – it's wrong to say more mature – but they were less rhetorical. I think that the Movement was forced to find ways to get its message across to a larger constituency, and therefore was less concerned – it never had seen itself, which I think may be different from the Africa Groups, it didn't see itself as an ideological movement with a role of educating people in Britain about imperialism, capitalism and the rest of it. Although you couldn't escape from some of these issues, when British business was playing such a big role in

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[2] Olof Palme chaired the International Conference on Namibia organised by the AAM in Oxford in 1966.

South Africa, you had to make some comments about why British business did these things. Even at that stage, we wouldn't have thought that by going along and being nice to some directors, we were going to convince them to pull out of South Africa. So there was a sense in which we saw ourselves as being in a kind of combat with big business. But it wasn't because we were against big business, but because that was the logic of the facts. We didn't think that we were going to get companies to pull out just by going along and saying: 'We have produced this memorandum. These are the conditions of your workers. Please pull out.' They weren't going to do that. There was this long experience. And so there was an extent to which we were engaged in a fight against those companies which were involved in South Africa. That meant that we worked closely with the trade unions, who were also, in a different way, in conflict with those companies. So there was a sense in which the organisation was perceived, all the way through really, to be more allied with the left than the right. Whether we handled all these things in a sophisticated way is another matter. I remember when we started meeting companies – we met, I think, the Chair and senior directors of BP around 1978–79, we started again an approach whereby, even if a company was investing in South Africa, if there was something we wanted them to do, we were prepared to go along and meet them and put a case. So we were beginning to move away from saying that all those companies were terrible exploiters and that we were just going to picket them and protest against them. We began to have more sophisticated strategies of dealing with them as well. So I think the language was a reflection of that, rather than the other way around.

HT: In Sweden the Metal Union was against sanctions and there were many battles between the ISAK and the Metal Union. Was there that kind of split within the workers movement in Britain? It's odd that in Sweden, on the one hand you had the Social Democratic government under Palme, and then you had various forces, mostly the Metal Union and Lars-Gunnar Eriksson. He tried to find another way. Did you have same tensions?

[Part of tape missing here?]

MT: … undoubtedly, if they had cooperated together better, and coordinated activities, there would have been more strength in the liberation struggle. But one sensed that behind it all was a kind of contest between Swedish social democracy and the Soviets. They were trying to have influence in the frontline states, within the ANC and the other liberation movements, so it was quite complicated. Going back to the question about the trade unions, as far as Britain is concerned the trade union situation was also quite complicated. We had a large number of trade unions affiliated to us, especially after Soweto, and most of them supported our policies. On the other hand, those same trade unions were affiliated to the TUC, and the TUC in turn was affiliated to the ICFTU, and a lot of the individual unions were also affiliated to their trade secretariats, and there were complex relations with the unions in South and Southern Africa. You will find out because Christabel is talking about it on Wednesday. But in 1973, the TUC sent a delegation to South Africa, invited at the initiative of TUCSA [Trade Union Congress of South Africa], which was effectively a white trade union centre. That led to a shift in TUC policy, so that they began talking about being against investments in South Africa, if the trade unions weren't recognised, so it was the beginning of this code of conduct approach, which Leon Sullivan in the States advocated and some of the churches in this country did. It was taken up and became a sort of easy code of conduct. It was an approach that we thought was designed to undermine the sanctions campaign, so we were quite critical of it.

The other problem was the links that existed with some of the unions – some of them were genuine unions – that either had their politics hidden, but some of them were clearly reading the international trade union movement scene. They thought that they would do best in terms of being able to get funds and resources if they distanced themselves from the ANC, because the ANC was allied to SACTU and SACTU was in the World Federation of Trade Unions. They thought 'We don't want to have anything to do with these reds, therefore, if we go to trade secretariats – you understand about trade secretariats? – these bodies would link up with groups in South and Southern Africa. So individual trade unions here found themselves under three countervailing pressures. AAM would say one thing; ANC/SACTU roughly the same thing, but not always exactly the same; and the TUC might say something slightly different. Then, for example, there was an international bank union body, but they recognized the TUCSA trade union – I mean it was a union that was mainly a white union, a parallel union (white unions had parallel unions for black workers). We were condemning these parallel unions, we would not have anything to do with them. So the bank workers would come back and say, 'We have met our fellow unions and they don't want sanctions, they don't want the ANC'. That was used against us, so there were some real problems, and they were also affected by the problems between SACTU and the internal trade unions as they developed in the '80s. So it was quite a complicated issue.

By the mid-80s, we had resolved these problems, because in a way these issues became less important once the UDF and COSATU were established in South Africa. There was a point of reference that people could deal with, and so our role changed. Before that, when there was nothing that you could really say was representative, and functioning legally or semi-legally within South Africa, people would come for our advice, and what we said counted much more. But once COSATU was there, if a trade union wanted to do something, we said 'Well, talk to COSATU, get their advice'. People were coming over all the time, so we would arrange meetings with people. We didn't have to deal with some of the more difficult, complicated things. We could defer to the South Africans. UDF people came over, so if people wanted advice about something they could talk with them. It became a lot easier, and so our job, especially in the mid- to late '80s, was much more to concentrate on mass public mobilisations for sanctions, for Mandela's release, against death sentences, for Namibian independence, etc. Some of the nuances of policy became less critical. By that time there was a kind of almost universal consensus on sanctions. You were talking about the LO [the Swedish trade union confederation]. I know there was a famous report from the Metal Workers, but that was more late '70s, wasn't it?

HT: There was one LO report in the mid-70s that was conducted by a man who later became the spokesman for big industry, Åke Magnusson, but during the whole of the 1980s there was a strong debate between, on the one hand, ISAK and, on the other hand, the Metal Union. They constantly brought people – or at least a couple of times – from South Africa, like Daniel Dube. I don't whether that was NUMSA [National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa].

MT: Yes, NUMSA.

HT: They invited him to a Metal Union Congress, where some members brought the issue up, and Daniel Dube did not say anything about sanctions.

MT: This problem with NUMSA was a particular one. It began when there was a South African metalworkers union, which was very much a non-ANC, non-SACTU, non-Congress trade union. NUMSA was a major problem right through 1985–87. At the time, we were trying to get across a message in this country which was relatively simple. If, on the other hand, you were an official in Ford or General Motors, and you were posed with the question 'Do you want Ford to withdraw?' and your members are working there, what do you say? So long as these unions were completely political unions, fine. But once they had members, they had got to respond to their members' wishes, and it takes a lot of political education to say, 'Oh, yes we want you to pull out'. So it was quite a tense problem, and there were a lot of people who had their own hang-ups about sanctions inside South Africa who were playing games in the process. So that within South Africa there was a kind of anti-sanctions kind of lobby.

It was more acute over the academic and cultural boycotts, but it was same kind of problem. It was easy, if musicians waned to go to South Africa and the Musicians Union said 'No, if you go to South Africa, you lose your card'. Then they couldn't perform anywhere, so they wouldn't go. Then you had cultural bodies linked to the UDF in South Africa saying, 'We have got to develop our struggle, and how can we develop our struggle in the cultural field, independent of the progressive cultural movement worldwide. We want to have people from abroad coming. It will help us get our message across. It will popularise us, etc. So want Nicaraguan musicians or Cuban musicians, or British musicians who were progressive'. But how do you go to the Musicians Union and say 'You can have this progressive person go, but not the other person'. The progressive person may well be somebody who is rich and famous, because the South Africans want someone rich and famous to fill their halls and give them political strength.

Then they would say that Denis Healey [shadow Foreign Secretary] came to South Africa, and he spoke at a meeting, or that some church people went and they spoke. They asked why people like that could go and speak at meetings, when we were saying that a cultural group shouldn't go, who were going to play at a concert with them, in order to increase their profile. So there were areas of ambiguity about the boycott. We had a huge conflict: *Gay Men's Press*, which was a publisher of gay literature here, was approached by gay organisations in South Africa, who were linked to the UDF. We talked to the UDF and they said, 'Sure, they should able to send stuff out here, because if we can empower the gay movement we will make sure that it is aligned with the national liberation movement – we don't want gay and lesbian people to be apolitical'. So we turned a blind eye to stuff being exported and then people who had a problem with Gay Men's Press said that we didn't understand about gay politics in Britain. They started protesting against us for allowing Gay Men's Press to send material, and they occupied Gay Men's Press and said that we had dual standards in terms of the boycott.

On the other hand, UDF and COSATU people used to come over to this country and we would campaign for the [inaudible] in South Africa. We spent a lot of time going around buying computers for them, because they needed computers. So once the mass organisations inside South Africa began effectively to unban the ANC, then there were bound to be conflicts and contradictions in the boycott. It was inevitable. We wanted the airlines not to fly South Africa, but were we going to refuse to meet someone from the UDF who was flying in on a South African plane? No! So these problems came from the victories of the struggle.

I think that the earlier problem was much more important, and that that was much more to do with the fact that there were some very substantial people in the trade union movement internationally who were not keen on sanctions, and who believed, rightly or wrongly, that there could be some kind of gradual erosion of apartheid through economic development, and that that was a way to solve things. They thought that the ANC and the liberation movements had got it completely wrong. So it was a kind of very reformist view of how change would come in South Africa. For a mixture of reasons, they were lukewarm about sanctions, if not hostile, and were very hostile to SACTU especially, but also to the ANC. That kind of problem was a very different problem from the problem that there was with NUMSA in the mid-'80s, although there may have been some of the same people involved. But the nature of the problem was very different. So although there were people from the previous period who were grabbing this as a reason to justify what they had said in the '70s, the reason why NUMSA in the '80s was taking a different position was much more because this trade union was actually taking off. It was growing, but there were a lot of people in NUMSA who were not firmly wedded to the ANC perspective, and therefore found it difficult to argue internally the case of sanctions. Under those circumstances it would have been hypocritical for them to come abroad and say that they were for sanctions, when they weren't able to say to their own members, working in American or British companies, that they wanted those companies to close down. They couldn't do that, it would have been very, very difficult. We had a similar discussion with Alec Erwin, who is now the Minister of Trade, and there was a lot of tension about it. We had a constituency – the solidarity organisations had a constituency – where we had to be delivering something; we had to keep that constituency with us. And the trade unions in South Africa and the other democratic organisations in South Africa had another kind of constituency. And what applied to one did not necessarily apply to the other. So there was a tension there.

HT: What were the AAM's relations with the government?

MT: We always sought a relationship, in the sense that we would seek meetings, we would present memorandums, we would present arguments to them. So although rhetorically we would condemn Thatcherism, that didn't mean that we had broken off relations. All the way through, whatever initiatives we were taking, we would want to present the case – whether it was for protection for ANC representatives who were here, physical protection after Dulcie September was killed [in Paris]. We would go and say, 'Look, you must provide some protection'.

HT: Were you received by government officials all the time?

MT: Yes, we saw the Foreign Secretary and the Home Secretary – that's like the Minister of Interior. Those were the only two Ministers that we would have meetings with. With the Home Office it would be about South Africa's illegal activities here …

HT: So they never refused to see you?

MT: You might not get a meeting when you wanted it, and not at the level that you wanted, so I think we only saw Thatcher once, although we asked, but we would then see the Foreign Secretary.

HT: Did you ever receive any funds, any money, from the government?

MT: The only money that was ever received in any connection was during International Anti-Apartheid year in 1978-79. We set up an International Anti-Apartheid Year Coordinating Committee. AAM serviced it, but it was a committee that consisted of 30 to 40 organisations, including Conservatives, Labour and Liberals, and it was when there was a Labour government in power, and the British government had voted for this anti-apartheid year resolution at the UN. David Owen was the Foreign Secretary. When we had set this committee up, we had a meeting with a junior minister in the Foreign Office, and they agreed to put a limited amount of money into the committee. It was administered by us and I think that Brian Brown [Africa Secretary of the British Council of Churches] was the Treasurer or Vice-chair. So the British Council of Churches were involved, the United Nations Association and the TUC, as well as ourselves. That was the only time that any cheque was ever issued, not to the AAM, but to this Coordinating Committee. It did not have any position on sanctions or on the ANC. It was just a committee to educate the public about how bad apartheid was, so it was a very uncontentious committee. But this again shows the difference from where AAM was ten years before. Ten years before we would never have gone into a committee like that. It was an AAM initiative, and it was partly because we wanted to be able to reach a wider constituency and at the same time keep our own integrity. So there were occasions when we would go into these kind of wider initiatives. We had a Nelson Mandela Coordinating Committee and various initiatives like that, where we might be the people doing all the work, but with a more limited objective, a limited policy framework. But that [International Anti-Apartheid Year] was the only time [that the AAM received government funding]: other than that, never.

HT: So, international relations – what were the important organisations that AAM cooperated with? More specifically, what were your relations with Swedish organisations?

MT: There were different stages. In the earlier period, in 1977 there was a big international conference in Lisbon, which was largely an ANC initiative, a kind of post-Soweto conference. But it was held in the climate of the new regime in Portugal as well. It was held a year after Soweto, and all the liberation movement leaders were there, although it was opposed by the Portuguese Socialist Party, so it was quite complicated. Politics in Portugal was complicated. There was a Swede who was quite involved in it – Hans Franck …?

HT: Hans-Göran Franck, Social Democrat Member of Parliament.

MT: Yes, so the following year, there was this organisation called ICSA, the International Committee on Southern Africa. It was essentially a coordinating committee, and it was the first kind of coordinating structure that I was involved with. There was a Secretariat, formed in London, with representatives of ANC, SWAPO and ZAPU – full-time people working there – and it was meant to be a link between the liberation movements and the solidarity movements. Hans Franck was either on the Secretariat, or something to do with it, and the Swedish Africa groups and some other Swedish groups were involved as well. There were also, from time to time, informal meetings of some of the major anti-apartheid movements in Europe. Whenever there was a big UN conference, we always used to meet either before or afterwards, or sometimes during the conference, so it was mainly the movements who were invited to UN gatherings who would get together.
In 1977, as well as the Lisbon Conference, the UN had a big conference in Lagos, and all of us went. We spent most of the time meeting among ourselves and left the UN people to get on with their thing. Mr Reddy, who worked at the UN, would also convene consultations from time to time, so it was a very informal kind of structure. ICSA was an attempt to try and transform that, but it fell under East-West tensions and the ZAPU-ZANU division complicated matters as well, because Mugabe was at the Lisbon conference, but ZANU was not on the Secretariat, although ZAPU was. So there was a problem about the Zimbabwean representation. The Soviet Union was also quite keen on this whole initiative, so they were backing it, and that led to divisions. Some Social Democratic parties were involved, but others not, and some individuals were, but others not, so it was quite difficult. The frontline states and the liberation movements were very firmly committed, with the exception of Tanzania, which was slightly more hesitant, which was partly because Tanzania was closer to China than to the Soviet Union.

I think Nyerere was not wanting, you know, was Chair of the frontline states and I think he was trying to keep himself slightly above some of the machinations that were going on. They were informally involved, but not as committed as others – especially the Mozambicans and Angolans, who were very committed. They had just got independence. They had been liberation movements. They knew the problems that liberation movements had, and so they saw it as a very good idea. So ICSA was a framework. It didn't last long. I think it lasted for two or three years, maybe a bit longer.

But it was the first attempt to have something formal. After that the only structure that really did take off properly was in 1987. The ANC held a big World Conference against Apartheid in Arusha, and we had had a meeting of European anti-apartheid groups in the summer of 1985, when the EEC was about to consider a programme of sanctions. We met in Brussels and we drew up a list of demands. The EEC adopted its first package of sanctions; they were very limited, but they were agreed on. That was in September 1985, and it was a just a one-off meeting. Then the following year, Johnny Makatini, who was the Head of the ANC International Department, was very critical that we didn't coordinate properly to push for further EEC sanctions. In September 1986 Britain agreed that it would support coal sanctions, and the Germans blocked them. Over that summer, Johnny tried various things to get us together and for one reason or another it did not happen. He said that we must get our act together on the European level. So when ANC had the conference in Arusha in 1987, we met together. The UN was also proposing something, under its auspices, to which we said 'No', because it meant the PAC being involved and all those kind of problems. So we met in Germany and eventually set up a Liaison Group of European Anti-Apartheid Movements in Athens in September 1988. That functioned right through to 1994.

Maybe on reflection I should have put this slightly differently. The contacts we had were at different levels. First and foremost, there were our relations with the liberation movements. Then, right from the very beginning – if you read about the birth of AAM – there was a very strong link with the Committee of African Organisations, and many of the people involved in that moved on to be in parties that came to power or were involved in the independent new African states – we always had a very good working relationship with many of the African states. Obviously they played a pivotal role, especially during the period when I was involved with the frontline states grouping, and then SADCC [Southern Africa Development Coordinating Committee]. Then what was also very important for AAM was its relations with the UN and the UN Special Committee Against Apartheid. It is very difficult, without having been involved, to appreciate just how important that was, especially during the period when Mr Reddy was the head of the Centre against Apartheid. His successors, particularly Mr Moussouris, who was there during the final stage, were also important. That relationship was very significant.

HT: When did Mr Reddy leave?

MT: In the early 1980s, but for the first few years afterwards the relationship that he established continued. That is to say that we were invited to meetings that the UN organised, and often that provided an opportunity for people to meet, because we didn't have the money to meet otherwise. It meant that we had contacts with groups in New Zealand, Australia and Japan, as well as groups nearest to us in Ireland, the EEC countries, etc. So the UN framework was very important. To a lesser extent there was a UN NGO [non-governmental organisation] community, and there was an NGO Committee on Racism and Apartheid. It held its meetings in Geneva, and that led us into some of the international NGO structures, although we had problems with that because the IUEF [Inter-University Exchange Fund] was involved. You know the IUEF story.[3]

The other relations tended to be – if you look at the whole history of the Movement, certainly for the 20 years I was there – very ad hoc. That is to say that if there was a rugby team going to New Zealand then we would liaise with New Zealanders – there is a big New Zealand community here. What happened in Britain helped them in New Zealand, and vice versa, if we had big campaigns here and needed some international support, we made contacts with people. So when, for example, there was the whole growth of a solidarity movement in the US, we regularly had top figures from the States coming over and addressing our rallies. The relationship was ad hoc, and in reality this was because the nature of the anti-apartheid movement varied from country to country, the policy varied, and the social and political composition varied. Although our Movement had its closest relationship with the ANC, it was not an exclusive relationship. Right through to the end we invited the PAC to our National Committee meetings as an observer organisation, and formally it had the same status as the ANC.

We were a secular organisation, but when I worked for the Movement, the President was always a bishop – Bishop Ambrose Reeves and then Archbishop Trevor Huddleston. We previously had Barbara Castle from the Labour Party and David Steel, who became the Leader of the Liberal Party. So we were a secular organisation. If you look at other groups, their origins were different. The group in the Netherlands, Kairos, came out of the churches. There were groups which were more trade union focused. Some groups came together out of social formations. So the reality was that it was very difficult to organise any structure where you had a common decision-making process. There were political factors as well. We had more resources than solidarity movements in African and Asian countries, so when there were meetings taking place, how could they participate? Did you only want those who could get there because they would get a government ticket? But we were very much NGOs, so there was a kind of North–South issue about the involvement of groups. It wasn't just Africans – there were Caribbean groups who did fantastic work, but they did it within the Caribbean. We were in contact with them, but few of them would have had the resources to travel around and attend meetings and consultations. There was also an East–West problem: over the years we had a relationship the Soviet Solidarity Committee. Bob Hughes, when he was a Labour MP, visited them twice, and they came and visited Britain. But we had different approaches. Although we had some common points of interest, we had differences as well, and there were some movements that would not wish to have anything to do with the solidarity movements in Eastern Europe. I expect that there were some groups that they [the East European organisations] didn't want to deal with, so you had a political situation which was underpinned by, on the one hand, Cold War tensions and by the tensions that existed between Social Democratic parties and Communist parties in western Europe. So I think that in general there was a reluctance on the part of the British AAM to get too involved in structures unless we were confident that they were going to further solidarity work, and not become areas where there were a lot of tensions and difficulties. We were encouraged by the ANC, SWAPO and ZAPU to become involved in ICSA, which was the continuation committee I talked about from the big Lisbon Conference. It did some important work, but it had its limitations, not least because it was a solidarity movement which was bottom up, if you like, in most countries. The movements were also quite disparate in the way that they approached things, so one could easily work with one group about the oil embargo, another about people on death row, etc., but to get them all to agree on this or that campaign became much more difficult because they had internal demands, priorities. There was an attempt by some of the Nordic groups – it was one of the few times I went to Sweden – to try and get something coordinated. But that got involved in this East–West conflict thing in the sense that a lot of the anti-apartheid movements that were perceived to be close to Communist Parties or very close to the ANC, or groups in which Communists were playing a role, were not invited, while other groups were. So an image was created that the way that these meetings were convened was not very inclusive.

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[3] Craig Williamson, who worked for the IUEF, was an agent of the South African security services.

HT: When was that?

MT: I think, but I am not sure, that it was in the autumn of 1987. I remember it very well – it was in some kind of church residence, near Stockholm.

HT: Västerås?

MT: I can't remember. But it must have been before 1988. We were on a drafting committee, and we had a room which was about the third of the size of this, with the people there all smoking, trying to draft a communiqué.

HT: But which Swedish groups could that have been?

MT: It was ISAK.

HT: To me it would sound strange that they would not invite people who were close to the Communist Party, because I the Africa Groups was always very influential in ISAK, and the Chairman of the Africa Groups was a member of the Communist Party.

MT: I'm just saying what happened. For example, in the Netherlands there were two groups, the Dutch AAM and the Holland Committee. There were lots of differences, but one factor was that within the AAM, there were people who had been involved in the Communist Party. The Dutch AAM tended to be more ideological and closer to the ANC, whereas the Holland Committee was more diffuse. In France there was a movement that had started off as very pro-black consciousness and moved beyond that. It was called MACAO, Movement Anti-Apartheid Campagne Anti-Outspan. It started off as a kind of anti-Outspan campaign, but it drew on various forces in French political life – some church people, some Trotskyists, some from the Socialist Party. But it was very hostile to the Communist Party, and at that stage in France there was a movement against racism, which was the main anti-racist organisation, with a whole programme on Southern Africa. It wasn't exclusively Communist, but in French terms it was very close to the

Communist Party. So one of these groups would be invited, but not the other. There was even some debate about whether or not the AAM should attend, but we decided – because our attitude was to take part in initiatives like this – to try and encourage an inclusive approach rather than an exclusive one. The only structure that really worked well, because it had a very clearly defined structural role, was the group coordinated in the EC [European Community] (later the EU). That was because we agreed that it would just be the anti-apartheid movements in the different countries. We were criticised for that – it was exclusive – but its purpose was simply to deal with any matters that related to the EC, so it was about the European Parliamentary Commission and European policy.

HT: About lobbying the EU?

MT: Yes, and, because it had very defined objectives it was very successful. But it was only set up after we had a meeting in Bonn in February 1988. Its founding actual meeting was in Athens because the Greeks had the EU Presidency, in October 1988. But it still exists; it continued through to 1995 and then it reformed as a kind of European Network. The lesson was that if you set up something with a particular objective, then it was quite easy to coordinate. But if we tried to debate other issues or other campaigns, I think we would have had the same kind of problems that other groups had, because you then bring in issues like whether Namibia should be a priority as opposed to South Africa, or should we be lobbying on this or that issue. And when you had so many different potential items on the agenda and set up an international structure, everyone is going to come with their demands. But there would have been be no capacity to deliver, because there was no money. The only way you could have resourced such a body would have been with government money, and certainly in the US, Japan and some Western countries, groups would have been very reluctant to get involved in anything that depended on governmental funding. So by its nature, whatever coordination went on had to be ad hoc and around specific objectives. For example, when the debt crisis happened, the ANC called a meeting of the different groups. They met, worked out plans, liaised and cooperated together. The Dutch groups working on the oil embargo did the same thing. When we decided to organise the Shell boycott, we got together the Dutch AAM, Holland Committee, groups in the US, and then wider groups coordinated together. If we had had e-mail we would have been able to develop better ways of coordinating. But the fax made an incredible difference – because you could discuss a document, send a draft document, people could comment on it and you could change it., So technology played its role as well.

HT: Do you remember when you started to use a fax machine?

MT: It must have been around 1987 or 1988. We didn't have a photocopier when I started working in AAM. We had to go out to get photocopies. We had no word processors – everything that we produced had to be duplicated. Every report we wrote had to be retyped every time it was rewritten. The technology that we now have makes campaigning much easier. Now, sadly in my view, English dominates, so that also facilitates cooperation in a way that it didn't previously. Then at meetings, if you didn't have translators, since English tended to be the language of the liberation movements, people who came to international meetings had to be English speaking.

In summary, our international contacts were very important – with liberation movements in Africa, non-aligned movement countries such as India at a governmental level, Commonwealth countries, which were very important as far as Britain was concerned, so we had good relations. There was a Commonwealth Southern Africa committee. Abdul Minty went to almost every Commonwealth country, representing AAM, to lobby for the Movement's policies. Then we worked with the UN, both the UN as an institution and the UN as a networking arrangement. Now, whenever there is a UN conference, there is always a kind of counter NGO conference, whatever UN institution it is, on women or environment or whatever. It was Mr Reddy who facilitated that whole arrangement, whereby grassroots NGO organisations were present whenever there were big international gatherings on anti-apartheid. I don't think enough has been said about that; it began a process which is now very common, where the NGO grassroots activists influence the international institutions in a way they never did prior to anti-apartheid initiatives in the UN.

HT: What about Swedish groups particularly?

MT: You need to talk to Abul Minty. Abdul was our Honorary Secretary and for part of the time I was working for AAM he was living in Britain, but for a period he lived in Oslo. So he tended to be the person who had most contact with the Nordic countries – at the governmental and NGO level. As you know, during the '80s there were gatherings set up by Nordic groups, so he was involved and he would be trying to lobby the government and at the same time he was the person in the AAM who had the closest relationship with all the NGO structures. I knew people from the Africa Groups, I suppose from the early '70s, when I first became involved nationally in AAM. There was a meeting on the Portuguese territories which was held here in 1974, where I met Africa Group people. The person I remember best is Mai Palmberg. Then we would meet at other other international meetings of various kinds, and I suppose it was then, when ISAK was founded, that there was the closest cooperation. I am still trying to remember the name of the woman who worked there. In terms of visits, as far as I can remember, the only times that I went to Sweden was once for this meeting that I was talking to you about, which I think was in 1987, and then also I was there when Mandela went in February–March 1990. There was a lot of traffic through London of Swedish people. They would come to London and visit us. But we were never a rich organisation, and so in terms of visits we depended on there being events like a UN conference. If there was a ticket, we would go. We would raise money to go to things that we regarded as important – high priority. So we would send someone to a Commonwealth Conference, or maybe something in Africa, but in general we didn't have a budget where we could just fly here, there and everywhere. So our relationships tended to be based on visits. People would come and brief us about things. Because Sweden wasn't in the EC, and because, with some exceptions, Sweden didn't have a large economic profile in Southern Africa, our cooperation tended to focus on countries that had similar campaigning agendas. So working with the Nordic countries wasn't such a priority as working with France or Benelux, or Germany or the US or Japan.

HT: I have the impression that there were sometimes discussions or disagreements between the Swedish groups and on the AAM in England on strategic issues. Does that rings a bell with you?

MT: There might have been, but it's not something that immediately comes to mind.

HT: On the one hand, if you compare the Swedish anti-apartheid movement with Britain, you might think that they were pretty close to their government. On the other hand, they were all the time criticising the Swedish government. We had this law in 1979, but ISAK was constantly saying that it was not effective. What people have told me is that people in the British AAM said that they shouldn't push it too far – they said that they would be happy if they could have had that kind of legislation ...

MT: I think the tension was a slightly different one. I don't remember it being a major issue, but we would tend to hold up the Swedish example as something to say, 'Look, Sweden is doing this, why can't you do this and that?' And then the government would turn around and say, 'But look, we are being praised by Trevor Huddleston or Abdul Minty or Bob Hughes or Mike Terry'. But I don't think it was ever a public issue. We were quite careful about how we handled it. We had the same problem with Denmark. Of the EC countries they had the best policy, and yet there were problems with Denmark. So how did you, on the one hand, keep the pressure on the Danish government, and at the same time turn round to other EU countries and say, 'Look, Denmark is doing this. Why can't you?' I think that because of the EU connection we had a more dynamic link with the Danish than with the Swedish groups. But it ebbed and flowed. Some of it was about personalities. The Swedish groups had a reasonable amount of resources. They were able to travel a lot to Southern Africa. The Africa Groups were involved in various projects in Southern Africa, so they had a programme and could take initiatives. Whereas, if you take Ireland, we used to cooperate a lot with them because we had very similar problems. Because Ireland is a small country, they would tend to talk about what we were doing and sometimes they would pick up on our campaigns. So I think that the British movement, how can I put it, would sometimes seem to be, to put it sociologically, in a kind of hegemonistic role over the solidarity movement. That's not true, but it was perceived as playing that kind of role. It was partly because we had liberation movement representatives in London, so often we had a hot line to what was going on. Once UDF and COSATU had been founded, there was traffic of people from South Africa through London. Often they would see us and ask us to take initiatives, and we had a good working relationship with them. I think the Swedish groups had much more of an autonomous kind of role, which was healthy – it's not a criticism of them, and they had their own approach, their own way of doing things, which wasn't necessarily identical to the British. But I can't remember any occasion where it was a source of conflict. There might be things which I can't remember, and there might well be things which Abdul was aware of that I wasn't. But in general we felt, especially after that Palme visit in 1975 or 1976, when he went to the Socialist International and took a much stronger position, and then when the Swedes came out with a stronger position on sanctions policy, they stepped up their support for IDAF and for the ANC … there is all this talk about Volvo diplomacy, there was a very proactive Swedish foreign policy, which was very important, historically, very important. At the same time we were linking up as much as we could. When was ISAK formed?

HT: 1979.

MT: From then on we liaised with ISAK. There was a UN sports meeting with SANROC [South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee] in Sweden that we sent someone to. Certainly we liaised on investment issues, and over the arms embargo, lobbying the Nordic countries, and in general co-operating on repression-type campaigns, on Mandela and political prisoners, on work on Namibia. But I suppose we were interfacing with people from Sweden at different levels. There was Michanek, who chaired IDAF. Then we would meet SIDA people quite regularly. They came to London and discussed things with us. We knew Bernt Carlsson from the Socialist International. He was a kind of roaming ambassador for a period, and when he was in London we would meet him. When he became Commissioner for Namibia, again we had a close working relationship. So there was a kind of multi-faceted relationship. We knew the diplomats – there were people in the Swedish mission who were responsible for Southern Africa. We knew the Swedish people working in IDAF, the Swedish IDAF Committee; it ebbed and flowed. Sometimes they were coming quite regularly to discuss issues, especially if they were trying to feel out their way to some new initiative – they might come and just brainstorm about how we saw things. And as I say, the Africa Groups initially and then ISAK – we tended to be much closer to ISAK than the Africa Groups. I think there was a feeling in the Africa Groups – how can I say, there was a tension between the Africa Groups and ISAK on some occasions.

HT: Yes, the Africa Groups in a sense formed ISAK, but it was intended to be something different, a broader thing, so there might have been tensions. Central people in the Africa Groups were active in ISAK all along. But the Africa Groups were viewed as a bit sectarian.

MT: They had an ideological view about Africa. Whereas we had our policies, our framework and our views about things. But we tended to be much more a campaigning organisation. We didn't see our task as educating public opinion about issues other than the Southern Africa solidarity work.

HT: The Swedish support for the ANC and IDAF was secret. It was somewhere between 50 and 75 per cent of the ANC's civil budget. Were you aware of the amount of the support?

MT: That would have been my understanding, yes, because I had worked for two years in IDAF, and I knew roughly the relationships between IDAF funding from different donors. Certainly it was evident, especially after the collapse of IUEF, that the educational money was going straight to the ANC. I would not have known what the percentage was, but where else would ANC get its money from? I knew some came from Eastern Europe, but I was also aware that it was nothing like what they were looking for, because I knew occasions when they were trying to get resources from the Soviets and not getting it, just from informal conversations with people. So where else were they going to get their money? They got money from churches, but it was a pittance. They got some money from Africa, but I knew also the problems that they had with many African states who would promise money, but didn't deliver. They got some from Denmark and some from the Netherlands. I would have thought that it was a big chunk, but I didn't know the percentage.

HT: Would you say that it was widely known in the active part of the AAM?

MT: No, I think it would have been known by about half a dozen people who worried about these things. But that wasn't why we existed.

HT: I asked you last time we met if you received money from the government and you said No. If you had been offered money from the British development agency or whatever, would you have taken it? Was it on principle that AAM did not take money from the government?

MT: I just don't think it arose. It would have been a different matter if British government policy could have been clearly described as being anti-apartheid, and then as a part of that policy, there was funding available. I think that then there would have been a debate in the AAM – I don't know what the outcome would have been. But there was no debate. At the time I am talking about there was a Labour government and it was beginning to shift its policy. It had supported the mandatory UN arms embargo, it had taken part in the big Lagos international anti-apartheid conference. Frank Judd, who had been involved in AAM, was the Minister who was sent there and talked about trying to reduce British investment. There were various think tanks going on that we were aware of, but weren't part of, with people close to the Foreign Office, in Chatham House. They were all debating what kind of policy options were available, and it was evident that under that Labour Government, especially when David Owen was the Foreign Secretary, there was the potential for a shift. I think that's one of the reasons why they voted for International AA Year and then were prepared to give some money for promoting the year. Who is to know whether, if Thatcher had not won the election in 1979, and then the crisis developed in South Africa, the Labour Government wouldn't have taken more decisive action. Or there might have been a Conservative Government that got itself into a broad anti-apartheid camp. But there wasn't. So from 1979 to 1990, we were in conflict with the government over most issues. So the question just never arose, and because of government policies towards South Africa, we would never have got involved in anything to do with funding programmes in Southern African countries. We encouraged British government support for Southern African countries, and Thatcher went to Zimbabwe and said [inaudible]. So we did as much as we could to make the British Government give support to the frontline states and Southern African countries. I don't think taking money from the government would have even been debated within the Movement, unless there was a government that taken some kind of credible anti-apartheid initiative.

HT: OK, so let's move on to the media – a wide sort of question to begin with. How would you characterise the importance of media and information in the anti-apartheid struggle?

MT: Well, it runs at a whole lot of different levels. I think the fact that we were able to produce our own monthly newspaper monthly for the whole way through until the changes happened whole time was of fundamental importance. It gave us a way through which we could speak to our members and supporters at a time when the coverage of Southern Africa was very uneven, the sort of ebb and flow of coverage, and the character of that coverage varied a lot, so there were occasions when it was clear that there was a kind of anti-apartheid sentiment being expressed in the media coverage. But often, even when you could characterise the coverage as being anti-apartheid, it didn't move on and give any fair coverage to policies and methods that would end apartheid. So something horrible would happen in South Africa and it would be Helen Suzman would be quoted as condemning it – not the ANC or the Anti-Apartheid Movement. So there was a need to be able to communicate about policy questions, as well as just about terrible apartheid is. There was also an underlying element in the media that saw Africans as victims and was patronising towards them, rather than seeing the African majority as being the decisive force for change, whatever happened, it wasn't supporting their struggle. Then there were the other publications we produced. And obviously later on, the ANC were doing those news briefings, and various other material was available which gave people information.

HT: The ANC were doing news …?

MT: They did a kind a news briefing, which was mainly extracts from the South African papers, so it was a way of getting information that didn't appear in the British press.

HT: Did the ANC in London do that?

MT: Yes, and then we sent it around to other groups. Then secondly, the most important thing in terms of changing people's views was film documentary work. A very large number of documentaries were made over this period. Right back before I started, there was a film which looked at the Transkei. There were frequently film crews that went in to South Africa, and there was very good documentary material, which was then screened on television. But in general, apart from critical occasions like Soweto and Steve Biko's death and other events like that, until the '80s, you got short, rather superficial television and radio coverage. The reporters, with a few exceptions, were very close to the white media establishment in South Africa. They didn't have any imagination as to how to reach beyond a kind of *Rand Daily Mail* approach to the South African question. They just perceived any change in South Africa as being white led – a kind of gradualist approach. We tried our best. We would meet journalists who were going to South Africa for BBC or ITN, and we tried to encourage them to make contacts with people. We did a lot of work whenever documentary teams were going out, suggesting people they should contact. So even in the pre-UDF days, at least we could point people in this direction or that direction in terms of sources of information, areas that they could go to, contacts that they could make. As far as national newspaper correspondents were concerned, on the one hand there were the broadsheets, where there was some good reporting. I am not disputing that. But they still had very much the same approach. Every January or February, the ANC would make a statement, and then there would be the speech of the President or the Prime Minister before the beginning of the parliamentary session. Whatever was said by Botha or de Klerk, that would get coverage. The ANC statement never got coverage. Certainly a lot of people in the media were fascinated by any alternative to ANC. So whether it was a Bantustan leader initially, or Buthelezi, or when the tricameral parliament was set up, people associated with that, they had a gradualist approach and a kind of perception that change would come from white-blessed initiatives. The idea that the African people themselves were capable of confronting and creating a situation where there could be a genuine transfer of power really didn't enter into their imagination until, maybe, the mid to late '80s. And to a lot of journalists, to be honest, it never happened. The other thing which was always a problem was editorial policy. Until the mid 80s there wasn't a single national paper that was sympathetic to sanctions. Most of them had a very dismissive attitude towards the ANC, and for that matter to SWAPO in Namibia, and before that to the Patriotic Front in Zimbabwe. Obviously media coverage played a role, because something like Soweto happens and there is a response there from people who had been conscientised about the issues. Basically you can see that our activity as a movement was influenced by events in South Africa and how those events in South Africa, and Southern, Africa, were reflected in the media. We didn't act in isolation from the media, but I think overall our strategy was not one in which we would take short cuts. We were criticised for this, sometimes quite heavily criticised, for not putting enough emphasis on the media. But I think that sometimes you can get media coverage, but you pay a price for it. The media want to hear something, and what we were saying wasn't necessarily very popular. I was talking to you earlier about the rugby tour that came here in 1969–70. A press statement was put out in Abdul's [Minty] name. The *Guardian*, which is supposed to be a liberal, progressive newspaper, said, 'Well, we are very interested in what you have to say, but isn't there a white person to say it, because that would be more credible?' I remember phoning the Foreign Desk at the *Guardian* about Steve Biko's death – before it hit the wires – and I said that another person had been killed in detention. The person who answered said, 'You are always phoning up about people being killed in detention in South Africa, what's new?' I said, 'You wait', and just put the phone down. Now if I had phoned up and said, 'You know Steve Biko, who is meant to be this anti-ANC person, has been killed' and sold it in the way in which people were trying to distort politics in South Africa. This isn't a caricature of Biko. The whole question is quite complicated. But if I had said, 'Here is this guy and he is anti-communist and he is anti this and anti that', they might have run it. But that wasn't our role. We weren't trying to massage the news to get it into the media.

HT: So what were your basic media strategies?

MT: Well, first and foremost, we wanted to get the media to cover seriously, properly, what was happening in Southern Africa. Secondly, we wanted to make sure that as far as possible we influenced them to cover the resistance to apartheid – that meant sympathetic coverage of the liberation movements and positive portrayal of resistance. The third issue was to try and get coverage of the policy issues, the strategy agenda which was going to produce change. Then finally it was about trying, because that's what we were about, to get publicity for our own campaigns and initiatives. So what did that mean? It meant firstly as close as possible contact with people who were open to listening to us and took us seriously. We were very fed up with the BBC radio correspondent in South Africa, a guy called Graham Leach. We just documented the kind of material and talked to BBC Radio, to the radio news foreign editor. The next time Leach was over we had a session with him. Someone from ANC and I met up with him, with the foreign editor, and said 'Look, why this and why this?' So it was confrontational. But other times it was simply to encourage them to see a different side of the story, and with others who were more sympathetic, it was to point them in directions so that, if they were in South Africa, they would have some contacts. The media is full of people with different approaches, so whenever there was anybody who we could see was potentially sympathetic, we would try and provide them with material, discuss issues with them, explain things that they might not be fully aware of and brief them as much as possible. So we had a kind of briefing role. Then obviously we organised activities. Sometimes there would be people from the liberation movement here, or other people who could give press interviews or press conferences. Valli Moosa, who is now a government minister in South Africa, was the first UDF person to come abroad. I think it is mentioned actually in that speech of Victoria Brittain's. He just turned up at our office – no one had told us he was coming. He walked in and said who he was, and then we fixed up for him to be interviewed. So there was a profile of him in the *Guardian*. That's just one example. There were hundreds of occasions like that. There were also the activities that we organised. When we organised big demonstrations or rallies or pickets, we would contact news desks. On the first anniversary of Biko's death, for example, we had a huge banner with the names of everybody who had been killed in detention on the top of the steps at the church next to South Africa House. It was on the front page of a number of national newspapers. We tried to plan things which were visually exciting, or had a content which was going to get coverage. As time went on, we got more experienced and I suppose this is what partly characterises the changes in the 1980s. We worked with Jerry Dammers in producing that first Nelson Mandela record. Then Jerry and Dali Tambo, Tambo's son, and some other people set up Artists Against Apartheid, and that provided a way of reaching younger people. That led various artists – the Scottish group, what are they called?

HT: Simple Minds …

MT: That led Simple Minds to produce Mandela Day and so on. So that was one arena, using popular music as away of getting a message across. That led to the Mandela concert in '88, and the one that Mandela came to in 1990. Then obviously we were moving to a different milieu because we were putting on events over which we had effective editorial control, which were being broadcast around the world. So we moved from a situation of frustration, where nobody would ever cover anything that we did, into massive exposure. Even when you have got that massive exposure though, there were still issues we couldn't get proper coverage for. There were policy issues where we still found it very hard to get the media to take them up seriously. The other thing with the media was that we used it to expose things – in the *Guardian* and *Observer* in particular. I think that was largely because there were journalists there that we had a cooperative relationship with. So when we knew about breaches of the arms embargo – those kind of things – we would plant the material and give it to particular newspapers. In 1979, in the middle of a Commonwealth Conference in Lusaka, we got information that the British were training South Africans to use military radar equipment that they were exporting to South Africa. We broke it as a news story, all over the front page of the *Guardian*. It impacted in Lusaka on the Commonwealth conference and put the government on the defensive. We had strategies like that.

In the same way, when people were picked up and arrested for breaking into the ANC and PAC and SWAPO offices here – in that case there was a BBC correspondent who was a very good guy. So we went with the story and said, 'Look, they are appearing in court tomorrow. Can you run it on the radio?' We met them and they would publicise it. On *Newsnight*, there would be people there who did in-depth things about the British and the arms embargo. There were trials of people who had been breaking the arms embargo, so it was a very multi-faceted strategy. But its objectives were, I suppose, when I first started working at AAM, to get over the facts about apartheid. At that stage, the mid-70s, there was a sort of impact. Christabel gave me a copy of the article that you dug up from the early '60s about media coverage. I mean all that had died down, there was not very much serious analysis of apartheid. Then secondly, we wanted to get positive coverage about resistance, liberation movements – but not just liberation movements – students, whoever it was, and let their voice reach people in this country. So that it wasn't all about 'these poor blacks', but about resistance to apartheid. The third point was to get the policy issues addressed. And then, finally, to get publicity for our own campaigns and issues. Those were the objectives. I have not read James Sanders' book, but that covers the '70s, doesn't it?

HT: Right.

MT: I think that our media profile, our sophistication with the media, and our ability to reach and use the media in different ways changed fundamentally in the '80s. I would say the turning point was 1984 when Botha came here. We had three weeks notice. We put 50,000 people on the streets of London and we got fantastic media coverage. There were programmes explaining how we organised the demonstration. They covered us leafleting people before the march. The actual march and rally and all the things that we organised got a high profile. We had women with black sashes who walked down the street – they were all in the news. Trevor Huddleston and Abdul Minty met Thatcher to try to persuade her to call off the meeting. There was big media coverage, and I think that was the first time that we got covered for a long period of time. Previously we might have had a chunk of news coverage about this or that. But this was sustained coverage. Then of course after that everything began to move very rapidly in South Africa and the only thing which I think changed in that period was that the ANC itself – its media strategy or rather, I mean the media's attitude towards the ANC and the ANC's capacity to project its media image changed a lot. So it became less important for us to do some of the first bits of what we had been doing, because the whole thing developed a dynamic. People didn't need to come to see us. We told them to meet the UDF because they were above ground in South Africa. During the States of Emergency it might be different. You know when people were underground, then it might be that we could facilitate. But also by the mid-80s, the ANC's profile changed dramatically, so the ANC had its own contacts with the media; whereas in that first stage when I first started, there was a small ANC office here and a small exile community here. But very few press people would deal with the ANC then, so we were opening up doors for the ANC. Whereas by the '80s those doors were open, so there was less need for us to do that work, and there was much more of a focus on policy issues. But by that stage, part of it had become a domestic political issue, it was a fight in Britain about what kind of relationship Britain would have with South Africa. That became the dominant issue. I suppose from there on, there was a tendency for us to lose out in the media in the sense that once it became a domestic issue, if Thatcher said something, and the leader of the Labour Party and the Liberals condemned it, AAM was out of the picture. But that was a product of the success of our overall campaign. Sometimes we were annoyed because we weren't being interviewed on TV News or whatever – but in reality it was more important for us to get, for example, the Archbishop of Canterbury or Neil Kinnock to condemn what the government was doing. That carried more weight with the public than if Mike Terry said it. So there was a period when even at that stage we didn't always got the coverage that we would have liked to get, although other things happened like the Wembley concert. But that wasn't the only example of when we got coverage beyond anything that we could have ever imagined. Does that make sense?

HT: Yes, sure. A couple of other …

MT: Two other things. I have not talked about the black press, the church press and the left press in Britain. The black press was very important and gave us a lot of support and some of the black programmes on the radio did as well. There was a local radio programme called *Black Londoners* by a guy called Alex Pascal. He gave us tremendous coverage. Whenever we had anything going on they would put some record, you know Mighty Sparrow – a Caribbean calypso singer. He was the first person to do a real anti-apartheid song on sanctions.

HT: Which one was that?

MT: 'Don't buy apartheid', or something like that. It was very early on.

HT: Who did 'Free Nelson Mandela'?

MT: That was Jerry Dammers, but this was long time before that. So they would always be playing these records and whatever was going on we would be in the studio and talk about it. So the black press was very important, and black radio programmes. Then there was the church press, especially when the churches began to move. They all have their own weekly newspapers here, so you are reaching a very informed constituency, but a critical constituency. There was also the left press: *Tribune*, which was on the left wing of the Labour Party then; there was the *Morning Star*, a daily paper which was linked to the Communist Party; for a whole while there was a paper called *Labour Weekly*. There were other more far left papers – some of them might not agree with us on policy – they condemned us for being bourgeois or whatever – but even so they covered our activities. There was also *Time Out* and *City Limits*, which did some fantastic stuff for us. *City Limits* did a whole supplement about apartheid, fantastic stuff. That was all very important – on a short-term perspective, if we were organising a march and we wanted to get people out on the march. But there was a longer-term perspective of building up a consensus, among a larger group of people that apartheid was wrong, that it had to be isolated and that you had to support those who were resisting. That meant in a way that it was more important to have a good article in, say, the *Methodist Recorder* than on the front page of the *Guardian*, because if one could reach those groups, you built up a constituency of support. The same was true of the left press – the trade unions all have their own journals, and again, we got brilliant coverage. So those were reaching out to active trade unionists, convincing them about sanctions, trade unions in South Africa, about COSATU. That kind of long-term media strategy I think in the end achieved an awful lot. It wasn't headlines, but what it reached out into the churches, and through them to a lot of development agencies and charity groups, into the trade union movement, which then influenced the Labour Party, into the black community, not necessarily in the black community in terms of mass turn-out, but creating a kind of consciousness, support and understanding, which also had to be a factor in politicians' minds, because there is a sizeable black vote in this country. We did a survey: a majority of our members had no political affiliation, they were not in any political party, they were just people who joined AAM. They got involved in AAM because they had conviction and those people were the most active. But under them, there was a whole strata of people. One out of every three people in this country were committed to the boycott. That is a huge number of people. On the one hand it is not a majority, but if you sat on the tube and look at every third person and know that they are consciously not buying South African goods, that's incredible. That was not done through the established media. It was done by this hard long-term grass roots based strategy of building up a commitment and it achieved its objective. That's not to say it wasn't important to get front page news. We wanted it. But there was an understanding that this base that we were building was more important in the long term.

HT: One important media strategy within the new social movements was to stage spectacular events or symbolic events. I know that Ethel de Keyser worked a bit with that in the 1960s, dramatising Sharpeville and so on. Was that important? And did you react directly to reports from international news agencies that were obviously building on South African …

MT: Propaganda … ?

HT: Yes. And thirdly, did these highly publicised events in South Africa mean that it became easier for you to …?

MT: Well, on the first thing, if you look at the period when I was involved, there were very significant social changes here. We had the growth of the peace movement, of AAM itself, of the environmental movement. One of the things I mentioned was about how the majority of the members of AAM were not members of any political party. That in itself says a lot about the changes. In earlier years, campaigning on these issues would have been the preserve of a particular political party. I think that the Movement was an example of, and perhaps the most effective of, the single issue movements that developed in this country from the late '50s onwards. Obviously, when we were campaigning we had to reflect that. I gave you examples of how we tried to reach people. Music was an important avenue to reach a lot of young people. It was very important. It can't be overestimated. I think we learnt a lot about presentation, so that the material – publishing, producing, stickers, leaflets, flyers, all that kind of material – was something that came out of this period as well. We used to produce lots of T-shirts, with Free Nelson Mandela logos, stickers, badges, – those were things you didn't see much – political parties didn't produce that kind of stuff. It was single issue campaigns that began to promote these kind of things as a way of getting their messages across. It wasn't exclusively us, but I think that we played a very important role.

The imaginative, visual presentation of issues was something Ethel was particularly good at. But I mentioned this banner that we had. It listed all these detainees and we stood outside South Africa House. We did an event with crosses to remember the dead in Soweto on the anniversary of Soweto. We had a march in '76 after Soweto with a Landrover and a coffin, as a symbol of the victims of Soweto, but also to illustrate the collaboration, because these people had been killed from Landrovers. So at the head of the demonstration was this Landrover next to a coffin. So we used visual images to get messages across. There was a lot of creative ability in the Movement. We also some really talented graphic designers who helped. Some of our posters were designed by a guy called David King. They were very powerful, based on a kind of photomontage. That quality of graphic design was very important for us in reaching people. If you look pictures of the big rallies, we always had these huge background banners in Trafalgar Square. So we transformed Trafalgar Square from just being a space into something with a message. We had some very beautiful banners produced. There is another very powerful banner which was produced just after Soweto. A lot of people gave their talents free of charge in the artistic field. That was very very important, and it created the idea that there was a sort of linkage between cultural resistance, and the culture of what we were doing, with the politics of it. I think that not enough is understood about what worked and what didn't work and why it worked, how much was influenced by the fact that it was evident that within South Africa, there was this developing culture of resistance. It really caught people's imagination so that anti-apartheid was not just a political thing, not just the preserve of politicians and high-up people, but something that could be part of ordinary people's lives, something they could participate in.

As to major events, if stories came off the news agencies we would normally know about it very rapidly. It would come through Reuters or PA. We didn't have immediate access to them in the sense that we had a connection, but if a story came off Reuters or PA someone would phone it through to us, so we got a copy quite quickly – this was before fax machines. So we would know what was coming out from South Africa quite quickly and we would be in a position to react. So sometimes we would be demonstrating outside South Africa House within hours of something happening in South Africa. If someone was on death row, or if a death sentence was imposed, the next day we would protest. It was an immediate reaction, which I gather from people in South Africa was very important to them and helped give them self-confidence. Obviously, what we did would depend of the scale of the event. After Soweto we had a big national protest; other times it would be possibly simply to appeal to the government to intervene over someone in detention. There were other occasions when we would hear about things before they appeared anywhere else, because people would phone us who had relatives – ANC people here had relatives in South Africa who would phone them and then they would contact us. When the deaths in detention started happening again in the mid-70s, we got photographs of people who had been tortured that were sent out of South Africa to us, which we tried to get published in national papers but failed. So we had networks through which we would get stuff that wasn't coming through the wires.

HT: So obviously when Soweto happened, that made easier for you to do your work.

MT: Yes. Usually events in South Africa would generate a response. How that fitted in with what we were doing varied. Sometimes we would have our own programme and it would just give new momentum to that campaign. At other times we would just react. So after Soweto there was a big protest. But we focused on the need for the arms embargo to be made effective. We took a decision that that was what we would focus on. And within a year and half or so, the arms embargo became mandatory. It involved lots of hard work, whereas it has to be said that there were other times when what happened in South Africa just helped to create a climate. Especially after 1984, there was resistance in the townships, in Sharpeville and other places in '84. From then onwards, there were things that we had to react to, so we would picket or protest or make some kind of response. All this was simply reinforcing the kind of initiatives that we were taking. I think prior to the 1984–85, period, we reacted to events in South Africa – Biko's death, the banning of black consciousness organisations, the first declaration of a State of Emergency. So it would take over whatever we were doing, because it required some kind of emergency response. That was certainly true through to about 1984–85. But from then onwards we were much more on the offensive. We had some very clear priorities: there was Namibia, Mandela, there was the whole sanctions campaign. But again when there was the Sharpeville Six death sentence, we had to really reprioritise things because there was no way that we could allow that to happen. We had to intervene, to take initiatives, and that was one campaign that was very successful.

HT: I have got a final question. How would you define solidarity from your point of view, and second, if you were allowed to speculate, what do you think of the future of solidarity in the way that that was expressed in the AAM – in the context of increasing globalisation?

MT: Well, I think you have to be in solidarity with something, so you have to be in solidarity with a struggle, and that struggle has to be one where you have some affinity with its goals and its strategies. I think also it has to be a relationship which is a mutual relationship. It shouldn't be patronising. I don't think genuine solidarity is something where you should be dictated to as to every twist and turn of what you should do. I think the strength of the AAM was that although we were in solidarity with the struggle of the peoples in Southern Africa, our relationship was one of mutual respect, which meant that we had a degree of dependence, because at the end of the day we were a democratic organisation, reflecting the wishes of our members and supporters, and I think that that was a strength of the Movement. So solidarity doesn't mean some sort of paternalistic support but a mutual relationship. It's a relationship that a lot of people in the AAM gained an awful lot from. I think at the end of the day people in this country gained a lot from their involvement in that struggle. It opened up people's ideas as to the nature of racism. I think it gave people an understanding of the fact that there is an international dimension to the world that we live in and it helped people to understand more about the evils of racism. When economic and strategic interests are at stake, people can be blind to the consequences of those relationships. I think that some of the concerns which have subsequently been expressed about our relations with Indonesia over East Timor, and at the moment what is going on with Chile and Pinochet – I think our Movement helped raise people's consciousness about the fact that we can't allow a situation where an economic relationship dictates other forms of relationship, so people were profiting from apartheid.