

Interview with Mike Sparham by Suresh Kamath, 19th of August, 2013, for the Anti-Apartheid Movement Archives Committee project Forward to Freedom
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SK: This is Suresh Kamath about to interview Mike Sparham on Monday the 19th of August 2013.

Mike, could you start off by telling us a few personal details? Your name, age, place of birth and your occupation at the time of your anti-apartheid activity.

MS: Yes, sure. My name is Mike Sparham, I'm now 63, and I was born in London and lived in London nearly all my life. And at the time of my involvement with the AAM, I was a trade union official with one of the predecessor unions of the Public and Commercial Services Union. At the time it was called the Society of Civil and Public Servants and then it became the National Union of Civil and Public Servants.

SK: OK Mike, could you just tell us a bit about how you got involved with the Anti-Apartheid Movement.

MS: Well, that was reasonably late, it was about 1979. The union that I was working for had affiliated to the Anti-Apartheid Movement in 1975, which I think was around the time the trade union committee was established, and my boss at the time was the representative on the trade union committee. In about 1979 he couldn't continue, and he asked me to take up the seat for the union, which I was happy to do. I had obviously been aware of the issues for some time before that, but that was the start of my formal involvement with AAM.

SK: And which was the trade union?

MS: Then it was the Society of Civil and Public Servants. It was one of the civil service unions, and they'd all affiliated in the mid-1970s, as white collar unions grew and started to become more like unions and less like staff associations.

SK: So you were aware of apartheid and what was happening in South Africa. And what was your awareness at that time?

MS: Oh, my awareness really started in the late '60s. As a life-long cricket fan, and player in those days, it first came to my attention in the famous d'Oliveira episode in the late '60s. Basil d'Oliveira was a good England player, who was of South African descent, came from the Cape, and wasn't picked for the England tour of South Africa that year. There was a great storm about that, because it seemed that he was deliberately not picked under pressure from the South African government at that time. However, an England player got injured and couldn't go, and so the MCC was then forced to pick d'Oliveira, because it was he was by far and away the best player, and the South African government then cancelled the tour, on the grounds that the team was not appropriate. And that's really the first time that the issue really came to my attention. I just felt that was basically unfair, just because of the colour of somebody's skin, that they weren't allowed to go and play cricket in the country of their birth. And then of course that was followed by the 1970 Stop the Seventy tour

campaign which was successful, and from there it obviously got me interested and more concerned about what was happening in South Africa.

SK: And did you have any further involvement through the '70s?

MS: Through the '70s, yes. I mean I became gradually involved, and at some stage I joined AAM as an individual member, and there was ... obviously the Soweto riots in '76, I think it was, and the murder of Steve Biko a year or so after. So at that point I had become an individual member, I had gone on one or two demonstrations in London, but I hadn't got involved in the local group or anything of that nature at that stage.

SK: And so what was your motivation to become more involved in the campaigns?

MS: Well, I just wanted to do something, really. I just felt so strongly about the issue, and I've always been very strongly against racism. Clearly, apartheid being institutionally racist, which was so wrong, and you had to do something and get involved. And when the opportunity came up to represent the union, and there obviously was something I was more than happy to do, and try and make some difference and just spread the message, spread the word. And try to, in my own way, just make my contribution towards what I hope eventually would be the end of apartheid.

SK: OK, we can then talk about how you more specifically got involved into AAM and its structures. You said that it was in about 1979?

MS: That's right.

SK: Could you tell us a bit about how that happened?

MS: Yes. As I said, the union put me forward as their representative on the trade union committee, and I joined that in about 1979, and that obviously brought a lot of responsibilities with it. The trade union committee's purpose, I think, was very important within the role of the Anti-Apartheid Movement in the UK. The TUC, as the overall body for unions, whilst opposing apartheid, was very reluctant to support the AAM and a number of unions over the years had tried to, but they were extremely reluctant, because they saw it as some kind of front for the Communist Party and they didn't see it as what it was, which was the broad, wide-ranging campaign organisation with support from all areas. And so at that time there would have been about 10 or 11 million trade unionists in the UK, affiliated to the TUC, so it was a natural body for the AAM to try and gain as supporters. But it was clear that it wasn't going to come from the senior ranks of the unions. So I wasn't around at the time when the trade union committee was first set up, which I think was in the early '70s,¹ but I was very aware how it developed and membership of that committee were people who had influence in their own union, but were not the senior people. So it was very much a working committee. And all the unions who affiliated had people on it, all the civil service unions were there, the Fire Brigades Union, the agricultural workers, the bankers, MSF, the Transport and General Workers, UNISON, Equity, the railway workers, a whole range of unions. And we were all either full time officers

or members of the national executive, who were able to influence and put forward AAM policies within our unions and to use that structure to gain support, which I think was extremely successful. So the trade union committee met once a month, it had its own secretary, and the secretary of the AAM, which at the time was Mike Terry, of course, who often attended as well. We had a representative from SACTU, the South African Congress of Trade Unions, Mark Sweet, who was living in exile in the UK, who was able to give support and give information. And the chair of the committee at the time I joined was Fred Carneson, who also was a South African exile. He was a member of the National Union of Teachers, and he chaired the committee right through to 1990 when he returned to South Africa, when exiles were allowed to return. So it was a very broad ranging committee. We constructed and recommended motions for branches to put forward to their own conferences, within their own union, to build up union support for AAM and its policies. We campaigned for branch affiliations. There was a constant appeal for donations. So we were able to do that. And obviously did things like progress the boycott campaign, get unions to adopt political prisoners and encourage people to support, to bring their own union banners, to the demonstrations that were held and those kind of issues. It was very much a working committee.

SK: So you were very much part of that committee?

MS: Yeah.

SK: But you were also a member, or the representative of another trade union. What was the activity you carried out within your trade union?

MS: Within what was then the SCPS, then in 1984 became the NUCPS, the National Union of Civil and Public Servants, I reported back to the national executive, through the deputy general secretary of the union, who was the senior official responsible for international relations and international issues. And I would put to the NEC proposals for actions and so on, I would draft things that went out to branches to encourage branch affiliations. One of the first campaigns we did was on the Barclays boycott, to try and ensure that no union branch, because within that union branches had their own funds, and we wanted to ensure that none of those funds were invested in Barclays. So that was one of the very first things that we did, to try and make sure that branches that did have Barclays as their bankers removed their money and put it elsewhere. We were able to send out speakers to branches. I did a number myself, or the AAM were able to supply people to speak at branch AGMs to try and get the number of affiliations increased, and to do that with the support of the national executive, so I was very much the go between, if you can put it that way, between the senior officials and the actual union branch level.

SK: Thanks, Mike. Could you tell us a bit about the activities that you carried out as part of AAM's trade union committee?

MS: Well really, that really covered the areas I just mentioned. I mean obviously we all went once a month to the meetings, but you didn't just turn up for the meetings for meetings sake. They were really to report back on things that had happened within the union, in your own union, and what the union had done, to hear what other

unions were doing and to get ideas from them, and also of course to hear from the Executive of AAM what their plans were for the future and what support they wanted and required. So that was very much the role. And each union had different things to focus on, because we were always aware that members of a white collar civil service union would not be able necessarily to do some of the things that some other members could. I mean one of the instances of that would be the boycott campaign, where there were unions such as the railway workers union or the Transport and General Workers Union that could refuse to move South African goods or refuse to unload ships, that kind of thing. And we weren't really in that position. I mean, although we had members in Customs and Excise, there was no way we could ask, because they wouldn't have done it, Customs and Excise members to take action against visitors from South Africa, or immigration staff against the flights that arrived from South African Airways. There wasn't just a role and mechanism where we could do it. So we had to concentrate on other things and we concentrated on the consumer boycott campaign, because that we could publicise within the union to all our members. 'Don't buy South African goods. Don't visit South Africa. This is why', and say why, and bring to them the horrors of apartheid. And the other thing as a union we focused on particularly was the issue of political prisoners. And we did a lot on political prisoners, when asked to, as part of the campaign. If they were on death row, the union would write to the South African Embassy to ask for clemency, or attend the vigils that were often held outside the South African Embassy in Trafalgar Square, and we would get our local branches along to do that. And that was something which our members were able to relate to, that people who were fighting for their freedom, fighting for democracy were being sentenced, often to death. That was something which our members could relate to and were prepared to organise for, and to try and ensure that that sentence was not carried out.

SK: I suppose some of the political prisoners and those on death row were trade unionists.

MS: Yes.

SK: And therefore the trade unions in this country could relate to them.

MS: Yes, exactly, and particularly if they were NEHAWU. Our union built up relationships towards the end of the '80s with NEHAWU, which was the South African union which covered the public sector. It stood for the National Education Health and Allied Workers Union. They organised primarily in hospitals and schools in South Africa, because obviously the civil service in South Africa was very much white and part of the apartheid regime, so there was no direct link at that level. But with the public sector union we built up very close links with them. And in the public sector unions, we were out to show very much that, you're sitting here in Britain working in the public sector, doing your job without any harassment, but there are people under sentence of death in South Africa, who are also public sector workers, just because they wanted freedom and democracy.

SK: OK, can you describe the sort of the, general dynamic of the trade union committee? You described a bit about its monthly meetings, you also said that there

were representatives from various trade unions. Could you describe a bit more about how the trade union committee functioned?

MS: Yes, certainly. We had as the secretary of the committee, for most of the period I was on it, not all, a dedicated officer who worked for the AAM, which to start was Chris Pond. He then left and we got Simon Sapper, and I think it was Gerard after that. And apologies if I've forgotten somebody, it's a long time ago. So they were the ones that supported the committee by doing the admin stuff – arranging the meetings, we were given the use of a meeting room for free by the Agricultural Workers Union – they were based up in Gray's Inn Road. And they prepared the agenda, did the minutes, got out the action points, the usual admin stuff. But also of course, just importantly, they were the face for the unions within the AAM, so they came along to our own meetings when they were invited, and we reported on what the AAM policies were and how things were developing and so on. So you had that input from the AAM, and alongside that, you had input from SACTU, because it was very difficult at that time, this was in the '80s, when I was involved. After 1990 things changed and perhaps we can move on to that a bit later. But during the '80s, it was very difficult and eventually of course COSATU was formed, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, and then it became easier to get information. But I mean this is in the days before internet, before email, before instant television, we didn't have satellite showing you things as they were. So the process of getting information was extremely difficult. You relied on information coming out through ANC members who were exiled from the country or ANC members who were still in the country, who were able to get information out, from sympathetic reporting, and of course all the time there was the threat of infiltration, and in fact the trade union committee was infiltrated at one point. And so the representatives from SACTU, and then subsequently COSATU, who we had on the committee were very important in that regard. And it made members of our committee feel that they were part of what was happening there directly, not relying on the media reporting. So you had the AAM there, you had SACTU performing that role. And then of course there were the union representatives themselves, who knew their own unions, who knew where we could do things and where they just wouldn't let us do things, for whatever reason. So it was a good mix, a good mix of people.

SK: You mentioned there were a number of other public sector unions involved. Did you work with them in any of the campaigns?

MS: Yes.

SK: ... as public sector trade unions?

MS: Well, the civil service unions tended to work together on campaigns – one of the strongest ones was the Inland Revenue Staff Federation, another predecessor of what is now the PCS. Their representative was Ian Stuart, who joined the committee about a year or so before I did and we were there all the way through. Eventually I would become the chair, vice-chair, I became chair when Fred Carneson left, and Ian became vice chair. And the CPS and IRSF did cooperate together and did work closely, normally around the political prisoners issue. The CPSA, which is another public sector union, tended to have their own problems, so weren't quite so active

and supportive. But I don't wish to do them down, I mean they had a representative, George Lobo, who attended and reported back. They were there when they were needed. And then the big one was UNISON and we did cooperate with UNISON quite a lot. And particularly after 1990, when things started to get easier in the transitional period between the unbanning of the ANC and freeing of Nelson Mandela and all political prisoners, and the lead-up to the '94 election. Then of course was the time when people started going to South Africa. My own union sent a delegation and UNISON did, and we were both linked with NEHAWU, in fact we were on the same delegation, we cooperated on that. But I'm not going to tell you any tales of what David Kenvyn and I got up to in South Africa [laugh]. And that was what we did. And the other thing that we cooperated very much was in trying to get the TUC changed. It was a pretty much of a nightmare. The TUC very much took their lead from the ICFTU, the International Confederation of Trade Unions, and they were extremely doubtful about working with SACTU or COSATU in later days. They were very reluctant to get involved with AAM, it was a minefield. We kept trying to get them to take speakers, and they wouldn't take them. They once went on a delegation to South Africa, I think that was around the early '80s at some point, which of course caused furore amongst a lot of the unions who were affiliated to AAM. And we were desperately trying to work through the Trades Union Congress, through the unions to get the TUC position changed. They were very close to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Their international officer at the time was an ex-FCO employee, very good, very effective, but giving no political leadership whatsoever, and was always very bureaucratic. And so my union, together with UNISON and the Fire Brigades Union and along with other unions, pushed all the time and eventually we got them to agree to hear from Archbishop Trevor Huddleston. I think he was the first ever [AAM] speaker at the Congress and from that things started to change a bit. There was a change in General Secretary, Norman Willis became the General Secretary of the TUC. He was more sympathetic. And this was just around the mid-'80s, so it was around the time the UDF, the United Democratic Front, was formed in South Africa, there was increasing violence in the townships, there was the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group visit, and they wrote a damning report, there was the declaration of a state of emergency by the apartheid government. So all these pressures were building up on the TUC and eventually we were successful and the TUC swung wholeheartedly behind AAM campaigns. But that was very much in the mid-80s. So we did cooperate, all the public sector unions worked very closely in trying to bring that about. And we thought it was important to do so. This was the age of Thatcher of course, when she was dead opposed to sanctions, called Nelson Mandela a terrorist, point blank refused to do anything. And so it was important that we got the TUC on side. Interesting times! The '80s were very volatile and fast-moving.

SK: Interesting indeed. You mentioned also that you became the chair of the trade union committee, after Fred [Carneson] returned to South Africa.

MS: That's right.

SK: So 1990 was an important time for the trade union movement. Could you tell us a bit more the work that the trade union committee carried out from 1990 onwards, when you were the chair?

MS: Yes, by then there was huge support within the UK generally by that time. The AAM had grown exponentially in the mid '80s. We'd had the concert in Wembley in 1988 for freedom at 70, and that got huge publicity, there had been the mass demonstrations, there had been a concert at Hyde Park, there'd been the Glasgow to London walk, which got fair bit of publicity, and so the dynamic of the trade unions in the '80s really changed, in the sense that the pressure was building so much, a lot of the argument about why attitudes taken against South Africa, and why apartheid should end, a lot of the academic argument had by that point been won, with the majority of people, you always had the far-right, of course, and some of the backwoods people of the Tory Party, but generally speaking things changed, so the role of the trade union committee changed. I still remember sitting in my office in 1990, in February 1990 at the time that de Klerk made his famous speech and said that the time had come to unban the ANC and Nelson Mandela would be freed. And I still remember the editor of our journal at the time rushing down to my office to tell me, the first time he heard of it. Obviously that was the crack that came. And that led to a number of exiles being able to return to South Africa. There was a sort of controlled way in which that was done and negotiated. And Fred returned, I think he returned, it was quite early I think, I think he went in the summer of 1990. Now when all that happened, some people said, 'Well, that's it, that's the end of apartheid, we've been successful, we're there'. And of course it wasn't it, it was far from being it. De Klerk was going to hang on for as long he could, we were going to enter a period of negotiations with the ANC, during the period of transition. We didn't know at that point when that would be finished, whether we would be successful and nobody knew what was going to happen. And it was important that that message was got across, so that then became the issue. So when I took over as chair of the trade union committee, and Ian Stuart became the deputy, we continued with the role the representatives that we had before. We had to get the message out, first of all to all the unions, this is not going to be an easy period, the period of transition. We need to continue to support the ANC and COSATU, and obviously being from the unions, most of our support was channelled through COSATU, rather than direct to the ANC, and we had to think what support could we most effectively give. For the first time they're being allowed to operate openly within South Africa, but they didn't have the premises in which to do so, they didn't have the funds – a lot of our support was given through training programmes, as I mentioned earlier on. Of course we were then able to visit South Africa. And so a lot of it was done by providing ... we used to go down to South Africa and attend COSATU workshops and help with shop steward training, for their reps. And we used to provide some of our old computers and old equipment, things like that, to just help build up the structure. So the focus of the trade union committee then shifted from supporting the boycott campaign, although that did continue for a year or so after, but towards providing support in the period of transition, so when the election came, they would be in a good position. And so yes, that was ... and it wasn't just us going to South Africa, we hosted a lot of South African stewards and union reps coming to Britain, and they would attend our own education workshops. We would take them out. I myself hosted a delegation up in Leeds for a week, and I went and visited union branches to talk to reps and see what was going on on the ground. And in the civil service unions, we had a slightly different role as well, which just applied to us, because one of the issues was what was going to happen to the civil service after the first election, because the civil

service was predominantly white, and it certainly was all apartheid appointed. It was clear that the ANC didn't want to make the mistake that some other countries had made, which was simply to sack them all and appoint their own people, because you are getting rid of all the experience. But equally there had to be mechanisms put in place to ensure that the civil service changed, and new entrants would be fast tracked, so they would reflect the country rather than the previous white regime. And so my own union, together with the IRSF, the Inland Revenue Staff Federation, were involved in some discussions with COSATU, which were never made public at the time, about how mechanisms could be introduced and what could be done.

SK: Is there anything you can say now about those discussions?

MS: I'm not sure I can remember too much about them. We had meetings with the ANC representative in London and he would come to our union headquarters, and myself and the deputy secretary would be there and we would feed in through that route and we were able to say ... It wasn't for us to set the political decision, that was for the ANC. They said that they did not want mass dismissals of the old civil servants, they wanted to work with them and change. So we were able to say how we had introduced policies of positive discrimination, how recruitment was an important issue, because the lack of a formal education system meant that you couldn't just go on the basis of qualifications, and how you can introduce mechanisms like making sure that equality officers, who were responsible for trying to ensure lack of discrimination, how there had to be mechanisms put into place if there was discrimination, or if somebody felt that they were being discriminated against. We emphasised the role unions could have in this, the South African unions. In terms of detail, it was more of a question of approach rather than detail that we took. But it was ... in the end, it was their decision and I think we did have some influence on how things were changed after '94.

SK: Mike, you described quite a lot of activity both during the '80s and '90s. Are there any particular incidents, incidents that particularly stand out for you?

MS: There's a large number really. It's a question I suppose of narrowing it down, because there was so much going on. I suppose, obviously, the successes we had. The one time that we were having a vigil outside the Embassy, during lunchtime between 12 and 2, it was specifically for the civil service unions, and it was for a prisoner who was due to be executed. And whilst we were there, the news came through that their death sentence had been commuted, and we had been successful. And to actually get that news whilst we were outside the South African Embassy, and people were there, was great, not just because it had been successful and somebody's life had been saved, but also people there felt immediately that they had achieved something, and that was quite a moment. And there are always things that do stand out. I'm trying to avoid the obvious, such as when Nelson Mandela made his first visit to Britain after his release, and there were a number of people invited to ... I think it was the Cumberland Hotel at Marble Arch to meet him, and I was one of them, and of course that's the kind of thing that stays in your memory forever. But that was a personal thing, rather than a collective memory. And obviously again one of the successes is when Barclays withdrew from South Africa. So it's the successes, I suppose, that you remember. And of course the demonstrations, walking through

London. I remember the ... I mentioned earlier before, the Glasgow to London walk in 1988, I can't remember how many did it now – I think it was about 30 or so that did the whole walk. But then they met in Finsbury Park in London, there was a demonstration in Finsbury Park, and then down to Hyde Park, which we were all on. And I still remember sort of seeing the walkers, turning up looking extremely dishevelled, but very pleased that they'd all done it. And that was to bring attention again to the issue of political prisoners, and it was linked with the Wembley concert of the same year. So I suppose you do remember those key successes in your mind. And of course the successes we made in our own union, and within the TUC, how we built and built and built. I mean, I joined the National Committee in 1984 or thereabouts and was elected to the Executive, I think in '86, I can't remember exactly. I was certainly on the Executive at the Wembley concert. And so I obviously got much more involved then.

SK: So just to clarify, this is the National Executive Committee?

MS: Oh, the Anti-Apartheid Movement, yes.

SK: OK. Can you describe a bit about your involvement with the NEC of the Anti-Apartheid Movement?

MS: Well, yes. All unions had a seat on the National Committee, and I took the union seat in about '84 or something like that, when the previous representative had unfortunately died. The National Committee was a body, a huge body, it had representatives from all the local groups of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, from all the trade unions that were affiliated, from church groups that were affiliated and so on. And it met ... I can't remember now whether it was every three months or every month – I think it was every three months. But they used to elect the Executive and I was successful at being elected to the Executive at the second attempt, I think it was in 1986, and that of course got me much more involved. Because you weren't just listening to what the policies were, you were involved in actually making the policies. And this was just before the AAM grew enormously in terms of public membership, individual membership support. But of course that brought its own problems as well. We weren't really ready for such a huge growth, we didn't expect it. It was nice to have, but there were issues we had about staffing, about where we were based, just trying to organise this huge mass of people, and what direction, what political direction to give. So the discussion on the NEC was very much about what the campaign priorities would be, what messages we had to get across. Obviously through the link with political parties, particularly the Labour Party and the Liberals, there were still several parties at that time, including the SDP, and organising demonstrations and so on. So I was very much involved in the direction of the Movement, as well as, obviously, hearing about what was going on. It was a difficult time. Just seeing off an attempt by some of the far left Trotskyist groups to take over the AAM, and that had just been seen off. But it was quite a difficult time.

SK: You described some of the high points of the campaign. Do you think there were any low points, and what were they for you?

MS: Well, the obvious one was disappointment at not getting more support quicker in the late '70s and the early '80s. We always faced people saying, 'But have you been there?' And of course you would say, 'No, I haven't been to South Africa.' 'Well in that case you don't know what it is like, do you?' And these kinds of, having to cope with these arguments that were being put forward and the sheer falsehoods that their spokesperson, I'm trying to remember his name, the Luton MP, John Carlisle, who always sort of pitched up on the Today programme as a supporter of the apartheid government, trying to pretend how their system of every ethnic group having their own parliament was a wonderful system, and of course it wasn't. And it was a constant struggle trying to get that message over and clearly, when you saw people being killed, when you saw the violence in the townships, when a political prisoner was executed, at points you did think to yourself, 'Are we ever going to get through this?' And you'd have set backs – 'Is it ever going to change? It just seems to get worse and worse.' And so that I think was the low points. But then something would happen that would get you motivated and spur you on even more. And as nobody saw, well at least I didn't, I'm not sure too many people saw in 1990, when it happened. Although there had been people released they had been an offer to release Nelson Mandela, which he rejected, a couple of years earlier, there had been some release of political prisoners back then. But when it changed, it changed very quickly. And I suppose the next low point was in the '90s, when as the transitional negotiations dragged on, it almost got to the point of civil war. And that then gave other challenges to us here. As the ANC was unbanned in 1990 people said 'Look what's happening. It's another example of giving African countries their freedom and look what happens.' That was the argument we had to counter. It was clearly an incorrect argument, but people were using it, and using the riots that were going on. It seemed as if we would never get through it, but we did. And more importantly, people in South Africa did, because our role was always to provide support from British people and British national trade unions from the UK, their tool. South Africans told us what they wanted. It was never our role to tell the people of South Africa what they should be doing or how should they do it. And we always had to bear that very much in mind.

SK: Mike, you mentioned an interesting observation you made I think it was around the trade union committee being infiltrated.

MS: Oh yes [laugh]. Looking back, it was actually quite funny.

SK: Well, could you tell us what you remember about that?

MS: Yes, It was ... it was a guy from a union that was then called ASTMS, don't ask me what it stands for, I can't remember. They eventually merged with another union to become MSF, one of the strongest supporters of the Anti-Apartheid Movement. But ASTMS were affiliated, and the AAM always took at face value people who sort of turned up at the trade union committee. We assumed that they had the support their unions and were able to deliver things and so on. So nobody ever questioned this guy who turned up from the ASTMS when the ASTMS affiliated, because they were quite late affiliating, they didn't affiliate until the early '80s. And I was sitting at home, I can't remember the year now, but it was a World in Action programme, produced by Granada Television, about the organisation that used to keep blacklists

of trade unionists, and it was all done on paper files. I can't remember the name of it now, but it was a scandal at that time, that if you were a trade unionist on their list employers would go to them and get information and if you were a trade unionist on their list then they wouldn't employ you. I was watching this World in Action programme all about it and suddenly this guy appeared on the TV being chased down the street by a World in Action camera crew who filmed him going into this organisation's head office, and they tried to interview him and obviously he wouldn't be interviewed. And it was clear from that point that actually he had been infiltrated, he had been sent to infiltrate the trade union committee of the AAM to see who was on it and report on whatever we were doing. And I mean where the reports went from there, goodness only knows. So I mean the phones started ringing immediately, 'Have you seen this?' [laugh]. We didn't have a clue. And it then turned out that ASTMS as a union denied that he was representing them on the committee, they had no knowledge of it. He was a member, but that was about it, he was just an ordinary member. So there was obviously something very wrong within the internal process of that union, which had been spotted. I don't think we worried about it too much, because everything that we did on the trade union committee was open, it was all done in a transparent way, nothing there wasn't public, as you do in the unions. And I think we just carried on, and so I thought that was an interesting episode. There were far more serious issues of infiltration in the AAM generally, which I don't know very much about. But we know that people were seriously at threat at some stage, so I don't wish to trivialise it at all. But that was the only instance that we were aware of on the trade union committee.

SK: OK. Looking back, a little bit of time now, what are your feelings about your involvement in the anti-apartheid campaign?

MS: My personal feelings? Basically, one of the most influential things I've ever done in my life. To be part of an organisation, to participate in its campaigns, you know, in a small way, but nevertheless to be there, to do it, is something that I'll always remember. And it's ... to be just a small cog in what was eventually a very successful campaign. You don't know how much of an influence as an individual you really have, but you know, I was able to persuade branches of our union to affiliate to the AAM, I was able to get the national executive to support campaigns, I was able to get members onto the streets and demonstrations outside the South African Embassy, and to just be a part of that is just something that you think you've achieved. Of course the real achievement doesn't go to anybody here, it goes to the ANC and the people of South Africa, but what we achieved here was to get the support that was needed. And I would like to think as well it helped change attitudes towards racism here in the UK as well, not just in South Africa. It helps sort that out, I don't know, the '80s were a strange decade. But yes, personally, it's something that I still remember, and am still very proud just to have been a part of

SK: Mike, we've talked quite a lot about all your involvement through the '70s, '80s and '90s. Is there anything else you'd like to add to what we've talked about?

MS: I don't think so [long pause], no, I don't think so. Perhaps just to finish off by saying that during the period of the 1990s, leading up to '94, just going back to the question you just asked me really, that I was part of a delegation that went to the

ANC's international conference in Johannesburg, and then following on from that, my union and UNISON, together we arranged with NEHAWU for an education visit. We went to different places. Dave Kenvyn and I first met, first went to a hospital in Johannesburg, and the union had arranged for us to meet the directors of this hospital, there was a white woman, whose name I can't remember, but it was absolutely horrendous and clearly wasn't really committed to the change that was about to happen. This would have been about a year or so before the election took place, about 1993. It was 1993, in fact. And then, having met this woman as a sort of social bit, we were taken down to meet the workers who were all assembled, the catering staff, the nurses, they were all assembled in the canteen of this hospital, and the welcome that we got was absolutely unbelievable, I've never felt anything like it. The generosity of spirit, that these two people from British trade unions turn up to meet them, it was an amazing experience. And we then separated, Dave went off on another visit for UNISON and I went off for the NCPs, and we went away from the big towns. So we went to the province of QwaQwa and we went to Umtata and other places like that and got a much different view and talked to people. And at that point it came across how much the support, not just of Britain, but other countries, of British trade unionists and trade unionists from other countries had meant. And that brought it home to you. And that's just a personal anecdote following on from your last question. And then of course there was being in South Africa for the first election in 1994. And then the final concluding meeting of the Anti-Apartheid Movement and the formation of ACTSA. We had the dissolution meeting, I still remember that. And then of course it all changed when ACTSA was formed and that's another story ...

SK: Yes, on that point we will stop.

¹ The AAM trade union committee was set up in 1969.