

Interview with Margaret Ling by Håkan Thörn, 29 February 2000, reproduced on the Anti-Apartheid Movement Archives Committee Forward to Freedom project website <http://www.aamarchives.org/>

Håkan Thörn: Could you start by telling me when you were born and where, and then what organisations, groups or activities associated with the struggle against apartheid you participated in?

Margaret Ling: I was born in 1948, which happens to be the birth year of apartheid, and I was born and brought up in a small town about 80 miles north of London, in the countryside. My background was upper middle class; my father was a teacher in a boys public school, which is a private fee-paying school, and I had three brothers, all of whom went to private schools. I went to a grammar school, and I would say that I was a very unpolitical person right up to the time I went to university as an undergraduate, and through that time. I became politicised mainly when I was doing my post-graduate course, which was a two-year course at Oxford University. By that time I had been to India and spent some months there. I had an uncle in India who was with a mission, and I travelled around, as I guess many of my generation did at that time.

HT: In what year was this?

ML: 1971–72, when everybody was going overland to India – nowadays young people go overland to Africa. I guess I wouldn't say that I was politicised in India, but it gave me an awareness of the situation in the so-called third world and the gap between the North and the South, and when I came back I went to Oxford. I became involved in organisations such as Third World First, which was campaigning on issues of global poverty and the North-South gap and the price of bananas and sugar and so on. So I became aware of those issues, and the fact that I did become involved in those organisations had very much to do with having been in India, the experience I had had there, and I also became involved in the Anti-Apartheid Movement, which was not an organisation I knew about before, but I became involved through meeting students there who were from Southern Africa, both Rhodesia and South Africa, and becoming interested in their situation. And it just so happened that Frene Ginwala, who is now the Speaker of the House of Parliament in South Africa, was in my college. She was a year ahead of me finishing her PhD, and through her I met Ethel de Keyser, who at that time was Executive Secretary of the Anti-Apartheid Movement. They had an influence on me, and this was by now 1972–73, in Oxford, and an anti-apartheid group was being formed in Oxford. I became involved with that and I was involved in AAM, and also events that took place while I was at Oxford. I guess it was the first political demonstration that I ever went on, was about the assassination of Amilcar Cabral in Guinea-Bissau, and I remember driving up to London with friends to attend a talk outside the Portuguese embassy – a protest which had quite an effect on me at the time. And another thing that happened – it was when the Pearce Commission were in Rhodesia testing opinion on the independence before majority rule issue – and Bishop Muzorewa, who was at that time very much identified with the liberation movement in Zimbabwe, came to Oxford as part of a speaking tour. I remember attending that meeting. And then he was the key

speaker at an Anti-Apartheid Movement national demonstration in London, which was the first national demonstration that I had ever been on. It may seem strange, by this time I was 24 or 25, so I was quite late to be politicised. And at the same time I was doing a course in sociology and I remember coming across apartheid as part of that, looking at sociological theory. And because of that theoretical study, and the experience of having been in India and visiting a member of my family who had gone out to be a missionary, who was continuing to be supported by my family, which had a family business which had at one time a subsidiary in South Africa, I started to put things together and really begin to understand where I stood in the British class system, and the relationship of that class system and society in Britain to what was going on in South Africa. So there was both a politicisation through friendships and emotional involvement, and through theory and through beginning to understand a bit more about who I was and where I fitted in.

HT: And after that, if you take the whole period, in which organisations did you work and during which periods?

ML: In 1973 I finished my course, and I came to London and of the various organisations that I had been involved in at Oxford somehow Anti-Apartheid seemed to be the easiest contact in London. I remember going to the AAM office and making contact and saying 'I am here in London now'. I think Christabel [Gurney] was working in the office at that time, or she had been, and then I became involved in a local anti-apartheid group in the area where I was living, which is still the area that I live in 25 years later, in north London. A group was being formed, and given my background – anyway, I ended up being the secretary, and so I was the secretary of this anti-apartheid group in Haringey in north London, which I did for quite a few years. That was 1973, and then in 1975 I was offered a job with IDAF [International Defence and Aid Fund], which I was offered because by that time I was quite active in AAM, and I went to work for their Research and Information Department and stayed with IDAF for nine years, up until 1984. In the course of that nine years I also took on the editorship of *Anti-Apartheid News*, in 1980, I think, I started doing that – it was the year of course of Zimbabwe's independence.

HT: Until?

ML: Now, I can't remember this, it must have been the mid-1980s, I guess, that I continued editing the newspaper, and then we got some funding to employ a person on the AAM staff – because I was never a staff member of AAM, I was always a volunteer. But we got some funding to employ someone on the staff to assist with the paper, which was by that time really getting too much to do on a voluntary basis. Also technology was changing – we used to put it together in my front room with scissors and paste and all that, and things began to change, so after we got a staff member to do it, I guess I continued to be the editor perhaps a few years after that, and then Alan Brooks took over as editor – that must have been about 1986–87.

HT: Do you remember the earliest images of Africa or Southern Africa, if you go back to your childhood or whatever, I mean images of Africa. Does anything come to your mind?

ML: Well, really my first encounter with apartheid, as opposed to Africa generally – I mentioned that my father taught in a public school and for 15 years, really the main body of my childhood, he was housemaster of one of the boarding houses. And at the time of the Sharpeville massacre, Bishop Trevor Huddleston, it just so happened by coincidence that Huddleston was preaching in the school chapel, and that weekend he was staying in the boarding house where we lived. I don't remember meeting him at the time, but I remember the excitement – perhaps the wrong word to use, because this was a massacre we are talking about – but this whole electric feeling. This terrible thing was happening, which I was aware of, and I remember my mother saying she was so impressed because the editor of *The Times*, I think it was, had a hotline to bishop Huddleston, ringing him up to get a quote on the massacre, over that weekend. So I guess you could say that that was the first time that I was aware of apartheid, but again not until much later did I look back and think – there is a strange significance of this, in the end I became very involved in the Anti-Apartheid Movement, and that had happened to me. But images of Africa generally, wow, well something that springs to mind, when I was quite small – I had one of those, I don't know if you have them in Sweden, missionary collecting boxes, and it was for the university's mission to Central Africa, but it was so attractive to a child, it was made of papier maché, it was made like an elephant, you pop the money through the whole on the top of the elephant, and I remember that it was very exciting to have that when I was a small child. That is one of the earliest things I remember, so missionaries definitely – very strong in my childhood.

HT: Do you remember, were there any books or reports that were important shaping your ...

ML: When I was a child?

HT: Yeah, from your childhood and onwards.

ML: Well another thing I should mention is [*inaudible*]. My mother's family in particular were always Liberals, my father as well. So they had a Liberal background, not Conservative, and did a lot of good works. One of my aunts, my mother's older sister, was very much involved in the International Alliance of Women, which grew out of the suffragist movement, who were the less activist side of the suffragettes. So she always had an international dimension, and I was always very aware from a small child of international issues and conferences and people from different parts of the world who were coming to stay in my aunt's house. She lived with my grandfather, and there were visitors from Africa and Asia. So that is an early memory. But books and reports, I have to think about that.

HT: Novels, or anything?

ML: Africa, I remember reading things like *Coral Island* and *Swiss Family Robinson* as a child.

HT: And then later on, when you started to get a political consciousness, were there any ... ?

ML: Well, I mentioned coming across the concept of apartheid as part of a sociology course, and that was really the first time that I became aware of it in that way. But something that I did feel very much on coming back from India – I mean I went to India full of enthusiasm to help solve the problems of India, and came back realising it is much more difficult. It is not just a question of going there with goodwill in your heart, this is a much more complicated situation, and relating very strongly to the situation in Southern Africa and to liberation movements, which seemed to be such a positive thing and something that I as a person in the North could give my support to. I felt very much that the Anti-Apartheid Movement was an organisation that I wanted to support, both because the liberation movements that it was supporting had vitality and clarity and a programme, and they were doing things and were calling for international support, and secondly because of the British involvement, both on the macro level and particularly because of my family being tied up with it as I mentioned – having a company which has a subsidiary in South Africa. It wasn't a big subsidiary and it made confectionery – it wasn't arms or anything like that – but nevertheless it had an involvement in South Africa. So there we were, making money, part of which was going to be used to support the mission in India, and the contradictions in that became very clear to me at the time. I do remember a book about – I had a godmother, who was in Uganda, that was an influence, they were missionaries again, in Uganda. I don't really remember books, again it's people, but I do remember reading a book and it was clearly about a white, an Afrikaner, on a farm in South Africa, and it was all about living on the farm and flowers and so on. I don't remember it mentioned any black South African whatsoever, it probably didn't, actually, but I do remember that book, it's stuck in my mind. I think I was about 12 at the time. But I remember at the school that my father taught at, they had a military tattoo for the military corps every year, and one year they were enacting the battle of Rorke's Drift and all the boys were dressed up as Zulus and they had shields made out of sacking and bits of wood and they were all black, and this was terribly exciting because as children we were allowed to have their shields and spears when they had finished with them to play with. But what I think I associated South Africa with is that I knew that there were beautiful flowers there, because I remember my mother had a university friend who had gone to live there, and I remember her posting some flowers back from South Africa. Every year my grandfather used to go by boat to Cape Town to check on the company there, and I always knew that that was a place you went by sea to and it was a beautiful place of flowers.

HT: Talking about travelling, as an activist, during those years, from the '70s and onwards, did you travel a lot?

ML: No, no, and in fact, I noticed in your outline of the project that you refer to anti-apartheid activists travelling to South Africa ...

HT: Southern Africa rather ...

ML: OK, well no, I never went. The first time I went to the region was 1980, which actually I suppose was only a quarter of a time into my history of involvement in Anti-Apartheid, that was with IDAF, and I went as their observer to the Zimbabwean independence elections. But I wouldn't say that travelling to the region was really important for being an activist. I thought about this on reading your outline – it wasn't necessary, and one of the things we constantly got taunted with, standing outside South Africa House or on any other street demonstrating, was that white South Africans, or people who sympathised with white South Africa, would come up to you and say 'Have you ever been to South Africa?' And you'd say 'No', and they would say, 'Well you don't know what you are talking about'. And so every activist had to have an answer ready, because you knew that you always were going to get this taunt – 'You don't need to go to the moon to know what's there', or whatever answer you chose to give. But having gone there was not important for us to know, and in a way it was almost like a matter of pride that you didn't need to have gone there to have a sense of solidarity with the people we were supporting. That was what solidarity was. It didn't depend on travel – it's something else.

HT: I mean the way I put it is more that activists, that all the activists I have been talking to did make some journeys, now I am talking about Sweden, to Southern Africa, and that experience of travel seemed to have been important, the way that you – in a sense you confirmed it when you talked about that journey to India. Mike Terry went to Rhodesia – he said exactly the same thing, just the way you just said it, that it wasn't an important thing for activism ...

ML: Yes, once you had been mobilised ...

HT: ... but at the same time he started his narrative with...

ML: Yes ...

HT: So in a sense that's more of the way I think about it, in terms of experience. But following that, travelling also involved all these South Africans coming to Europe, and you already said that meeting a couple of South Africans was important to you. If you would define in what sense, what did that mean, being involved with South Africans, for your commitment?

ML: Yes, I was going to say that. I think for me the experience of travelling to India, it's about that experience, and it's the emotional and as well as intellectual experience that is very important. I think to motivate people into the Anti-Apartheid Movement, you have to have some – there is always some sort of emotional strand to it. I think if you travel there or you have met somebody from the region and you've heard their story – maybe you've just heard them speak at a meeting, and been moved by what they said, but I think that personal contact, that sense of personal involvement is important. If you look at any activist, somewhere along the line they would have met somebody from Southern Africa, or they had a letter, or they had been there or something would have happened to make them feel personally and emotionally involved in the situation. And then having

so many South Africans and other people from the region here in Britain was extremely important, to keep people continuously motivated and engaged and involved. Then you began to find your whole social life got wrapped up in it, which was very very important for the Anti-Apartheid Movement – that became our social life, going to meetings, and then not just political meetings, but also social events. And people in the region became friends and there were relationships and marriages ...

HT: It became a way of living for at least this group of activists.

ML: Yes, there was a sense – we were like a community, and even today, like yesterday, going to a funeral, in a way it's still part of that same tradition. It's almost like a family, and I think what a lot of people missed when the AAM came to an end was that you didn't have the social events in the same way.

HT: And then I guess, you were a part of a movement culture then. I should put it as a question, were this community of anti-apartheid activists part of a wider community of people being active in various political ways – I mean if you can talk about a movement culture in a sense?

ML: Yes, as a progressive or the left, yes, very much so. Yes, anti-apartheid was located within that whole galaxy of left or progressive movements, and that's how it was organised, because the trade union, the labour movement, as you know they were extremely important, this whole context within which AAM was organising. Without the support of the organised trade union and labour movement, it would never have got to the size and strength that it did in Britain, and funding without the trade union movement would have been very difficult – not so much the Labour Party itself, but the trade union and labour movement, very important, and that's how mobilisation took place. It was a structure there, trade union branches, Labour Party branches, that's how the leaflets got out. It wasn't the only channel, but it was very very important.

HT: Going back there about travelling – you said in 1980 was your first time. Did you go after that?

ML: I didn't go to South Africa until 1992.

HT: But to the region?

ML: Yes I did go, I went to Angola in 1981, that was for an IDAF conference. I returned to Zimbabwe in 1980 – that was a private holiday, and then I went back there in 1984, 1986 and 1989, because in the course of this, as you gathered, I became very much involved with Zimbabwe, rather than South Africa, actually.

HT: Did you also go to other parts of Europe or the United States as an activist?

ML: No, I did go to Geneva and Vienna – that was for IDAF business. I don't think I ever went to Europe for the AAM. I think that was something that after the AAM came to an

end. I was actually going to Sweden and meeting an activist in Gothenburg, Ann-Marie Kihlberg, we had been in touch for quite a few years, but we'd never met. We had corresponded on this and that and talked on the phone, but never met until apartheid was over. And then when we did meet, we sat down and talked about this – how as cadres of the movement we hadn't had the chance to go to these various conferences abroad. That was always the top executives, and that it would have been nice, now that it is all over, for the grassroots, as it were, of the movements of the different countries to meet each other and have a festival or something, a gathering, but that idea never came to anything. But related to your question, again the travel was not necessary for the lower ranks, as it were, for one to feel that there was an international anti-apartheid movement and that we were part of it. Maybe that's a different thing about the way the left is organised today – it was a much more top-down system, and AAM was quite a top-down organisation, in that it mirrored the character of the trade union and the labour movement in this country. I think movements now are rather different. We were very disciplined, which is part of the reason for the Movement's effectiveness. It was quite an organised machine, and the British AAM always stayed as one movement and had various sorts of interesting tensions within it and so on, but it always stayed as one umbrella body, which was its strength.

HT: Would you say that there were tensions related to what a sociologist would call professionalisation of the movement, in the sense that people were getting employed, and if there were tensions between ...

ML: No, I wouldn't say so at the time because I think that is a more modern phenomena. The AAM the way I knew it never had any money, so the staff were paid extremely poor wages and there were always constant crises – they weren't able to pay the tax bill or the rent or anything like that, so I don't think that the conditions were very conducive for the type of professionalisation you mention. Actually, I would say that that is a more modern phenomenon, of NGOs today, which perhaps have access to much greater funding. The AAM didn't have any funding. We were opposed to the government, and who was going to fund us except the left? It wasn't the sort of organisation that could raise funds through big aid agencies or anything like that. IDAF did, but that was a different sort of organisation entirely. There were other sorts of tensions – I mean there were tensions on the gender issue, and there were tensions on race and class issues within the Movement. The Movement was often characterised as white and middle class, which it was mainly – look at me – and so there were tensions about why were we concentrating so much on the situation of black people 7,000 miles away when there was racism in Britain. Some people said we should be doing more about racism in Britain, and that was a constant issue that came up on our annual general meetings, whether the AAM should also campaign on racism in Britain.

HT: Was that issue there all along? Or did that come up in the late '70s? I think the anti-racist struggle in Britain started in the late '70s?

ML: Yes, it started to come up then. I don't remember it in the early years – I mean the end of the 1970s. I remember more that there were tensions about who were we

supporting in Zimbabwe – race issues more in the '80s, I would say, and the Women's Committee of Anti-Apartheid ...

HT: Could you elaborate more on that?

ML: Well, there was a Women's Committee formed in the mid '80s, and that was partly in solidarity with South African women, but also fuelled by a feeling that women in the Movement didn't get their ...

HT: Were you a part of that?

ML: I was a member of the Women's Committee, yes, and if you looked at the top leadership of the Movement, it was rather male. Whereas if you looked at the local groups, you found that who is actually doing the work, who are the secretaries of local groups, they were often women. So that committee was concerned about that. But I wouldn't say that that was as big an issue as the race issue actually. And then another tension within the Movement was on the frontline states versus South Africa, which I was quite involved in, because being a person very much tied up with Zimbabwe and interested and engaged in those issues, which was very largely to do with that being my job at IDAF – I was a research and information officer for Zimbabwe and Namibia – and got very wrapped up with Zimbabwe. But there were tensions within the Movement, but really it was about where resources were going to be put, in a movement which never had enough money. It came up at perhaps three annual meetings in succession, about whether we should have campaigns on the frontline states, and the Executive Committee tended to be defeated by the grassroots. Actually, the Executive were wanting motions about frontline state to be remitted to the Executive, and the grassroots wanted to get them passed as motions, so the frontline states would have a greater priority. But it was really, at the root of it, was a debate about resources. You can't campaign about everything, and the Executive was more aware about the budget situation, and the grassroots less aware of that than the principle of the thing.

HT: You also mentioned tensions related to class?

ML: It was tied up with the race thing. I mean the white middle class people were not so concerned about racism in Britain, so I would put them together. I wouldn't say that there was this whole debate about class separate from the race issue.

HT: You said that there were a lot of women if you look at the local groups, but you didn't see them so much in the Executive. How about black people, were they there in the local groups or were they not there at all?

ML: They were there in the local groups, but no, they weren't there in the numbers that they should have been really, and that was an issue. And I think even now, if you look at ACTSA, it's actually still an issue. The AAM had quite a white face, if you took away the exiles from Southern Africa who were there.

HT: So were there any particular strategies to recruit these various groups not being represented?

ML: Yes, there was a strategy of targeting the communities we wanted to involve, churches or women or black community, or community groups or whatever. I think that there was a black committee actually, Mike Terry could tell you more about that, just as there was a Women's Committee.

HT: So what about central-local tensions, meaning on the one hand the people working – I don't know how many people were employed.

ML: At the peak, which was the late '80s, I think it might have gone up to maybe even 20 people – 15 to 20.

HT: And when you started?

ML: Oh, about four or five, there was Ethel, and there were always a lot of volunteers.

HT: But I mean, the people there at the office, central AAM office, and people of the local groups, were there any tensions related to that? You mentioned the discussion about the frontline states, but were there any other conflicts?

ML: There was the big issue of City Anti-Apartheid, you know about that? They were a local group of the movement, City of London, and they organised a non-stop picket of South Africa House. They were very effective, and they did a huge amount to popularise the anti-apartheid struggle. There they were outside South Africa House, they were going to be there night and day until Mandela was released and they kept it up for ages.

HT: How long did that go on?

ML: Oh, a couple of years, I think.

HT: Was that the end of the '80s then?

ML: Yes, it must have been, it might even had gone on until he was released. I mean they kept it going, it was amazing, but it wasn't national AAM policy to do that, and the City AA were regarded with suspicion because they were felt to be closely linked with either the Revolutionary Communist Movement or Group.

HT: Were they Trotskyists?

ML: Yes, one of those, and they had an entrust strategy into the AAM. There was one annual general meeting, where they all got into the AAM to try and influence the voting at the meeting, so they were regarded with great suspicion, and the issue which they tended to attack the Movement on, was this one of the racism in the Movement, and they were actually pretty effective at involving, or appearing to involve, black people, I

would say. They had an image that they were good at that, and the AAM was not being good at that, and they were very very active, and the Trotskyist groups are very very active. There they are night and day on the pavement – and like I said to you before, it would be very interesting to know what's happened to their archives. I have absolutely no idea, you know, what happened to them, did they have records, who their members were? They were also regarded with suspicion because local groups were supposed to be made up of people who lived in an area. I said which AA activists live in the City of London, so who are these people, and even today it is with great suspicion they are remembered by the more sort of Stalinist comrades in the AAM. The memories burn deep in the collective memory of the AAM, so when we had the 40th anniversary conference, they were never mentioned as part of the history except in a sort of derogatory sense, as an aside almost, as an example of the sort of dangers of infiltration and splitting and the strategies of the Trotskyist left.

HT: But still you said, I think, in Gothenburg that the image that the common Londoner had of the AAM was much influenced by the City of London AAM's presence outside the South Africa House.

ML: Yes, you would go on the bus around Trafalgar Square and see them on the pavement, and most people probably, people going by on the bus, wouldn't know that they weren't the official Anti-Apartheid Movement, which I suppose was another reason why the official AAM regarded them with such unease and nervousness. But it would be interesting to know if they had any records, and how many people they had, how many members.

HT: Just let me get it clear because I have not yet sort of found out about the form of AAM as an organisation, so these local groups were still part of the AAM?

ML: Oh yes, the local groups were affiliated and had representation on the national committee. I think each local group could send two people to the national committee, and they got campaign material and so on. I mean when you were saying just now about the tensions, about the Movement being quite centralist, it's interesting, because despite those things it was actually very effective, I would say, at mobilising and motivating its local groups. It was very efficient as a campaigning organisation. It fed its local groups with material, and it was very good at keeping everybody active, and that's a tribute partly to the AAM's efficiency as a campaign machine, but also to the issues themselves, that the issues were so strong and so motivating in themselves. I mean local groups were set up to campaign, and so they did campaign and they did what the Movement told them. But the AAM had an internal democracy, the national committee was a big organisation with lots of representation on it, and it's interesting that one of the effects of the City AA period was to instil a great fear of this infiltration threat into the collective consciousness of the AAM. So when we were debating the future constitutional form or how it should change, that was very much in our minds, that danger of infiltration, and in practice I think the issue for ACTSA is not that people want to infiltrate to take it over, but the fact that it is very difficult to keep people motivated when there aren't really the campaigns there any more. You know, it's a new situation, you are not fighting an enemy

like apartheid any more, it's quite a different situation. But the reason groups were interested in infiltrating the Anti-Apartheid Movement was because that was a big political issue at the time. It was very important for the left, but now it doesn't have that significance.

HT: Were there any other local groups that sort of made themselves very visible?

ML: Was trouble? (laugh) Yes, there was a group, I think in Kent somewhere, that again had a rather Trotskyist flavour, I think, and they came along and put up motions. I think they never got really far, that was in the closing years of the AAM.

HT: You also had organisations affiliated to the AAM, they also had a vote then, like the local groups. Did they have the same status as the local groups?

ML: I think there was voting and non-voting actually, you can check – ask Mike Terry. There were other groups, because there was a sort of coalition which was a sort of church group, a very very broad organisation, which had church groups and groups like Amnesty in it – groups that didn't feel able to join the AAM, because they weren't able to take policy decisions in support of the liberation movements, but they were in support of sanctions and the boycott, Coalition for Southern Africa I think it was called, churches and aid agencies.

HT: So talking about different strategies, how important were public demonstrations or actions for the AAM, talking about the national AAM now?

ML: Very important, to be visible, and that was very much what local groups did – have street action, picketing super markets, picketing petrol stations, picketing banks. I think every local group did that because it was a way of making itself visible to the public, creating situations where you can hand out material to the public, a very activist movement like that. And national demonstrations, there were always things going on, and things outside South Africa House. The Movement was very efficient at organising pickets at very short notice on issues like the death sentence or people being detained or whatever. It had a great capacity to get its supporters out at very short notice outside South Africa House, obviously within London, in partnership with the ANC office, to get all the South Africans out, and get all the AAM people out.

HT: And those public actions – were they also consciously media directed actions?

M: Oh well, I mean the press would always be told.

HT: I mean, they don't exclude each other, but you could have an address, you would appear to hand out pamphlets to people passing by or you could go out in the streets to get attention from the media and to get into the papers and spread your message that way. They go together, of course, but to what extent they were planned and thought of as media strategies?

ML: I think it depended on the event. If it was someone who was going to be hanged tomorrow and you were outside South Africa, you are thinking that was the priority, because that was a solidarity gesture and a protest. Other things might have been planned more in advance with the press in mind – obviously the Boycott Bus that travelled around. There was a bus that went around the country to campaign. I can't remember if it was boycott or Mandela, I think it was called the Boycott Bus. And yes, sort of gimmicky things outside banks, tearing up giant cheques outside banks or dressing up – you know, those kind of things that get media attention, particularly local, and national, level. Those things needed a bit more thought, so they were more the pickets that were planned a bit far in advance, but we always tried to get media attention – whatever it was, the press would be told.

HT: I want to get into that, but just talking about boycott as a strategy, you know boycotts and sanctions, they were the really important strategies in the Anti-Apartheid Movement. I was wondering if there were discussions on the function of, for example, boycott strategy. I mean on the one hand you could say that this boycott strategy is actually to get South Africa, to get pressure on the South African government via South African business to stop apartheid. On the other hand, you could take a sort of realist approach, like some people in Sweden, for example in the Africa Groups, saying the boycott is a very good way to raise people's consciousness. You know, once a leader in the Africa Groups could say that 'I don't believe that a boycott could bring the government to fall in itself, but it is a very good way of wakening people and getting them active'.

ML: Yes, it was both. It was one of the three pillars of the struggle, wasn't it, the boycott, the armed struggle and the internal organisation, and people would always say – opponents of the AAM, sympathisers of the South African government would always say – that boycotts wouldn't work and Mrs Thatcher said – you are wasting your time, it's never going to have any effect. But we knew it worked, it did have an effect, and it was also very good for mobilising people, because that is an action that everybody can take. Everybody goes shopping, everybody had the opportunity in Britain to buy or not to buy a South African product, every shop you go into, so that is an action that goes right from the very very bottom, the individual person going shopping, right up to the top, you know, government arms supplies. And it certainly had an effect. I mean it's the most effective campaign you can think of really, a campaign which is capable of going right from that very top, pinnacles of power, arms supplies, right down to the individual shopper. There are not many other campaigns that you can think of which span that.

HT: So was that more important? This question might be wrongly put, but I was thinking about the relations between sanctions and boycotts?

ML: The two go together because you motivate individuals through the boycott, raise consciousness, and that then builds up the pressure for sanctions, because the government knows that its electorate is in support of sanctions, and you come to believe in the rightness of sanctions because you have been motivated through an individual boycott.

HT: Because in Sweden in the '80s you would have arguments from the labour and cooperative movement, when ISAK argued for boycott, that said – you know we tried boycott in the early '60s, it didn't work out, so it's better to put our energy pushing for sanctions, because that would have an effect.

ML: Was it an argument about where you put your resources?

HT: Yeah.

ML: No, I don't really recall that distinction being made – it was two sides of the coin.

HT: Let's move on to media, how would you characterise the importance of media and information in the struggle against apartheid? What role did that play?

ML: Well, I mean in this country, we had a media which by and large was not particularly sympathetic to the AAM, it didn't give the AAM a lot of coverage. I don't know if you have seen Victoria Brittain – she did a really excellent speech on that 40th anniversary, of what it was like to be a journalist who supported the Anti-Apartheid Movement, trying to get stuff into the press, even into liberal papers like the *Guardian*. So being annoyed about the press and media coverage about southern Africa was part of the day to day life of being an anti-apartheid activist. Actually, I would say it was one of the things that almost kept you motivated – how cross we were with the way the press covered or didn't cover the issues and cover or didn't cover the AAM. The alternative media was a way of finding out what was going on, that was important. I mean a movement can't function if its members aren't being fed with information. So I think films, I would say, were very very important, the sort of films – not the sort that was being showed at cinemas, they were more of the sort that one would be boycotting perhaps – but the films that were moving round on the alternative circuit that were available for anti-apartheid groups to hire and show to members. You know, that is a way of having a public meeting, and one of the first ones, was [*inaudible*], which was very widely shown in the AAM and had a tremendous influence on many people who saw that.

HT: Was that films that were produced by the movement?

ML: No, the film I mentioned was made by a South African exile.

HT: So it was more sort of picked up and distributed by the movement?

ML: Yes, they were distributed through alternative channels and anti-apartheid groups might hire them and have a public meeting and show them, going together with speakers on the situation. I think films were extremely important in bringing the situation across – I think a film is worth many speakers, unless they are very good speakers, and pictures, photo exhibitions, which IDAF, that was one of the things it produced as part of its information strategy. We had a big photographic department at IDAF, and many films as well if I remember it – we certainly distributed films, alternative films and photographs, and produced photo books, very important.

HT: So what other media strategies were there at the IDAF?

ML: Well, IDAF had a mission to quote 'Keep the conscience of the world alive to the issues at stake in southern Africa' and that's what its information department was tasked to do, to produce factual materials, with emphasis on factual and not 'propaganda', facts about the situation, and make them more available. The IDAF was a very important organisation for the Anti-Apartheid Movement in that it was producing the materials that the AAM activists used in their campaigning. The Anti-Apartheid Movement itself produced quite a lot of material, it produced the newspaper, quite a lot of pamphlets, endless leaflets and information sheets and briefings and so on, press packs and so on, but the more substantial publications, the sort of thing you could sell at a public meeting, came above all from IDAF. So if you would go to a local anti-apartheid group who were having a public meeting, in all probability they would have a bookstall, and the materials of that bookstall, some of them would have come from the AAM, but a lot of them would have come from IDAF. That was very important. And then of course I got involved in the late '80s in merchandising, which was also, you know it's correct to actually bring it in response to your question, because I think merchandise was also extremely important in conveying a message in creating and sustaining a sense of identity of the movement. It communicated a message about the movement, it was also a way for people to identify with the movement through wearing T-shirts, buying the merchandise. So yes, I would include in answering your question there, and I certainly myself in getting involved in merchandising saw that very much as a contribution to the Anti-Apartheid Movement campaigns, and in building a movement and at the same time raising money for it. At that time, the late '80s, it was a period in this country when merchandise was very important for political activism. All the campaigning organisations had merchandise and wearing a political T-shirt was very much a fashion thing. Marxism was quite fashionable, I suppose it was partly a reaction to Thatcherism, that political T-shirts were fashion items, and it was also the idea of having mail order catalogues, which was quite a new thing. All the campaigning groups and the charities were starting to get them, and for a while it was a way to get money. Then I think the market got too crowded and it became more difficult later on, but it was a great rush of merchandise catalogues, whatever it was – Nicaragua Solidarity, Chile, AAM – everybody had a catalogue.

HT: This was the late '80s, from '85?

ML: Yes, that was when AA Enterprises, which I set up, we started in '85.

HT: Could you say something more about that?

ML: After I left IDAF, I worked for a while with Twin Trading, which was a Fairtrade organisation, and we were developing fairly traded products like coffee, and cocoa, chocolate and so on, and I put that together with the AAM idea, the sanctions campaign, and came up with the idea, which was behind AA Enterprises, was that what we should be doing was taking the boycott campaign one logical stage further, and as a way of supporting the frontline states in their solidarity against apartheid, we should be

positively buying from the frontline states. So the idea was to add that concept of positive purchase, of using your power as a consumer, in a positive sense, as well as in a negative sense. 'Boycott apartheid and buy from the frontline states' – that was the slogan. So we set up a merchandising cooperative whose purpose was to create and disseminate the products that would make that possible for the individual supporter of Anti-Apartheid, and we had a mail order catalogue, which included AA merchandise, AA T-shirts and products from the ANC, but also products from the frontline states or that in some way supported the frontline states, or were symbolic of the frontline states. I even used designs from artists in the frontline states, for example lots of our T-shirts used Mozambican designs. We paid a royalty to the artist in those countries, or we sold products like Angolan coffee and Zimbabwean wine and Mozambican cashew nuts, mugs and greetings and what have you, and for three or four years, 1985–86 onwards, it really boomed, and all the local anti-apartheid groups had the merchandise at their meetings. It was very attractive and it really added to the bookstore, and people liked wearing the T-shirts – yes, it was about creating an identity and getting people products that they enjoyed wearing and were attractive, and raised a bit money as well.

HT: I bought a T-shirt in 1985, something with 'Free the Children'.

ML: Yes, that was one of ours.

HT: I bought it in Sweden, at a Leftist theatre ...

ML: Ann-Mari was the key contact in Gothenburg with our T-shirts.

HT: This is very interesting, I think, because it adds to this concept of movement culture also an economic dimension.

ML: Although I have to say, there were always a slight suspicion about us, on the part of the AAM – there was a little bit of a tension there, because you know we had gone outside the movement to do this.

HT: So this was not within the movement?

ML: No, well it was a sort of closely related organisation, but we weren't part ... I never worked for the AAM, we were slightly outside. And part of the motivation of that really was that we thought if you go through the official channels nothing really happens.

HT: It was called AA Enterprises, which meant Anti-Apartheid Enterprises?

ML: Yes, it wasn't, it didn't mean anything really but everybody knew it was anti apartheid, and it also had the advantage you got quite high up in the phone book, which was always an advantage for any company. We purchased – no we sold – Anti-Apartheid Movement material and paid a royalty to the AAM for the use of their design. We printed the products. We were licensed to print the AA designs and paid the movement a royalty, and I think it was a bit of a sense on the part of the AAM that it was

losing control a bit, or maybe a feel that maybe we could make more money if we made this ourselves. But the two of us – it was me and a partner who set up the company – we were partly motivated by the feeling that the Anti-Apartheid Movement wasn't actually very good at fundraising and we could do a better job, and this was actually better because we were taking the capital risk. We were certainly going to be paying the Movement money – without that they were going to have to put up the capital, and we thought that that was actually a good thing for the Movement. I think we were right, but I think there was a bit of a suspicion on the part of the AAM establishment – you know that they were sort of losing control. So it goes back to your question earlier on about tensions. I thought that we were right, you know from a business point of view that was quite a correct thing for them to have done, because they didn't have any capital, but I mean there were some really funny things happening – the AAM trying to make its accounts look reasonably OK, but everybody knew they weren't, were trying to claim its stock of leaflets as assets, all those piles of outdated leaflets, capital assets, trying to look not quite so bankrupt as it really was. So we were sort of motivated out of, you know, absolute commitment, in helping the Movement. But I think it is true to say that perhaps we weren't always appreciated.

HT: So getting back to the media again, how did you relate to established news agencies and their reports? If you found something that was inaccurate, did you react?

ML: Yes, the AA office had a very good press strategy. You need to talk to Mike Terry about the press, because it was essentially what he was spending a tremendous lot of his time doing. The AAM had a very quick response rate, and would respond things in the press and dealt constantly with the national press, and Mike knew all those people. I mean Victoria was a key supporter. Another person who gave a fascinating presentation to that 40th anniversary conference was Patsy Robertson in the press office at the Commonwealth Secretariat. At that 40th anniversary conference, she was able to say all sorts of things that she could never had said at the time. It was fascinating how she tried to support the AAM from within her position, and she is a great friend. There were other people like Mr Reddy at the UN who were important – yes, it was head office really.

HT: By the way is she in London?

ML: Patsy, yes, she is working for Sonny Ramphal because he has a consultancy, because he was the Secretary-General when she was in the press office. I think she would be well worth talking to.

HT: Did you have the impression that the relations between the Anti-Apartheid Movement and the media changed during the period and in that case how?

ML: Well, towards the end of the '80s, the Anti-Apartheid Movement became much more fashionable and the membership rose a great deal – never as much as CND but it increased tremendously, and the members of staff and the head office increased. The Anti-Apartheid Movement was in the news, there were things happening in South Africa, so we got more press coverage. That was a big contrast to the early 1970s when hardly

anybody took any notice. Then the Soweto uprising came along and got in the news there, so yes I guess in the end the AAM had many more friends in the press than in the beginning, but I'm not really the person to speak about the details.

HT: Did you have the feeling that when there were certain events in South Africa that were extensively reported by the media – did you have a feeling that it was easier to work as an AA activist?

ML: Oh yes, when it was in the news, absolutely, yes. When we look at the alternative media, also one thing to mention is song, because pop artists who made up songs about Mandela and the struggle were very important. Jerry Dammers was extremely important in the movement – the song 'Free Nelson Mandela', that was extremely important. Jerry Dammers was very involved in the movement, became involved quite a bit in the movement. There was a sort of a committee of artists, there was also – a very early one was Gill Scott-Heron, the American artist, who had a song about Johannesburg, that was the first one that I was aware of, but 'Free Nelson Mandela' really got into the hit parade, that was Jerry Dammers.

HT: Yes, Peter Gabriel was the one that meant something for me when he made the song 'Biko'.

ML: Right, yes, yes indeed, they were very important, so I think that if you are looking at popular culture, what affected people, these things certainly did, and there were celebrities who identified with the struggle.

HT: So did you actively approach these people or did they just come around?

ML: Ask Mike [Terry] about that, about how the Wembley concerts were organised. There was the huge one when Mandela was released, which he appeared at, in April 1990. Then there was one for his 70th birthday, which would have been 1988, that was the first Wembley concert, that was like at the peak of the Movement. I mean the idea that that Movement, which was almost virtually bankrupt, it organised this huge event at Wembley, which was shown around the world on TV. I mean it is extraordinary.

HT: How many concerts were there?

ML: There were two, there was another one actually for his 65th birthday, which was at Alexandra Palace, which was a smaller thing, and then the Wembley one was the huge one, and then when he was released at Wembley, that was organised at very short notice, obviously after he was released in February and the concert was in April when he came here. So those kind of things were crucially important in mobilising the Movement and putting it in the popular eye. It was both cause and effect – the Movement had by that time become so important that it could sustain a concert on that scale, but vice versa, those kind of events got to so many people. It's incredible thinking back really.

HT: I was thinking about how to define the struggle. You can define it as an anti-racist and as an anti-imperialist struggle, and sometimes these two definitions might not be in conflict with each other. But taking different ideological positions they might be clashing. I would also bring in there the concept of human rights, if that concept, I mean today human rights is an extremely important thing in grassroots global issues, so my question is: Can you reflect on these different ways of defining the struggle, or if there were any sort of conjunctures or changes or conflicts related to how to define what the struggle was really about, do you get my idea?

ML: I would say the great strength of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, certainly in Britain, and I am sure in other places as well, was that it was a very broad church, and within the Movement you had a huge spectrum of political and ideological positions, so people who perhaps had a church, human rights, non-violent background and motivation for joining could campaign and picket and organise quite happily alongside members of the British Communist Party, who saw it in the context of an anti-imperialist analysis of the world. And yes, in a typical anti-apartheid group you would find all these people all together, and that was the great strength of the Movement, that there were people of all political parties and all united by that one campaign of boycott and sanctions. I mean there has not been another campaign of that kind since. And it was Shula [Marks], I think, at the conference we've been talking about, who pointed out that the Anti-Apartheid Movement was the largest and most significant mobilisation of its kind in the entire second half of the 20th century. My goodness, she is right actually – I mean no other issue has united such a diverse collection of people. Did that answer the question?

HT: Yes, it does, because it was different here from in Sweden.

ML: I mean the one time that it did cause a tension was not the Communist Party in the Stalinist tradition, but the Trotskyist, the Socialist Workers Party. It was always there in the AAM, that we regarded with some suspicion, and then, we mentioned the Revolutionary Communist Groups and the Revolutionary Communist Tendency.

HT: Was the concept of human rights important all along?

ML: Yes, because those campaigns were very very important for local groups, campaigns around political prisoners. I think if you looked around local groups – there were probably between 50 and a 100 local groups at the peak of the movement – if you looked at what they were actually doing, of the various campaigns that they could have taken up, I think you would find that a vast majority would be campaigning around political prisoners. You know, that sort of very easy thing to start – they would campaign about the boycott, they would be doing things outside the supermarket, and they would be campaigning about political prisoners, because those are the things – everybody is a shopper, and everybody can identify with those human rights issues, political prisoners, you know you don't need to support the armed struggle to support either of those two campaigns. For certain the AAM had members who might have felt rather uneasy about armed struggle and didn't feel able to support it, but you didn't have to support armed struggle to join the AAM. The AAM had policy of supporting ANC and all the liberation

movements, but you didn't have to feel personally committed to armed struggle to become a member, Again, that was a strength.

HT: So I have a last question, which has a different character from the other ones. I would like to ask you to define solidarity from your own point of view.

ML: Well, the definition of solidarity that I have always liked and always tended to use, I can't even remember the exact quote, is from Samora Machel, where he said something along the lines that solidarity is not charity, but it's about two people who share the same vision, working together to achieve that. And I think that is what it is – you share a common vision of the world. Now there is something else he says also, I think it is Samora Michel, anyway it came from Mozambique – that the liberation struggle is like a sort of train, going along. As it goes along, some people might drop off the train or get off, but the train goes on. And I feel that very much does describe what's happened, because in the time that I have been involved I have lived through the independence of Zimbabwe, Namibia, the Portuguese colonies, South Africa, and each one of these countries you find after independence, people that you once knew, perhaps very very well as exiles, perhaps standing alongside you on the pavement outside South Africa House, do things which you find really quite surprising and extraordinary when they are in the new situation of being in government. Is this really the same person doing this? You know it's that train going on, the idea of solidarity, those things, I never found those things inevitably happen, it never made me disillusioned about the idea of solidarity, and that the idea of that continues even in the post-apartheid situation. There are those who consider it a problem in defining it and defining what you do with your Anti-Apartheid Movement post-apartheid – of course there are – but the idea of solidarity, I wouldn't feel it's an old fashioned or an out-of-date concept or as a word, but it's no longer politically correct to use.

HT: You would feel that it is?

ML: No, no, I don't have a problem with that, and I'm sure that other people find it is an embarrassing word or not politically correct, but I don't feel that. Sometimes it's quite hard to recognise who it is has the same vision as you now, or you may sort of identify people or groups or who you feel share the same vision, but working out how you might work with them is much more difficult. I mean, you have the liberation movement, that's the challenge that the post-apartheid organisation has, I don't know how you tackle that in Sweden, but that's a difficult one for ACTSA here.

HT: If you could be allowed to freely speculate about the role that solidarity would play in the world in the nearest decades?

ML: Personally, going back to what we were saying earlier on about why people get motivated and how they become motivated, and why did we join the Anti-Apartheid Movement, and if you go back to what happened to individuals, you tend to find that some personal experience or contact or a friendship or meeting someone was very important. And I continue to believe that is very important, to put people in touch with

each other. It's a strange thing that although the world gets smaller all the time, and there is more and more communication, and although in one way on the surface it seems as if it is much easier to communicate with people in other parts of the world, in another way it isn't, there are barriers still remaining. We talked about travel, and when we were in the 1970s people didn't travel so much. Now it's much more common for a younger generation to travel and think nothing of it, and for people to take two or three foreign long holidays a year. That has changed in the last 20 or 30 years, but that hasn't necessarily brought people closer together. It can actually create more division in a funny kind of way. We perhaps felt when we were travelling to Southern Africa, at the time we were standing outside South Africa House, picketing, it wasn't necessary. As we were saying earlier, there was our sense of solidarity. Now people may travel to Africa, but the divisions can remain and be even worse, and that is a strange contradiction. So what I am trying to say is that what is very important is to find ways of putting people in touch with each other and really creating opportunity for people to dialogue with each other, and to get to know each other, and to debate and quarrel, and not fight, but discuss among themselves, in a sense, in a form where they are really communicating. The things I have gone into since Anti-Apartheid, as you know I am still very involved with Zimbabwe, and the Friendship Society. I would say that that is very much one of our aims, to try and create situations in which people from Britain and Zimbabwe can really meet and exchange ideas, and really debate and discuss, in a comradesly way, as equals. I have worked quite a lot with linking groups, twin towns or twin communities and schools or whatever it is between here and Southern Africa in particular, not only Southern Africa, and that is quite a challenging thing. It's much harder than it looks at first, sometimes the idea of linking could be very easy – oh, let's link our school. But when you get into it, you actually find it is really difficult to do it in a way which becomes a partnership of equals where there is a real dialogue, and you have to really work at it. That isn't necessarily solidarity, but it's creating the conditions for solidarity, I would say.

HT: OK, thank you very much.