

Interview with Rev. David Haslam by Christabel Gurney, 11 September 2013, for the Anti-Apartheid Movement Archives Committee project Forward to Freedom <http://www.aamarchives.org/>

Christabel Gurney: David, thank you very much for coming today. This is Christabel Gurney talking to David Haslam on 11th September 2013. Could you just confirm your name and tell us when and where you were born.

David Haslam: Yes, I'm David Haslam. I was born in Southport in Lancashire in 1942.

CG: Thank you. And what do you, or did you, do for a living?

DH. I still am a Methodist minister. They don't pay me any more but I do get a pension.

CG: Can you tell us when you first became aware of the situation in Southern Africa?

DH: Well, when I was a theological student training for the ministry in Handsworth College in Birmingham we received the opportunity to apply to become a steward at the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches which was going to be held in Sweden in 1968 and I was fortunate enough to be selected for that, so I went to that Assembly. And that was the Assembly at which for the first time there were a substantial number of church representatives from the South, including South Africa, and it was an Assembly at which the issues of racism and inequality in the world were very much to the fore. One of the keynote speakers was Kenneth Kaunda, for example, from Zambia, and James Baldwin from the United States. And that was a kind of second conversion experience to me. I heard and spoke with people from South Africa, Christians who explained the apartheid system and what was going on and how important it was for Western countries to make a positive response.

CG: That's very interesting. Was Pauline Webb there?

DH: She was indeed, and I've been in touch with her ever since as another traveller on the anti-apartheid road.

CG: So when you came back from the Assembly (conference) how did you follow that up?

DH: Well, it was quite difficult to put all one's experience immediately into practice, but in fact the following year in 1969 the World Council of Churches launched its Programme to Combat Racism in Notting Hill. I had been invited to go to that event, but my then first wife, I think, found the first experience of me being away for two or three weeks and then coming back much changed, as she put it – she didn't really want me going on the second phase. So I always regret not being at the launch of the PCR. But that of course did create quite a lot of response in the British churches and an increase of awareness, as well as resistance and outright opposition, and it seemed to me that this was an area that I wanted to get engaged with. I was then posted to my first church in Hillfields in

Coventry in 1969, which was a multi-racial area in the city of Coventry, and gave me the opportunity to both be involved in anti-racist work at local level, but increasingly to look at how one could be involved in anti-apartheid work at the wider level. I joined the Anti-Apartheid Movement in around 1970, I think.

CG: What was your involvement in the Anti-Apartheid Movement as an organisation?

DH: Well, initially as a member. I moved to Southampton as a Minister in 1971, which made commuting up to London relatively easy. I went to a couple of Anti-Apartheid Movement AGMs and I think with encouragement from one or two others, because there weren't too many church people involved at that time, was encouraged to stand for the Executive Committee, which I did, and then served on the Executive Committee for I think six years through (until) the middle years of the 1970s, then a further six years in the early eighties..

CG: You said that the churches had different reactions to the Programme to Combat Racism – the British churches. Could you say a bit more about that.

DH: Well, the PCR created quite a lot of debate – perhaps not enough to some degree, but certainly some. When the Special Fund came, that was the hard edge because the Special Fund was created to support the humanitarian needs of the liberation movements, and many of the British churches were sort of quietly oppositional to that. In the Methodist church we did get a degree of response, which led eventually to the Missionary Society – because our general secretary at that time, Albert (Alfred) Mosley, had worked in Southern Africa, and so was more aware of the issues than some of the leaders in other churches. And even though the Methodist church as a whole would not support the Special Fund, the Methodist Missionary Society said 'Well, we're going to set up a specific fund for church members to contribute to the Special Fund and we are going to support the Programme ourselves'. There was a differentiation between the Programme to Combat Racism, the costs in Geneva, and the Special Fund, which was going to support the liberation movements. None of the churches, however, were willing to give support to the Special Fund. Some allowed modest support for the Programme itself, based in Geneva. Two churches, the Presbyterian Church of Ireland and the Salvation Army, actually came out very vigorously against the Programme to Combat Racism and withdrew their membership from the World Council of Churches because of the PCR, a decision which they later regretted and admitted they'd been mistaken.

CG: At that time the Anti-Apartheid Movement was campaigning for sanctions, or actually in the '70s more for disinvestment, and was asking churches, as well as other organisations, to withdraw from companies, sell their shares in companies involved in South Africa, with a little bit of success. Could you say something about that campaign and the reaction to it.

DH: Well, through the '70s, I mean perhaps the two key areas of campaigning were banks and then later oil, and to some degree gold as well, as that became higher profile. And I, with others, started ELTSA, the End Loans to Southern Africa campaign in '73 or

'74 as a result of my having been to the United States in 1973 just for a short visit and having come across the Interfaith Centre for Corporate Responsibility, ICCR, which was leading amongst the American churches on this issue. Many of the churches belonged to it and some Roman Catholic Orders and some Jewish communities and through them (they –) I discovered that the European American Banking Corporation, EABC, which is based in the United States, but had six European banks involved, was making loans direct to the South African government or its agencies, and that was seen as a hard case, an opportunity to get the churches to address the banks involved. So we came back and with others in Europe also sought to address the six European banks that were involved in that, which involved Midland Bank in the UK and German, Dutch and French and Belgian banks. So we focused in Midland Bank in the UK. We did get eventually some sympathy from the churches about that because they saw that it wasn't appropriate to lend to (for) the South African government, and so the Methodist Church and the Church of England, the Church Commissioners, did join the campaign in an establishment sort of way against the loans to South Africa. And the Midland Bank did say in 1976 that they would no longer be involved in loans to the South African government or its agencies. So there was a bit of a shift. But at the same time the Church of England would not support the Programme to Combat Racism and in the 1970s reduced its grant to the World Council of Churches by £1,000 a year to show its disapproval of the PCR, while the Methodist church was in fact collecting money to support it. It has to be said though that the Methodist church faced reaction from some of its own members. One member sought to bring a court case on the grounds that the church was a charity and should not be supporting that sort of activity. And so there was a degree of nervousness even in the Methodist church about the support, although the court case was withdrawn, I think, because it was demonstrated that the Missionary Society had a right to act in the way it was acting. The Roman Catholic church gave some support to the bank loans campaign and some support to the wider disinvestment campaign and in fact I think in the late '70s, one Catholic diocese, I think it was the Birmingham diocese, did withdraw money, disinvest from, I think, six British companies that were involved in South Africa. So the reaction was patchy. There was some fairly radical action and some quite clear resistance to that sort of action.

CG: Why do you think that was? Did they have links with churches in South Africa in the '70s?

DH: Yes, they did. I mean this caused more links to be made, as it were, and churches in the UK and the European countries asked their South African counterparts much more detailed questions about what was going on. And it depended on what their South African counterparts told them. The South African Council of Churches had become increasingly radicalised during the 1970s partly as a result of the Programme to Combat Racism and it had started calling for disinvestment from South Africa. Whereupon the reaction of some of the British churches was 'Oh no, you've got this wrong. We know better than you do.' There was an element of racism there – clearly white people would know better than black people and by then the leadership of the South African Council of Churches was black, so they were able to listen to the voice of the black communities much more closely (vigorously), and some of the establishment, the Anglican church in

South Africa, was a bit equivocal. I think the Catholic church was less so and the Methodist church was more closely involved with the South African Council of Churches position, which was a more radical disinvestment type position. So that was some of the factors that were operating.

CG: Can you say a bit more about End Loans to Southern Africa and how it came to be formed and how it was structured and who funded it?

DH: Yes, it was formed as I said in 1973, 1974. I think we started with an action outside a bank AGM in 1974, having learned what we had learned from the Americans. I mean just as an interesting side story, the information about the bank loans to South Africa by the six European, as well as American, banks came about because Reverend Don Foster, who was a South African Methodist Minister in exile, spoke at a small meeting on a dark November evening in a New York church. And afterwards somebody came to him and said 'Is that really what it's like in South Africa?' And he said, 'Yes' so the person said, 'let me take your phone number. I may have something to interest you.' And he was actually a whistle-blower from inside one of the banks, who gave Don – Morton his name was – who gave Don Morton the documentation that demonstrated that these bank loans were taking place. After that they called them the Frankfurt documents to show they hadn't come from inside the United States at all, but that's where they came from. And so ELTSA was formed and there were groups also in Germany and in the Netherlands formed in reaction to this information. And we sought support from the churches, we made it a largely church-based campaign because we thought this was a hard-edged thing that we might get the churches to support. And we got money initially from individual donations and then we did get a bit of structural money from the Missionary Society, I think, and one or two other churches that gave grants and we were able to employ somebody, Bernard Rivers, who worked for two days a week for ELTSA initially. And of course when you've got somebody employed you can produce more documentation and get it out more widely and do more effective campaigning. So it built up through the '70s and in the late '70s actually we also, because we were working with the Anti-Apartheid Movement all this time, but focusing on awareness building in the churches, and getting church investors to ask questions of the banks, first Midland and then Barclays Bank, then Hill Samuel and Standard Chartered. And also we supported, obviously, the Anti-Apartheid Movement boycott campaign in the universities and so on, which became more public and more vigorous. And then we latched also onto the oil campaign, as I say, at the end of the '70s.

CG: It was very effective, looking back. So who were your activists, were they church people?

DH: Yes, they were largely individuals who were turned on by this and thought 'This is bad to be happening in the churches'. We had little campaigns like we – I remember we put out – in those days to make a deposit you had to go into a bank and take out a little slip from the desks in the bank and fill it in with your money and pay it in. So we had forays into banks and put in false paying-in slips, which said 'If you pay in here you are paying in to support apartheid' kind of thing. And some customers, we know, quite

unsuspectingly filled these in and handed them into the bank and they got into the bank system, because they looked very similar to the normal paying-in slips. And the bank started saying 'What on earth are these?' So there were opportunities for individuals to do those kind of things in their local banks, so that was quite fun. And also we started calling international days of action against the banks and said on this particular day – and sometimes it was a day that was associated with an apartheid – days like Sharpeville Day in March, and we would find that we could get people out in six or eight cities in the UK, but also three or four cities in the Netherlands and in Scandinavia, increasingly. So those international days of action – these days it would be much easier to organise through electronic means – but in those days to get those kind of things happening – it clearly made an impact because it was an uncommon sort of thing, and so rare. It was all helped by the information in the *Guardian* that came out in 1973 about the poverty wages being paid to black workers in South Africa, so that that campaign was running alongside ours as well.

CG: Can you remember any particular incidents from these occasions, these days of action? Did you get opposition from particular branches?

DH: I think the banks didn't quite know how to play it really. We would go into the branches and explain to the staff we were not against them, or we asked activists to do this, not against them individually, but it was against the bank's policy and we felt we had to do this, so that created some interesting dialogues. There were some cashiers, or managers, who would say 'Well, yes we understand what you're doing', and there were others who had a more negative reaction. In Harlesden where I was Minister the Barclays Bank was across the road from our church, so if our church did some action, largely middle-aged black ladies, not the normal student activist sort of person, when they went into the bank, they sometimes knew the cashiers, who were also from the black community in that particular area and so there was at least an understanding of what was going rather than any immediate antipathy, so that was quite helpful. I remember on one occasion – it wasn't Barclays, it was Shell, when we were getting going on the Boycott Shell campaign, which again was a joint one with the Anti-Apartheid Movement, one of our ladies, who must have been in her 50s or whatever We did a Shell branch in Battersea, a Shell petrol station, and we actually closed it down for a couple of hours in the morning because we just had people lined up across the entrance to the petrol station. And when this lady got home that evening she got a phone call from her sister in New York saying 'I just seen you demonstrating outside Shell in England, in London, what are you getting yourself mixed up with that sort of thing for?' So Eunice, or whatever her name was, had to explain to her sister what it was all about, so that was a bit of an educational extension, as you might say.

CG: Can we go back to the banks for a minute. Did you go to AGMs?

DH: We did go to AGMs. That was the time when we started buying small blocks of shares in Midland and Barclays, and Standard Chartered and Hill Samuel were two of the banks that were particularly involved in facilitating the loans. We discovered that we could get into the AGMs even with a single share. So we would buy a block of ten and

distribute them – you could do it yourselves in those days – maybe you still can. And so we would have six or seven people who each had one share each, and then others popped up and said ‘I already have shares in Barclays that my aunt left me’, and that sort of thing, so we would finish up with quite a number of people. And one or two church bodies investing initially in Midland and then in Barclays did send official representatives, but they never actually got up and spoke. But in the case of Midland they did actually vote with us, because in Midland we did actually put down the first shareholder resolution in modern times on a social justice issue. I think that was 1975 or 1976. And we actually got the Methodist church to vote with us and the Church Commissioners of the Church of England, to our surprise. And although that resolution only got 6% of the vote, I think, by the end of the year, because this would be March or April, Midland announced that they were no longer making loans to South Africa.

CG: Was that what the resolution asked for?

DH: Yes, it wasn't asking them to pull out. In fact Midland weren't in South Africa at that time, but they were facilitating these loans and participating in them, so they did stop that. It was harder to get the Church Commissioners to act on Barclays, I remember, but clearly there were conversations going on behind the scenes. And the culmination of all that, with the protest in the AGMs themselves and the conversations that were going on outside, led eventually to Barclays disinvesting.

CG: Let's move on then to the oil campaign. How did that come about?

It really started because two journalists, one of whom was Bernard Rivers, who started his work with us on anti-apartheid with ELTSA back in 1974 or 75, and Martin Bailey found out again through these leaks somewhere along the line that Shell and BP were directly involved in sanctions busting into Zimbabwe because at that point, at least as far as Rhodesia as it then was concerned, the UN had called for an embargo on oil into Zimbabwe in order to bring the Smith government into conversation with the black majority, in particular the liberation movement leaders. And Shell and BP and Total and other companies were actually breaking that embargo secretly through Mozambique and indeed through South Africa. And that sort of burst on the scene, I think, in the late '70s, I think in '77 – I can't remember the date. And therefore it became clear that as well as money, oil was another key element initially to do with Rhodesia/Zimbabwe and then with South Africa as well – that the oil helped to grease the wheels of apartheid, or oil the wheels of apartheid, as we used to say. So again the Anti-Apartheid Movement picked that up and ELTSA broadened its interest into the oil embargo, and in fact the Embargo campaign with the participation of a number of groups was set up, particularly in Britain and the Netherlands, because it was Shell and BP that were particularly involved. And that again involved buying shares in Shell and BP, going to company meetings and urging the churches, who were big investors in Shell and BP, to take a more radical challenging attitude. I do remember that the Church Commissioners at that time had £22 million worth of investments in Shell, but would not tell us whether they were actually saying anything to Shell about their position in this particular situation. So we created some pressure through the General Synod of the Church of England, and

indeed the Methodist Conference, to get the church investors to say more publicly what they were doing, if anything, and preferably to say that they were putting the maximum pressure on Shell and BP to stop that activity.

CG: Who else was involved in Embargo?

DH: Well, my memory is, you know, ELTSA and the Anti-Apartheid Movement were the main people. I think some of the trade unions gave support to that, the same ones that were supporting it anyway, but I can't recall – I mean it was an international campaign. Again there were people – the World Council of Churches of course was involved in that as well.

CG: And at that stage Embargo was asking companies to disinvest from BP and Shell? Were you asking people to boycott BP and Shell products?

DH: I think we were. That's where the days of action against Shell and BP came into action. It was really 'Don't have anything to do with Shell'. I think Shell was a particular target because it was an international company, it was owned partly in the Netherlands and partly in the UK. It was also present in the United States. I mean BP was becoming more international of course at that point.

CG: Looking back, what do you think it all that campaigning achieved – if you look back at the overall move to the end of apartheid?

DH: Well, I think ultimately it was very effective. The Programme to Combat Racism was also getting involved in all of this process. Perhaps I should say a bit more about them – they picked up on both the banks campaign and the oil campaign and urged their member churches, 300 of them internationally, to take action on that kind of thing, and that did lead to more awareness in Africa, for example. And churches in Ghana and Nigeria and places like that were coming out to raise questions about the oil companies and the banks through that whole period, and that kind of put more pressure on churches and other bodies in the UK to become more aware. When there was a coup in Grenada in 1983 and the Bishop government, the New Jewel Movement, took over, I'd been – this is a small story. I had visited Grenada, I think, in 1977 when the New Jewel Movement was almost an underground movement in formation and talked to them about Anti-Apartheid and Barclays. And when that movement grew stronger and overthrew this very peculiar person, Eric Gairy, who was then the Prime Minister of Grenada and believed in unidentified flying objects and that kind of thing, and they took over, the first thing they did was withdraw the Grenadian government account with Barclays and say 'You are not welcome in this island because of your involvement in South Africa'. So those kind of little spin-off effects around the world which were happening, partly because I went to Grenada as a church representative from the Caribbean Conference of Churches in 1977. So there were all those sort of ripple effects that were going on. And I think that the building awareness around the world through the churches, and the trade unions of course, was very influential in terms of slowing the flow of money, and eventually really stopping it, and slowing the flow of oil. And then the gold campaign

latterly as well, 'Don't buy South African gold'. I mean that was basically strangling the South African economy and ultimately there was no way for them to go but to turn to the black community and say 'OK, we've got to do business with you'.

CG: The internationalisation, the international campaign, is very interesting and very important. Can you also say what the high points and low points of the campaign were? Were there times when you felt like giving up?

DH: Yes, there were. I mean, I think the role of the UN we ought to refer to, because it's sometimes a maligned institution, and of course it always takes ages to get very far. But the fact that the UN was willing to set up the Special Committee Against Apartheid and that that committee was willing to engage with activists, as well as governments, and bring people to New York to hearings ... I spoke in New York on the banks issue, and I remember Bishop Desmond as he was then, Bishop Desmond Tutu was there at the same time. He was speaking about the effect within South Africa and that got a degree of profile and that then backtracked into the British press and the European press. Then there were meetings in Geneva along with the World Council of Churches, because their headquarters is there, and between the UN and the World Council and that gave additional profile and so on, and those were really getting somewhere because the international community was taking notice. And then of course you would think, 'Well things are now going to happen'. But they didn't, so even by the mid '80s we were still thinking, 'This is going to run and run. Will we still be here in the 21st century?' But the collapse in the late '80s came quite quickly, and that was the result of that wide international pressure and everything, from the student actions on campuses against Barclays through the late '70s and early '80s to the demonstrations against Shell and the AGM. On one occasion at the Shell AGM we had about 25 people there, and there was question after question after question about South Africa, and the Chairman would then say 'Well, we have dealt I think with South Africa now. Could we please have the next question.' And someone else would say 'Well I know you've said this, Mr Chairman, but I do want to ask why you are still supporting the South African government'. And of course the other shareholders began to get quite angry and said – there were shouts of 'We have had enough'. But we were very persistent and on that particular occasion we had written a Shell song and at the end of the AGM we started singing the Shell song. I wish I could remember the tune now. But there were about 20 verses and we went on and on – maybe I could search the files again for the words. But it was pretty clear what we were calling for, it was about Shell getting out of South Africa. And on another occasion at the GEC AGM, the Chairman was Lord Weinstock at that time, there were only three or four of us on that particular occasion. But I did ask a question, which he didn't answer, and I persisted, but he wouldn't answer it, so I carried on speaking. And I remember the BBC *World at One* were covering the AGM and they actually signed off the programme by saying 'Well, Lord Weinstock has declared the AGM closed, but the Reverend Haslam is still speaking'. Lord Weinstock came to speak to me afterwards and there was a picture in the *Financial Times* next day of Lord Weinstock and me debating the topic. So there were all kinds of little things like that which culminated in the success.

CG: You did quite imaginative things. We have photos of a spoof, a mocked-up tank outside Shell garages. Was that Embargo?

DH: Yes, it was, it was a very clever piece of campaigning. Yes, that was the Embargo campaign, a range of activists and organisations were involved. We also took a piggy bank round the City of London on one occasion with a large silver coin – a mock-up piggy bank, and we went round the five key banks that we thought were involved in apartheid. And then people were putting large silver coins into the top of the piggy bank, which was the apartheid piggy bank, and then they were getting sheaves of notes out of the piggy's backside. And we had a ringmaster dressed up in a top hat and frock coat saying 'Come along and see the apartheid piggy bank. You can put silver in one end and you get notes, bundles of notes, out of the other end and this a remarkable money producer.'

CG: There was also a P W Botha, President P W Botha, mask ...

DH: There was – that was on a different occasion that we did that, and stood outside the bank saying 'Here's the man who will produce you the money'.

CG: Is there anything else you would like to say?

DH: Well, I think it is important in these sort of international campaigns to keep hope alive, as it were, all the way through. I always remember a little message that Guy and Molly Clutton Brock, who were activists in Zimbabwe, or Rhodesia as it was then. They were Quakers and they were very committed to non-violent resistance. But they bought the first farm in Zimbabwe which was jointly owned by them and I remember Didymus Mutasa, who later became the Speaker in the Zimbabwean Parliament, and there were others, white and black, involved. And the Smith regime got so angry with them that in the end they actually deported them without any of their belongings. Molly Clutton-Brock arrived in the UK with just a handbag and she later gave that handbag to my older daughter as a sort of keepsake, which was really nice. But they said, 'We want to remind you of the old African proverb – It takes a lot of pinpricks to move an elephant. But yours may be the pinprick that actually counts in the end.' So I've always used that as an encouragement to people campaigning, as we are now, on tax justice, that it will take a lot of pinpricks to move the elephant, but yours may be the pinprick that moves it. So that's something that has stayed with me. I'd say the other thing with regard to the churches – institutions take a long time to shift and they are committed to their own survival, initially, whether it's a big company or a trade union or a church or a government, their first reaction is 'We must survive'. It's a hard struggle to remind them of their moral obligations, what they really stand for. That's more true of course of churches and trade unions and faith communities than it is of businesses or governments. But political parties need to be reminded of their moral obligations, also. So I would say to activists in these institutions – Don't be surprised if the initial reaction is always negative, but what the anti-apartheid struggle shows is that truth and righteousness wins in the end.

CG: Thanks very much, David.