

The Anti-Apartheid Movement in the 1980s

In 1980 Zimbabwe achieved majority rule after long drawn-out negotiations at the Lancaster House conference. The Anti-Apartheid Movement had warned against a sell-out by the new Conservative government, but under intense pressure from the 1979 Lusaka Commonwealth Conference Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher initiated talks that led to genuine independence. The AAM could put all its energies into campaigning against apartheid in South Africa and Namibia and the threat South Africa posed to the whole Southern African region.

Beginning with a conference on 'Southern Africa after Zimbabwe' in March 1981, the AAM highlighted South Africa's illegal rule in Namibia and its aggression against the frontline states. Once again it recast its strategy on sanctions, calling for the imposition of a UN mandatory ban on trade and investment in South Africa and signalling its determination to isolate South Africa in every field.

WORLD CAMPAIGN AGAINST MILITARY COLLABORATION

It worked closely with the UN, launching the World Campaign against Military and Nuclear Collaboration with South Africa in 1979, with Abdul Minty as its director. The campaign made detailed proposals to the UN committee set up to monitor the arms embargo and worked with the AAM to close loopholes exploited by the Thatcher government. The UN mandatory arms ban was a crucial factor in forcing the apartheid government to the negotiating table in the early 1990s. South Africa lost air superiority to Angola and its Cuban allies and its defeat at the battle for Cuito Cuanavale in Southern Angola in 1988 was one of the defining moments in apartheid's complex endgame.

SPORTS BOYCOTT

Together with the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (SANROC), the AAM worked with the UN Special Committee Against Apartheid to compile a register of sportspeople who broke the boycott and to make the British government honour the Commonwealth Gleneagles Agreement. In the more difficult area of the cultural boycott anti-apartheid local groups and local authorities persuaded artists like Shirley Bassey and Tom Jones, who had performed in Sun City, to pledge that they would not return. But as 'struggle culture' took off in South Africa, a blanket ban on South African groups performing in Britain became more difficult to defend. With Artists Against Apartheid, the AAM opposed Paul Simon's decision to record his album 'Graceland' in South Africa with local black musicians. By the late 1980s it was forced to hone its policy, saying that it still called for a total boycott, but that groups that were clearly part of the struggle, like the BTR strikers theatre group, fell outside it.

INTERNATIONAL OIL EMBARGO

In 1979 the revolution in Iran cut off South Africa's main source of crude oil. The following year, the UN Special Committee against Apartheid sponsored a seminar organised by anti-apartheid groups in Holland to co-ordinate action for an international oil embargo. The AAM campaigned against Shell and BP's involvement in South Africa and intervened with the British government to stop any significant sales of North Sea oil.

‘SOUTHERN AFRICA: THE TIME TO CHOOSE’

The ‘Southern Africa: The Time to Choose’ conference and demonstration in March 1982 was the AAM’s most ambitious initiative to date. The Vice-President of Nigeria, Alex Ekwueme, delivered the conference keynote address and speakers included the leaders of the Labour and Liberal Parties, Michael Foot and David Steel, and Tom Jackson, Chair of the TUC’s International Committee. Over 15,000 people marched through London in support of sanctions against South Africa. The following day, an AAM delegation met the Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington.

On the morning of the demonstration a bomb blast wrecked the back of the ANC’s office in north London. This was the worst of a series of arson attacks and break-ins directed at the offices of the AAM, the liberation movements and other anti-apartheid organisations in London. In October 1982, an AAM delegation met the Home Secretary to present a long list of illegal operations by South African undercover agents in the UK. It also alleged that Britain was being used as a base for planning South African operations against independent African states.

BOTHA’S VISIT TO BRITAIN

Support for anti-apartheid campaigns was growing, but the real breakthrough came with the announcement that Prime Minister Thatcher had invited South Africa’s President, P W Botha, to pay an official visit to Britain on 2 June 1984. Botha was on a tour of Western Europe and Britain was the only country to extend an official invitation. The visit was met by a storm of protest. In May over 100 organisations attended a meeting to plan a response. The next three weeks saw spontaneous action by organisations ranging from Christians against Racism and Fascism, who held a vigil at St Martin in the Fields, to Kent miners, who delivered a sack of South African coal to the South African embassy. Afro-Caribbean organisations played a leading role; the West Indian Standing Conference held an all-night vigil outside the embassy. The mainstream media, usually hostile or indifferent to AAM initiatives, came on board with a special Channel Four news report on the preparations for the demonstration and full-page features in the *Guardian* and *Observer*. Most remarkably, Thatcher acknowledged the strength of the opposition by meeting the AAM’s President, Archbishop Trevor Huddleston, and Hon. Secretary, Abdul Minty. On 2 June around 50,000 people marched from Hyde Park to a rally and rock festival sponsored by the Greater London Council on the south bank of the Thames.

SEIZING THE TIME

In the mid-1980s the Anti-Apartheid Movement was transformed into Britain’s biggest ever international solidarity movement. It mobilised hundreds of thousands of people to take part in demonstrations on the streets of Britain’s major cities, and many more to make their own personal protest by boycotting South African products. It drew together a unique alliance of trade unions, churches, local government, opposition political parties and community groups. And it turned Nelson Mandela into a household name. Behind all this lay two factors. The most important was the growth of resistance within South Africa. The formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in August 1983 and the insurrection in the townships in 1984–86 changed the whole potential for solidarity action. Crucially, this resistance was taken up by the media; for a few months in 1985 British television showed South African troops attacking unarmed protesters on almost every news bulletin. The second factor was the intransigence of

the Thatcher government. In the polarised Britain of the 1980s, anti-apartheid campaigning became an important part of the wider opposition to Thatcher. The paradox of the mass support for the AAM in the 1980s was that it was stimulated by Thatcher's hostility. The flipside was that this condition of the Movement's growing strength made changing government policy more difficult.

Other changes altered the context of anti-apartheid campaigning. Britain's accession to the Common Market in 1973 brought about a long-term reorientation of British trade and overseas investment towards Western Europe. South Africa was still an important partner, but it slipped down the rankings. Racial attitudes were changing. According to one poll, in 1987 72 per cent of British people thought that black South Africans should have 'equal political rights and social equality', compared with only 42 per cent in 1965. Apartheid had become an anachronism. By the mid-1980s nobody, not even Prime Minister Thatcher, defended apartheid: the question was what should replace it – some form of power sharing or majority rule. The British government no longer argued that apartheid was an internal affair: the issue now was what form intervention should take – diplomatic pressure, or sanctions and backing for the liberation movements.

THE UNITED DEMOCRATIC FRONT

As above-ground resistance developed inside South Africa, the AAM established close working relationships with the United Democratic Front and other groups. In May 1984, UDF Acting Secretary Valli Moosa visited London and later spoke at Wales AAM's annual general meeting. The links were consolidated when a delegation of UDF leaders visited London in an attempt to get Prime Minister Thatcher to support the six UDF leaders who took refuge in the British consulate in Durban in September 1984. From then on, a steady stream of UDF visitors provided the AAM with up-to-date briefings on the situation inside South Africa and the AAM facilitated contacts between the UDF and British politicians, churches and aid agencies.

Just as important was the changing role of the ANC, which had had an office in London since the 1960s. The ANC had always been a big player in the international solidarity movement, but it had been ostracised by the British media. As it became clear that the ANC had widespread support within South Africa, attitudes changed and the ANC developed its public relations skills. The London section of its Department of Information and Publicity briefed the media and produced a weekly press digest. Internationally, the ANC convened a solidarity conference in Arusha, Tanzania in December 1987, with a wide range of British delegates, from Labour foreign affairs spokesperson Gerald Kaufman to a community activist from the Broadwater Farm estate in north London. A follow-up meeting in London drew 400 people. Oliver Tambo held meetings with British businessmen and was invited to brief the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee. Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe met Tambo in September 1986. Although Thatcher courted Gatsha Buthelezi and denounced the ANC at the 1987 Commonwealth Conference as a 'typical terrorist organisation', she understood there could be no change without it. Behind the scenes she pressed Botha to unban the ANC.¹

The AAM was finding new ways to project its image. Ever since the protests against the Sharpeville shootings, supporters had worn its black and white AA badge. From 1986 AA Enterprises produced T-shirts, mugs, jewellery, cards, calendars and badges – all using visual imagery to spread the AAM's message. The Movement had always produced well-designed posters. In the 1980s its mass rallies took place against dramatic backdrops; these climaxed with

the stage set for the 1988 Wembley concert, featuring huge banners featuring woodcuts by the Namibian artist John Muafangejo.

1984–86: THE CRISIS YEARS

All this was the background to the crisis years of 1984–86. In September 1984 school students all over South Africa boycotted classes; at the same time rent increases sparked insurrection in the Vaal triangle. Rebellion spread and the government sent troops into the townships, killing 21 people at a funeral in the Eastern Cape on the 25th anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre. On 20 July 1985 Botha imposed a draconian state of emergency over most of South Africa, and in August failed to make any concessions in his 'Rubicon' speech. Ten months later, on 12 June 1986, he imposed a nationwide state of emergency.

International reaction was much stronger than that against the shooting of Soweto school students in 1976. At the UN General Assembly, Western governments joined with African states to pass a resolution calling for mandatory sanctions. With Britain and the US committed to vetoing sanctions, the Security Council asked UN members to impose restrictions such as prohibiting new investment in South Africa and suspending export credit guarantees. Only Britain and the USA voted against. The AAM responded by launching a 'Ten-Point Programme of Action' of initiatives which it urged the government to take 'as a minimal response to the crisis in South Africa pending the imposition of mandatory sanctions'. They included the imposition of exchange controls to enable an investment ban, an end to government subsidies for trade missions and a ban on South African coal and uranium imports. The Programme was launched in the House of Commons and incorporated into a parliamentary Early Day Motion signed by over 100 MPs.

A THREE PRONGED STRATEGY

The AAM's strategy was three-pronged: to lobby the government and put pressure on MPs; to mobilise mass demonstrations in support of sanctions; and to create broad alliances within local communities to boycott all links with South Africa. In 1984 Labour parliamentarians set up an anti-apartheid group to co-ordinate action within parliament. In July 1985 an AAM delegation met Foreign Office Minister Malcolm Rifkind and on 16 August the AAM released an open letter to Thatcher. In September and October, activists collected 200,000 signatures to a sanctions petition presented to parliament at the start of the new session. In 1986 the British government twice vetoed UN resolutions imposing selective mandatory sanctions, and on 17 June more than 3,500 people came to parliament to ask their MPs to press the government to change its policy. The lobby was the biggest ever mounted on an international issue, organised jointly by the AAM, the TUC, the British Council of Churches and the United Nations Association. Next day, Huddleston led a delegation to meet Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe and appealed at a crowded House of Commons press conference for mass action to counteract Howe's rejection of the AAM's proposals.

At the same time the AAM took to the streets. On 16 June 1985, 25,000 people marched from the Greater London Council's headquarters opposite parliament on the south bank of the Thames to Trafalgar Square behind coffins symbolising protesters shot by the South African Defence Force. The following Sunday, Scottish AAM supporters demonstrated in Glasgow. In the autumn, local AA groups held demonstrations in Sheffield, Manchester, Birmingham and Edinburgh. On 2

November, after Thatcher blocked substantive sanctions at the Nassau Commonwealth Conference, around 150,000 people joined marches from east, west and south London, converging on Trafalgar Square to hear Oliver Tambo, SWAPO leader Shapua Kaukungua and US civil rights leader Jesse Jackson. After the collapse of the Commonwealth mission to South Africa and a month of intensive anti-apartheid campaigning in Britain in June 1986, an estimated quarter of a million people gathered on London's Clapham Common to take part in a Festival for Freedom in Namibia and South Africa.

Two years before, in June 1984, the AAM marked its 25th anniversary by relaunching the campaign to boycott South African goods. In towns and shopping centres throughout the country, local anti-apartheid groups held motorcades and supermarket pickets. The following year, in an intensive month of action in March, they distributed three-quarters of a million leaflets, including a special multilingual version for ethnic minority communities. The month culminated in a day of action when around 1,000 pickets and demonstrations were organised in shopping centres all over Britain.

At the height of the campaign there were pockets of spontaneous trade union action. In September 1985 Southampton dockworkers stopped the export of a milling machine for Armscor. At Swansea in South Wales, dockers refused to unload a shipment of South African coal. Clerical workers at the British Library refused to process records from South African libraries and passport office workers rejected applications from South Africans entitled to dual citizenship. Portsmouth health workers kept up a long-running dispute with the local health authority to force it to boycott South African produce, with the support of their trade union NUPE (National Union of Public Employees).

COMMONWEALTH SANCTIONS

Ever since South Africa was excluded in 1961, the Commonwealth had been a forum for action on Southern Africa and Commonwealth heads of government were ready to impose sanctions against South Africa at their meeting at Nassau in the Bahamas in October 1985. As Thatcher prepared to fly out, it was clear she was determined to prevent this. At an eve of conference meeting at TUC headquarters, speakers from the opposition parties and TUC General Secretary Norman Willis endorsed a pro-sanctions declaration signed by over 200 British organisations representing 18 million people. The AAM's Hon. Secretary, Abdul Minty, flew to Nassau to present the declaration at the conference.

After fierce argument, Thatcher agreed to a limited package of measures, including a ban on the import of Krugerrands and new government loans to South African government agencies, an end to official funding for trade missions and a ban on the export of computers to the South African police and military. As the price of her acquiescence, Thatcher exacted an agreement from the other heads of government to send a mission to South Africa. The Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group (EPG), visited South Africa in March and May 1986 with the aim of initiating a 'process of dialogue involving the true representatives of the majority black population'.ⁱⁱ Convinced that there was no prospect of meaningful dialogue, the AAM was concerned that the visit would give credibility to the Botha government's very limited reforms. In the event, the South African government rejected the mission's 'possible negotiating concept'.ⁱⁱⁱ On the last day of the

visit, the South African Airforce launched bombing raids on Zimbabwe, Zambia and Botswana. The EPG concluded that there was no prospect of meaningful negotiations.

The accord reached at Nassau stated that if no progress had been made within six months, a smaller group of heads of government would meet to consider further measures. This meeting took place in London on 3–5 August 1986. The AAM held an eve of summit meeting addressed by the co-chair of the Commonwealth mission, Nigerian leader Olusegun Obasanjo, and ANC Secretary-General Alfred Nzo. For three days protesters held vigil outside the meeting. Isolated within the Commonwealth, Thatcher was unable to block the adoption of effective measures by the rest of the Commonwealth, including a ban on the import of South African agricultural products, new investment and air links. But all she agreed to was a voluntary ban on new investment and the promotion of tourism to South Africa. Two years later, the Commonwealth set up a special Committee of Foreign Ministers on South Africa, which recommended strengthening the arms ban; at its biennial meetings in Vancouver in 1987 and Kuala Lumpur in 1989 it focused on how to enforce the measures it had already put in place. But because of Thatcher's war of attrition, it imposed no further significant sanctions.

THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY

Britain was also a member of the European Economic Community (EEC). The AAM's first contacts with the EEC were with the European Assembly; in 1982 Abdul Minty briefed a meeting of the Socialist Group on the arms embargo. The following year the AAM wrote to all Assembly members on the eve of a debate on the Scott-Hopkins report on EEC relations with South Africa. In 1985 Labour MEP Alf Lomas steered a sanctions motion through the Assembly. But the Assembly had no power over the EEC's South Africa policy.

For two years after the imposition of the July 1985 state of emergency in South Africa, the European Council was a battleground, with Denmark, Ireland and the Netherlands advocating tougher measures and Britain and West Germany opposing them. In September 1986, the EEC put in place a package of 'restrictive measures', banning South African steel and iron products, but with so many exceptions that the ban only applied to an estimated 2 per cent of total EEC imports from South Africa. The EEC prohibited the import of Krugerrands and new investment in South Africa, but left enforcement to individual member states.^{iv}

Preoccupied with campaigning in Britain, the AAM co-ordinated a joint letter from anti-apartheid groups in EEC member states to the president of the Council of Ministers in August 1985. At a meeting in Brussels the groups drew up an appeal for tougher EEC action which Mike Terry presented to foreign ministers in Luxembourg at the start of Luxembourg's presidency. It was not until 1988, partly at the prompting of the ANC, that the European anti-apartheid groups set up a formal structure, the Liaison Group of European Anti-Apartheid Movements, serviced by the AAM. For the next six years, the Group lobbied the EEC, and in 1995 reconstituted itself as the European Network for International Action on Southern Africa (ENIASA).

BRITISH COMPANIES PULL OUT

While Thatcher held out against sanctions, British companies pre-empted government action. In November 1986, Barclays Bank, the target of a sustained 16-year anti-apartheid campaign,

announced that it was pulling out of South Africa. It admitted: 'Our customer base was beginning to be adversely affected'.^v Altogether 55 British companies sold their South African subsidiaries in 1986–88 and another 19 reduced their holdings. If mergers and liquidations are included, the number of British companies operating in South Africa fell by 20 per cent.^{vi} New British direct investment in South Africa slowed to a trickle, from 2 per cent of total British overseas net investment in 1984 to 0.7 per cent in 1986.^{vii}

In August 1985, South Africa announced a moratorium on the repayment of its foreign debts and the temporary closure of the foreign exchange markets and the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. The declaration was precipitated by the decision of Chase Manhattan Bank not to roll over its loans. Other banks and investors moved to switch their funds. Like the defeat at Cuito Cuanavale, the crisis was a key moment in the events leading to de Klerk's decision to lift the ban on the liberation movements in February 1990. From now on, South Africa's domestic policies were constrained by its need to negotiate short-term debt packages with overseas banks and its economy was starved of investment.

PEOPLE'S SANCTIONS

1986 marked the climax of the AAM's campaign to win government support for economic sanctions. When the Conservative government won a third term in June 1987, the Movement's emphasis moved to 'people's sanctions'. It called for boycotts by individual shoppers to be transformed into mass action to stop the supermarket chains that dominated British retailing from stocking South African goods. Tesco and Sainsbury's became its main targets; they were subjected to regular 'days of action', when activists handed out leaflets warning 'Every bite buys a bullet!' or piled South African fruit into trolleys and refused to pay. Afraid of losing market share, Tesco pledged that it would stop sourcing its 'own label' produce in South Africa. In two areas with big black communities, Brixton, south London and St Paul's, Bristol, Tesco stores took all South African goods off the shelves. In 1989 the AAM's 'Boycott Bandwagon' bus toured the country, blitzing local shopping centres. The AAM commissioned a special film promoting the boycott, *The Fruits of Fear*.

The boycott campaign found new targets – gold, coal and tourism. A coalition of the AAM, End Loans to Southern Africa (ELTSAs), the ANC and SWAPO set up the World Gold Commission to research gold sanctions. The AAM linked up with the National Union of Mineworkers to hold a conference to plan an embargo against South African coal imports. Activists picketed travel agents telling their customers 'Apartheid is no holiday'. In 1986 a new group, EMBARGO, was set up with church and trade union support to campaign for an international oil ban. In March 1987 the AAM joined the campaign launched by US and Dutch groups against Shell, joint owner of one of South Africa's biggest oil refineries and a lead company in its coalmining and petrochemicals industries.^{viii} Shell garages had been a target for local anti-apartheid campaigners since the 1970s; now the AAM launched a total boycott of Shell. Several local authorities moved big heating oil contracts and unions instructed their officials not to buy petrol at Shell garages. The company's 1989 annual general meeting was disrupted by protesters.

After the South African government's 1985 declaration of a moratorium on loan repayments, it negotiated a series of loan packages with international banks in 1986, 1987 and 1989. In 1989 the ANC convened an international consultation in London on how to pressure the banks to pull

the plug, attended by anti-apartheid organisations from 16 countries. The groups co-ordinated days and weeks of action targeting the banks which represented their countries on the 'technical committee' set up to negotiate with South Africa. In Britain the lead was taken by ELTSA and the churches played a big role.

What did the Anti-Apartheid Movement's sanctions campaign achieve? Prime Minister Thatcher was obdurately opposed to sanctions and resisted all pressure to put in place any meaningful measures. But millions of British people responded to the call for people's sanctions. In June 1986 a Harris poll found that 51 per cent of British people were in favour of some form of sanctions against South Africa. A remarkable 27 per cent said that they boycotted South African products.^{ix} Fruit and vegetable imports from South Africa fell by 8.5 per cent in 1986, and between 1983 and 1986 imports of South African textiles dropped from £14 million to £9 million, a fall of over 35 per cent.^x In November 1985 the Co-operative Retail Society, Britain's biggest co-op with 800 outlets, took South African goods off its shelves. The South Africa Canned Fruit Export Board commented: 'Although there are no official sanctions against South African agricultural produce entering the UK ... there seems to be a reluctance of buyers to take the risk of stocking South African produce'.^{xi} By 1987 over half of all local authority pension funds, totalling £13 billion, placed restrictions on investing in South African-related companies.^{xii} Public opinion also meant that Thatcher was unable to renege on the arms embargo or the Gleneagles Agreement. Most important, through its lobbying at the Commonwealth, the EEC and the UN, the AAM played a big role in putting sanctions on the international agenda.

RESISTANCE AND REPRESSION

As resistance grew within South Africa, the apartheid government hit back by staging high-profile trials of UDF and trade union leaders, and detaining thousands of protesters, many of them children. Southern Africa the Imprisoned Society (SATIS) and the AAM responded by alerting church, trade union and human rights organisations and asking them to protest to the South African Embassy, especially in cases where trialists were threatened with the death sentence. In 1985 SATIS convened a UDF Treason Trial Campaign Committee to campaign for the withdrawal of charges of high treason brought against leaders of the UDF. By December 1986 24,000 people had been detained under the state of emergency, around 40 per cent of them under 18 years old. In 1987 the Bishop Ambrose Reeves Trust organised a groundbreaking international conference in Harare where participants heard firsthand accounts of detention and torture from children who had just left South Africa.^{xiii} A national petition, 'Free All Apartheid's Detainees', launched in June 1987 by Trevor Huddleston and TUC General Secretary Norman Willis, with the backing of the British Council of Churches and the Catholic Bishops Conference, was signed by 300,000 people. As trade unionists came under attack after the banning of the UDF in February 1988, SATIS launched a Joint Campaign Against the Repression of Trade Unionists in South Africa and Namibia with a demonstration outside South Africa House. The demonstration coincided with the reopening of the trial of South African metalworkers' union general secretary, Moses Mayekiso and four other members of the Alexandra Action Committee; the trial was the focus of a huge international protest and the five men were acquitted in April 1989.

'NO APARTHEID EXECUTIONS'

On 6 April 1979 Solomon Mahlangu was hanged in defiance of appeals from the UN Security Council and world leaders, including British Foreign Secretary David Owen. His death was South Africa's first political execution since 1968. Over the next seven years 14 young freedom fighters were sentenced to death and seven of them were hanged – the others had their sentences commuted largely because of international protests. In Britain, SATIS led campaigns to save their lives. Mourners kept vigil all night outside South Africa House and stood in silence as the executions took place at dawn.

The most notorious cases, involving civilian demonstrators rather than MK combatants, were those of the Sharpeville Six and the Uppington Seven. Both groups were condemned to death because they were present at protests where black collaborators were killed. The six were sentenced to death in December 1985; during the two and a half years they spent on death row, SATIS kept up a constant demand for their reprieve. The Archbishop of Canterbury, the leader of Britain's Catholic church, Cardinal Hume, the TUC general secretary and MPs from all parties protested, and there was extensive media interest in the case. Members of an AAM delegation which met Foreign Office Minister Lynda Chalker in 1987 received a sympathetic hearing, and were shocked when she told them that three other political prisoners on death row had already been hanged. One of the main aims of the campaign in Britain was to pressure Thatcher to intervene; just days before the executions of the Sharpeville Six were due to take place she instructed the British ambassador to tell Botha of her concern. Because of the huge international pressure, the South African justice minister announced an indefinite stay of execution in July 1988.

In the late 1980s, there was a big increase in the number of people sentenced to death and a new secrecy about the hangings. In every case it knew about, the AAM asked the British government to intervene with the South African authorities. But in the great majority of cases, the government refused, on the grounds that the cases did not meet its criteria that there must be 'extenuating circumstances or grounds to doubt the fairness of the judicial process'.^{xiv} From 1986, SATIS co-ordinated a 'no apartheid executions' campaign. By 1989 at least 80 political prisoners were on death row, and SATIS circulated an emergency petition with a target of half a million signatures. British trade unionists campaigned to save the lives of union activists sentenced to death. At least eight more political prisoners were hanged, but as a result of British and international action, and campaigns inside South Africa, many more survived on death row until they were reprieved as part of the negotiating process in the early 1990s.

'FREE NELSON MANDELA'

The AAM's biggest initiative of the 1980s was the campaign to free Nelson Mandela. In 1977 or 1978 Enuga Reddy, Secretary of the UN Special Committee Against Apartheid, wrote to national anti-apartheid movements suggesting they mark Mandela's 60th birthday, 18 July 1978. The idea was taken up by the AAM as part of the activities it was planning for UN International Anti-Apartheid Year. It distributed 50,000 copies of a special leaflet and thousands of birthday cards were posted to Mandela on Robben Island. Prime Minister James Callaghan sent greetings on behalf of the British government.

Two years later the *Sunday Post* in South Africa launched a petition calling for Mandela's release. Significantly, this time the initiative came from within South Africa. The AAM linked up with IDAF

to launch a new film about Mandela at a meeting marking the anniversary of the sentencing of the Rivonia trialists, and thousands of postcards were sent from Britain to the *Sunday Post*. A declaration calling for the release of Mandela and all political prisoners was endorsed by over 100 MPs, trade unions, student leaders, playwrights, musicians and academics. The Labour Party took up the campaign by sending an invitation to Mandela to speak at its conference and Scottish miners asked him to come to their annual gala.

In August 1981 Mandela was awarded the Freedom of the City of Glasgow, and later in the year Glasgow's Lord Provost launched an international Declaration of Mayors calling for Mandela's unconditional release. The Declaration was signed by more than 2,200 mayors in 56 countries. Over the next few years Mandela received an avalanche of honours in countries all over the world, especially Britain. Innumerable buildings, streets, public gardens and student union facilities were named for Mandela; he was awarded honorary degrees and medals, and prizes and scholarships were named in his honour. The street in north London where the AAM had its headquarters was renamed Mandela Street.

The AAM consciously used the Mandela campaign to try to reach out to new people. In 1983, to mark Mandela's 65th birthday, it set up a Free Nelson Mandela Co-ordinating Committee to encourage groups to take their own initiatives. Millions watched the television profile of Mandela, 'South Africa's Other Leader', timed to coincide with Botha's visit to Britain in June 1984. Trevor Huddleston presented a petition – signed by 'half a million people including an Archbishop' – to the UN Security Council on South African Political Prisoners Day, 11 October. In a rare concession to the strength of public opinion, Thatcher wrote to Huddleston: 'I recognise Mr Mandela's standing in the black community of South Africa ... We have made it clear to the South African government both privately and publicly that his release would be widely welcomed'.^{xv} Subsequently, the British government joined in an appeal by EEC foreign ministers for Mandela's immediate and unconditional freedom.

In 1986 City of London AA Group launched a non-stop picket of South Africa House to call for Mandela's release; it kept the picket going until February 1990. The protest attracted hundreds of young and enthusiastic activists, and was a constant reminder to the hundreds of thousands of Londoners and tourists who passed through Trafalgar Square of Nelson Mandela's continued imprisonment.

Music made a big contribution to raising anti-apartheid consciousness from the earliest days of the AAM. The first group to release a record calling for Mandela's release was the Birmingham rock band The Sussed – they advertised their 1980 number as 'beating the drum for the release of our brother'.^{xvi} Mandela's 65th birthday was celebrated at a 'Festival of African Sounds' with Hugh Masekela at London's Alexandra Palace. Inspired by the gig, Jerry Dammers wrote a hit single 'Free Nelson Mandela' for The Special AKA, which became the theme song for the campaign. With Oliver Tambo's son Dali, he founded Artists Against Apartheid, which organised a free rock festival on Clapham Common in June 1986, where around a quarter of a million people listened to a line-up of top UK performers.

'NELSON MANDELA: FREEDOM AT 70'

Plans for what was to become the most successful of all the AAM's campaigns were first mooted in 1987. Jerry Dammers secured the support of Dire Straits and Jim Kerr of Simple Minds for a concert at Wembley Stadium in 1988 and approached Tony Hollingsworth, one of the organisers of the Glastonbury Festival, to act as producer. At the same time the AAM had been discussing how to mark Mandela's 70th birthday. These ideas came together and the concept of the Nelson Mandela: Freedom at 70 campaign took off. Bob Hughes and Mike Terry flew to Tanzania in December to attend the ANC's international conference, where they discussed the plans with Thabo Mbeki. In its 8 January 1988 New Year's message the ANC called for the celebration of Mandela's 70th birthday.

Over the next six months, the campaign took shape. The BBC made the courageous decision to broadcast the entire Wembley concert, and Trevor Huddleston took on a new role as the AAM's front man in contacts with Peter Gabriel, Whitney Houston, Stevie Wonder and Sting. Meanwhile the AAM worked on a wider campaign, to be launched at the concert, timed to mark the 25th anniversary of the start of the Rivonia Trial, and followed by a march by 25 people from Glasgow to London, signifying the 25 years Mandela had spent in prison. The campaign was to culminate in a rally in Hyde Park on 17 July, the eve of Mandela's 70th birthday.

On 11 June 1988 at Wembley stadium a capacity audience of 82,000, with Oliver Tambo as guest of honour, listened to a dazzling non-stop parade of rock, jazz and traditional groups, singers, instrumentalists, dancers, actors and comedians. The celebration was broadcast by the BBC, which made it available to television stations worldwide, so that it had a potential audience of a billion people in 63 countries – a record number for a live event. It was agreed that the concert would be headlined 'Nelson Mandela: A 70th Birthday Tribute', because of an implicit understanding that a more overtly political title would make it harder for the BBC to resist the virulent right-wing attacks on it for broadcasting the event. But as the concert rolled out, it was infused with calls for freedom for Mandela and the isolation of apartheid. Little Steven paced the stage saying: 'We will no longer do business with those who do business with apartheid'. Peter Gabriel told the crowd: 'South Africa is the only country in the world to have racism written into its constitution', before launching into his hit song 'Biko'. The concert raised the stakes by universalising Mandela's significance. 'Until you are free', Stevie Wonder told Mandela, 'no man or woman or child of any culture or colour is free'. Dire Straits echoed: 'One humanity, one justice'.

Next morning Tambo and Huddleston, together with Jim Kerr and Simple Minds, flew to Glasgow to speak at a 15 000-strong rally in Glasgow which saw the freedom marchers off on their five-week walk from Scotland to London. The marchers stopped in 40 towns and cities along the way. In a 'Free Mandela' cycle ride, 11 cyclists rode from Land's End to London. On 17 July in Hyde Park, a crowd of a quarter of a million people heard Desmond Tutu call for Mandela's release. Mandela's birthday was celebrated at a multi-faith church service at St James's, Piccadilly. The AAM aimed to get a million people in Britain wearing its special 'Free Nelson Mandela' badge on Mandela's birthday and 30,000 birthday cards were delivered to the South African embassy.

The Freedom at Seventy campaign was a huge international event. It projected Mandela not just as the world's most famous political prisoner, but as the future leader of a non-racial South Africa. According to one poll, a remarkable 92 per cent of people in Britain recognised Mandela's name;

seventy per cent of them thought he should be freed and 58 per cent wanted Thatcher to do more to secure his release.^{xvii}

GROWTH AND EXPANSION

The campaign also strengthened the AAM's organisational base. National membership more than doubled from 8,500 in 1986 to a high of 19,410 in March 1989. A change in the AAM's constitution in 1987 formalised a new category of local members, so that at its peak the AAM's total membership was around 40,000.^{xviii} This was still small compared with organisations like the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament; support was always much wider than formal membership. The number of nationally affiliated organisations nearly doubled from around 700 in 1985 to just under 1,300 in 1989, more than three-quarters of them trade union and Labour Party branches, with a sprinkling of church, women's and community organisations. Most important was the mushrooming of local anti-apartheid groups from 69 in 1984 to 187 in 1988, giving the AAM a nationwide branch structure. The AAM's new constitution reflected this growth, instituting a delegate national conference which in 1987 was held for the first time outside London, in Sheffield.

THE SOUTHERN AFRICA COALITION

The success of the Freedom at Seventy Campaign gave the AAM a new authority within the wider anti-apartheid coalition. In February 1989, a conference organised by the British Council of Churches and the development agency Christian Aid endorsed a 'Call to Action', advocating targeted sanctions against South Africa. The AAM's Mike Terry was on the conference preparatory committee and helped draft the appeal. The meeting was a new departure in that it was attended by business representatives and by Foreign Office minister Lynda Chalker. It inspired the formation of the Southern Africa Coalition (SAC), an alliance of churches, trade unions, development agencies and local authorities, in which the AAM played a key role. SAC moved quickly to try to persuade British banks to refuse to reschedule South Africa's debt. It represented a breadth of support for sanctions that would have been impossible only a few years before. But as the AAM and SAC pressed the British government to change its policy, they were overtaken by events in Southern Africa.

NAMIBIA

From its formation, the AAM worked for the independence of Namibia, and throughout the 1980s campaigned for an end to South Africa's illegal occupation and support for the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO). It urged the British government to support UN sanctions against South Africa to bring pressure on it to withdraw from Namibia. It circulated lists of British companies involved in Namibia and pressured them to withdraw. It supported the Campaign Against the Namibian Uranium Contract (CANUC) in campaigning against the import of uranium from RTZ's Rossing mine. The AAM worked closely with the Namibia Support Committee (NSC) and Church Action for Namibia (CAN), organising an annual week of action on Namibia and hosting visits by SWAPO leaders. The AAM's Health and Women's Committees and local AA groups fundraised for NSC appeals for medical supplies for Namibian refugees.

The Western Contact Group, set up in 1977, held long-drawn out talks with South Africa on the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 435, which put forward proposals for a cease-

fire and democratic elections organised by the UN. From the early 1980s the talks were bogged down by the US insistence on 'linkage', under which Namibian independence was contingent on the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola. The British government was initially equivocal on linkage, but from 1984 it endorsed it on pragmatic grounds, arguing that South Africa would not withdraw 'until there is, in parallel, also the withdrawal of Cuban forces from Angola'.^{xix} In delegations to government and in memoranda the AAM lobbied hard against linkage, urging Britain to end prevarication by the Contact Group and insist on South African withdrawal. In December 1988, in response to military setbacks in Angola and overwhelming international pressure, South Africa agreed to the UN plan. In Britain the AAM's President, Trevor Huddleston, and the leaders of the Labour and Social Democrat Parties set up an election appeal for funds for SWAPO. Namibia celebrated its independence, with SWAPO leader Sam Nujoma as its new President, on 21 March 1990.

CONCLUSION

At the end of the decade, internal resistance and international pressure were pushing South Africa towards the negotiating table. The AAM feared that South Africa might use its apparent reasonableness over Namibia to improve its international position and buy support from its Western allies. Its assessment was that, backed by the British government, the National Party's new leader, F.W. de Klerk, was seeking to achieve a political dispensation which would be apartheid under another name. In August 1989, at the prompting of the ANC, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) adopted the Harare Declaration, setting out preconditions for negotiations. These were endorsed by a special session of the UN Security Council held in December. The AAM's chair, Bob Hughes, flew to New York to address the special session. The AAM stressed that the 'pillars of apartheid' were still in place and that for meaningful negotiations to take place, the UN preconditions must be met. In 1990 there was all to play for: it was clear that apartheid was unsustainable – the issue was what would replace it, a botched compromise including black faces but leaving the white minority in control, or a genuinely democratic constitution.

ⁱ Her spokesman Charles Powell wrote to Geoffrey Bindman, Chair of SATIS, on 23 October 1986: 'We have also repeatedly pressed the South African Government ... to lift the bans on the African National Congress and other political parties'. MSS AAM 779.

ⁱⁱ *Mission to South Africa. The Commonwealth Report*, Penguin Books for the Commonwealth Secretariat, London, 1986, p. 143.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

^{iv} See M. Holland, *The European Community and South Africa*, Pinter Publishers, London and New York, 1988.

-
- v Quoted in *The South African Disconnection: An Examination of British Company Withdrawals from South Africa 1986–1988*, AAM, April 1988, p. 13.
- vi Ibid., p. 2.
- vii Ibid., p. 9.
- viii *Stop Apartheid Boycott Shell: Shell Shadow Report*, Anti-Apartheid Movement/EMBARGO, March 1987.
- ix *Observer*, 15 June 1986.
- x RH: MSS AAM 2203, *Sanctions Begin to Bite*, p. 10; *Anti-Apartheid News*, March 1987.
- xi RH: MSS AAM 2203, quoted in *Anti-Apartheid News*, December 1987.
- xii *The South African Disconnection*, p. 13.
- xiii The Trust was a charity set up by the AAM to raise money for educational work on southern Africa. The conference received financial support from IDAF and was organised in co-operation with the UN Special Committee.
- xiv RH: MSS AAM 779, Margaret Thatcher to Robert Hughes, 9 November 1988.
- xv RH: MSS AAM 779, Margaret Thatcher to Trevor Huddleston, 19 February 1985. Thatcher changed her attitude in response to the campaign. In July 1980 she wrote to Abdul Minty: 'We have no standing in the case of Mr Mandela'. After the 'Freedom at Seventy' campaign in 1988, she told Trevor Huddleston: 'We raise his [Nelson Mandela's] case regularly with the South African government'.
- xvi RH: MSS AAM 2203, *Anti-Apartheid News*, November 1980.
- xvii RH: MSS AAM 1932, Gallup Poll, 29 June–5 July 1988.
- xviii RH: MSS AAM 680. Calculated from membership lists sent by local group secretaries to the AAM head office.
- xix Quoted in an AAM leaflet 'Namibia Independence Now', published in 1984.