



The AAM at 50

On the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Anti Apartheid Movement (AAM) leading figures and activist from the Movement remember the campaigns and the role they played.

To share your own memories please email them to info@actsa.org and we will add them here.

A great experience

Colin Adkins

My memories of the Anti-Apartheid Movement are varied. The comradeship amongst staff working at Mandela Street. The great fun we had on campaigns. The dedicated volunteers who appeared out of nowhere to support emergency actions. The rotation of responsibilities amongst staff at national demos and Mick Flynn's big book which contained all acquired wisdom on events on which we relied. Mike Terry and Alan Brooks.

Working closely with the SACTU comrades and our communal lunches in Flowers Mews. The dignity of Comrade Zola Zembe (Archie Sibeko) in facing insults from some in the international trade union movement. The ANC on the platform at the TUC (ask). The AAM Trade Union Committee. Receiving phone calls from Moses Mayekiso and Oscar Mpetha.

Running stands at trade union conferences and liaising with all people Dennis Goldberg. Dancing outside South Africa House on Mandela's release and walking through the door of the same building to mark his inauguration as President. My time working for the AAM was and remains the greatest experience of my working life. I owe the organisation an immense debt of gratitude for enabling me to play a part.

Colin Adkins was Trade Union Secretary at the AAM.

My abiding memory

Paul Brannen

January 1990 - Someone rang the AAM office in Mandela Street and tipped us off that the rebel cricket party, led by Mike Gatting, were gathering at a hotel outside London ready for their flight to South Africa. Karen Talbot rang a friend of hers who had a car and the three of us shot off.

When we arrived we discovered there was no security present. As a result Karen and I were able to walk in on the team photograph and start haranguing Mike Gatting and the other players while the media happily snapped away. Our surprise at such good campaigning fortune turned to disbelief when we realised that we were going to be able to do the same all over again at the actual press conference.

Politics and sport have always made for a heady media mix as we quickly discovered; 6 o'clock BBC news, 9 o'clock BBC news, 10 o'clock ITV news and then all over the newspapers the next day - and no one arrested!

Paul Brannen

Taking on the car workers

Chris Child

One of my roles as AAM trade union officer was to encourage local groups to approach trade unionists – but we didn't always agree about tactics. One group was trying to get car workers to stop 4x4 vehicles being exported to South Africa where they were being used by the police.

The group secretary said 'I just tell them as forcefully as I can that it is a racist regime, and that if they don't stop their collaboration that makes them as guilty as the regime itself'.

She suggested that if she told them this loudly and long enough they would take some form of action, even if it was just to put AAM leaflets into the packing crates. Nothing more sophisticated was needed. In London we were all highly sceptical about this approach, fearing that it would alienate the workers rather than win them round. So we advised the local group secretary that experience had shown that careful, patient explanation and a thought-out and long-term approach - trying to win the workers round rather than identifying them as 'collaborators' - worked better than shouting at them.

However, the local group secretary continued to berate the workers as 'collaborators'. In London we were sunk in gloom.

But to our astonishment, it worked. The workers did put the leaflets into the packing cases. And the local group secretary made more than one remark about 'too much caution in London'!

Chris Child was AAM Trade Union and Local Groups Officer, 1976–82

Boycott Bandwagon Tour

Mark Eastgate

My enduring memories of the 'Boycott Bandwagon' tour in 1989-90 are mixed and poignant of the times we lived in. I remember the launch of the tour outside the Houses of Parliament with the press and radio waiting expectantly. Around 30 MPs gathered for a photo shoot in front of the bus with me standing on the cut down upper deck outside. All went well and then it was decided that I take the bus up to South Africa House in Trafalgar Square.....and the MPs were to come with me.

We set off up Whitehall and as we came into Trafalgar Square I had to negotiate the heavy traffic and cross the square to approach South Africa House. The 'boys in blue' were waiting with pens and paper ready at the kerbside, and I had to swing the front of the bus over the pavement to get a straight line next to the kerb (the steering wheel is in front of the front axle). One of the police stepped back hurriedly in panic, fearing I was going to knock him down but I missed him and pulled in perfectly parallel to the kerb...and pushed the handle to open the front doors.

"You're nicked son" said a copper to me as the doors swung open. "Me too mate?" replied one of the MPs stepping into the doorwell from behind my seat. "And me?" said another MP as they disgorged onto the pavement. I think one of the MPs even threatened this young police officer with lifetime parking duties if he didn't button up and go back to his duties!!!

That was the start of many games we played on the tour, creating waves of anxiety at Tesco's stores, Shell petrol stations and many other places, where we plugged the message of the boycott. I was delighted that it worked, and of the awareness that we raised despite the obstacles we faced...mainly the ignorance, and the racism that the ignorance fostered.

Mark Eastgate was driver of Boycott Bandwagon and Freedom Bus

AAM in Scotland

Brian Filling

Many people view the culmination of the campaign in Scotland to be that of the visit of Nelson Mandela to receive the Freedoms of 9 UK cities at a special single ceremony in Glasgow on 9 October 1993. And, it was a great day despite the weather!

Prior to the formation of the AAM Scottish Committee in 1976 there was activity against apartheid in various parts of Scotland including the election of Chief Albert Luthuli as Rector of Glasgow University in 1962 and the boycott of South Africa by Aberdeen City Council in 1964.

With the creation of the Scottish Committee, activity increased and was coordinated. When the Lord Provost of Glasgow hosted the South African Ambassador in 1979 the Scottish Committee organised a huge picket of the City Chambers. The next Lord Provost presented Nelson Mandela with the Freedom of the City in 1981, the first city to do so. Others followed: Aberdeen, Dundee and Midlothian District. Edinburgh never managed to get the necessary 2/3 majority prior to Mandela's release but the Council did a range of other things, including the erection of the 'Woman and Child' statue, which remains an Edinburgh landmark.

Glasgow City Council in association with the AAM Scottish Committee took further initiatives in the campaign to release Mandela. These included: the launch of the worldwide Mayors petition in 1981 at the United Nations in New York by the Glasgow Lord Provost; in 1984 a deputation of Mayors from all over Britain led by the Glasgow Lord Provost to Downing St when Mrs Thatcher was in office; a street housing the Apartheid South African Consulate was re-named Nelson Mandela Place, much to their annoyance, and they refused to use the address, choosing a Post Office Box instead. It became the site of many pickets and demonstrations.

Despite several injunctions against pickets and demonstrations and denunciation as friends of terrorists, the campaign grew in line with the increased level of struggle in South Africa. A particularly big moment was the launch of the Glasgow-London march calling for the release of Mandela at 70. The march was launched from a rally of some 30,000 people in Glasgow Green by Oliver Tambo and Archbishop Trevor Huddleston in 1988, the day after the Wembley concert.

Brian Filling was Chair of the Scottish Committee of the Anti-Apartheid Movement from its foundation in 1976 until its dissolution in 1994 when he became Chair of the successor organisation, ACTSA Scotland.

'Botha buzz off'

Sara Grayson

I have happy memories of being a once-a-week volunteer at the AAM office in the 1970's. My main job was to help get out AA news. This involved folding it twice, and then, in order to make it flatter for the paper wrapper to go round it, sitting on it! By the time one had a pile of about twenty copies under one's posterior they were ready for wrapping and labelling and the whole process started again. I guess the heavier you were the better the job!

At this time of course, there was always a demo outside South Africa House, not to mention bigger marches to Trafalgar Square. I had my youngest son, then I guess about seven or eight, with me when we were out in force protesting about a visit from Pik Botha. I found he had made himself a small placard reading 'Botha buzz off!' Rather good I thought.

We later moved to Somerset and helped set up an AA group in Sherborne. Does anyone remember a film put out by the AAM called 'Last grave at Dimbaza'? Very powerful and it was that film that first got me involved.

Lady Sara Grayson was a volunteer with the AAM in the 1970s and founder member of the AA Sherborne group.

Mission accomplished, now what?

Christabel Guerney

When the Anti-Apartheid Movement dissolved itself 'mission accomplished' in 1994, I thought I would move on to other issues.

My first idea was to become an anti-roads protester – I made it to a demo against the Newbury by-pass. But it wasn't so easy. After visits to South Africa, Mozambique and Namibia I realised I couldn't walk away – and that ACTSA was still campaigning.

Since then I have researched and written about the history of the AAM. But I believe that as well as rediscovering and analysing our history it is even more important to help overcome the legacy of apartheid and work for sustainable development throughout the southern African region.

On our 50th anniversary we should celebrate the achievements of the AAM – but we must also build solidarity in the present and look forward to the future.

Christabel Gurney was the editor of Anti-Apartheid News, 1969–80 and later secretary of Notting Hill AA Group

Stop the Seventy Tour

Peter Hain

One of the biggest triumphs of British anti-apartheid campaigners was the stopping in May 1970 of the all-white South African cricket tour to England. Preceding this, a 25 match tour by a white rugby team had been put under siege. A broad based campaign, with the AAM involved nationally and locally, mobilised more than one hundred thousand activists. The key was our radical new tactic of disrupting sports matches using non violent direct action: running onto the field of play, inserting super glue in the hotel bedroom door locks of sleeping Springbok players, and so on.

After months of activism in 1969-70 a huge threat built up against the impending cricket tour. Eventually, with just weeks to go, the British government formally asked the cricket authorities to cancel it which they did - one of the biggest successes of any protest campaign anywhere. Within weeks white South Africa was out of the Olympics and virtually isolated from all international sport. A similar campaign in Australia forced the cancellation of a cricket tour the next year.

It was a body blow against apartheid at a time when internal resistance had been all but suppressed. Sports-mad whites craved international tours and Nelson Mandela and his

comrades told me after they were released in 1989/90 how important the campaign was and of the morale boost they had received when news leaked through to Robben Island.
ends

Former Labour Cabinet Minister Peter Hain MP was Chairman of the Stop the Seventy Tour campaign. His new biography of Nelson Mandela will be published by Octopus.

A job well done

Bob Hughes

The founders of the Anti-Apartheid Movement 50 years ago could not have dared to hope that now South Africa would have had four democratic non-racial elections.

Over the years AAM grew to be one of the most powerful Campaigning organisations of the 20th Century.

Under successive Executive Secretaries, the late Ethel de Keyser and the late Mike Terry, AAM worked closely with the Liberation Movements of southern Africa. It engaged individual members, political parties, trade unions, religious and secular bodies in common cause to end Apartheid.

AAM recognised that Apartheid was an economic system to maintain and bolster white supremacy. Together with the African National Congress a campaign for economic sanctions against the regime began.

This was not universally approved.

The “Far left” complained that sanctions would stifle industrial growth and thereby hold back the development of an urban proletariat, without which revolution and the ending of apartheid would be impossible.

The “Right” argued paternalistically that sanctions would hurt most those it was intended to help. Furthermore, that investment would lead to economic growth and the trickle down of wealth leading to Apartheid “withering” away.

To that I would respond, “To believe that, one would be naïve enough to believe that if you fed a carnivore more and more and more meat, then one day it would turn into a vegetarian!”

We have travelled a long way in the last 50 years. All those who participated in the struggle for freedom can be satisfied that a job was well done and that an example was set as to what can be achieved by unified campaigning.

Lord Hughes of Woodside

Nelson Mandela in Glasgow

David Kenvyn

At 10.30pm the fax sputtered into life in the ANC office in London, and spewed out several pages - Nelson Mandela's speech to be delivered in Glasgow the next day. Jim Paterson, Jackie Motsepe and I were the only ones there. As I was wearing a suit, the others said "Get on the night train and deliver the speech".

So I ran to Euston, bought a ticket, some toiletries and leapt aboard. I told the guard to wake me 30 minutes before arriving in Glasgow.

At 6.00am, I jumped into a taxi saying "Hilton Hotel, please!" The cabbie replied "That's where Nelson Mandela is staying". I said "I know. I've got his speech in my bag."

The cabbie asked "Is that true?" and I said "Yes".

When we got to the hotel I asked "How much?"

The cabbie replied "I'm not taking money from a friend of Nelson Mandela".

David Kenvyn

Toyi toying in Cheam

Nigel Lawrance

With the many highs and lows during the struggle against apartheid I find it hard to single out specific events but I will never forget the time during the South African elections when I acted as an observer in the London polling station. The atmosphere of absolute joy and enthusiasm from people who for the first time had the opportunity to vote on the future of their own country was incredible, at times feeling more like a party atmosphere.

Another time was when my local group arranged for some South African councillors to visit Sutton council and observe the running of local government offices. During their visit we hosted a party for them which gave us a fantastic opportunity to find out first hand what the needs and problems were that faced the new government. I will never forget the sight of them all toyi toying on Cheam station late at night in an attempt to keep warm.

Nigel Lawrance was Secretary of Kingston and Sutton Anti-Apartheid and Head Office volunteer, Freedom Day Organiser.

Some wobbly headlines, but...

Margaret Ling

My friend Rita had a healthy lack of respect for the establishment of the Anti-Apartheid Movement and I had a sneaking feeling that her choice of headline for the front page of Anti-Apartheid News would not go down too well. The inspirational, brave and beautiful Ruth First had just been assassinated in Mozambique, killed by an apartheid letter bomb, and, with the help of rub-down sheets of headline lettering, we were struggling to do her justice. 'You Can't Kill the Spirit' would have sent an immediate signal of solidarity to all women involved in campaigns for peace around the world, and especially to anyone who had been taking part in the Greenham Common Peace Camp anti-nuclear protests.

An eyebrow was indeed raised in the proofreading and the September 1982 issue eventually appeared with the headline 'They Had to Kill Her', a reference to the determination of the South African regime to eliminate its opposition, and the subhead 'Apartheid – graveyard of the human spirit'.

Anti-Apartheid News was the monthly newspaper of the AAM. The 12 page broadsheet was put together on a shoestring with the help of the AAM's ever-reliable, super-efficient typesetter Nancy White. In those pre-digital days, it was a cut

and paste job with scalpels, cowgum and Letraset. With the help of volunteers, we sliced up the lengths of copy and stuck them into position. Finally, the completed A2 artboards had to be delivered to the printers.

AA News had some wobbly headlines but it helped the AAM punch far above its weight. Its ability, with the help of some high profile names who were persuaded to write for free, to stay at the cutting edge of analysis of the apartheid regime, lent weight to campaigns. I was editor of AA News in the early 1980s after Zimbabwe won its independence, and a letter that I particularly appreciated came from a reader in the region who regularly sent greetings to 'the AA Newsroom'. Toiling over a manual typewriter at home in the small hours, I enjoyed that.

Margaret Ling was the editor of Anti-Apartheid News, 1980 – 1988

The Harare Working Group

Joni McDougall

I was delighted when Mike Terry informed me that my application to work at the offices of the Anti Apartheid Movement to coordinate the work of the Harare Working Group (HWG) was successful. The HWG consisted of the UK delegation who attended 'Children, Repression and the Law in Apartheid South Africa' held in 1987 in Harare, Zimbabwe. The conference, convened by Archbishop Trevor Huddleston and presided over by ANC President Oliver Tambo received the testimonies of children who had suffered at the hands of the Apartheid regime.

The testimonies, some from children as young as six, were of extreme brutality, suffering and torture at the hands of the South African security forces, of children who had been arrested and given no legal assistance. More often than not, parents were not informed of the arrest, or of their child's whereabouts and were prohibited from visiting them as this would have involved leaving their designated area, an illegal act in breach of the notorious Group Area Act – a savage practise which sadly mirrors what Palestinian children and their parents face in the occupied territories today.

The work involved planning a series of events and initiatives to highlight the plight of children. In the period 1984-86; 173,000 children were held awaiting trial in police cells, 18,000 were arrested, 11,000 detained without trial, thousands were wounded and 312 were killed by the South African police. Black children also suffered from all the minor and major indignity of subjugation, the daily grinding fact of life for the black child was witnessing your parents being treated like crap, living in overcrowded conditions often with no basic infrastructure, utilities or amenities. And all this with all the other monstrous inequalities of separate development heaped on top – the second rate education, inadequate health care and a virtual absence of all basic services designed to provide care and protection for children.

The HWG exposed the true nature of apartheid towards the children of South Africa and the front line states and mobilised support to end the injustice. Although at times it was harrowing, working for the Anti Apartheid Movement was the best job I ever had. What a privilege to work full time for a cause that you so whole heartedly believed in alongside likeminded comrades. What an honour to be involved in this great movement which brought together the best of people against the worst of evils. I am proud that I was able to play a part.

Joni McDougall

A sweet moment

Bill Morris

Throughout the 70s and 80s I was one of many trade unionists who supported the Anti-Apartheid Movement in the fight to end the repugnancy of apartheid in South Africa.

There was money to raise, meetings to be held with ANC exiles, boycotts to be organised amongst members, and conversations to be had with opinion formers.

There was a variety of platforms including rallies and the vigil outside South Africa House in Trafalgar Square to show our anger and hatred of a vile system.

It was sweet justice, then, that in April 2001 I stood with President Nelson Mandela and other trade unionists and politicians looking down on Trafalgar Square from a balcony in the South African High Commission. The concert in Trafalgar Square was Nelson Mandela's thanks to the Anti-Apartheid Movement and the people of Britain for their stand against apartheid.

A sweet moment indeed.

Lord Morris of Handsworth

Namibia Support Committee

Jo Morris

In 1974 I had just returned from a clandestine visit to Namibia. Peter Katjavivi, the SWAPO London representative, asked me to set up a new solidarity organisation for SWAPO to win public support for SWAPO's little known struggle against the illegal SA regime in Namibia. Operating from the cramped SWAPO office in Tabernacle Street, the NSC organised public meetings for visiting SWAPO leaders, generated publicity and built up NSC groups.

Following a 1975 tour by SWAPO women, including Putuse Appollus, SWAPO's health specialist, the NSC began to send medical kits and sanitary towels to PLAN (People's Liberation Army of Namibia) fighters operating in northern Namibia and the Caprivi Strip. Making up the kits involved buying huge quantities of medicines and bandages, setting them out around large trestle tables and packing them into first aid boxes.

Years later when meeting Peter, by then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Namibia, at the Safari Hotel in Windhoek he introduced me to one of the regional leaders in Kaokoveld, who had been a cadre in PLAN – it was good to hear that the kits not only reached PLAN but were much appreciated! It had been difficult to imagine the kits ever reaching their destination while packing them in London.

Jo Morris was the first Executive Secretary of the Namibia Support Committee 1974-77

Lands End to London

Gerard Omasta-Milsom

Cycling from Lands End to London back in 1988 was a memorable experience. The South West Regional Committee of the Anti-Apartheid Movement organised the cycle ride, as part of the national Nelson Mandela Freedom at 70 Campaign.

Steve Reicher from Exeter, Idris Roker from Bath, myself, and nine others spent a week on the road. It was remarkable in terms of the amount of interest it generated, in places like Redruth, Newton Abbot, Bridgwater, and Swindon, not renowned for their radical traditions.

The Mandela Wembley Stadium Concert, the previous month, ensured a high level of public interest. The cycle ride culminated on Sunday 17 July in Hyde Park, joining the Marchers who had come all the way from Glasgow. It was exhausting but rewarding, and one of the many initiatives worldwide that helped ensure the release of Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners.

Gerard Omasta-Milsom - AAM Staff 1988 to 1994, Bristol AA Secretary 1984 –1988

My AAM “scoop”

Bill Otto

My only AAM "scoop" in 20 years of membership was photographing the loading of a SA defence radar set from Marconi at Bournemouth (Hurn) airport in the early 80s. I was otherwise unemployed ("between jobs" you might say) so had a bit of time. Mike Terry phoned to say he had had a tip off, but did not say from whom. Being relatively close it was clear who should go to investigate. I packed my trusty Praktika PLC3 SLR and some rolls of film and my 200mm lens into my pannier on the old Matchless G5 350 single (1962) and set off from Totton.

Scared stiff, I parked up some distance from the airport and walked in, somewhat naively thinking this would bring less attention to myself (no CCTV being obvious). I sat in the airport lounge by the window and across the tarmac was a Hercules C130 transport plane. Pretty soon after I got there this low loader approached with a large container-like load which was winched onto the tarmac and then into the plane. I shot lots of pictures with the long lens, and was amazed to not be arrested or even approached by anyone.

Once the loading had finished I left for Totton, and then by train to London and the AAM office. Mike gave the film to the Guardian's film desk and they developed it in about 5 minutes flat. The long lens had underexposed too much so not much detail could be made out but the obvious. Still, it made the front page, also of the New Worker, who got the negatives later on and they played with them some more to try and get details, but without a lot of success.

Nonetheless, two front pages, and a lot of embarrassment for the regime and our government, so a good job was done. They were not able to deny the somewhat grainy evidence I had produced, and Marconi no doubt had a bad day at the office. With Photoshop we may have got better-developed pictures, and if I can find the negs perhaps we can have another try.

Bill Otto was a member of Southampton AA.

All in good time...

Chandran Owen

As a child growing up in Zambia and learning first hand about the effects of apartheid. I was shocked to hear about the Orange Free State which did not allow Asians to stay the night, group areas acts, Bantustans, and the dreaded Immorality Act (which forbid any liaison between young people of different races). And I was shocked to learn they based it on the Bible! What upset me was the fear it created and that I was too afraid to do anything till I came to UK in 1983.

At first I immersed myself in a research which was published as a book, "Scotland's Apartheid Connection ". It involved hours of beavering away in cold Edinburgh libraries searching micro-fiche lists of shareholders. Those were the early days of ethical investment activists and prior to computer search programmes! Later when we moved to Sheffield I was more emboldened to join in picket lines on Shell boycotts and fundraising events.

Even during those dark days when the Thatcher government was such good friends with the regime we never lost hope as the struggle neatly meshed with the British peoples own struggle with racism in British society.

The Mandela concert made its mark in making sure the days of the regime were numbered. A few years later when Nelson Mandela walked to freedom we were able to celebrate that evening with bells ring in Sheffield cathedral. It was a proud day when we could vote to disband the AAM, the job done. But now almost twenty years hence South Africa is still struggling from the after effects of Apartheid and needs every globally conscious individual to make the rainbow dream a reality.

There is still evidence of racism in many quarters, the least we can do is make racism unacceptable in our neighbourhoods and maybe the message will filter back to the die-hard racists and xenophobes of all colours. There is a lot of work to do in this respect, but it is that of cleaning people's minds of this poison. All in good time, this too will change.

Chandran Owen was Vice-Chair Yorkshire and Humberside AAM and a member of the National Executive AAM.

Putting together the Anti-Apartheid News

Anne Page

The AAM was only four when I went to work alongside Dorothy Robinson, as the second-ever paid staffer. I worked on publicity for the Rivonia campaign and the World Campaign for the Release of Political Prisoners. Abdul Minty asked me to continue full-time, to start the information service, and, in 1965, *Anti-Apartheid News*.

Mazisi Kunene, the ANC's first representative abroad, found Gus, now Lord, Macdonald, working at *Tribune*. Together with *pro bono* help from Jessica Strang, of Pentagram — the trendy graphic designers, and a slew of Fleet Street journalists, Gus and I got the paper going, and I continued to edit it until 1970. Myriad volunteers distributed it around the country, and even on to Robben Island.

Those who helped us, not only to put the paper together, but by covering AAM events, and uncovering political complicities, lies and backsliding, included: Michael Parkinson, then a sports writer for the *Sunday Times*, and outraged by sporting apartheid; Arthur Maimane, former *Drum* journalist and ITN reporter; Tony Clifton, later a *Newsweek* war correspondent and foreign bureau chief; Michael Leapman, the writer, then at the pre-Murdoch *Sun*; Alex Mitchell, now a well-known columnist in Sydney, and Bruce Page, then editor of *Insight*, the *Sunday Times*' crack investigative team, and later of the *New Statesman*.

Anne Page (formerly Darnborough)

Southampton Anti-Apartheid Group

Anna Ridehalgh

Looking back, we are surprised at the range and energy of our campaigns. We threw ourselves into the usual AA activities: sponsored walks, leafleting supermarkets, letter-writing, arguing over AAM policy, organising socials. We pulled plugs and subverted meetings of the Friends of the Springboks.

There were some high profile local actions. One member spent hours at Bournemouth Airport, photographing arms exports to South Africa for the UN Committee Against Apartheid.

The 1986 World Archaeological Congress in Southampton brought the first real action of the academic boycott of apartheid: against ferocious reaction, we worked with Southampton City Council and the AUT to maintain the boycott.

With the T&GWU, we stopped the export of machine-tools and exposed the import of Namibian uranium, through the docks. We sent a fast inflatable with a banner to warn de Klerk, arriving by liner, that he wasn't welcome in Southampton. Sadly, he took no notice and ran the gauntlet of our demonstration on land.

Anna Ridehalgh was a member of Southampton Anti-Apartheid Group from the 1970s onwards

We were very hard up

Dorothy Robinson

I almost have difficulty in remembering I was actually there in 1959 when AAM started. We have had so much success with all our campaigns. I was a typist (unpaid) in the tiny basement offices of CAO and The `Boycott Movement at 200 Gower Street, NW1 (now North Gower Street.) I became the first Administrative Secretary of AAM in 1960 and stayed through the arson attack on Gower Street and our migrations around the Borough of Camden until 1966.

The most vital campaign was in 1963/4 on the Rivonia Trial when Nelson Mandela and eight co-defendants were on trial for their lives. This ended with a victory as they were all sentenced to life imprisonment instead of the death sentence. In his verdict the Judge referred to the unprecedented international action around the world on the Rivonia trial.

One of the other campaigns was for economic sanctions and against support by the international banks for South Africa. So that in 1989 the South African Finance Minister confessed that his country "cannot stand alone". The rest, as they say these days, is history.

There was a terrible amount of racial tension in Britain in the 1960s. Our office was burnt down when we were all out demonstrating to get South Africa out of the Commonwealth in 1961.

It was hard to find anyone who would let us a room – they thought we would get their premises damaged. For a while I had to work half time, because they could only afford to pay half my salary.

I was responsible for everything, organising the marches, the meetings, writing to speakers. I used to work in the morning and then go back in the evening because we would have people calling in and committee meetings were held in the evenings. We were very hard up.

Dorothy Robinson was Secretary of the AAM in the early 1960s

Folklore and fact

Simon Sapper

From folklore...summer 1984. A tall blonde young man stops, loitering outside South Africa House, gets a tin of red paint out of a bag and hurls it at the building. Plain clothes coppers race after him across the square.

White passers-by see a white guy being chased by two black men. They rugby-tackle the pursuers.

Our comrade turns up at Mandela Street panting and paint-splattered. Or so I was told.

November 1985. Three long columns of protestors snaking down the approach roads to Trafalgar Square.

From the plinth of Nelson's column all you can see are banners, placards and people. The noise and buzz and chatter.

All sorts of different groups trying to wriggle onto the platform with *their* message rather than ours. The redoubtable Chris Easterling and the best team of stewards ever.

As the wintry afternoon dwindles into twilight, Jesse Jackson speaks. People are pressing in on the platform. But Jackson steps up to the microphone and you could hear a pin drop.

Simon Sapper

The Fireworks Day Committee

John Sheldon

In 1969 I was a student at Ruskin College in Oxford. The first game in the Springbok rugby tour was due to be played in Oxford on 5 November. We decided to stop it if we possibly could – and set up a group called the Fireworks Day Committee.

We arranged for every college to take up its ticket allocation and made sure they went to students who would try to occupy the pitch. But as a diversion we also organised a rally outside the ground – very moderate with the leader of the Liberal Party speaking.

The evening before the match we met the police to go over the arrangements for the rally – keeping quiet about the real plans to disrupt the match. But when we got home we discovered they had switched the game to Twickenham. They knew what we were doing all along.

John Sheldon is the former General Secretary of the PCS

ACTSA delegation South Africa tour 1996

Margaret Sheldon

Taking part in the first official delegation of ACTSA to South Africa in 1996 was a life changing experience for me. As we toured the country we met many interesting people from tribal women in their rondavels to ministers in Parliament. I was full of admiration for the commitment to reconciliation across the new 'free' nation.

I was also very proud to represent AAM and ACTSA as guest of the provincial government when I went alone to Mpumalanga which was twinned with the Midlands. Visiting schools there revealed a great need for resources so on my return I collected thousands of good reading books which were sent to disadvantaged schools in the province through the Community Heart scheme.

So impressed was I by this trip that I retired early and returned to spend years in the townships facing many dangers to help development but making many friends.

Being very interested in Community Tourism promoted by ACTSA I went backpacking round the country, eventually visiting the Zulu valleys where I lived in a Zulu village for months, even helping to build a new rondavel for tourists staying overnight.

South Africa won my heart and I miss the excitement of life there.

Margaret Sheldon

The goal of ultimate freedom

Mike Sparham

My enduring memory of the AAM is the end - privileged to be an observer at the 1994 elections in South Africa. I will never forget the faces of people queuing for hours to cast their vote in the first-ever multi-racial election. It was a life-changing experience. Apartheid was dead – all the years of boycott, of attending numerous meetings encouraging people not to use Shell, or bank at Barclays, or support artists who played Sun City, or buy wine from South Africa, were vindicated.

But I also remember the darker side – the many people who were killed or threatened with the death penalty. Protesting outside South Africa House and campaigning for political prisoners in the wider collective struggle for freedom. We all experienced highs (Namibian freedom, the release of Mandela) and lows (Soweto, the assassination of Chris Hani) – it was the goal of ultimate freedom for South Africans that kept us all going.

Mike Sparham was a member of the AAM Executive Committee; National Committee and Chair of Trade Union Committee

“Why me?”

David Steel

In the spring of 1960 when the Anti-Apartheid Movement was officially launched following the appalling massacre at Sharpeville I became one of its first members, and treasure a photograph of a group of us students at Edinburgh University holding up banners calling for a boycott of South African produce.

My instinct was nurtured by memories of four years at school in colonial Kenya. On becoming an MP in 1965 ("baby of the House") I joined the national committee, and after the 1966 election a deputation of Abdul Minty and Vella Pillay called on me in the central lobby to my astonishment asking me to become President. "Why me?" I asked.

They explained without embarrassment that having lost first Barbara Castle and then David Ennals to government they were looking for someone who was unlikely to go into the cabinet! On that dubious basis I was chosen, and enjoyed four years in that active role until my appointment as Liberal Chief Whip after the 1970 election.

My most difficult time came in January of that year when the Springbok rugby team played one of their matches at Galashiels in my constituency. (Rugby is a religion in the

Scottish Borders). We held a public protest meeting and stood outside the ground handing out leaflets. This was deeply unpopular, but clearly I had no choice. At the election a few months later my Tory opponent had a brilliant last minute leaflet showing a ruby ball sailing over the bar between the posts. The slogan was "Convert to Conservative". Many did, and I held my seat only after three recounts.

I treasure many friends from those days - the South African exiles such as Oliver Tambo, Sam Nujoma, Ruth First, Albie Sachs and activists in the Movement like Neil Kinnock, Bob Hughes, Andrew Faulds, Peter Hain, Adul Minty, Ethel de Keyser and many others; also the Bishops Ambrose Reeves and Trevor Huddleston who succeeded me as President.

The Movement played a proud part in repeatedly raising the issue of apartheid and hastening pressure for its end.

Lord David Steel

The raggle-taggle foot soldier of AAM

Ian Stuart

One damp Sunday morning in March 1990, AAM supporters met to greet Nelson Mandela during his first visit to Britain after his release from prison. The venue was a posh London hotel. We gathered in single file in the foyer, awaiting admittance to the meeting room under the gaze of the well-heeled hotel guests. Well might they stare, for were we not a motley crew? Mainly ANC officers, SA exiles, students and trade unionists, some of us felt a wee bit out of place and certainly underdressed in the chandelier lit splendor of the opulent hotel. We were the raggle-taggle foot soldiers of AAM.

Nevertheless, the slingshots of this unprepossessing volunteer army had helped the South African people bring the apartheid colossus down on its knees.

It had been a truly David and Goliath Act and as acknowledged by Nelson, it had been our victory too. AAM's history shows the wisdom of never underestimating the sheer power of ordinary people, especially when they unite behind a cause that is just.

Ian Stuart

The challenges of the early years

Roger Trask

Having worked for AAM for nearly four years at the beginning of the 70's – in many ways some of the darkest years in the anti-apartheid struggle – I am full of respect for what the Anti-Apartheid Movement has achieved and its contribution to winning freedom in South Africa.

Back in the early 70's the Tory Government was selling arms to South Africa and branding Mandela a terrorist – the TUC still recognised the white-led TUCSA federation – and even the Labour Party was very wary about its official links with the ANC. But through its relentless educational and mobilisation work in the past decades the movement helped to build the economic, cultural and sporting boycott and move Britain over to the anti-apartheid side of the freedom struggle. A wonderful achievement, especially by those who devoted so much of their lives to this objective – Abdul Minty, Archbishop Huddleston, Mike Terry, Bob Hughes, Ethel de Keyser, Christabel Gurney, Alan Brooks and so many more. We all owe them a huge amount.

Roger Trask

A drive round the block

John Verdult

A day trip to Glasgow from Coventry by car is not something I would normally recommend but when an unexpected face-to-face encounter with Nelson Mandela is involved then the journey seems little more than a drive round the block.

Local groups had been invited to attend a rally to celebrate the great man's being granted the freedom of numerous British cities. So I persuaded my flatmate to lend me his company car for the day and set off at the crack of dawn with two other AA activists, one of them a South African student doing a course at Coventry University. The rally itself was an inspiring event, an affirmation of the great distance South Africa had travelled in such a short space of time. Just five or so years earlier we had been campaigning for Mandela's release and hearing almost daily reports of atrocities carried out by the Apartheid regime. Now the country was just months away from its first democratic elections.

When the event finished my South African friend got chatting to some of his compatriots who invited us to a 'meeting' somewhere else in the city. They directed me round Glasgow's one way system and into a subterranean car park. I thought that we were just going to someone's flat for tea and a chat so you can imagine my surprise when the lift from the car

park disgorged us in the foyer of the Hilton hotel. At that very moment Nelson Mandela swept across the room. Within a matter of seconds he had approached us, shaken hands, exchanged pleasantries and moved on, before I had time to realise what was happening (and certainly before I'd thought to take out my camera!).

I must confess to having name-dropped shamelessly ever since on the back of this incident, though this did backfire on me once when a Zimbabwean colleague could boast of having shaken Mr Mandela's hand not once but twice!

John Verdult was a member of Birmingham and Coventry AAM/ACTSA from 1988-1996.