Interview with Talal Karim by David Shortland, 20 September 2013, for the Forward to Freedom Anti-Apartheid Movement History Project. http://www.aamarchives.org

David Shortland: *If I could just ask you, for the recording, to give your full name.*

Talal Karim: Talal Karim

DS: And if you could tell me when and where you were born.

TK: I was born in Dhaka, Bangladesh in December 1953. I'll be 60 in December this year.

DS: OK. Sorry, what was the name of the town in Bangladesh?

TK: Dhaka. D-H-A-K-A.

DS: D-H-A-K-A.

TK: Bangladesh. I came to this country in 1971, when Bangladesh was going through the war of independence and liberation. So that's when I came here to study and have settled in this country since then. I came with my older brother by land route from Peshawar to Kabul by bus and then Tehran by bus and train. I stayed three months in Tehran, Iran and came to England in December 1971 by train to Istanbul and then the Orient Express from Istanbul to London.

DS: OK, and what do you currently do for a living?

TK: I am currently Executive Director of a not-for-profit organisation, Finsbury Park Trust, which is a community resource centre and it provides subsidised low-cost office space for rent to a number of third sector organisations. It was set up with government funding through Islington Council. So it covers Islington, Hackney and Haringey. Also we are a regeneration agency, providing business support, town centre management and involved in regeneration development work in this area. So one of my roles is also town centre management and business support to local businesses.

DS: OK, great. And at the time in question, during the Anti-Apartheid Movement, what did you do for a living at that point?

TK: I first got involved in supporting the Anti-Apartheid Movement when I was a student at Warwick University. I was doing a degree in politics, and obviously at that time the Anti-Apartheid Movement was in its infancy. I wasn't that active. I had lots of friends whom I shared accommodation with in my final year of my degree, when I was living in International House. A number of them were from South Africa or Southern Africa, and we used to have lots of late night politics and discussions in our common room about apartheid and about injustice and about all that had happened, you know, the Sharpeville murders, massacres and Soweto and all that, and there were heated arguments late into the early morning. So I built quite good links with some of them there. But at that time, I wasn't very active. I just supported the Anti-Apartheid Movement in wanting an end to injustice.

DS: And at what time did you become a Councillor with Islington?

TK: Well, I'd been an acting member of the Labour Party since my student days, when I

was doing a degree – 1974. So during that time I supported a number of causes like Anti-Nazi League, Anti-Apartheid Movement and things like that, you know. And I then became a Councillor in May 1982 and that is when I started becoming active with the Anti-Apartheid Movement. I was instrumental with other colleagues to persuade Islington Council to formally join the Local Authorities Against Apartheid movement (LAAA), and in London the three or four leading authorities which took a major part were Islington, Camden, Lewisham and Haringey. In Islington, we had the ANC headquarters based in Penton Street and we had a very strong active Race Equality Committee, of which I was a member, either chair or vice-chair, and we used to support a number of causes like the Anti-Apartheid Movement. So we were asked to join and at that time, collectively, through the Local Authorities Against Apartheid. It had a steering committee and I was on the executive committee, and we met three or four times a year to decide collective action. One of the first actions was to adopt the local authorities charter on anti-apartheid – the boycott charter calling upon local authorities in Britain to disinvest from South Africa and boycott South African goods. We adopted this charter simultaneously in 1983. I recall when we adopted our charter, which is still in the Mayor's parlour, we were fortunate that we had speakers from all three movements, the ANC, the PAC and SWAPO.

DS: Just to check … the PAC?

TK: Yes, the Pan-Africanist Congress.

DS: Right, OK.

TK: At that time there was a bit of friction between the ANC and PAC. The PAC was very much part of the Communist Party[1] and disagreed with the leadership of the ANC on the liberation struggle. And the third organisation was SWAPO, fighting for an independent Namibia. The chief representatives of all three movements addressed our Council meeting. Our moral commitment was providing as much support to the ANC head offices, we gave them discretionary rate relief as a registered charity, and we also joined the boycott movement and disinvestment, which included investigating all our pension funds and which ones were investing in South Africa. And I remember, from time to time, myself and a couple of leading members from our contracts panel would make investigations if we purchased any goods from South Africa. Whenever we had new contracts awarded, we would check on their links, whether they had any links in South Africa or not. And one day, I remember, we paid a surprise visit to our canteen, where we kept all the food items and we went through shelf by shelf, checking if there was anything made in South Africa or not. [*Laughs*] And we told the officers off, 'This is our policy. You're not supposed to buy anything from South Africa …' And then I took part in the Free Nelson Mandela campaign. Then when we had stalls, like in Nag's Head, 'Boycott South African goods', so I used to take part in that.

DS: Can I ask a bit about when you first became aware of South Africa? You spoke a bit about university days and everything … but a little bit more about, practically, what it was that drew your attention to it and what your feelings were at the time?

TK: I think partly I used to listen to some of the black students about their anger against what was happening in South Africa – the discrimination, the racism, particular massacres, you know, that were happening. And there were some very heated debates going on [*laugh*], you know, and also about strategies to adopt and all that kind of thing. Some were very passionate about the guerrilla movement – wanting to continue until the white regime was defeated. Some were very passionate about negotiated settlement. And this used to take place in our common rooms, and I would not be

surprised if many of them are now leading … [*laugh*] holding leading positions in government. Funnily enough, I went to visit South Africa – my only visit, I was hoping to visit again – in 1998, and at that time my oldest brother, who was in the Bangladesh Diplomatic Service, he was Bangladesh High Commissioner to South Africa, so he knew quite a lot of leading people. I met Abdul Minty, who was in the Foreign Office during this visit. Abdul was in the Anti-Apartheid Movement. He was the Secretary in the early '70s. I just knew him mainly at that time, meeting him at trade union meetings, etc., so didn't know him that well. And who else did I meet? The first black South African High Commissioner to London was Mendi Msimang. He was also the last Chief ANC Rep to UK and Ireland and then he became the first black South African High Commissioner. At Islington Town Hall – we had a black mayor at that time from Ghana, Michael Boye-Anawomah, and he hosted a reception for him, the fact that he was the first black South African High Commissioner to the UK. And we had everyone from London, including the first four black MPs in the House of Commons, who attended this reception. But as I said, the awareness thing, what inspired me was what I used to hear about in the student common rooms during my undergraduate days. That's what inspired me to do something and join it.

DS: I just want … just for the recording, to check on a couple of those names that you raised, just to make sure I'm going to transcribe them correctly. Abdul Minty?

TK: Abdul Minty. M-I-N-T-Y.

DS: OK.

TK: He is now at Ministry of Foreign of Affairs in Pretoria, he's Director General. I think he was Secretary of Anti-Apartheid Movement. You maybe should check.

DS: And there was Mendi …

TK: Mendi. M-E-N-D-I and M-S-I-M-A-N-G.

TK: He was the last Chief ANC Rep to UK. And then he became the High Commissioner for South Africa in 1994. When did yes, Nelson Mandela became president in 1994. That's when they obtained black majority rule for … yes, so he was the first black South African High Commissioner. So then, after 1994, the Local Authorities Anti-Apartheid Movement … well the Anti-Apartheid Movement changed its name. At that time, the person in charge of the Anti-Apartheid Movement was Mike Terry, who died, who was a brilliant campaigner. He was a teacher. They changed the name to ACTSA, Action on Southern Africa, and the local authorities side of the movement became known as LAACTSA [Local Authorities Action on Southern Africa]. So I then, through my trade union, I've always been active in the trade union movement, which was ASTMS in those days, and then AMICUS and MSF, I got my branch to affiliate to the Anti-Apartheid Movement later on, so I was always my branch delegate to ACTSA or AAM from 1981. So I attended the annual conferences every year.

DS: I was going to ask a little … going back to university, the politics degree that you did. I wondered, at the time and in that context, how professors at your university, or the syllabus, might have viewed the apartheid regime and if it had much to say? Or was it mainly just the discussions that you had outside of class?

TK: At that time, as part of the core service, the Anti-Apartheid Movement was a very small society. So it was outside the classes really. So most of the activities would be

held through the students union. There were lots of clubs and societies, and they would hold workshops or events or gatherings with keynote speakers about the awareness, you know, the boycott movement. So the NUS took a leading role to boycott Barclays and there would be vigils occasionally, and Barclays was investing in South Africa. For example, boycotting Barclays was a big thing [*laugh*] in those days, remember. We were all passionate not to use Barclays [*laugh*], which I believe did have a big effect. Barclays, Shell, there were companies … big disinvestment.

DS: And you mentioned the Barclays campaign. Were there any of the other major campaigns that you personally got involved in?

TK: In the boycott thing?

DS: Just generally, through the years … the various campaigns. Obviously Boycott Barclays was one of them.

TK: Boycott Barclays was the major big campaign, but the student union also campaigned against university pension funds in South Africa also. I recall after the Soweto uprisings, there was a campaign about justice for the victims of the Soweto, so I took part in that, went to awareness meetings, that sort of thing. But my main thing was about releasing Nelson Mandela and so I went to a number of events and rallies. Those were the key ones really.

DS: When you felt compelled to become involved in the movement, was there anything more personally that drove you to want to be involved? That made you emotionally attached?

TK: Yes, because I felt … being very politically minded, I felt this was a just cause. I felt that the black majority were being discriminated against and oppressed, and I felt the whites didn't have the right to govern South Africa, you know. I felt very strongly that [inaudible] that they should have a black majority government, based on one member, one vote. And I felt, ultimately, they will cave in to negotiations, and that's what happened. I think what happened was, the longer they kept Nelson Mandela in prison, the more it became a unique, universal cause to support. And we had right-wing governments in Britain – Thatcher and all – who were very sort of pro-white South African government, to do nothing, and now they've suddenly, they've changed overnight, you know. [*Laugh*]. And one of the things Nelson Mandela did after his release, he came to Britain to thank us. He said this is where the main movement was based. He came to Glasgow and the Local Authorities Anti-Apartheid Movement held a reception and he met each one of us. And you know it was remarkable, the knowledge he had. He just said to me, 'I'm so grateful for all the support Islington gave to us'. That was one of the most memorable events of my life to meet Nelson Mandela personally.

DS: My goodness.

TK: Yes, I'm still trying to get a copy of that DVD.

DS: Oh brilliant, recorded as well, that's brilliant.

TK: Yes, the Scottish Anti-Apartheid Movement got some DVDs done, and that was my turning point, meeting the man himself. I never thought I would meet him. And what I also realised … that how humble he was despite all the sufferings he went through, that warmth, that humbleness and that attitude of, as if nothing had happened. 'Let's get on with life.' You know? I found the same with Mr Mendi Msimang – such a

generous, warm, affectionate person. When I went to South Africa, I met him. He knew exactly who I was. He took the post of Treasurer of ANC when he returned to South Africa. His wife was a Cabinet minister in the first post-apartheid government. I think probably she still may be. But he was a very respected figure in the ANC. The others whom I got to know and … Oh yes, the other thing we did from the Council, we passed a motion that this was what we would do, you know, as part of the Anti-Apartheid Movement and what support we could do. We also allocated housing units to ANC exiles based in London. Whenever we adopted a resolution we ensured it went to the relevant committee for action. We passed that resolution to each committee of the Council, like housing or economic development, you know? So the housing committee, we allocated some empty void properties to ANC exiles and we were one of the first boroughs, and two of the key people who benefited from this scheme became senior government officials post-1994. One of them became Deputy High Commissioner in the UK. He was a key ANC person at that time, George Johannes. He's now in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Pretoria. When [inaudible] he always inquires about me [*laugh*], and there was someone else. So after 1994, some of our steering committee meetings – the main committee meetings of the Local Authorities Action – sorry, LAACTSA, Local Authorities Action on Southern Africa – we used to meet in South Africa House. We were very fortunate that the High Commissioner used to, afterwards, entertain us with drinks and took us to the basement. Oh yes, we were locked in one evening, we were having a meeting and the city demonstration suddenly was happening, the anti-capitalist movement. What do you call it? They came and just took over the entire city, so we couldn't get out of the building. What's it called? Once a year in May they used to demonstrate across the UK, targeting the big multinationals and banks and everything.

DS: Yes, I'm aware I guess of similar things today like the Uncut movement and everything. I'm not sure if it's …

TK: No, it's a nationwide body and they do it universally, all across the world. Protesting against capitalism and exploitation, about not paying taxes and things like that. Anyway, they swarmed into the city, Trafalgar Square and all was just taken over, so we couldn't get out of the building. The police said, 'You can't come out'. They locked us in. So we stayed there until midnight because the High Commissioner … George Johannes was there at that time, the Deputy High Commissioner. So we were entertained, we were taken down to the basement, the secret basement where the bomb was made. [*Laugh*]. When they targeted the ANC, the bombers targeted the ANC, this is where the South African Secret Service Agency, BOSS, the headquarters in London was based here. So it was quite remarkable, something to see. There you were, until 1993, 1992, going up to South Africa House, protesting, you know? Boycotting South African goods and all that. And then our mayors … dependent on the personality, they always took part once a year. Remember the day … I'm trying to remember. There was a day in the year, it might have been the Nelson Mandela Day, or something linked with the Sharpeville massacre. The mayors of London were invited to take part, to chain themselves outside South Africa House, so we had two of our mayors take part, we would go and support them. Our MP Jeremy Corbyn was a very passionate supporter of the Anti-Apartheid Movement. He would go there outside South Africa House, chain himself and invite to be arrested.

DS: Yes, I just wanted to ask … the meeting with Mandela sounded fascinating and I'm sure personally at that point it must have felt like a very satisfying conclusion to a long journey, a long slog. What were your feelings?

TK: Well, as I say, it was a very quick, brief one, but I was amazed that he knew who I

was and he knew what Islington's contribution was and in that quick two minutes, he expressed his gratitude to Islington Council for the work we had done. And then he said, 'I invite you to give any assistance to how we will rebuild ourselves'. I remember him saying that. So we were all part of the movement, through the Commonwealth Local Government Forum and through ACTSA, supporting newly elected councillors in South Africa, giving them mentoring, training on good governance and things like that. But I was so overwhelmed with my meeting face-to-face with him and being able to shake hands with him. Unfortunately I did not keep a copy of the photograph.

DS: That's unfortunate. So in Islington Council at the time, what sort of words would you use to describe the general dynamic of the group and the culture of the people working together?

TK: Oh, the people were very supportive, you know. We managed to get the entire Council behind us. Every time we would pass a motion and we also, from time to time, had the ANC women's choir come in, whenever there were events, come into [inaudible]. We also gave them free lettings, you know, for meetings, meeting rooms if they wanted to have a meeting or an event, through the Mayor, we would just give them a free letting. But these are minor things that we did for them. And then, much much later, moving on, Denis Goldberg set up the 'Ten Pence and a Book' campaign. Islington was again one of the first authorities to support his cause and we had a formal launch in Islington Town Hall. I was the Deputy Leader and we had a big gathering. We had quite a few well-known local celebrities came into that meeting. We had Mendi's successor, she was the first woman High Commissioner, Cheryl Carolus. She came to that, and … yes, so moving on, we always kept support. And then, unfortunately, Labour lost control of the Council in 2000 and that's when the new Lib Dem Council decided to stop its involvement in all these activities. So they pulled out of taking part in LAACTSA and various other things. But as I say, we continued up to the point we were a majority Council administration on pensions investment resources. I was representing Islington on pension investment resources [inaudible] and talking about disinvestment and everything, how we could co-ordinate across local authorities, pulling out pension funds which had a stake in South Africa, through the boycott days. And as I said, we … twice we sponsored newly elected councillors after post-apartheid to spend a few days mentoring and shadowing our departments, attending committee meetings, just to see how we governed ourselves. It was part of a learning exchange programme.

DS: I guess there must have been a lot of projects at various points that required some degree of funding, that maybe were or weren't involved directly with the Council. Did you find it hard to fund any of the Anti-Apartheid Movement's work?

TK: No, we were not allowed to. Under some legislation you couldn't take part, fund specific campaigns, sort of thing. So all we were able to do was give moral support. We did, I think, education programme things. I remember we sponsored a couple of events, like the oral history programme, like what you're doing now, part of knowledge and history, kind of thing. We did that.

DS: As you say, that's maybe because it's less overtly political?

TK: Yes. During the apartheid days, when I had just come on the Council and we had just started giving assistance to the ANC, housing and everything, we did move the idea of giving them a grant so they could let … grant, in a sense, not directly to the ANC for their political activities, but if they were to set up an information, advice, guidance, counselling advice service for their exiles. You know, South African exiles. But they turned down the proposal, saying they could not take a Council grant away

from its main cause. So unfortunately we were not allowed to give a grant for a political cause.

DS: I was going to ask a little about… Obviously at the time… You've spoken a little about the mainstream political, Conservative view of apartheid and that sort of thing. You must have encountered, on many occasions, people that you disagreed with and you debated with. How would you have kind of… What would you have said to people who completely opposed your views on apartheid?

TK: Well, funnily enough, all the Council – firstly, we didn't have any Tory councillors for the time I was on the Council, and while the Liberal Democrats were there, they generally got along with supporting our policy, and what I did was, we tried to set up … This was after apartheid had come to an end … I tried to set up some kind of a charity, before Denis Goldberg did, towards education and training for students in South Africa. There was a small sum of money that we had raised from businesses for that cause. It was very small, and we set up a trust, Islington and South Africa Trust, and I was a trustee of that. And what I did was, I involved the opposition councillor, who was South African himself – a white South African who supported, you know, on that Trust. And the other person whom I involved was … she was also a councillor until 1984 – Anne Page. She's also a white South African by descent, who came here in the 1960s and she was also a supporter of our movement, cause and everything. So there wasn't a chance of debating with anybody who were opposing our cause, hardly anybody.

DS: Even personally? Not necessarily in your role at the Council. Personally, did you ever find yourself debating the issues with people?

TK: I would say very rarely. The only place I think I may have encountered was in my first job. My first job was within the private sector, working for Esso Europe and I had to be very careful politically what I said to some of them. The ones who I did, they were a bit wary about saying, 'Oh, what will you achieve out of disinvestment?', that kind of thing. They would question. Some of them were not quite as enthusiastic as I would have expected, you see. But on the whole, generally, I never came across anybody opposing our line, you know – which was good. And when we went around, like … it was amazing … when we went around collecting petitions or signatures, like say at Chapel Market, you know, support was very overwhelming. People would kind of just sign, you know [*laugh*].

DS: So your impression of the time, in terms of the public in general, the amount of people that were for and against apartheid, did you feel like it was evenly split, or were people generally behind the boycott movement and things like that?

TK: Well, I think what happened was, the boycott movement gained its momentum by late 1980s, early 1990s I would think, and then by the time the big event in Wembley took place – it was coinciding with Nelson Mandela's 70th birthday, I think.

DS: I think it was.

TK: The big … yes. By then, you know, it had drawn so much support that it was hard for people to not to associate themselves with the cause. I mean it took a while for the Anti-Apartheid Movement to get itself to that stage, but then, better late than never, you know.

DS: And over that same time, while public perception changed, did you see similar kinds of changes in government?

TK: I think … yes, partly. By then Thatcher had gone, so you had more liberal-minded Conservatives, who were also coming around at that time to argue for a black majority rule in South Africa. So there was some senior sort of Tories, compared to what Thatcher and her lot were saying. And of course the Liberal Party has always been, nationally, pro-sort of campaigning for an end to apartheid. Peter Hain was in the Liberal Democrat … was a Liberal Party member actually, before he joined Labour, and he was a leading member of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, and then he became a Labour minister. Things happened so rapidly in four or five years, you know, from that Free Nelson Mandela event, 70th birthday. And then suddenly things were happening. I'm just not quite sure what sort of led to such a sudden… Partly I think, well first, I think, when de Klerk took over from Pieter Botha, who was very, very arrogant, completely living in a cloud cuckoo land that white South Africans could rule forever. It's a bit like when Ian Smith said 'not in a thousand years there'll be a black majority ruling Zimbabwe, Rhodesia' – and suddenly there was a changeover and a bit more liberal and a bit more realism started coming in, and I suppose there was a lot of pressure. It's a question of whom he was talking to and secondly, I feel, white South Africans were feeling the pinch effect. Sports boycott, the image it was having to the country, and probably casualties as well in the guerrilla war. The number of white South Africans who were dying, you know. So I think that led to them to say, 'Let's see whether we can get a negotiated settlement now'. And I think the boycott movement had a big effect. It was how it was crippling the economy, and I think that's when they started sort of thinking twice: 'Is it worthwhile going down this route?'

DS: So the boycott movement – would you definitely place that as the most instrumental element of the Anti-Apartheid Movement?

TK: I think so, yes. And I think Nelson Mandela has acknowledged that the Anti-Apartheid Movement boycott movement was the key thing [inaudible] in bringing an end to apartheid.

DS: Sorry, I just wanted to check some spellings again. You said when someone took over from someone and I'm not sure what the names were, in South Africa at the time. There was a change in leadership.

TK: Oh the white leadership, you mean?

DS: Yes, sorry.

TK: Oh yes. I said it was de Klerk was the last white South African President. I'm trying to remember his first name.

DS: That's OK.

TK: And he's the one who handed over power to Nelson Mandela. So in the first transitional government, he was the Deputy President under Nelson Mandela.

DS: I see.

TK: And then de Klerk took over from Pieter Botha.

DS: OK. Cool, perfect. Let me see. I think we've covered quite a bit of stuff. Let me just have a wee look. Yes, so when you look back over the history of the Movement, what particular incidents, what particular points and incidents stand out as the most

significant to you, and how would you describe the most important moments?

TK: During Anti-Apartheid? It's a difficult one to sort of … I think my most memorable one is the Free Nelson Mandela. I felt that was the most successful in terms of a campaign awareness culturally, that drew so many people together, packed the Wembley Stadium together, and people watching it on the DVD and everything, on television and everything, was the most … It will remain in my life as the thing that may have had quite a big effect in getting him released sooner.

DS: So do you think that that event had a big overnight effect even, for a lot of people?

TK: I think, because it brought together so many singers, artists, you know, and this is where I feel art and culture play such a big part in any political movement. Even now in the Middle East, Palestinian … you've seen some … heard about well-known musicians and others. How they are … And obviously the sports boycott. South Africa was missing so much out on rugby and cricket and all that. They must have really felt the effect of the boycott, not being able to take part. So I think that was my most famous sort of … in terms of, it's still in my mind, refreshing, even though it was about 20 years ago, more than 20 years ago. The singers who took part and … I still want to watch it from time to time. It was … I've still got my T-shirt, you know, yes.

DS: It's interesting that you brought up the parallel with Palestine. I was thinking of asking at some point, any kind of similar…

TK: Well, I got involved in the Palestine Solidarity Campaign thing as well. I keep advising them, 'Well look, you've got to follow the lead from the Anti-Apartheid Movement. Particularly the boycott movement'. So they've started also a 'Boycott Israeli Goods' campaign and everything. It hasn't quite kicked off to the level … but maybe one day it will. And I said, 'Look, the Anti-Apartheid Movement also took quite a while before it started having an effect'. So as people see the injustice, and the more the Palestinians give in, the more extreme … the Israelis keep on building settlements. I think it's having a bit of a thing that is a one-sided thing, you know. It's not a fair, equal, even-handed, peaceful settlement that's coming about. So who's … So I think they've got a lesson to learn from the Anti-Apartheid Movement's boycott campaign. But unfortunately, the reason it hasn't succeeded is because the Jewish lobby is so strong in business, in everywhere. That's why they haven't been able to be as strong as the AAM.

DS: So would you see a lot of parallels between South African apartheid and I guess what you could call Palestinian apartheid, Israeli apartheid?

TK: It's a slightly different context. Here you're talking about occupation of a land, and refugees and things like that, and the oppression that happens in the occupied land under Israel, you know, whereas there you're talking about a minority which was ruling the country over the majority. So it has to be done under two different contexts. But there are some parallels which they can learn from the Anti-Apartheid Movement's campaigning tactics, possibly. They've only in the last five years, they've started having a very successful annual lobby of Parliament, where thousands of people turn up, not just in London, but Glasgow and you name it. So maybe, it may lead to something that's sort of international pressure.

DS: *Can you describe what you think were both high points and low points of the anti-apartheid campaigning? Obviously, you said an obvious high point was the Wembley event.*

TK: Yes, the Wembley event was the major high point of the … culminating in it. And suddenly, the release of Mandela happened, and within a year everything started happening. I think it was within a year of the Wembley event that Nelson Mandela was released, I think. He was released in 1991, I think.[2] Elections took place in 1994 and the Wembley event was in 1990 or 1991. So that was what I think was the turning point of the Anti-Apartheid Movement. Suddenly the office was very busy, suddenly a lot of work to be done. They were all working 24 hours a day [*laugh*] and I remember Mike Terry, he looked so overworked. Everyone was very enthusiastic and everyone was looking forward to when the elections would take place, 'What will be the new South Africa?' kind of thing. And the low point was always when, I suppose when you have a leading British government and Prime Minister sort of supporting the apartheid cause, supporting the white South Africans, when they should have taken a neutral stand. That had a big demoralising effect, I think, on the Movement, when they were rubbishing everything that we were doing.

DS: At that point, I wonder, would you have had people dropping off from the Movement? Maybe sort of …

TK: No, I don't think there was, at any point, people losing momentum. No. I don't think, never.

DS: Excellent. I was going to ask a little about the relationship between groups you were involved with and other types of groups that were part of the larger movement. What other sorts of groups did you have involvement with, or interaction with and talk about the relations between the groups.

TK: Well, I think my main two contributions were through the Labour Party as a councillor and through the trade union movement. And the trade union movement, whenever I got an opportunity – if I were a delegate at a conference, I would raise the issue about boycotts, about supporting the Anti-Apartheid Movement. So these are my two main sorts of involvement, promoting the cause.

DS: And if and when you ever did encounter other types of groups, maybe far left groups or…

TK: Well, the other ones were… we had just, within the Labour Party, set up the Black Socialist Society, and they started taking the lead. That was in the mid-'80s. And they also started supporting Anti-Apartheid. But then what happened was, there were some in the Black Socialist Society movement who started questioning, 'Why should the Anti-Apartheid Movement be led by white, middle-class men?', or whatever. And I used to disagree with that approach. I said, 'So what? It doesn't matter. It's not a question of black versus white leading the movement, it's a question of the cause you're supporting. It doesn't matter who…' And in many senses, it makes sense, it gives more credibility if, rather than … No, the arguments were about 'Are we not capable of leading these movements?' So I said, 'Well, this has been going on for years and it gives more credibility if it's white South Africans leading it', you know. It's a bit like the Palestinian movement, the Palestinian Solidarity Committee, you wouldn't want … Yes, there are people who are involved in the committee, a lot of them are white, leading it. But they have now got quite a lot of Palestinians, senior, involved on the committee and everything.

DS: And in your experiences, would there have been many fall-outs and clashes between various factions within the movement?

TK: I would say there would be – not fall-outs, there would be arguments. Like in any political movement, you would have debates and arguments and disagreements, you know, but they had a structure. There was always the annual conference. They would bring policy papers together. Another success about ACTSA – their conference in November every year, they discuss a way forward. They discuss what the next activities and everything should be. So that's how it used to happen in those days. The other thing was that the Movement [inaudible] was led by very well-known, credible people, high-profile people, Bishop Trevor Huddleston, Bob Hughes MP. They were very well-known, how should I put [Inaudible] figures, you know?

DS: So generally, looking back, what are your feelings about your involvement in anti-apartheid campaigns?

TK: It was a cause worth supporting, I think, and I feel very proud of my involvement. I feel that it happened in my lifetime, something that you were a part of it. You were able to see the results. And I hope it's now leading to a better South Africa for everyone. In particular, what Nelson Mandela achieved, particularly the fact that Nelson Mandela's still alive. It's remarkable that he's still seeing through, 20 years later, and his presence has had a big effect in the post-apartheid South Africa because he's seen as the godly figure among the black community, and a lot of whites respect him as well. When he was ill, so many people were worried what South Africa will go to. But sadly, as it happens in any country – we've seen it in Zimbabwe and others – corruption is there. Some of the poor black South Africans, their quality of life has still not improved. They're still living in poor old shantytowns. Unemployment's still high. So some of the … until those mission statements are achieved, I think, we've still got to carry on the ACTSA movement and all that. People sometimes question, 'Why are you still focusing on South Africa when it no longer requires any attention?' and the answer is, it will still require attention for a while.

DS: You don't want to leave a job half done.

TK: No.

DS: I wonder about other political or campaigning activity, apart from the Anti-Apartheid Movement, that you were involved in. Like other types of campaigns.

TK: Internationally, I was also involved with the Kurdish autonomy movement [Inaudible]. When I became an Islington councillor, when the first Gulf war started in 1991, we had a lot of Kurdish refugees who came here. Not just from Iraq but also from Turkey, where they were oppressed, because Turkey was also trying to kill off the movement for autonomy. And I went, purely out of my social links and meeting people, getting new friends, I went to Kurdistan in 1991, as part of a trade union delegation. So I became very actively involved in supporting Kurdish people's rights. And I'm still involved in that, and I'm also … Other areas I've been involved in, like I'm from Bangladesh, so when we've had … it's gone through a turbulent ups-and-downs history in terms of democracy. Whenever we had a military-backed government, so I've been involved in the restoration of a democratically elected government and things like that. So I have my links with the pro-democracy movement, not specifically aligned with a particular party in Bangladesh.

DS: Interesting.

TK: And the other causes I've supported are Cuba Solidarity Campaign and Nicaragua

Solidarity Campaign. I'm also involved in Liberation, which was set up over 50 years ago. Jeremy Corbyn MP is the chair of it. It also advocates proportional democracy, human rights, things like that, all across the world.

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[1] The PAC was hostile to the Communist Party.
[2] Nelson Mandela was released in February 1990.