

Anti-Apartheid Activism in Britain: The AAM, the BEM/BSC and the wider concerns of the Black community regarding anti-apartheid activism in Britain

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In the written accounts of the origins of the British Anti-Apartheid Movement thus far, we have become familiar with its origins emanating from the initial boycott of South African goods, and in particular the indelible part played by South African exiles in shaping and directing the organisation from the late 1950s onwards. However the early influence of Africans and African-Caribbeans living and studying in Britain upon the precursor to the AAM has not yet been adequately recorded.

The AAM came out of the Boycott Movement set up in the late 1950s, this itself sprang from the work of the Committee of African Organisations, set up by African students residing in the UK.¹ Research on the extensive reach of the work of the CAO is still very much in progress² The essential facts are as follows: The CAO was formed in March 1958 in London and was a union of 13 'constituent bodies.'³ The stated six objectives of the CAO were:

- To work with, and promote the aims of the All-African Peoples Conference, as well as the Independent African States and to spread among Africans the spirit of Pan-Africanism
- To work with all constituent organisations and to ensure the fullest possible cooperation and solidarity on issues affecting the Continent of Africa, or any particular country.
- To provide an all-African forum for the discussions of matters affecting Africa.
- To cooperate with other organisations which support the above aims and help to keep the conscience of the world alive to the problems affecting Africa.
- To work with and provide facilities for, African leaders who visit the UK for purposes of furthering the struggle against colonialism and imperialism.

¹ Hereafter to be referred to as the CAO.

² The following information on the CAO is indebted to details provided to the author by Dr H. Adi. For further detail see Adi, H, 'The Committee of African Organisations' unpublished paper 2003.

Also Christabel Gurney discusses the influence of African Independence and the new confidence it engendered among African activists that they could make a difference in the national and international climate of which they were part.

Gurney, C. 'A great cause': The Origins of the Anti-Apartheid Movement June 1959-June 1960.unpublished paper.

Gurney, C. 'When the Boycott Began to Bite' in History Today Volume 49, Issue 6, June 1999 pp32-34.

³ Including WASU, the Uganda National Congress and the Nigerian Union of GB& Ireland, the South African Freedom Association, African League, Ghana Students Union, Sierra Leone Student Union the Kenya Students Assoc etc

- To assist the struggle of our people for freedom liberty, equality and national independence.⁴

However Adi has noted that the only published account of the founding of this organisation is provided by one of the early leaders, Ghanaian Kwesi Armah, which expresses little about the circumstances that led to its founding or those who were responsible.⁵ However in material published by the CAO on the occasion of its first congress in 1965 it noted that the organisation was formed:

As a result of the deep desire among Africans in Britain to have a uniting body, which would voice out their opinion on African and world events. The immediate cause of its formation was the passing of the racist discriminatory Franchise Bill by the white-dominated Federation of Nyasaland and Rhodesia, which was awaiting the approval of the British government. From the beginning, the CAO was an Anti-imperialist and Anti-colonialist Students and Worker's Movement. The Movement was effectively organised in this country to contribute to the struggle for National Independence and Unity.⁶

The first headquarters of the CAO was at Warrington Crescent, the site of one of WASU's hostels in London. By November 1958 the CAO had established its own headquarters in Gower Street in central London, in premises also used as a surgery by Dr David Pitt who would later become Lord Pitt of Hampstead, one of only three peers of West-Indian origin to sit in the House of Lords in the twentieth century.⁷ The CAO became actively involved in anti-colonial battles of the time as well as campaigning against the injustices surrounding racially motivated crimes and issues of the period.⁸ Notably its representatives formed part of a delegation that met with

⁴ Constitution of CAO Mss AMM 1.

⁵ Adi, H. 'The Committee of African Organisations'. Unpublished paper 2003.

Armah alludes to the key role that the struggle against the proposed new restrictive franchise in the Central African Federation played in the founding of CAO. The evidence suggests that Alao Aka-Bashorun a Nigerian student who was the President of the WASU and the Nigerian Union and the first Chairman of the CAO played a leading role in its founding. Shola Adenle another Nigerian and Denis Phombeah-Tanzanian were joint secretaries. Phombeah later became the CAO's general-secretary.

⁶ See 'What is CAO?' p.2

Quoted in Adi, H. 'The Committee of African Organisations'

⁷ It would be in this premises that the nascent AAM would be based. Pitt would continue to be a life long anti-apartheid supporter and have close relations with members of the ANC in London. He was Oliver Tambo's Physician.

⁸ Christabel Gurney and Hakim Adi both discuss the social and political campaigning of the CAO, for example it sent protest telegrams to the government of the Central Africa Federation opposing the restriction of African participation in the region's politics, letters from the CAO were published in the *New Statesman* and *Manchester Guardian*. The CAO was in contact with the Labour Party and supported the peoples of Nyasaland and Southern Rhodesia during 1958, it appealed to the British public through the trade unions and local Labour Party branches regarding the arrest of Hastings Banda and other African political leaders. It organised large public meeting at Westminster Hall addressed by MP John Stonehouse and Kanyama Chiume over 300 meetings throughout the country in collaboration with the MCF. It supported anti-colonial struggles in other African countries, especially supporting African politicians visiting Britain. ie Julius Nyerere, Joshua Nkomo. The CAO organised protests against atomic tests in the Sahara by the French government, including a mass rally in Trafalgar Square in conjunction with the Direct Action Committee Against Nuclear Weapons, and a picket of the French embassy. After the Notting Hill Riots of 1958 and the racially motivated murder of Kelso Cochrane in May 1959, the CAO worked to combat racist attacks even writing to the Prime Minister noting that "coloured citizens in the UK have lost confidence in the ability of the law enforcing agencies to protect them." The CAO claimed to be speaking for African, West Indian and other coloured people in the UK

the Home Secretary in May 1959 calling for more government action and enquiry into racism by a Select Committee and suggested more active recruitment of black constables into the police force.

The CAO and the Boycott Campaign

In reaching the decision to launch a boycott campaign to support of the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, the CAO was influenced by the ANC's spring conference in South Africa during 1959 calling for an international economic boycott of South African produced goods.⁹ The decision of the All-African People's Conference held in Accra Ghana December 1958, calling on independent African countries to impose economic sanctions against South Africa, may have also played a part in influencing the CAO to launch its boycott.¹⁰ It launched its boycott sub-committee in May 1959, the chairman was Femi Okunnu.¹¹ Other members included representatives from African student unions based in Britain, and Claudia Jones of the West Indian Gazette and Rosalyn Ainslie and Steve Naidoo from the South African Freedom Association. With the exception of Claudia Jones all the members of the sub-committee were delegates of CAO's constituent organisations and it held its meetings at the CAO headquarters at 200 Gower Street. The sub-committee worked closely with Tennyson Makiwane and with leading members of the CAO-Alao Bashorun and Denis Phombeah. In writing letters to potential supporters to join and organise the campaign, Bashorun explained:

The CAO has been asked by the South African National Congress, the South African Coloured People's Association and the South African Congress of Trade Unions, to launch a boycott of all South African goods in this country, in an attempt to force the Nationalist Government of South Africa to abandon its policy of racial discrimination and segregation.¹²

The CAO called a press conference on 24 June 1959 to maximise publicity for the boycott campaign, the speakers were Kenyama Chiume and Tennyson Makiwane followed by a 24hour vigil outside South Africa House. The 26 June the CAO held a public meeting in Holborn Hall London calling for the boycott of fruit, cigarettes and imported goods from South Africa.¹³ It was agreed to boycott all South Africa goods sold in the UK as well as protesting in shops that sold the goods. In following days shopping centres were picketed. Leaflets issued by the CAO encouraged shoppers to purchase Caribbean, European, and Australian goods rather than South Africa

Stressing that African and West Indian organisations had gathered together to combat racism the letter also noted that there be: "a public condemnation of the murder and that the culprits be immediately apprehended; police protection for all citizens and the introductions of laws against racism." Bashorun noted that those from the Commonwealth who had fought in the war eager to make sure that the fascism they had fought against did not rear its head in Britain, and that they expected the Government to be serious about 'its professions of a multi-racial Commonwealth of equal people.'

⁹ Gurney, C. 'A Great Cause'.

¹⁰ In South Africa the Anc announced that 26 June 1959 SA Freedom Day, would be a 'Day of Denial' its supporters were asked to boycott shops, cinemas etc this day was also chosen to start the boycott in Britain.

¹¹ Also president of the Nigeria Union.

¹² As quoted in Adi, H. 'The Committee of African Organisations'.

¹³ Speakers were Julius Nyerere, president of TANU, Kanyama Chiume of the banned Nyasaland ANC, Tennyson Makiwane of the ANC, Vella Pillai representing the SA Indian Congress, Michael Scott of the Africa Bureau and Trevor Huddleston.

produce.¹⁴ In July 1959 the CAO held in conjunction with the Finchley Labour Party, Pickets in North London as well as in St Pancras, Hampstead and Brixton. It encouraged other organisations to set up their own protests and courted the support of trade councils and local Labour Party branches. Support was widespread and demand for the 'Boycott Slave Driver's Goods' leaflet was so high the CAO began asking supporters for donations to finance the cost of printing larger numbers.¹⁵ An important supporter was the Movement for Colonial Freedom which had contacts and local branches throughout the country, and the Liberal Party. Adi has noted however that the campaign brought problems, such as the constant demands for speakers and the increasing demand for more leaflets. A plan to give prominence to South African brand names in 1959 produced the problem of possible litigation, and printers refused to print. Criticism had to be fended off from the national press and various trade organisations. By time of the a sub-committee meeting at the end of July 1959, it was noted that after the initial impact of the campaign the CAO had not been able to mobilise enough forces to broaden and intensify the campaign sufficiently. It was decided to work harder and gain the support of more 'eminent sponsors' as well as broadening the campaign nationally and internationally.

Restructuring of the Committee in September 1959 brought a new name; the South African Boycott Committee and new officers.¹⁶ Denis Phoembeah chaired the meetings, Rosalyn Ainslie of the SAFA, was now secretary, Vella Pillay of the SA Indian Congress now would act as treasurer. Tennyson Makiwane recruited Patrick van Rensburg of the SA Liberal Party, who became Director of what was now the Boycott Movement Campaign by the end of November 1959. Adi has commented that at this juncture:

Most of those involved were exiled South Africans and although CAO chaired the committee it was clear that it began to play less of a leading role¹⁷

Similarly Gurney notes:

It was becoming clear that if the campaign was to fulfil its potential, the Committee needed a broader base with more formal representation from a wider range of British-based organisations.....the Committee was very concerned to achieve the correct balance between South African and British involvement...this arrangement of personnel linked satisfactorily South African and English participation.'¹⁸

It was fitting that just as the BMC was about to reconstitute itself as the Anti-Apartheid Movement, the front page of its publication should acknowledged that:

¹⁴ Placards read 'Don't Buy Slavery, Don't Buy South African' Leaflet: 'Boycott Slave Driver's Goods'. Christabel Gurney has noted that the idea of boycotting goods had South African antecedents and was a tactic used by the ANC and the congress movement throughout the 1950s. There had been attempts at boycotts of SA goods in Britain in the same period. The Labour Party's National Executive Committee had rejected a resolution sent to the Labour Party conference in 1957, urging members not to buy SA goods.

¹⁵ For example one branch of the Association of Engineering and Shipbuilding Draftsmen requested 5000 copies of the leaflet.

¹⁶ New members included Socialist Left Youth, Robin Field COD, Robin Ballin, M Chetty, A Minty, A Asmal, Raymond Kunene of SAFA, Johnny James of the British Guiana Freedom Association, Derrick Sylvester of MCF as well as individual members affiliated to no particular organisation.

¹⁷ Adi, H. 'The Committee of African Organisations'. P14.

¹⁸ Gurney, C. 'A Great Cause' p5

...the Movement was first launched by the CAO, who transmitted an appeal from South Africa in June 1959.¹⁹

The BMC renamed itself the Anti-Apartheid Co-ordinating Committee, then the Anti-apartheid Committee and finally the Anti-Apartheid Movement in March 1960 just before the Sharpeville massacre galvanized anti-apartheid activism. This tragedy transformed the nature and direction of the future of anti-apartheid activism in Britain. Although Gurney has shown anti-apartheid activity had already been transformed by the work of the CAO and the boycott movement, in particular during the boycott month-March 1960.

However after Sharpeville the CAO and MCF and the London Boycott Committee called a protest demonstration in London which saw thousands marching from Hyde Park to SA House. The CAO sent out its own press releases condemning the massacre and the banning of the ANC to press agencies worldwide as well as to international leaders.

In the aftermath of the Sharpeville tragedy the CAO continued to engage in activities to support the struggle in South Africa. June 1960 saw it organise a packed meeting to mark South African Freedom Day. In September alongside the AAM and MCF, and the African Bureau and Christian Action it organised and took part in a meeting of 700 in Caxton Hall to present the newly created 'South Africa United Front', which included the ANC, PAC, SAIC, SWANC, with speakers including Tambo, and Dadoo further calls were made to boycott SA produce.²⁰ Again in 1964 the CAO now renamed the Council of African Organisations participated with the AAM, ANC and the Committee of Afro-Asian and Caribbean Organisations to co-ordinate a hunger strike against apartheid. This was part of a worldwide campaign for the release of political prisoners in South Africa. However it was the AAM that would emerge as the spearhead for anti-apartheid activity from the 1960s.

In referring to the CAO and its early influence upon the Boycott Movement that evolved into the AAM, I wished to demonstrate that there was concern and active commitment from Africans and people of African descent living in Britain over the internal affairs of South Africa. This early commitment predated what would emerge as the mass movement of the anti-apartheid coalition of forces in Britain, of which the AAM would emerge as the most effective-organisationally-champion .

The subsequent 'invisibility' of black membership of the AAM and the lack of black officers within its main structures did not mean that black British concern was not there. Nor that the AAM did not recognise this apparent disjuncture and did not seek to remedy this state of affairs. Writing about Anti-Apartheid activism in the late 1970s one historian in reference to the apparent apathetic nature of black support commented that:

In the UK, the resident blacks are essentially immigrants, outsiders in the social system. This group has no immediate revolutionary expectation....the African liberation leadership while

¹⁹ Adi, H. 'The Committee of African Organisations.' P. 17

²⁰ PRO HO 325/9 Special Branch Report 6, 19 December 1960

revolutionary is necessarily more concerned with African than with English society. There is little sense of unity of common cause between the two groups.²¹

This comment fails to acknowledge the long historic tradition of the active engagement and interaction between continental Africans, African-Americans and African-Caribbeans and other members of the former British colonies while residing in Britain.²² Among the politically conscious in the black community the unfolding events in South Africa engendered a unique empathetic understanding of the struggle against the Apartheid regime, an understanding often not shared by the majority white population. A cursory glance at the contemporary West Indian papers of the day in particular *The Caribbean Times* and *The West Indian Gazette* is evident of this.²³ Sensitivity to what was felt to be unfair treatment and the attempt to draw parallels with South Africa, can be seen in the reaction to the Government's immigration policy of upholding the deportation of illegal immigrants in one editorial in the *West Indian World*:

.....our feeling of security has been shattered....before we walked the streets of this country as free citizens, entitled to the protection of the law, like anyone else. It never occurred to any of us that we will be stopped by an official policeman....like the blacks of South Africa....[and]...have to produce the British version of the pass-the passport.²⁴

Even before the significant migrations of West Indians to Britain in the post war era, black intellectuals and political activists met in London to discuss the treatment of colonial peoples within the British Empire, they expressed their concern over the deteriorating conditions of Africans, Asians and Coloured in South Africa. Though this may not have translated into political action with concrete gains, the interest was sufficiently strong for invitations to be sent to invite speakers from South Africa during the series of Pan-African Congresses that started in 1900 and continued throughout the twentieth century. There were written declarations of support for Southern Africans struggling under discriminatory laws and the rest of Africa still under colonialism that showed an acute understanding of the interconnectivity of the politics of race and racism across national boundaries. Declarations of intent and protest to HMG often followed.

The Pan-African congresses brought together Africans and African-Caribbean and Asian representatives. Sol Plaatje attended the Pan-African Conferences in Paris and

²¹ Shepherd, G. W. Anti-Apartheid: Transnational Conflict and Western Policy in the Liberation of South Africa (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977)P68

However the External Wing of the ANC and PAC would establish groups precisely to making linkages between the black community in Britain and their own liberation struggles. This will be discuss fully within my dissertation.

²² One can argue this has been the case since the anti-slavery campaigns, in modern times African Association founded in 1897 by Henry Sylvester Williams a Trinidadian was one of the first self conscious attempts to politically connect the strands of the Black diaspora to seek justice within their various national environments. See also the work of David Killingray, Marika Sherwood, Hakim Adi, and the recent work of Mark Christian, among others that articulate the social, political and economic interactions of Continental Africans and those in the wider diaspora.

Christian, M. Black Identity in the Twentieth Century: Expressions of the US and UK African Diaspora (London: Hansib Publications Ltd, 2002)

²³ Claudia Jones the founder of the later was a tireless campaigner for African and black diaporian fight for justice within their societies.

²⁴ *West Indian World* 2 August 1973 p69

London in 1919 and 1921. At the 1945 conference in London under a session chaired by WEB Du Bois, Peter Abrahams and Marko Hlubi both members of the ANC spoke while Professor DDT Jabavu sent greetings from himself and the President of the ANC at the time Dr A.B. Xuma. Jabavu and his wife tried to obtain passports to attend but were denied these by the authorities. This 5th Pan-African Congress moved a resolution regarding South Africa, it stated that in:

Representing millions of Africans and peoples of African descent throughout the world, condemns with all its power the policy towards Africans and other non-Europeans carried out by the Union of SA which, although representing itself abroad as a democracy with a system of parliamentary government, manifests essentially the same characteristics as Fascism....this Congress demands for the non-European citizens of South Africa the immediate practical application of.....fundamental democratic rights...it pledges itself to work unceasingly with and on behalf of its non-European brothers in South African until they achieve the status of freedom and human dignity. This Congress regards the struggle of our brothers in South Africa as an integral part of the common struggle for national liberation throughout Africa. ²⁵

In the mid 1950s, Sir Learie Constantine more commonly known as one of the greatest of West-Indian test cricketers, wrote in detail about the racial politics of the day in Britain, America, the West Indies or Africa.²⁶ He notes:

I am afraid it is hard for anyone of my colour to write dispassionately about what is happening in South Africa today....I will begin by listing some factual reports from recent South African affairs and making no comment upon them.²⁷

However later he allows himself the following polemic:

Coloured nations gaining power and knowledge elsewhere will not for ever sit idly by watching the progressive degradation without end that coloured people in Africa now suffer. They will intervene, first (as now) by protest, certainly later by action. For there is something that all coloured nations share-a dislike of white Government. It could be a dangerous common factor one day....the only *final* solution in South Africa, to be reached necessarily by progressive steps, is a condition of exact equality between all colours. They must be equal in law, in labour, in pay, in opportunity, in political control, in education and in respect. Even in mutual respect. If white people really believed themselves superior to black ones, they would not fear such a state, since then their own vaunted mental superiority would keep them socially and economically at the top. The fact is that they know that their claimed superiority will not stand the test of equal opportunity and cannot be sustained save by bayonets....I see no eventual objection to a South African Parliament mainly composed of coloured members representing the coloured majority among the population. There is no need to deny the whites representation of their own colour, as they deny the blacks. I see no reason against a Negro Prime Minister there. If Democracy *means* the rule of the people by the people, then South Africa has no other future-but the result can either be achieved by tragedy and violence or by wisdom and law.²⁸

²⁵ Adi, H. and Sherwood, M. The 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress Revisited (London: New Beacon Books, 1995) pp104-5

²⁶ Constantine, L., Colour Bar (London: Stanley Paul, 1954). This is an incredible book that combines history, politics, economics, ethnography, anthropology, and religion, it focuses on regions such as wide ranging as Scandinavia, Russian territories, Asia, Australia, to look at the problems of race in the contemporary world.

²⁷ Constantine, L., Colour Bar (London: Stanley Paul, 1954) P 39.

²⁸ Ibid. pp50-51.

However despite the early work of the COA, and the emergence of the AAM black faces were notable in their absence from AAM sponsored public events at least until the Cricket and Rugby tours of the nineteen seventies and later on for the significant turnout of black people at the anti-Botha demonstrations in 1984 when he came to Britain. How does one account for the apparent irony of the British AAM fighting to support the struggle to end racism in South Africa while the domestic black community fighting their own battles of race discrimination in British society and had a deep empathy with the anti-apartheid struggle, were noticeable by their low turnout to AAM sponsored events? As current research is still unfolding, the complexities of black activist involvement with anti-racist groups and their politics of anti-racism still needs to be examined thoroughly. As the author continues to examine black involvement in anti-apartheid activism through interviews with the relevant participants, and examine the available archives and materials certain considerations are emerging.

Firstly, it is clear when that the apparent low black turnout at AAM sponsored events during the nineteen seventies and eighties-with a few exceptions-was not in itself an indication of apathy on the part of members of the Black community. There has always been an interest and concern about the fate of Africans in South Africa among the black community in Britain. They felt a visceral sympathy with peoples that from their vantage point seemed to be experiencing a not too dissimilar-albeit with its own peculiarities-form of racism. While 'Kith and Kin' is a term often used for the empathy white Britons may feel for their compatriots settled elsewhere in the world, Blacks in Britain despite the long trajectory of separation from the African continent and the cultural, linguistic and religious differences, felt a distinct empathy with people of colour fighting racism and repression elsewhere.²⁹

Representing those who became politically conscious of the interconnections of race across national boundaries, one politician describes it thus:

...emotionally....we always felt that whatever gains we made as black people elsewhere in Africa, or indeed in the wider diaspora in terms of our freedom, in terms of our economic advancement, in terms of our political emancipation, it all counted for nothing so long as the apartheid regime was in place in SA. Because the suffering of black people in SA, and the fact that for so long the Apartheid regime got away with it, with the active collusion and connivance of governments in the West, that reduced our humanity. That's why "Brent-South today, Soweto tomorrow..... It was to remind everybody there who at that moment of triumph for black people and for white people who cared about the creation of a multi-racial democracy in Britain, was a reminder to them that that counted for absolutely nothing as long as SA remained under the heel of the apartheid regime."³⁰

Furthermore one must recognise the depth of the domestic struggles against racism in Britain unfolding from the second half of the nineteen seventies. Black youth in particular could identify Ruth Mompati's comments, and make comparison with their

²⁹ From the days of slavery and especially since there has of course been constant contact within the 'Triangle' of Africa, Europe and the Americas between people of colour whether as missionaries, sailors, merchants, educationalists etc These experiences often gave lie to the popular demonisation and rhetoric of negativity regarding Africa and its peoples which diasporian blacks often absorbed from the predominant European societies in which they lived.

³⁰ Interview with Paul Boateng Chief Minister of the Treasury. 13th December 2002.

own experience in the urban landscape of Britain. Mompati's observation relating to life under apartheid:

In South Africa you do not join politics, politics joins you...because your surroundings is oppressive, people are suppressed, oppressed, brutalised and this is all in the time you grow up angry-at every turn.³¹

Many young blacks by the 1980s did not make academic distinctions between the racism of apartheid in South Africa and the racial battles they were facing in the cities of Britain. Linton Kwesi Johnson comments:

..... black people, felt very emotional about South Africa. That was one of the things that most black people felt strongly about. And for people involved, activists involved in the black movement in this country, there was a sense that no matter what, how much progress we make in our own struggles here, as long as the apartheid system existed in SA black people could not see themselves anywhere in the world as being really free.³²

Johnson is symbolic of those black youth that came of age politically during the late 1970s and the 1980s through their struggles against racial discrimination and clashes with the police. His poetry skilful articulates the experiences of those on the front-line of this struggle. Referring to the issue of South Africa he notes:

The issue of South Africa did not politicise me in the 1980s I was politicised *already*. I was as a youngster involved in the Black Panther Movement [in Britain]. The Black Panther Movement was an organization founded in the late 1960s. And lasted until the early 1970s, it was an organization fighting for black rights in this country. In the Black Parents Movement were immersed in anti-colonial politics so therefore we were involved and had solidarity with all the anti-colonial struggles going on, including the anti-colonial struggle in South Africa and the struggle against Apartheid. We supported the anti-colonial struggle in Angola for independence against the Portuguese, Mozambique, Guinea and other places. So the question of South Africa and Apartheid was always there as one of the main issues that black people were focusing on or people politically involved were focusing upon at that time.³³

Similarly Professor Stuart Hall symbolises those black activists and intellectuals who were not only grappling with the domestic anti-racist politics of the 1970s and 1980s but also had an eye with the wider international struggles against racial injustice. Hall comments:

South Africa was central to our political concerns from the 1960s. [Especially] from Soweto onwards. South Africa became a long running problem from the late 60s onwards... there were people that made those connections, there were people who were alive to the Southern

³¹ Council of Elders: A Tribute to the Veterans of the South African Liberation Struggle (Minaj Publishers, 1997) p.16

³² Interview with Linton Kwesi Johnson 15th May 2002. LKJohnson who came of age in the latter 1970s and early 1980s became involved in black radical politics and emerged as a 'dub poet' eloquently using the language of the streets to articulate the feelings of alienated black youth in the urban areas of London. Currently he is one of the few living poets to have entered the cannon of Penguin modern classics. He was also awarded the C Day Lewis Fellowship in 1997, and is soon (May-June 2003) to be made an Honorary Fellow of Goldsmiths College, University of London. See the latest retrospective of his work: Johnson, LK. Mi Revalueshanary Fren: Selected Poems (London: Penguin, 2002)

³³ Interview with Linton Kwesi Johnson 15th May 2002.

Africa situation and who were activists.... people who were black intellectuals and political activists ... For people like me it is partly about race and partly about politics. Partly about the oppression about people anywhere, part of one's general sympathy with oppressed peoples struggling for their freedom and liberty.³⁴

One historian has argued that though one should not over exaggerate the parallels that may have been made between the clashes that occurred between black youth and white policeman during the latter part of the 1970s and during the 1980s in South Africa and Britain, nevertheless:

In the eighties activists in the front line have shown a.....identification with the black struggle in South Africa.....the connections between black oppression in South Africa and inner-city Britain should not be romanticised-the rule of apartheid is a different order of oppression altogether than the racism within a democracy, albeit an increasingly authoritarian democracy. Nevertheless....it cannot fail to be noticed that the government in Britain which has carried out policies to the detriment of inner-city areas is the same government which colludes with apartheid in southern Africa. These connections have produced a participation in traditional forms of political actions amongst sections of the black community which otherwise operate wholly outside the reference points of the left...[for example] ..the huge contingent on the demonstration against Botha's visit to Britain, which was mobilised by the Mangrove Community Association.³⁵

Lee Jasper an activist at the time later to become a leading light in the National Black Caucus notes:

Obviously the struggles that young black people were going through in the UK in the early 1980s, resonated with the struggles that were going on in the South African townships..we began to see pictures of black young people in tremendous struggles with South African police services, and that resonated with imagery that we'd already seen in the American civil rights movement in the 1960s, it resonated with our own experience of policing in largely poor black working class areas of Liverpool, Manchester, Handsworth, Brixton. And it seemed to have a universal metaphor for black experience; it was one that viscerally affected lots of black people in the country. Because it somehow transported us back to a time when legalised racial oppression was the daily lot of many more people in the world....so all of those [images]transformed the political consciousness about the world wide struggle against racism and racial oppression and apartheid within the minds of the UK black community to a tremendous extent.³⁶

If the concern was a great as has been indicated above *where were* black activists directing their energies in reference to anti-apartheid activity if not directly through membership of the AAM? How and why did they choose to express their anti-apartheid solidarity in the way that they did? What were the perceived obstacles to joining the AAM? And what attempts were made by the AAM-who valued the support of empathetic allies in a largely hostile political environment-to redress the low level of black participation in the AAM?

³⁴ Interview with Professor Stuart Hall, 13 June 2002.

³⁵ Carter, T. Shattering Illusions: West Indians in British Politics (Lawrence and Wishart Ltd, London, 1986)P125

³⁶ Interview with Lee Jasper Chair of National Assembly against racism and advisor to the Mayor of London, Ken Livingston. 10th October 2002.

Trying to answer these questions takes us into discussion about the nature and function of the AAM its priorities and objectives from the 1960s through to Nelson Mandela's release. Moreover one cannot overlook the tremendous battles against racism and inequality that the black community have had to face from the time they set foot into post-war Britain.³⁷

Professor Hall has noted that:

...What was happening on the ground was so overwhelming, happening at such a rapid pace, and intensified so much. Absolutely preoccupying people in their lived situations., it affected jobs, it affected where they could walk down the streets, it affected whether their kids would be recognised in schools, it affected whether you could drive a car and not be stopped by the police. People were bedded down in those daily struggles, they could also see that it connected with what was happening in race in Africa, and in what was happening with race in the US. But what they could do something about was right there in front of them...it is not a surprise that the overwhelming political energy went into the building of resistance at a local level, rather than the building of anti-apartheid politics.³⁸

Considering the battle that many faced over housing, employment, unfair treatment over the education of their children, racially motivated crimes, conflict with the police, sections of the justice system, and the general hostility from the political establishment down to the man on the street engendered by the politically charged public debates on race and immigration, it is amazing that many still found time to involve themselves in anti-apartheid activities, although noticeably more so from the second half of the 1980s.

Also in trying to account for why blacks did not engage more visibly in AAM events during the 1970s and 1980s parallels can be drawn with the overall lack of political participation of ethnic minorities across the board in the British political arena during the years of their assimilation and consolidation of their communities while grappling with the shocks of their 'shattered illusions' regarding the lived reality of life in Britain.³⁹ Though acknowledging the interest that was there, but trying to account for an obvious short fall of quantifiable interest at least in the AAM itself during the late 1970s and mid 1980s, Professor Stuart Hall has commented:

...the reason why it was so is because black people felt excluded from political organisations generally and they did not make distinctions necessarily with those involved in SA because

³⁷ A written history of Caribbean experience in post-war Britain is now emerging, as a valuable complement to the academic texts see the personal testimonies detailed in the following; Carter, T. Shattering Illusions: West Indians in British Politics (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1986) Chamberlain, M. Narrative of Exile and Return (NY: Macmillan, 1997) Francis, V. With Hope in their Eyes: Compelling Stories of the Windrush Generation (London: Nia, 1998) Chamberlain, M. Caribbean Families in Britain and the Trans-Atlantic World (London: Macmillan, 2001) James, W. Inside Babylon: The Caribbean Diaspora in Britain (London: Verso, 1993) Phillips, M. Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain (London: HarperCollins, 1998) Wambu, O. Empire Windrush: Fifty Years of Writing about Black Britain (London: Gollancz, 1998)

³⁸ Interview with Professor Stuart Hall, 13 June 2002.

³⁹ To coin a phrase first used by Trevor Carter.

Carter, T. Shattering Illusions: West Indians in British Politics (Lawrence and Wishart Ltd, London, 1986)

they were largely run by South Africans and by sympathetic liberals and radical white people in exile...one of their preoccupations was that these sorts of people in the organisations that they ran, did not really make common cause with them, so why should they make common cause with the others?...there is a structural problem...it is similar to the problem between blacks and the Labour party. The great majority of blacks voted Labour. Were they involved in the Labour Party? No! They wouldn't go to meetings, they wouldn't pay up because when you said to the labour party "are you going to help us stop the police knocking our kids around in the streets of Brixton." They did not want to know. So they felt about many of these organisations that although they were apparently supporting causes that they would identify with generally speaking, they couldn't get organisationally involved because that was the moment of building black organisation.⁴⁰

However one veteran staff member⁴¹ of the AAM explains that the reason why the AAM did not engage more fully with the racial politics of black Britain was due to the fact that the key thinkers within the organisation felt that the Movement would become 'distracted' with British black politics, which would be counterproductive in the overall objective of the AAM to fight Apartheid and heighten awareness of its evils in Britain while exerting pressure on the British government and galvanizing the general public. Some individuals argued that British blacks and Africans in South Africa had nothing in common and did not share an affinity. For them the racism of South Africa and Britain were too dissimilar. Moreover it was apparent that the younger black activists had a leaning towards the PAC and its ideology regarding the participation of whites in the struggle, while it was acknowledged that the AAM was more biased towards the ANC's with its more inclusive interpretation of the struggle for all South Africans-black and white, Asian, or so-called 'coloured.' However even though the AAM did not manage to make as deep a connection with the black community as it would have liked there were many instances before the setting up of the Black and Ethnic minority committee where the AAM worked with the Black community, and it was the involvement of the black community that tipped the balance at Lord's during the 1970s. The West Indian Standing Conference became heavily involved during this time and rallied prominent blacks to the anti-apartheid cause.⁴²

Similarly a former executive secretary of the AMM disagrees with any suggestion that the black community may have been apolitical regarding the African liberation struggle, although it is acknowledged that:

To many in the AAM, black domestic politics seemed volatile and could even possibly threaten the *raison d'être* of the AAM if they became too involved in its anti-racist struggles. While Black radicals for their part were critical of the AAM's handling of their allies.⁴³

It became necessary for the AAM to have a broad church of support however this often meant that the allies of the AAM presented an area of conflict with black activists. These allies were often the same individuals in conflict with black activists over domestic racial concerns. For example members holding prominent positions in the Labour Party were often strong anti-apartheid advocates while fundamentally opposed to the moves of radical black Labour activists to form a black section within

⁴⁰ Interview with Professor Stuart Hall, 13 June 2002

⁴¹ Chooses to remain anonymous.

⁴² Interview with Ethel De Keyser 3 March 2001.

⁴³ Requests anonymity.

the Labour Party. Therefore the power structure of the AAM may have been dominated by individuals that black activists felt were their enemies in the realm of domestic British politics.

Even after the Black and Ethnic Minority committee a sub-committee of the AAM became established precisely to form a bridge between the main body of the organisation and those black activists that wished to give their support⁴⁴ there was still discontent that the AAM did not concern itself too deeply in the emerging anti-racist politics of Britain during the eighties. However a member of the Black and Ethnic Committee of the AAM comments that:

The AAM strategy was not about doing anything with the black people in the country [UK], it was to get the Government to change its attitude, it was to put pressure on the Government to stop supporting the regime, that was the whole focus of the AAM.⁴⁵

For another office holder within the BEM:

[It seemed]... certain members more interested with fighting racism abroad than at home. However much it was a pragmatic and functional decision/view, it was decided to let those that wanted to divorce the 'racisms' in GB & SA do so. This would not stop West-Indians from carrying on the fight here [in the UK] outside of the AAM if needs be....one could not address racism in SA without addressing it in GB. The bottom line being, the European races in SA were supported by their kith & kin in Europe. Therefore one could not attack racism there without attacking the source here. The racism here may not have been as overt as in South Africa but it was still just as deadly. It was not necessary that of men in jack boots but those of those in suits and ties. The ordinary man in the street was the recipient like those in South Africa (who kept voting in the Nationalists in with increasing number of votes) of the benefits of racism.....[Although] not all elements within the AAM thought the racisms should be separated. Unfortunately those who did were the ones that had the dominant influence within the organization. The attitude seemed to be that if one wanted an anti-racist organization one should go elsewhere. For them AAM nothing to do with anti-racism in discussion of these issues the movement not as democratic as it could have been in considering views.⁴⁶

From the above it seems that the nature of anti-racist politics in Britain posed a potential conflict of interest between AAM priorities and black activist objectives. Black radicals wanted more action against racism in Britain, while the AAM's focus lay with South and Southern Africa. Many within the AAM argued that the AAM had to be narrow in its focus to meet its objectives.

By the mid to late 1980s after significant anti-racist landmarks were achieved black activists began to focus more on South Africa and were more noticeable in their presence at demonstrations. In the aftermath of the urban revolts and visible governmental and local authority commitment to improving inequalities many felt emboldened to become more actively involved at various levels within the political firmament of the society especially after the introduction of four members into the Houses of Parliament of African-Caribbean and Asian descent. The level of black

⁴⁴ Mike Terry has acknowledged that there was a strong feeling that blacks needed to organise for themselves without the intervention of well meaning whites.

⁴⁵ Requests anonymity.

⁴⁶ Request anonymity.

community involvement in the AAM through the work of the Black and Ethnic Minority Committee and other organisations should be assessed within the context of their wider struggles against racism and its manifestations in their lived realities of urban Britain. These struggles also shaped their perspectives on how to counter and combat racial inequities at home and abroad as well as affecting their relations with white allies.

The Anti-Apartheid Movement and the Black and Ethnic Minority Committee: The Beginning

As noted above the Anti-Apartheid Movement⁴⁷ was an outgrowth of the Boycott Movement formed in 1959, its formation was a response to the call by Albert Luthuli, the President of the African National Congress, for sanctions against South Africa.⁴⁸ From the early 1960s to the 1980s the AAM established itself as the premier Anti-Apartheid organization operating in Britain. Despite its early African influences as discussed above it developed and became largely staffed by South African exiles and émigrés who brought a unique perspective to the racial problems of Apartheid. They were able to sustain contact with members of the African National Congress. The ANC's external operation was conveniently headquartered in London and therefore provided an alternative perspective to Pretoria's propaganda regarding Apartheid.

⁴⁷ The AAM was also known as "the Movement". It aimed to inform people in Britain and elsewhere about apartheid and its consequences for the non-white peoples of SA. It campaigned for international action to help bring the system of apartheid to an end. It cooperated with and supported the Southern African liberation movements campaigning against apartheid. Membership of the AAM was open to organisations and individuals who supported the aims and objectives of the Movement. Regional and local anti-apartheid groups were recognised. An Annual General Meeting-AGM-was held each year. The policy making body of the Movement Executive committee carried on the work of the Movement between meeting of the NC and met monthly. The structure consisted of officers: chairpersons, up to 4 vice-chairperson, honorary secretary, honorary treasurer, executive secretary, and 8 ordinary members to be elected from and by the National Committee. The National committee responsible for the interpretation, implementation and development of policy between Annual General meetings. Met three times minimum per year. Has honorary President, vice-president, four ministers, twelve sponsors. The National Committee also invited observers to its meeting. Later the Constitution was amended by the National Committee in 1989 and ratified by the AGM by the end of the year.

⁴⁸ Prof Roger Fieldhouse currently working upon official history of the AAM. For details of its early years see:

⁴⁸ Shepherd, G. W. Anti-Apartheid: Transnational Conflict and Western Policy in the Liberation of South Africa (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977)P68

Lissoni, A. The Anti-Apartheid Movement, Britain and South Africa: Anti-Apartheid Protest vs Real Politik ; A history of the AAM and its influence on the British Government's policy towards South Africa in 1964 <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/aam/dissertation.htm>

Fieldhouse, R. 'The British Anti-Apartheid Movement: Origins and Early Years, 1959-64'

International Boycott of Apartheid Sport: With special reference to the campaigns in Britain by the Anti-Apartheid Movement Paper prepared for the United Nations Unit on Apartheid in 1971

Gurney, C. "A Great Cause." The Origins of the British Anti-Apartheid Movement, June 1959-March 1960", http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/aam/aam_ornis.html

Berstein, H. Interview with Trevor Huddleston, Boycott Apartheid 1959-89: 30 Years of the Anti Apartheid Movement, London, AAM

Anti-Apartheid Movement: The 40th Anniversary

<http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/aam/symposium.html>

Minty, A. 'The Anti-Apartheid Movement and Racism in South Africa' in Willetts, P. Pressure Groups in the Global System (1982)

The first office used by the AAM were within Lord Pitt's premises, therefore collaboration with sympathetic individuals of African-Caribbean heritage was evident from the beginning. From early on the Movement showed an interest to incorporate substantial numbers of black participants in the structure of the Movement as well as campaigning for support in the black community, however it was acknowledged by the late 1970s that:

The AAM is still faced with the difficult task of mobilising in the black community in Britain. Some developments have taken place but there is much more to be done in this area.⁴⁹

A few months later the Annual report again noted that:

It is not possible to report any major development in support from the black community in Britain. Although relations exist with a range of organisations and they regularly support various AAM initiatives, it remains the case that the AAM's work does not make a significant impression in either the West Indian or Asian communities....However there has been some significant increase in support from anti-racist organisations. At a local level there is usually close liaison between AA groups and local Anti-Nazi League or similar groups....this area of the AAM's work is one which requires much closer attention in the future.⁵⁰

The AAM's AGM in 1979 had discussed the need to:

secure greater support from the black community in Britain...for a number of years the AAM has regarded this as an area which needs special attention⁵¹

Mention was made of encouraging developments such as local groups making special effort to involve the black groups in campaigning, and the increased interest from all quarters in the 'Free Mandela' campaign. The black newspaper *West Indian World* was also singled out for its feature and expanded coverage of Southern Africa including a front page appeal for support for AAM's Free Mandela campaigns. As well as *West Indian World* the Black Londoner's program featured material from AAM on the main points of the campaign in support of the patriotic front and publicised the demonstrations and other activities in London.

However the report notes that thus far:

the most important development" was the commitment of the ANC and black organizations to campaign to stop the Barbarians tour.⁵²

⁴⁹ Anti-Apartheid Movement, Annual Report of Activities and Developments: October 1977-September 1978 (London, 1978), p. 24

⁵⁰ AAM: Annual Report October 1978-September 1979 p.19

At national level the Anti-Nazi League Conference in July voted to support a number of AAM campaigns.

⁵¹ AAM: Annual Report October 1979-September 1980 p.20

⁵² Annual Report October 1979-September 1980 p.20

The Indian Workers Association (GB), The West Indian Standing Committee, and Pakistani and Bangladeshi workers in Britain pledged complete opposition to the tour, calling upon members not to attend matches and to circulate AAM material on sport in SA. For accounts on the various sports boycotts during the 1970s see

'International Boycott of Apartheid Sport: With Special reference to the campaigns in Britain by the Anti-Apartheid Movement' Paper prepared for the United Nations Unit on Apartheid in 1971-United Nations Unit on Apartheid, Notes and Documents, No. 16/71, April 1971

However:

On this and other campaigns the AAM continued to receive valuable support from Caribbean Labour Solidarity ...[However]...it remains the case that the AAM's work does not make a significant or lasting impression on either the West Indian or Asian community and despite the encouraging developments of the last year there is a need for more work in this area, especially at the local level.⁵³

By the early 1980s it was noted that:

Members of the black community in Britain were increasingly involved in the campaigns of the AAM as well as taking their own initiatives in solidarity with the liberation struggles in Southern Africa⁵⁴

One initiative was the Mohammed Ali sports development association that organised a programme of acts for the international year of mobilisation for sanctions against South Africa. This aimed to involve young black sportsmen and women in the sports boycott. The AAM was invited to participate at the launch in Brixton. Black newspapers in particular the *West Indian world* and *Caribbean times* became notable for carrying extensive reports on numerous aspects of the campaigning work of the movement.

These papers called on readers to boycott Rowntree-Mackintosh products to coincide with the AAM's week of action. And the Black Londoners radio programme frequently carried interviews with representatives of the liberation Movement as well as anti-apartheid spokespersons.

Sport became a crucial area of campaigning to engage the interests of the black community. The Black British Standing Conference against Apartheid sport founded at the initiative of the Mohammed Ali sports development association spoke vigorously against the private tour of West Indian cricketers to SA, as did other British based Caribbean organisations such as the West Indian Standing Conference. The Standing Conference against Apartheid sport contributed to the success of the international conference on sanctions against Apartheid sport by ensuring the participation of black British sportsmen and women.

Activists from the AAM staffed a 'Free Mandela' stall at the Notting Hill carnival originally started to promote the positive aspects of West Indian popular arts. At subsequent carnivals signatures were collected and campaigning material distributed. Black councillors were also active in promoting 'Apartheid-free Zones' in their local authorities. It was noted in the annual AAM report that black newspapers such as *West Indian World*, *The Caribbean Times* and the 'Black Londoners' radio program were noticeable in their constant support and publicity given to the AAM and its campaigns. It was noted that this was in sharp contrast to most of Fleet street and the broadcasting media.⁵⁵ The Channel 4 program 'Black on Black' was particularly

<http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/aam/abdul-2.html>

Hain, P. *Radical Regeneration: Protest, Direct Action and Community Politics* (Quartet, London, 1975)

Hain, P. *Sing the Beloved Country: The Struggle for the New South Africa* (Pluto Press, London, 1996)

⁵³ AAM: Annual Report October 1979-September 1980 p.20

⁵⁴ AAM: Annual Report October 1981-September 1982 p.23

⁵⁵ AAM: Annual Report October 1982-September 1983 p.23

singled out for praise for its coverage of events in southern Africa and solidarity campaigns.

The visit of Jesse Jackson in January of 1985 to Trafalgar Square generated a substantial crowd of people where 25-30% were black. The AAM noted that Jackson's engagements gave:

...an important boost to Anti-Apartheid work among the black community."⁵⁶

Jackson addressed a well-attended service in Notting Hill and spoke to seventy black councillors and community leaders. The meeting was organized at short notice by Ben Bousquet of the AAM Executive committee. Jackson's programme involved meetings with a wide range of organisations and activities in the black community. This stimulated an increased solidarity within the community. The Boycott campaign was taken up by local black organizations such as the Black Parents Movement in Haringey and community groups in Brixton.

The following year the annual report of the AAM noted the 'Carols for liberation' event held in Trafalgar Square⁵⁷ which was sponsored by four black newspapers in London; *The Africa Times*, *The Asian Times* and *Caribbean Times* and *The Voice*. The Methodist inner city churches group were also involved. The London community Gospel choir SWAPO singers and ANC choir lead the singing.

However it was the visit of PW Botha⁵⁸ to meet with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the face of heavy criticism, that caused the black community to come out in force during the AAM sponsored demonstrations.⁵⁹ The AAM continued to strengthen its links with black groups such as the Black British Standing Conference against Apartheid sport, the West Indian standing committee, and the African Liberation committee. Moreover encouraged by significant black presence at the anti-Botha demonstrations the AAM decided to capitalise on black anger and discontent over British policy of engagement with the Pretoria regime. The decision was made to strengthen and deepen contact with black organisations nationally and locally. The executive committee of the AAM⁶⁰ therefore set up a working party to examine the possibilities of encouraging more members of the black community to become involved within the structures of the AAM and by extension encourage greater numbers of the black community to join its membership. The working party would also examine the perceived obstacles to black participation. The AAM annual report notes that the formation and functioning of a working party represented a watershed in the Movement's development.⁶¹

⁵⁶ AAM: Annual Report October 1984-September 1985 p29

⁵⁷ Sunday 21 Dec 1986.

⁵⁸ Prime Minister of South Africa from 1978-84, State President 1984-9.

⁵⁹ AAM: Annual Report October 1983-September 1984 p28

The Mangrove Community Association was largely responsible for the huge turn out of black people at the Botha demonstration.

⁶⁰ The Executive Committee was elected by the National Committee of the AAM to carry out the work of the AAM and met on a monthly basis. The National Committee was the policy-making branch of the AAM.

⁶¹ AAM: Annual Report 1986/87 p.33

The working party was convened by the Movement's vice chairperson Dan Thea, and brought together representatives of local groups from several parts of the country with activists in the black community. The working party then submitted its report in November 1987 at the Annual General Meeting. The report recommended that the Movement give priority to its work in the black community and establish a standing committee to develop it while committing resources that would make it possible to give practical effect to the importance attached to this area of work. The 1987 AGM adopted the report of the working party on recruiting members and support within the black and ethnic community. For the AAM it:

...Signified an important development in the Movement's efforts to step up its work in these areas and to address the concerns that exist, both about the issues at stake in Southern Africa and about the AAM as an organisation.⁶²

The AGM also committed to record that it:

Applauded the contribution made by black and ethnic minority groups to the work of the movement....noted the successes achieved by anti-apartheid activists working with local black communities especially in St Paul's area of Bristol, Brixton, Edinburgh, Glasgow....recognised that these groups have shown the way in some key areas of our work.. [and]Resolved to widen our appeal to and encourage work within the black and ethnic minority communities."⁶³

It was agreed that the clear intention of the Movement in establishing the BEM committee was to advance solidarity work amongst the Afro-Caribbean and Asian communities. This report therefore led to the formal establishment of the Black and Ethnic Minorities Committee. Furthermore the report was used as a basis of discussion in a number of local Anti-Apartheid groups.

The report frankly discussed the negative perceptions within the black community of the Anti-Apartheid Movement. According to the report the Movement was perceived as:

...distant from the black community...all too often seeking to speak for the liberation movement of South Africa and Namibia.⁶⁴

Antipathy was particularly strong among the black youth who desired to see the movement involved in more active, radical campaigning-type work. The report noted:

... [they] have a view that the AAM exclusively identifies with "only one" of the South African movements, is opposed to other organisations which may seem more militant, and ostracises any one who may be seen to support such organisations."⁶⁵

Moreover it was noted that:

The AAM is often seen as a white middle-class set up, and may even be seen as standing between Black people and their kith and kin living under apartheid, tends to hinder the

⁶² AAM: Annual Report 1987/88 p.39

⁶³ Report of the Working Party on the Black and Ethnic Minority Committee October 1987.

⁶⁴ *ibid*

⁶⁵ *ibid*

involvement of such people in the activities of the Movement. There can be resentment at having to give solidarity via an 'intermediary'-the movement.⁶⁶

In view of this perception the working party counselled that:

This view should not be ignored; rather it requires appropriate response by the Movement to explain and defend its policies, and to expunge any impression that the Movement is not so much interested in solidarity with the liberation struggle in Namibia and South Africa as seeking to have a longer-term, post-independence political influence in these countries.⁶⁷

Perhaps more damagingly for the AAM the working party reported that the general consensus among black activities was that the organisation was that:

The AAM..[seemed]disinterested...uninvolved...and even unsympathetic to the anti-racist struggles in Britain, whilst shouting at the top of its voice how anti-racist it is in far-off South Africa and Namibia.

To dispel this image the working party instructed that the Movement should actively be seen to be anti-racist in "theory and practice" and particularly supportive of anti-racist struggles in Britain.⁶⁸

The working party noted that it saw the:

...the Movement is part of the anti-racist struggle worldwide, and not just in Namibia and South Africa. We do not accept the fear expressed by some that this perspective would at all inhibit or reduce the AAM's capacity to work for the elimination of the apartheid system. On the contrary, the Movements moral and material strength would be enhanced by the public and firm acceptance of this approach.⁶⁹

In answer to the prevailing assumption on the part of members of the AAM that the black community should find a natural home and affinity within the AAM, it was noted that it was unrealistic for the Movement to expect that the special affinity and empathy that Black people in Britain felt for black Southern Africans should also be equally shown to the AAM. There support could not be taken for granted in this respect. In the working party's view:

this affinity is [primarily] reserved for the oppressed people and their liberation movements.⁷⁰

Interestingly it was noted that:

...the committee did not consider that it should expend too much time evaluating the perceptions or in assessing the extent to which they are true. We judged them to be

⁶⁶ Ibid p4

⁶⁷ ibid

⁶⁸ The BEM would take up this task of forming linkage between the anti-racist nature of anti-apartheid activism and the wider anti-racist politics in Britain at that time. It was therefore the Committee that sent solidarity messages to two anti-racist demonstrations in Southall to mark the tenth anniversary of the death of Blair Peach.

⁶⁹ Report of the Working Party on the Black and Ethnic Minority Committee October 1987 p3

⁷⁰ Ibid p4

sufficiently accurate for the AGM to have adopted the resolution which led to the establishment of the working party.⁷¹

It seems the working party's task in documenting the disgruntlement and criticisms of those that kept the AAM at arms length was to provide a window through which operatives within the AAM could begin to understand why more black people had not engaged in supporting the organisation in a consistent way. The BEM⁷² would attempt to bridge this gap. After the adoption of the resolutions put forth by the working party, and the establishment of the BEM as a sub-committee in its own right within the structure of the AAM, it prepared a document called 'Call to Action' which outlined the perspectives of the liberation struggle in South Africa and Namibia and the role of the Anti-Apartheid Movement. It stressed the need for solidarity action in the black and ethnic minority community. Nearly 20,000 copies were distributed at the Notting Hill Carnival of that year and they were so well received that the National Committee decided that:

...in view of the importance of the Movement working in this area the brochure should be made available free to local groups, despite the high costs of production.⁷³

The committee proceeded to discuss means of involving black and ethnic minority organisations in the Mandela campaigns and an appeal for support was signed by Bernie Grant MP, the Chair-Dan Thea and Vice-Chair-Suresh Kamath of the committee. Support for the Mandela's Marchers from black community organisations was provided in Leeds, Walsall, Birmingham, Coventry and Nottingham. The Black and Ethnic Minority Committee's official launch occurred on 25 May 1989 in the evening at Soho's Wag Club. It attracted over 250 people from a range of organisations.⁷⁴ Bernie Grant MP addressed the crowd, and representatives from SWAPO and ANC were present, including a FRELIMO militant who gave a defiant speech.⁷⁵ Collections for SWAPO's election appeal amounted to £600 which was raised with a pledge from The National Black Caucus of £100.

The AAM's vice-chair-Dan Thea appealed to the black community to continue to boycott South African goods and get involved in anti-apartheid campaigns. In August that year the AAM leafleting at the Notting Hill carnival took a further step, spearheaded by the BEM in collaboration with the London Anti-Apartheid committee, Women's committee and Church Action on Namibia, plans were made to design and staff a float at the Notting Hill Carnival bringing the anti-apartheid message more overtly to the thousands of revellers that gathered over the weekend event. The float was designed to promote support for SWAPO.

⁷¹ Ibid p7

⁷² Black and Ethnic Minority Committee of the AAM.

⁷³ AAM: Annual Report 1987/88 p.39

⁷⁴ Elsewhere it is noted that over 130 names were on a written list, additionally a note states other invitation cards were presented at the door. The diverse mix of organisations were represented; The ANC, ELTSA, Society of Black Lawyers, Jagaran Newspaper, St Lucia Association, NUPE, National SteelBand Association, NBC, Kiss FM, Turkish Community Centre, Health Visitors Assoc, Magngrove Community Association, Northampton AA, Lambeth AA, Hackney AA, Mozambique Embassy, AAM, SWAPO, SAN-ROC, Gandhi Foundation etc

⁷⁵ Southern African liberation individuals included: Shapua Kaukungua-SWAPO, Mendi Msimang-ANC, Billy Masethla-ANC, Wally Serote-ANC, Essop Pahad-ANC, Martin Mabiletsa.

The BEM in 1990 held a Black Solidarity seminar on 3rd March in Brixton. It aimed to present the latest information and analyse the progress of the liberation struggles in southern Africa. Moreover it sought to create a forum where suggestions could be made to aid the effectiveness of future solidarity work in aid of the southern African liberation struggles. A further purpose of the seminar was to attract and include black activists not normally involved AAM activities and campaigns. This seminar signified the committee's commitment to mobilise members of the black communities in the overall drive for solidarity support by the British people in the struggle for freedom and democracy by the victims of apartheid in South Africa.

Black activists involved in anti-apartheid work met to consider the theme 'South Africa: Countdown to Freedom?' Bernie Grant MP the keynote speaker gave a description of his recent trip to South Africa where he met Nelson Mandela on the day of his release.⁷⁶ Siphon-Pityana coordinator of the Nelson Mandela Reception Committee provided a thought provoking assessment of the emerging new phase in the liberation struggles. Also present were representatives from the South African Trade Union and the ANC Women's section. Members of black organisations from within Britain were also present.⁷⁷ A full report of the day's events was circulated to all participants, and distributed to Anti-Apartheid local groups who were encouraged to use the report and to invite speakers from the BEM committee.

In 1990 members of the BEM attended a meeting in July as part of a collective of representatives of the Black community hosted by the ANC to meet Nelson Mandela on his second visit to London. In his capacity as Deputy President of the ANC he urged them to play a full part in strengthening the AAM at what he considered a critical moment of their struggle. He then noted:

We are aware that you the activists and leaders present this morning represent a large and important constituency. Whilst in prison, we endeavoured to follow as closely as possible your own battles against racism and injustice...the thick prison walls...could not prevent us from learning about the contribution many of you have made to the anti-apartheid struggle...it is our wish, that at this critical moment in our struggle, the British Anti-Apartheid Movement should be strengthened. We call on you, dear sisters and brothers, to play your full part in this noble movement....we are also conscious of the fact that in you we have fellow freedom fighters in the struggle to destroy apartheid...the support and solidarity of people like you, and millions throughout the World gives us enormous strength and encouragement. There is no doubt that it has made a significant contribution to ending Apartheid.⁷⁸

The BEM committee tried to raise the profile of its work through Anti-Apartheid News. Though it sought to appeal primarily to the politically conscious in the black community, progressive white readership was also considered. Under the heading of 'Black Solidarity' members of the BEM used the allotted space to discuss issues of race in Britain and South Africa, drawing parallels as well as providing analysis concerning the democratic future of South Africa. Through the personal account from

⁷⁶ The first and only British Parliamentarian to do so at that point in time which went unreported in the mainstream press.

⁷⁷ For example the West Indian Ex-servicemen's Association, the Black Unity and Freedom Party, and Afro-Caribbean student societies. Even the Singapore and Malaysian British Association.

⁷⁸ AAM: Box 385B 'Speech of Nelson Mandela, Deputy President of the ANC to the Black activists, London 3 July 1990

one member of West Indian heritage, describing his visit to Namibia, readers could see how the region was beginning to open and be accessible to all tourists no matter their skin colour. The aim was to promote the work of the BEM, attract black readership interest and engagement, as well as giving the BEM's own perspective on the debates concerning racism and anti-racism. For example one member under the heading 'The last battle?' opined:

In countries such as Britain and the USA, where the practice of racial discrimination has been formally outlawed, black people continue to suffer disproportionately from humiliation and oppression. What then are the prospects for SA blacks? The ending of apartheid in its legal forms will mark the end of white colonialism in Africa. Black people in SA will then have the same old struggle as the rest of us. [they must]make liberation a reality for the majority, [and] struggle against class oppression (fuelled by the forces of international capital), struggle against external and internalised racism.. [and] struggle to ensure that entry into the corridors of power is everybody's birthright.⁷⁹

Under another heading, 'A shared legacy of racism' the author concurs with Bernie Grant that the position of black people in Britain and Africans in South Africa is very different. In South Africa the black majority were enslaved by a minority government in their own country. In the UK there is a minority of Blacks and Asians who do not suffer the indignity of legalised racist policies.

Yet there are similarities as regards the effects of discrimination. The writer notes that in surveying the black population and its overall position in British society a disproportionate number inhabit:

Poor, run-down areas, high-rise tower blocks on unpopular council estates, the ghettos no one else wanted...a health system which in the 1940s actively encouraged colonial immigrants to come and work for the 'Mother Country', yet now in the 90s still exhibits a reluctance to cater for the health needs of those people. Sickle Cell Anaemia and Thalassima are not routinely tested for. In mental health, racist generalisations label black people as having schizophrenic tendencies, 'sectioning' is used against black people with resulting deportations. A reputation of 'under-achievement' and a legacy of suspicion remains after immigrant children were channelled into 'Educationally subnormal' schools' several decades later black students are now better represented in terms of exam grades, and progression into higher education. But it brings them little benefit when it comes to gaining employment. Black graduates have been found to be far less successful than their white counterparts in getting jobs. Employment agencies connive with racist employers to impede non-white applicants.⁸⁰

The writer continues to note the desultory fortunes of blacks in the penal system in comparison to their white counterparts and the poor relations between the community and the police. Race discrimination at the bar was finally outlawed in 1990:

This is the reality in Britain where black people have been restricted not by laws, but by practice.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Anti-Apartheid News July/August 1991 p7

⁸⁰ AA News July/August 1991 p7

⁸¹ AA News July/August 1991 p7

The writer raises the question as to whether gaining the franchise and being in the majority in South Africa will ensure black Africans have control over their circumstances. In making analogy with women who numerically form a majority in most countries but still do not enjoy the “power and control” of their male counterparts, the writer infers that the numerical strength of the black population would not mean they would automatically gain the equality on par with Europeans as they wish. For instance:

The Race Relations Act in Britain sought to provide a framework to enable ethnic groups to have equality of opportunity. But the damage and disadvantage of the past have restricted progress-commitment from the people who have the power is not there. In South Africa, where the disparities in the conditions and quality of life are extreme, the legacy of apartheid will live on long after the last law has been relinquished. The struggle must go on.⁸²

The BEM-by now renamed the Black Solidarity Committee organised a ‘Education for Liberation Conference’⁸³ billed as a conference on the role of the UK Black community in helping to transform education in Southern Africa. Speakers included prominent black educationalists and representatives from the ANC, and FLS.⁸⁴

In noting that Apartheid had robbed the educational opportunities from generations of black people in South Africa-whether through poor quality education or no education due to political instability the organisers noted that:

The aim of this workshop is to examine ways in which some of the remedies found or being sought by the black community in UK could be applied to the situation in Southern Africa. Solutions would revolve around adult education such as technical colleges, vocational courses, distance learning, the mass media, voter education, youth work and positive action programmes.....[and] to provide an acceptable framework for direct links in terms of mutual benefit.⁸⁵

It was further noted that there was little provision in southern African for black students with special educational needs. The workshops aimed to focus on provisions that would be relevant for the southern African context whether materials or equipment and identify British as well as other international organisations that might wish to assist adults and children. The radical ideological thinking behind the conference could be seen through the conceptualisation of a ‘curriculum for liberation.’ It was noted that:

Black people all over the world have been oppressed by the contents and language of curriculums as well as the political and economic structures of education systems....the aim of this workshop is to identify the key issues in designing curriculum and teaching materials that reflect the rich cultural heritage of black people. It will examine education under neo colonialism and ways in which such education legacies can be challenged or reversed. The

⁸² AA News July/August 1991 p7

⁸³ Held at Camden Town Hall on Saturday 3 April 1993.

⁸⁴ For example Stuart Hall, and Gus John, Paul Gilroy, Chris Mullard, Sivanandan, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, Moliphe Pheto, Loretta Ngcobo.

⁸⁵ BOX AAM:172B In order to sustain linkages it was proposed that student to student links should be encouraged; letter writing, material exchanges, links between student unions, youth exchanges and professional contacts made.

workshop will also focus on ways in which teaching in Britain can include the Southern African experience from a black perspective.⁸⁶

On the 19th June 1992 a speaking tour was organised by the BEM. Two ANC speakers were invited-Lawrence Bayana from the Soweto Youth Association and Kgopotso Sindelo from ANC woman's league, encouraged by Southall Black sisters. The tour was part of a national black led initiative involving a number of organisations. Similarly the National Union of Students Black student's conference in Manchester asked a BEM member to speak about its work and the anti-apartheid activities in light of Mandela's release.⁸⁷

Concluding Remarks

The Black and Ethnic Minority Committee grew out of a Working Party set up in fulfilment of an AGM resolution. It aimed to raise the profile of black activists, and strengthen the campaigning links between the AAM and black and ethnic minority communities in the struggle against apartheid. The BEM committee should be seen in the context of the times. The 1987 general election produced for the first time in British parliamentary history four black members of parliament; Bernie Grant, Keith Vaz, Paul Boateng, and Diane Abbot.⁸⁸ With this watershed the time seemed ripe for an advance by black activists sharing sympathies with pressure groups such as the AAM. A key operative within the AAM at the time has noted that:

Activists fighting racism in diverse ways wanted there to be an effective campaign against apartheid-the worst manifestation of institutionalised racism in modern times. The AAM provided it, and when we came in the late 1980s to focus on the campaign to free Nelson Mandela, support from black activists came pouring in.⁸⁹

In 1990 the report to the AGM of the AAM commented:

No where has the release of Nelson Mandela and other achievements of the liberation struggle been welcomed more warmly than in the Black community and by ethnic minority groups in Britain.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Box AAM: 172B 'Education for Liberation Conference'

⁸⁷ 27-28 June 1992.

⁸⁸ The four black MPs elected in June gave a high profile to the Anti-Apartheid struggle through their pronouncements two were on a consultative basis with the working party-Abbot and Boateng. A third-Bernie Grant became a vice-chair of the parliamentary labour party's anti-apartheid group.

⁸⁹ Alan Brooks-Deputy Executive Sec to the AAM, Member of the National and Executive Committee of the AAM. Secretary of Barnet AAM, Editor of AA News. Sec of the Working Party and later the BEM-in private letter to researcher, October 2002.

⁹⁰ Report to the 1990 AGM October 1989-October 1990. AAM archives Rhodes House Library.

Why not the lack of active support from members of the black community?

AAM's perspective:

Recollections of Ethel De Keyser 3/3/01 interview. Staff member from 1965 of the AAM:

Arguments over why AAM should not become more involved in black political domestic race politics in Britain:

- Many feared that the Movement should not become 'distracted' with British black politics, as the whole aim of the AAM was to fight Apartheid and heighten awareness of its evils in Britain-exerting pressure on HMG and the general public.
- Some even argued that British blacks and Blacks South Africans had nothing in common, and faced 'different' and 'unique' racisms.
- It was apparent that especially younger black activists had a leaning towards the PAC, while the AAM was more biased to the ANC/ZAPU, MPLA and SACP

The AAM did not manage to make a connection with the black community though they were very visible during the STST-sports boycott, the AAM worked with the Black community, and it was the involvement of the black community that tipped the balance at Lords during the 1970s. The West Indian Standing Conference was very involved and rallied prominent blacks. (Ethel De Keyser interview 3/3/01)

The ANC were concerned however over the fact that more British blacks were not on board with the AAM at the time. Tambo resigned to the fact that blacks in GB and in SA following different struggles.

Recollections of Mike Terry 18/12/00 interview

Disagrees with notion that the black community apolitical to what was occurring in African liberation struggles.

The West-Indian migrants that arrived in Britain during the 1950s onwards did not arrive as political novices⁹¹. All had grown up in an environment of sustained political activity in their respective islands. The economic recession that hit Europe in the twenties and thirties had also affected the West Indian colonies. This led to anti-colonial unrest in the English-speaking Caribbean and the foundations of the modern trade union movement and later political parties were laid. After agitating over parochial issues, the larger goals of adult suffrage and political independence became the focus for the population. The fight for political independence affected everyone and a strong solidarity bound the black majority together against their British colonial masters and the system of Imperialism. Therefore when they arrived in Britain many West Indians felt their natural political allies to be on the left or within the labour movement.

The 1960s injected a stronger current of black radicalism now termed 'black power' into the younger generation of blacks growing up in Britain during that time. They were radicalised by the racial politics of America and South Africa and began to develop a confrontational style with British institutions including the anti-racist politics of the socialist left and the labour parties.⁹² The empowerment features of Black Power ideology had made the concept and fact of 'blackness' a positive thing, something to be proud of rather than a hindrance or psychological handicap. In contrast to the older generation who arrived in the early 1950s-60s the younger generation were not prepared to pursue a gradualist policy in fighting back against racism. The establishment of the Race Today Collective used its journal as a campaigning tool. While

⁹¹ Although it may be debatable how much of the work of the following thinkers was known to the general population, there is no doubt that local political figures and many of the mentioned were known to the people. The West Indian Islands have produced towering figures of Black radical scholarship. Edward Wilmot Blyden, Marcus Garvey, Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X, Kwame Ture, Claude McKay, CLR James, George Padmore had cultural roots in the region. The writing of Marcus Garvey in particular would have a profound influence on black British youth of the 1970s coupled with the emergence of Rastafarianism.

⁹² Claudia Jones and C.L.R. James one of the the major black intellectual Marxist scholars of the 20th century and others had become disillusioned with the British Left. Trevor Carter black educator and activist and a former worker in the CPGB, criticised the labour movement and the Left of racism. He still argues for blacks to be part of the class struggle. He thought the Communist Party would provide and integration of all aspect of struggle across the boundaries of race, class and anti-colonialism. However he notes that the party did not address the distinct patterns of racism in Britain: '...the stubborn class-before-race position of the party during the fifties and sixties cost the party dearly in terms of its members'. For Carter was a wasted opportunity for the party to engage the black working class. Carter, T. Shattering Illusions: West Indians in British Politics (Lawrence and Wishart Ltd, London, 1986)p62

the Race Today Review published critical discussions of black literature and the arts.⁹³ The politics of black power soon spilled into the public domain through the infamous trial of the Mangrove 9.⁹⁴ The symbolism of the growing Rastafari movement and reggae music were important features of the emerging black urban youth identities.

The alliances formed during the 1970s-80s with the largely white left and black radicals was not without its tensions.⁹⁵ Also there were joint campaigns over various anti-racist causes. Many white across the political spectrum did support the struggles against racism in British civil society.

Factors that mitigated against fuller cooperation between the AAM and the black community:

- Policy: The AAM was closer to the ANC than the PAC, ANC were very concerned over the failure to engage black British more fully, their non-racial policy was out of step with the more radical strands of Black activists who were more in sympathy with the exclusivity of the PAC. There was a strong feeling that blacks needed to organise for themselves without intervention of well meaning whites.
- Allies: of the AAM were a problem, these were often the same individuals in conflict with black activists over domestic racial concerns ie Neil Kinnock's opposition to the emergence of a Black section of the Labour Party though was a keen anti-apartheid supporter of the AAM. Radicals like Marc Wadsworth of the ARA were critical of the AAM. However the ANC needed to reach a broad range of allies, and the power structure of the AAM was dominated by those that black radicals might have felt were the enemy.
- To many in the AAM black domestic politics seemed volatile and could threaten the raison de etre of the AAM if they became too involved in its anti-racist struggles. Black radicals for their part were critical of the AAM's handling of their allies they chose.

The nature of racism in Britain posed a potential conflict of interest between the AAM priorities and black activist objectives. Black radicals wanted more action against racism in Britain, while the AAM's focus lay with South and Southern Africa. The AAM had to be narrow in its focus to meet its objectives.

⁹³ C.L.R. James was an early mentor of *Race Today*.

⁹⁴ For first hand accounts with interviews of the participants see chapter 'Carnival' in Phillips, M. and Phillips, T. Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998)

⁹⁵ Gilroy, P. There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991)

Miscellan

The report also notes the growing involvement of black community nationally and locally as evidenced by the formation of community anti-apartheid groups eg in Hackney. It notes:

And the spreading scale, variety and impact of local authority-lead activities, especially cultural events, in the period between 16 and 26 June.⁹⁶

The struggle for human dignity and self-respect has involved the vast majority of African-descended peoples, directly or indirectly, throughout the globe since about the fifteenth century and up to the present. In short, the nature of this mental and physical struggle has essentially involved overcoming the European dehumanisation of peoples who can claim African ancestry...this has been due to the philosophy of white supremacy, and through its varied growth and usage during the eras of African enslavement, colonisation, segregation and, the more recent and endemic form of social exclusion, second class citizenship.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ AAM: Annual Report 1986/87 p33

⁹⁷ Christian, M. 'The Black Intellectual/Activist Tradition: Notes on the Past, Present and Future' in Christian, M. eds Black Identity in the 20th Century: Expressions of the US and UK African Diaspora (London: Hansib, 2002 p.121

emotionally because we always felt that whatever gains we made as black people elsewhere in Africa, or indeed in the wider diaspora in terms of our freedom, in terms of our economic advancement, in terms of our political emancipation, it all counted for nothing so long as the apartheid regime was in place in SA. Because the suffering of black people in SA, and the fact that for so long the Apartheid regime got away with it, with the active collusion and connivance of governments in the West, that reduced our humanity. That's why "Brent-South today, Soweto tomorrow."..... It was to remind everybody there who at that moment of triumph for black people and for white people who cared about the creation of a multi-racial democracy in Britain, was a reminder to them that that counted for absolutely nothing as long as SA remained under the heel of the apartheid regime.13/12/02 Paul Boateng

the AAM needed to do more in order to reach out to black and Asian people and to make the linkages between the struggle in Europe and the struggle in Africa.Boateng

TP- No, I think that the truth of the matter was, that the black political activists were hostile to the ANC because they....here the

black groups as opposed to black people involved in the trade unions, student movement or whatever, were going through a what you might consider a nationalist period. And the people they admired were Steve Biko, Black Consciousness movement.

.....I'm talking about organized community groups, activists within the black community, people in the BUFP and all these kinds of people were more interested in the black nationalist perspective to SA, and as a consequence they were rather...hostile is not too strong a word actually to the ANC because the ANC was consciously multi-racial, they were also hostile to it because of the involvement of the communist party and they were suspicious of the Communist party.

TP- That's true the AAM in London was seen as a creature of a Left liberal white political establishment, and something about the tone of the approach that it made to black communities, was to some extent slightly patronising.

Q-What do you mean by that?

TP- Well it was sort of....I think there was a sort of sense [I can't give you chapter and verse] in which the AAM basically didn't...well there were not any black people in the leadership of the AAM for a start. And that was quite a big problem.

TP-Well it looked a bit absurd, to have a lot of white people going on about racism against black people in SA, but having no black people in their leadership here. I think they realised that rather late.

There appeared to be no reflection of black south Africa in the leadership of the AAM group here.

Lela Kogbara

While we were picketing on the streets we'd have support from all the races but politically feeling black people.....there were those that did not bother and would sling their pound in the bucket, but would not be engaged. Don't know what's going on, but know it was not right. But politically active black people thought the AAM was a dreadful institution. So people like Lee Jasper-National Black Caucus. BSC tried to bridge that gap, between the black community the black people who were active in the black community but said they

would not touch the AAM with a barge pole..... They thought it was a white organization, and they were more PAC. But people like Jasper were more PAC sympathetic rather than ANC sympathetic. But we did get in there. Made good links started meeting up with Lee Jasper and the Nat Black Caucus. **So that's part of the achievement of BSC.**

Lela

Yes to make the links with the Black community, the objectives included making the connections as far as racism was concerned, with what was going on and the black community was tapped into but no necessary recognising the AAM as...I think some members of the black community thought there's a whole load of white people....., but politically why would you wake up in the morning and decide to focus on something miles away, you need to recognise, everybody has their niche market in terms of campaigning but you can't say you're campaigning against racism in another country and yet don't recognise that it also exists in Britain.

Q- What did you achieve?

LK- Couple of things we did was the Nelson Mandela meeting with the Lawrence family, part of the issue of making the people in the world and Britain understand the inconnectedness to oppression elsewhere. And it would be difficult to do that without acknowledging what people suffer over here, they have their own struggles here. So there was that so we were also active to join what the anti-racist alliance were doing, we joined that and had a couple of meeting with Anti-racist Alliance, we got involved with the ???????? around campaigning. We were joining them in terms of our own agenda as well, putting our agenda on their agenda and vicesa versa.

Q- What about concrete gains, you could have days of conscious raising but at the end of the day would the young people be joining the AAM?

LK- Yes some people joined, but one of the things we decided at some point in discussion with the BEM/BSC at that time of transition wasn't necessary for people, it wasn't our objectives to get people to join the AAM or BSC/BEM but the aim was to raise people's awareness so that they would boycott SA goods, its difficult to describe when you talk about concrete outcomes it is about getting the mass of the people to have a set of belief systems, ideologies and commitments, it then means that the Govt of the country would be conscious that a whole group of people think like this and therefore If I'm going to win their support in my being elected and support them/representing them then I have to take on board the struggle in SA. So when you say 'join' we decided that joining wasn't necessary in order to achieve that objective.

Lee jasper

Obviously the struggles that young black people were going through in the UK in the early 1980s, resonated with the struggles that were going on in the SA townships

and began to see pictures of black young people in tremendous struggles with SA police services, and that resonated with imagery that we'd already seen in the American civil rights movement in the 1960s, it resonated with our own experience of policing in largely poor black working class areas of the course, Liverpool, Manchester, Handsworth, Brixton. And it seemed to have a universal metaphor for black experience, and it was one that viscerally affected lots of black people in the country..... so all of those transformed the political consciousness about the world wide struggle against racism and racial oppression and apartheid within the minds of the UK black community to a tremendous extent.

Glenroy

For him certain members more interested with fighting racism abroad than at home. However much it was an pragmatic and functional decision/view. Let those that wanted to divorce the 'racisms' in GB & SA do so. Would not stop West-Indians etc from carrying on the fight here outside of the AAM if needs be. For interviewee one cannot address racism in SA without addressing it in GB. The bottom line being, the European races in SA were supported by their kith & kin in Europe. Therefore could not attack racism there without attacking the source here. The racism here may not have been as overt as in SA but still just as deadly. Not necessary that of men in jack boots but those of those in suits and ties. The ordinary man in the street was the recipient like those in SA(who kept voting in the Nationalists in with increasing no of votes) of the benefits of racism. Many acquiesce towards the climate of racism. Whites had first choice within each society.

There was a flaw within the analytical interpretation of the black position in Africa and the world (interviewee dislike the title 'front line states' as if only these states suffering from white South Africa's domination. **The whole of Africa was. Country's encourage to trade with white SA, or believe they could not survive without her, even UN culpable) by certain individuals in the AAM. They did not want 'Black Liberation' per se but the end of an 'unfair system'. (see Nth & Sth during US civil war). Aim to get Africa independent so can trade with Europe on favourable terms for Europeans rather than fairly for all sides. There were those in AAM however who wanted to fight for black liberation.**

The disparity of interpretation was not significant enough for him to fail to operate within the AAM. Not all element within the AAM thought the racisms should be separated. Unfortunately those who did were the ones that had the dominant influence within the organization. The attitude seemed to be that if one wanted an anti-racist organization one should go elsewhere. For them AAM nothing to do with anti-racism. In discussion of these issues the movement not as democratic as it could have been in considering views.

The leadership on the whole wanted to create the impression that the struggle was just about South Africa and anti-apartheid activities. For Glen Apartheid a legitimisation of racism/legislation of racism.

What was their qualification for this role/setting up selves as black reps?

Ans: most members involved in anti-racist and community groups, dealt with issues of racism in day to day experience. Involved in community action etc therefore well versed and aware of the 'grass roots' of black thought and the impact of racism in GB on their lives and feelings of solidarity for people of colour world wide.

Bone of contention arose as to the nature of the BSC. Took issue that blacks should be allowed to run own meetings and not necessarily have whites sitting in on their forums. The White presence not necessary-it was about expressing black solidarity, and operating in an forum free to express their views. With the white presence on the BSC this took away something from black contribution and the development of ideas and perspectives and need to establish solidarity links with their brothers and sisters in southern Africa.

Ostensibly to be inclusive of those that might have not felt comfortable with the moniker of 'Black'. Aim to draw an anti-racist aspect within the struggle.

Interviewee unhappy with the name from the original name from the beginning..... Another issue: The name of the committee the BEM changed to BSC. Originally meant to attract those who did not consider themselves 'black'. In Glen's view if this was the case they did not understand the politics behind the necessity to rename the organisation.

The argument about the original name was not viable. The BEM did not attract the number of non-blacks as intended. If people did not want to consider the moniker black as a descriptive term they would just have to catch up.

Alex Pascal

1974-1988. That program educated and informed the black community. Everybody who came from Africa to here etc everybody passed through there. It was the voice, Reagan attacking Grenada in the Caribbean, the entire changes of Africa and the Caribbean went through that program.

The people that came to me mostly were the musicians-Juliet Mboya? Mariam Makeba, Mogotsi, Hugh Masekela, these guys they were the ones that really and truly trumpeted change for Africa. All of these people.

I had to be so careful within the BBC. The BBC never wanted open blatant discussions. It gathered momentum after a while because the program took a sort of militant stand on all sides. So the individuals came. The whites who came from Africa, who I knew were lying in any case, were still brought to the program to be

interviewed. Wherever people came from; Africa, America, we spoke Africa.

It is only in the last decade that accounts settlements of the early West-Indian migrants to Britain have started to emerge. Accounts detailing their entry into a drab and depressed post war Britain, and country hostile to their presence-ironic in the light of the active courting of Government to procure their help during the war years and call to fill the short fall of available in British industry and public sector-the shock of social rejection and political apathy, the subsequent painful integration and struggle for equality in a Britain struggling to come to term with its role in a post-Empire and post-war world. From the Nottingham and Notting Hill riots of 1958⁹⁸, the fight against the arbitrary categorisation of their children as ‘Educationally sub-normal’ during the 1970s a, to the 1970s campaigns against the ‘Sus’ laws, the death of Blair Peach and the numerous suspicious deaths of black individuals either in racially motivated attacks or in police custody since 1969⁹⁹ the Deptford Fire in 1981 and conflicts with the police that

⁹⁸ Black and Asians have always been vulnerable to physical racial attacks in Britain, form the notorious 1919 riots to the late 1990s and beyond. See

⁹⁹ Between 1969-1999 over one thousand people have died in such circumstances and to date no one has been charged with culpability for a death in custody.

led to the sequence of urban disturbances throughout the eighties. By the late 1980s strengthened by these and un-going battles black activists were ready to get involved. Prof Hall has commented that:

And yet the AAM was concerned to incorporate more blacks into its membership and support base. The eventual establishment of the Black and Ethnic Minority Committee was essentially to bridge the gap between the obvious concern of black activists concerning the racial politics of South Africa and to incorporate their support and engagement into the structures of the AAM the only visibly successful organisation in Britain leading the anti-apartheid fight from within the British context.

See Boston paper from here on in....