

**The Alan Paton Centre  
& Struggle Archives**



**RECORDING THE ANTI-APARTHEID STRUGGLE IN  
KWAZULU-NATAL**

Oral History Project of the Alan Paton Centre,  
University of KwaZulu-Natal,  
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Interview with Colin Gardner  
conducted by Ruth Lundie  
on 23 July 1998  
at the Alan Paton Centre

The interviewee has agreed to open access for use by researchers,  
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**KWAZULU NATAL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**FIRST INTERVIEW WITH COLIN GARDNER**

**CONDUCTED BY RUTH LUNDIE**

**AT THE ALAN PATON CENTRE ON 23 JULY 1998**

**(TAPE ONE)**

**(‘C’ SHALL INDICATE THE INTERVIEWEE AND ‘R’ THE INTERVIEWER)**

R: This is an interview with Colin Gardner at the Alan Paton Centre on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 1998. Colin, you were born in London?

C: Yes, I spent my childhood in London - a large part of it in the War - Second World War, I was five when the War began and eleven when it ended. And I think one thing I might say about that is that my consciousness, I think, has always been affected, to some extent, by the fact that I spent those formative years in a state of war: there were German bombers over our houses quite often, particularly of course towards the beginning of the War, and I think that as a result of that the idea of living as something of a battle, or a contest, is something that probably affected my way of thinking about things and is probably relevant in some ways to the attitude that I have had to the South African political situation. I often felt I was surrounded by people whose attitude towards what was going on was a very quiescent one, whereas I felt myself to be engaged in some kind of contest or war. Yes, then I - I - my parents came to South Africa in 1947, at a time when many people were emigrating from the United Kingdom to South Africa, to Canada, places of that kind. My parents didn't know much about South Africa; my father, who was a school teacher, wanted to get a university job. And in those days there seemed to be very few vacancies in British universities, especially for people like my father who had not got an Oxford or Cambridge degree. So we found ourselves coming to Pietermaritzburg; my father came here as a senior lecturer. One interesting thing about our moment of arrival, which was in September, 1947, was that the Nationalist Party, which came into power in 1948, passed a bit of retrospective legislation which said that only people who arrived before a certain date became South African citizens

1 automatically, and I don't remember exactly what that date was - I think it was  
2 September the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1947. And we arrived about two weeks after that date so I lost the  
3 chance of becoming a South African citizen automatically, and one of the interesting  
4 aspects of my political career - if you can call it that - is that right up until I think 1992, I  
5 was actually not a South African citizen, which made my position, at times, a little dicey.  
6 Yes, so that is what I would say about my earliest years.

7  
8 R: May I ask why your family chose Pietermaritzburg?

9  
10 C: They chose Pietermaritzburg, because my father, having been a school teacher for twenty  
11 years and having reached a point where he could obviously apply for a university job as  
12 he had published a very well received study of the nineteenth century poet Gerald Manley  
13 Hopkins, wanted to move out of school teaching and apply for whatever jobs were  
14 available at that particular moment. This would have been early 1947. He was in fact  
15 offered two jobs, one in Pietermaritzburg, and one in Spokane in the State of Washington  
16 in the USA. I remember the family sitting down together round a table saying, 'Should  
17 we go to Pietermaritzburg, or should we go to Spokane?' And to young Londoners like  
18 myself it was a really a choice between two different versions of Timbuktoo: we knew  
19 neither place. Somehow, I'm not quite sure what the reason was, my father seemed to  
20 think that he would rather go to somewhere which was in those days, of course, within  
21 the British Empire, within the British Commonwealth, rather than the United States.

22  
23 R: I see, I see, yes.

24  
25 C: So it was to some extent...

26  
27 R: Sure enough..

28  
29 C: ...a sort of case of eanie, meanie, mo, and so we arrived, puzzled, in 'Maritzburg, in  
30 September 1947.

31  
32 R: Thank you. Now you were put to school at the Maritzburg College...and how did you  
33 find that?

34  
35 C: Well, I don't know whether you want me to talk much about this...

36  
37 R: No, let's do - the influence of it on you.

38  
39 C: Well, I don't know that it had much influence upon me. I think the main thing to say  
40 about Maritzburg College, to me, as a person of thirteen who had come from a Grammar  
41 School -- begun I say English schooling, in a Grammar School in South West London.

1 was that going to Maritzburg College was a great emotional shock. The school I had  
2 been at in England had been very easy-going and humane; Maritzburg College turned out  
3 to be a place, as I realised afterwards, which was trying very hard to pretend that it was a  
4 British Public School in the early nineteenth century. So I immediately found myself  
5 walking into a minefield of I think deliberately irrational rules and regulations. For  
6 example on the first day, just after I had begun to befriend somebody slightly, I was  
7 talking in what I took to be a perfectly normal way and a prefect came up to me and said  
8 'What do you think you are doing?' So I said 'I don't know... what *am* I doing?' And  
9 after a while it turned out that I had one hand in my pocket and that this at Maritzburg  
10 College was something that new boys could never do. That was a new religious ritual -  
11 so I took my hand out of my pocket and thought 'I'm in a madhouse.' And I have to say  
12 this - there were many moments while I was at Maritzburg College when I felt that I was  
13 in a madhouse. But I got used to the place and I suppose I, I felt a sort of rough affection  
14 for it by my final year.

15  
16 R: Yes, by the time you left...and then came to the university here?

17  
18 C: Then I went to the University of Natal and I was particularly, well I was interested in my  
19 studies, I was doing well at them, so a lot of my time was spent simply going to lectures  
20 and reading and writing essays and things. I was a person who spent I suppose ninety  
21 percent of my time working at my academic work, but I became involved also in the  
22 Students' Catholic Union. My father had become a Roman Catholic largely as a result of  
23 his studying the Catholic Priest/Poet, Hopkins, and the family had followed him into the  
24 Catholic Church. I - I therefore became a Catholic at about the age of nine, I think. If I  
25 remember. My father took me to a Catholic mass - he wanted to give me a choice of  
26 whether I wanted to go or not - and I was so enchanted when at the consecration they  
27 rang bells... It was actually that that really that made me decide that I would become a  
28 Roman Catholic - and I knew then very little about what that entailed. ...But I became a  
29 member of the Students' Catholic Union on the 'Maritzburg campus and before long - by  
30 the end of that year - I had been asked by the outgoing chairman if I would take over, so I  
31 found myself chairing that Union. It was quite a keen grouping of Roman Catholics and  
32 we took our beliefs and commitments very seriously. I mention this because from that  
33 moment onwards - although it took a bit of time to develop - my sense that the political

1        affairs of South Africa were important grew partly, simply, from my Christian  
2        commitment: you know, the idea that Jesus encourages his followers to consider the  
3        plight of the poor, the needy, those less privileged than oneself. was certainly as far as I  
4        could see a call to resisting what was happening more and more, obviously, within the  
5        South Africa of 1951.

6  
7        R:     And it presented the favouredness of your position?

8  
9        C:     Well, yes, although I have to say that the full recognition of the implications of  
10        Christianity in the political situation was something that dawned upon me and others, in  
11        some ways very slowly, I have to say also, talking about these things - I also became  
12        involved in NUSAS, and there was, in those days - both on the 'Maritzburg Campus and  
13        nationally - there was quite an easy relationship between NUSAS and Catholic students.  
14        The National association of Catholic students - NCFS, the National Catholic Federation  
15        of Students, was quite a strong body in those days, and as I say there was an easy  
16        association between NCFS and NUSAS: they usually held their conferences at the same  
17        centre so that people in the NCFS could go across to the NUSAS Conference for certain  
18        sessions. But, the other thing I wanted to say about political awareness was that when I  
19        look back on my four years on the campus in Pietermaritzburg, certainly some students  
20        were beginning to take what would obviously be regarded as a relatively left wing line -  
21        certainly left wing as far as ordinary, not particularly thinking students were concerned,  
22        and there was a very large majority of such students in those days. But our political  
23        awareness was something that we worked out or forged to some extent for ourselves. We  
24        weren't really in touch with what was going on in the country - we didn't have links with  
25        I won't say the Liberal Party - because the Liberal Party had hardly come into existence  
26        then - we weren't really aware of what was happening in the ANC and in the Liberation  
27        Movements. We were, as it were, pulling ourselves up by own bootstraps, beginning to  
28        becomes more aware, but in the 1950s, as in the 1940s, I think the different communities  
29        were really very, very apart from one another except for those very few individuals who  
30        had enough confidence and knew enough about what was going on to be able to move  
31        across out of their own social and ethnic grouping into another one.

32  
33        R:     And you found a lot of students that were compatible and you got on well with them and  
34        you were working things out together.  
35

4

1 C: No, we were - it wasn't - it was quite a lot of students if one considered the NCFS and  
2 more particularly NUSAS as a whole. NCFS was concerned with many specifically  
3 religious matters as well as the social implications of religion, but NUSAS in those days  
4 was almost entirely interested in the political situation. There were a lot of students there  
5 - but when one came to the 'Maritzburg campus it was often quite a small body of  
6 students in those days - I - I'm not sure what the number of students was on this campus  
7 in the years when I was an undergraduate between 1951 and 1953, but I would guess that  
8 it was not much more than a thousand, and of those - and it was entirely white I must say:  
9 there were no students who weren't white - the number who could be said to be  
10 politically aware and moving in a left wing direction was not very great - it wouldn't  
11 have been much more than fifty to eighty odd, and most people, of course particularly  
12 students of (if I may say so) subjects like Agriculture and Science, showed very little  
13 signs of even knowing that a political situation existed, let alone having any attitude  
14 towards it.  
15  
16 R: I think the only group at that stage being - having their parents, their fathers being in the  
17 War - because it was the ex-servicemen being put together in the various racial groupings  
18 that produced a magazine like 'Fighting Talk', for instance - but that would have been a  
19 very small group.  
20  
21 C: I think it was, and I would say - without being too confident about that - I would say that  
22 largely, by the end of the 1950s, the effect of being in the War and of people fighting  
23 together meant that some white people were saying 'Look we must really - we must  
24 really seek for justice for these people who have been fighting on the same side as we  
25 were.' Ever since that war-time feeling, it becomes an outright political one, I think.  
26 Particularly White South Africans had begun to settle back into their own niche which  
27 was of course a segregated one and one in which there wasn't a great deal of - certainly  
28 very little contact between peoples of other racial groups.  
29  
30 R: Of course, of course... so that we are now in about 1953?  
31  
32 C: Yes.  
33  
34 R: '54 you did your Honours.  
35  
36 C: Yes, and again I have to say that I was very caught up in my - my academic studies. I did  
37 well, it was, it was interesting and exciting for me - I used to enjoy my work. When we

1 were asked to do an essay, in one subject or another or on one topic or another, it was  
2 always a challenge and an excitement. But at the same time my involvement in NCFS  
3 and NUSAS was, was quite serious, quite earnest, though I have to say looking back on it  
4 - after all these years it doesn't really seem to amount to much. Then in 1954 I  
5 completed my Honours degree, and soon after that I managed to get a place at Oxford  
6 where I was going to continue with my study in English. And by then the notion of  
7 attempting to get a lectureship in English at a university had occurred to me. Also,  
8 incidentally, I had done well in French, which was my other major subject in third year,  
9 and I was offered a scholarship of some kind at Paris. But I turned that down, as I felt  
10 that going on in the language and the literature that I was not closest to made no sense,  
11 but nevertheless in the first half of 1955 I found myself - much to my surprise - a junior  
12 lecturer in the French Department, teaching mainly those students who - who do the  
13 special French course, in other words, starting French from scratch. I have to say, as an  
14 example of the way in which, for all our earnest concerns, we were cut off from the main  
15 stream of what was going on in the political life of the country (and this being cut off was  
16 to some extent due I think to the newspapers: the mainstream newspapers of the time  
17 which showed very little interest as far as I can remember in what would then have been  
18 called 'non-white politics'). But it was on my twenty-first birthday, on June the 26<sup>th</sup>,  
19 1955, that the Freedom Charter was accepted.

20  
21 R: Oh yes, of course.

22  
23 C: And I wasn't aware of it - I have to...

24  
25 R: And may I ask you another question?

26  
27 C: ...it says something about my past that I didn't know what was happening on my twenty-  
28 first birthday, I wasn't aware: so far from being at Kliptown myself, I didn't even know  
29 that there was this huge gathering at Kliptown - fascinating to me in retrospect - that a  
30 person in my position, a seemingly thoughtful, young intellectual, of white skin, was able  
31 to be to that extent out of touch with politics.

32  
33 R: And what you haven't mentioned - was the Bantu Education Act in 1953, where  
34 Verwoerd said that most of the population could not progress beyond standard three.  
35 How and where were you at that time, because there was a lot in the press at the time?

36  
37 C: Yes, we were aware of that, and indeed, that Act created a sense of outrage, and I

1 remember that was one of the topics that was dealt with in a little journal that we called  
2 'NUX Magazine' - to distinguish it from the NUX newspaper, which came out every two  
3 or three weeks - a little journal, NUX Magazine, which was edited during our third year -  
4 1953 - by John Deane and myself, and we collected articles from different people who  
5 wanted to discuss this or that, and we had occasional short stories or poems. I think about  
6 five or six copies of NUX Magazine came out, and John Deane and I used to write the  
7 editorials, and as far as I remember they were mainly about politics and certainly we  
8 talked about the Bantu Education Act, although I think even with that our commentary on  
9 things was probably a little bit amateurish, a little bit unaware of African education - it  
10 wasn't really...

11  
12 R: Yes... Colin, before we proceed with the various lectureships that you've taken up, tell  
13 me a bit about your interest in sport when you were at school - when you were at the  
14 Maritzburg College for instance..

15  
16 C: Well, I had, as an ordinary London schoolboy, playing soccer or football. I had never  
17 come across anybody who played rugby, though I had vaguely heard of the game and I  
18 assumed that it was played by people who were in schools of far higher social status than  
19 the one that I was at. When I got to Maritzburg College I found that sport was a big thing  
20 and that rugby was a very important thing. I quite enjoyed sport: I was quite good at it,  
21 so I learnt to play rugby, and that was okay. I played for various Maritzburg College  
22 teams - the under-fourteen B and the under-fifteen B and so on: I was quite good at  
23 rugby. I used to play rugby on Saturday mornings. But I continued to play soccer and I  
24 used to play soccer on Saturday afternoons, which didn't interfere with any of my  
25 College commitments, but the word got around that 'Gardner plays soccer.' And this was  
26 considered to be really an almost disreputable activity at the time. In fact I was good at  
27 soccer: I became the vice-captain of the Natal Schools side, and when I went to  
28 University, I continued playing soccer. I captained the university side and in fact in 1952  
29 played for the South African University side, for which I was awarded a half blue. I  
30 didn't play in the inter-varsity tournament after that, because I used to go to NCFS  
31 conferences in July and they always overlapped with the soccer tournament. But it was  
32 probably, to some extent, because of my qualities as a soccer player that I got a Rhodes  
33 Scholarship in 1956. And the fascinating thing about this was that it was the first Rhodes



1 Scholarship that anybody from College had got for seven or eight years. So it was quite  
2 an important thing for College. Now the person who had been headmaster while I was at  
3 Maritzburg College, was a person called Hudson, John Willie Hudson, and it so happens  
4 that after he had left College, retired, he was asked to go and be headmaster at Hilton,  
5 which had been having some difficulties. So he found himself headmaster of Hilton and -  
6 and by coincidence - my brother happened to be at a dance at Hilton, at the time when  
7 the news got through that Gardner of Maritzburg College had got a Rhodes Scholarship.  
8 And my brother happened to be at the same table as John Willie Hudson when this news  
9 came through, and he was delighted that a Maritzburg College boy had got a Rhodes  
10 Scholarship, because although he was then at Hilton, his real love was Maritzburg  
11 College. And then he said, after he had expressed his pleasure. 'Gardner, Gardner - there  
12 was something wrong with him, ...' He stopped and he thought.. 'I know - he played  
13 soccer!'

14  
15 R: How lovely!

16  
17 C: So in other words the, the great event in that part of College history was blotted by the  
18 fact that I wasn't really a reputable person.

19  
20 R: Absolutely - because you had got your Rhodes Scholarship through the back door!

21  
22 C: Well, I suppose so. I mean I don't think - I don't know how important my soccer was in  
23 the decision of the Committee, but certainly it was a very disturbing and perplexing thing  
24 for John Willie Hudson.

25  
26 R: This absolutely gives the ethos of the school - it really does.

27  
28 C: Yes.

29  
30 R: Well now, you were taking up this lectureship in the French Department and then you  
31 moved to Oxford.

32  
33 C: That's right. I went to Oxford in October 1955 and was there for two years, and in my  
34 last months there - by the time I'd taken my - uh - I was getting ready to take my final  
35 examinations, I decided that I would try applying for lectureships in South Africa. I can't  
36 remember whether I looked at newspapers myself or whether somebody in South Africa  
37 sent me adverts - I really can't remember about that - but I applied for a job at UNISA  
38 and got it. I arrived back in South Africa, on something like the 15th of August, 1959,  
39 and I went almost immediately to UNISA to take up this post. I was at UNISA.. Sorry...  
40

1 R: It was '56.  
2  
3 C: Beg your pardon, '57, and I was at UNISA from the middle of '57 'till the middle of '59.  
4 Mary McCauley, whom I had met on the campus in 'Maritzburg, in fact, first at a  
5 meeting of the Students' Catholic Union in 1951 - we had been more or less, though not  
6 really formally, engaged for most of the time since we first met. We decided that we  
7 would get married when I came back. She came up to Bloemfontein to meet me: my  
8 parents were there; my father was then Professor of English at the University of the  
9 Orange Free State. I went down to Pietermaritzburg in September '57 and we had an  
10 engagement party at which many of our old friends from the SCU, from the campus,  
11 came; and then we married in early 1958. While I was in Pretoria, I joined the Liberal  
12 Party..  
13  
14 R: In Pretoria?  
15  
16 C: In Pretoria, yes. I joined the Liberal Party: there was quite an active small branch of the  
17 Liberal Party in Pretoria. I remember going to a meeting - I think the first time I met  
18 Peter Brown personally was when he came up to address a meeting of the Pretoria  
19 Liberal Party. It was quite an active branch, I was more and more committed to what the  
20 Liberal Party was doing, so that when I got down to 'Maritzburg, in the middle of '59,  
21 one of the first things I did was to link up with the Liberal Party in Pietermaritzburg.  
22 Another thing to say about my time in Pretoria is that I spent quite a lot of time with  
23 Catholic organisations, Catholics who were on the whole forward-thinking people and  
24 who were beginning to see more and more clearly the implications of Christianity for the  
25 socio-political situation of South Africa. I was particularly friendly with a person called  
26 Colin Collins, a priest who was then the Secretary of the South African Bishops'  
27 Conference, and he was at that stage beginning to move more and more to the left. He  
28 later became much involved with the Student Christian Movement, was hunted by the  
29 police, and left the country hurriedly and went to ...  
30  
31 R: This man was very well known - from the press...  
32  
33 C: Yes, later went to Canada, and is now in Australia. So that was a part of my political  
34 growth and education at the time. The link with progressive Catholics and the link with  
35 the Liberal Party - though still I wasn't deeply involved in the sense that I hadn't had to  
36 put myself on the line in any way. I continued with my teaching at UNISA. I can't say

1 that I was involved in anything that was in any way particularly daring or momentous.

2  
3 R: Were you - did you belong to the Kolbe Association when you were there?

4  
5 C: Yes, also...

6  
7 R: ...and what was ...

8  
9 C: ...also there was a branch of the Kolbe Association. I'm trying to remember how I -  
10 certainly there was a strong branch in Johannesburg - there were a few Kolbe Association  
11 members in Pretoria, and then when we came down to Pietermaritzburg there was a  
12 branch of the Kolbe Association here. But the Kolbe Association was at that stage to  
13 some extent a prolongation: there were older people in it who had been around for some  
14 time, but it was a prolongation of the kind of intellectual activity which had taken place  
15 in the National Catholic Federation of Students. I may say another thing about my  
16 involvement: something I've only just remembered was that when I was at Oxford I  
17 became a member of the International Committee of a body called PAX ROMANA,  
18 which is or was the international union of Catholic students, and in fact in my capacity as  
19 a member of that Committee I went to a very interesting conference just before I got  
20 married. In fact, it all lasted three weeks. It was from mid-December 1957 until the end  
21 of the first week of 1958, in Ghana. I was with an international body of Catholic students,  
22 including a delegation of twenty-five from South Africa, people of all races. We had  
23 first the conference, and then there was a work camp: a group of about thirty or forty of  
24 us were building roads with pickaxes in the Ghanaian midday sun. It was quite an  
25 experience, and in fact I arrived back from Ghana only one week before my wedding. It  
26 was a bit unfair, because it meant all the...

27  
28 R: ...all the others had to do ...

29  
30 C: ... all the organisation had to be done particularly by Mary and her family. One of the  
31 worrying things about being in Ghana was that people kept on going down with  
32 mysterious fevers, and it happened to - well out of our delegation of twenty-five, it  
33 happened to about fifteen of them at one time or another. They suddenly had this vastly  
34 high temperature, would flake out, look as if they were dying, and then get better, usually  
35 two days later. And we were told by a doctor then that, of all the fevers that people get in  
36 Ghana, only about five percent are ever identified. So in other words - from living in,  
37 well I think it's been called the 'White Man's Grave' - I was living in Africa - a rather

1 worrying situation. I didn't get ill, but what I did do was to pick up a germ of an illness  
2 which blossomed while I was on honeymoon.

3  
4 R: Oh what bad luck.

5  
6 C: And that was measles!

7  
8 R: Oh goodness me Colin!

9  
10 C: So about six days after being on honeymoon - while we were honeymooning in the  
11 midlands near New Hanover - I suddenly got a terrible temperature and felt awful, and a  
12 nearby mission doctor was called in and he announced that I'd got measles. And I was  
13 blotto for half of our honeymoon. So that was one of the effects of - but the fact is that  
14 going to Ghana is another indication of the degree to which my Catholic involvement and  
15 a progressive or liberal political involvement were associated with my belief, because this  
16 was a big high profile conference, and while at it I met and shook hands with Kwame  
17 Nkrumah, and also with the leader of the opposition at the time, whose name was  
18 Professor Busia? So we suddenly found ourselves right in the middle of the evolving  
19 African political life, because that was about six months after Ghana's Independence.

20  
21 R: I found this when interviewing Vera Cebekhulu and his association with the Young  
22 Christian Workers: for South Africans, in the way the country was developing,  
23 international links were absolutely invaluable...

24  
25 C: I think so.

26  
27 R: ..in opening horizons - particularly perhaps for black students, but also for whites.

28  
29 C: I think that is true, yes. But already the South African question was important in the  
30 outside world because I remember - I think the group of us who were actually introduced  
31 to Nkrumah - we shook his hand - were the members of the Steering Committee. So the  
32 only South African who shook his hand was myself, and I remember as I shook hands  
33 with him - someone kept on saying 'this is so and so from Portugal, this is so and so from  
34 Indonesia, this is Colin Gardner from South Africa.', and he said - in his deep voice -  
35 'South Africa?' as if to say - 'well I wouldn't have expected to see you here..'

36  
37 R: Yes, quite..

38  
39 C: So it was quite an interesting...

40  
41 R: I think so - I think so..

42  
43 C: But yes, so in that sense, religious and political things were involved together and have to

1 quite a large extent continued to be so in my life, as I will point out when we get on to  
2 the Christian Institute later... but now where have we reached?

3  
4 R: Well, we had reached...Here we go..

5  
6 C: Alright, well, so - I moved down to Pietermaritzburg to become a lecturer in English at  
7 the campus here. I remember it very well: it was June the 26<sup>th</sup> - African Freedom Day and  
8 also my twenty-fifth birthday - exactly four years, then, after the signing of the Freedom  
9 Charter. I joined the Liberal Party and was soon - or shall we say I linked up with the  
10 Liberal Party branch as soon as I got here - but most of that first few months was spent  
11 adjusting to teaching. Then at the beginning of 1960 we found ourselves facing dramatic  
12 events. There was Macmillan's 'Winds of Change' speech, then Sharpeville, then the  
13 State of Emergency, and three prominent members of the 'Maritzburg Liberal Party were  
14 detained in March - Peter Brown, Hans Meidner, from the Botany Department, and  
15 Derick Marsh from the English Department - one of my close colleagues, and a person I  
16 had known also when I was a student here. And so we found ourselves really in the  
17 middle of dramatic circumstances. I was myself probably a bit more involved in Liberal  
18 Party activities then than Derick Marsh who had been chairman of the local branch a year  
19 or two earlier but had withdrawn to quite a large extent because of his wife's illness. The  
20 current chairman, Jack Spence, of the Politics Department - Historical and Political  
21 Studies Department - was convinced that the Special Branch would be looking for him  
22 and so slept for a number of weeks in a different house every night. But probably, in  
23 retrospect, the Special Branch weren't looking for him because it looks as if all their  
24 documents were out of date and they thought that the Derick Marsh they'd got was the  
25 chairman of the local branch - which was what they were looking for. There are many  
26 stories about the general ineptitude of the Special Branch at that time, including one of  
27 their knocking up - at two o' clock in the morning - the owner of the house that Derick  
28 Marsh had lived in some months earlier. This person obviously objected to being thrown  
29 into jail for no apparent reason, and some of the police said 'It's no good, Mr Marsh.'  
30 ...and he realised that they'd got the wrong person! So I mean there was certainly an  
31 element of farce about it all. But it was a dramatic time - 1960 in Pietermaritzburg: one  
32 was aware then of close friends in jail, one knew about the marches of Africans in  
33 Durban and Cape Town - one didn't know which way the political current was going to

1 flow. The Government was acting with an oppressive vigour that we hadn't really seen  
2 before. It was all nerve wracking; one was doing one's university teaching under  
3 considerable stress. Then towards the end of that year, both Derick Marsh and Geoffrey  
4 Durrant decided to leave the country. Geoffrey Durrant in fact went on six months  
5 sabbatical leave, but it was fairly clear that he was going to take the opportunity to look  
6 for a job elsewhere, and he did in fact get an appointment at the University of Manitoba  
7 in Winnipeg, and Derick Marsh at the end of the year went to a Senior Lectureship at the  
8 University of Sydney. And so from that moment onwards I had a strong sense of being  
9 one of those left behind, while others had taken the perhaps wise decision to go and  
10 pursue their lives in a more sane society. I had friends who in the next year or two went  
11 to universities in Australia, in Canada, in America, and especially in Britain. And their  
12 going made me think a great deal about what I was doing or trying to do in South Africa.  
13 I came then to the conclusion that if I was going to stay here - I decided I was going to - I  
14 could only do it if I was going to spend quite a lot of my time and energy positively  
15 trying to change the situation here. I didn't feel that I could justify simply being an  
16 academic in South Africa. If I wanted to be simply an academic then I would have to go  
17 and work in some other country. So from then onwards I felt myself to be part academic,  
18 part activist of some sort. Nevertheless my academic life continued. In 1962 I became a  
19 Senior Lecturer - I was presumably fit for such a promotion at that time because I was  
20 simultaneously offered a Senior Lectureship at Rhodes University, Grahamstown. But I  
21 have to say that I had a sense that I was moving into something of a vacuum, so many  
22 good academics, particularly in the Arts - particularly in a subject like English - had left  
23 the country. I don't think I would have become a Senior Lecturer at that moment in my  
24 career if there wasn't this - this gap. That too, I think, in retrospect, gave me a sense of  
25 responsibility. I was to some extent stepping into the shoes of people who were no  
26 longer around, and I felt, particularly then, the urgency of the task of trying to make  
27 South Africa a country that we could live in - and as a Christian too, I felt, and have  
28 always felt, that one could never really live one's life as if socio-political realities weren't  
29 relevant. One couldn't really be a Christian and not recognise the implications for one as  
30 a Christian of living in the kind of society that we had in South Africa. So on both those  
31 scores I felt - I felt committed, I felt that I couldn't be - let me put it this way - an

1 ordinary academic, and in that respect I have to say that I was, I suppose, to some extent,  
2 throughout the 60's, '70's and '80's, at loggerheads with a number of my colleagues on  
3 the University side (not with members of the English Department) - none of whom could  
4 understand how academic seriousness and socio-political commitment flowed into each  
5 other. I was rather more committed than other members of the English Department -  
6 especially after somebody like Derick Marsh, someone like Geoffrey Durrant had left -  
7 but my colleagues in the English Department, and some of my colleagues in the Faculty  
8 of Arts and related subjects, understood my general position. But certainly I think many  
9 people in Faculties like Agriculture and Science regarded me as something - something  
10 of an oddball, and they really didn't see how spending one's time trying in whatever way  
11 to change the life of society was something that an academic should be doing. And I  
12 have to say that I have had to smile to myself on a number of occasions, when, since  
13 1990, large numbers of University staff members have assured everybody that they were  
14 always totally opposed to apartheid. I have no doubt that in a general sense that is true - I  
15 don't think we've had many people on the University staff who were supporters of  
16 apartheid - but a very large proportion of academics during the apartheid years did not  
17 see it as in any way a part of their responsibility - as academics, or as human beings - to  
18 do anything which would suggest dissent, protest or a desire to change things. Well, I  
19 said then that in becoming a Senior Lecturer I had some sense of moving into a vacuum  
20 which had been left by other people who had decided to go elsewhere. I was quite active  
21 in the Liberal Party in those days and I began to become - I began to move up the  
22 hierarchy of the Liberal Party - if one can really talk of anything so grand as a hierarchy  
23 in the Liberal Party, and there too I was moving into a gap. A gap left not only by  
24 Liberals who had left the country, and there were of course a number of those, but a gap  
25 left also by Liberals who had been silenced by banning orders. In the years 1962 to 1964  
26 or 5 - I don't know the exact numbers, but something like seventy or eighty members of  
27 the Liberal party were banned, so that as people became inactive, there was more work  
28 for those who were still able to be active to do. In Pietermaritzburg Peter Brown was  
29 hanned, John Aitchison was banned, Heather Morkel was banned - a string of Liberals.  
30 There were of course people in other organisations who were banned too, and we began  
31 to draw up a kind of list of who would be the likely victims - to be got next - and I by that

1 stage had become quite high up on that list. Some people in fact put me on the top of the  
2 list as the next Liberal to be banned. Then suddenly, in about 1965 I think it was, the  
3 government changed its policy: they stopped banning Liberals and people of that kind. I  
4 think it was partly that they were already beginning to think of the Public Interference  
5 Act, but they also began to decide that the people who they really disliked and wanted to  
6 interrogate or intimidate - or torture - they would get under the 90 or 180 day detention  
7 clause. So there was a switch from banning to detention, and that may be the reason why  
8 I - I was never banned. Still, as I say, I began to become a member of more and more  
9 Liberal Party Committees: I was a member of the Natal Executive of the Liberal Party. I  
10 remember a group of us from Pietermaritzburg would drive down for executive meetings,  
11 and Edgar Brookes, Marie Dyer, Selby Msimang, myself - a few other people from time  
12 to time - would drive down to these meetings, which were held at the house of Alan  
13 Paton. So we'd go to those about once a month, and then a little bit later I found myself a  
14 member of the National Executive of what was then - one has to say - a very much  
15 thinned-down Liberal Party.

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17 (End of first side).  
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