

**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

Second interview with Colin Gardner  
 conducted by Ruth Lundie  
 on 29 July 1998  
 at the Alan Paton Centre

The interviewee has agreed to open access for use by researchers,  
 students and members of the public.

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2 **KWAZULU-NATAL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

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4 **AND INTERVIEW WITH COLIN GARDNER**  
5 **CONDUCTED BY RUTH LUNDIE**  
6 **ON 29 JULY 1998 AT THE ALAN PATON CENTRE**

7  
8 (Second Side of Tape 1)

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10  
11 R: The second discussion with Professor Colin Gardner - at the Alan Paton Centre on the 29<sup>th</sup> of  
12 July 1998. Colin, we started to discuss country visits with the Liberal Party - would you like to  
13 take up the story there?

14  
15 C: Yes, well one of the activities of Pietermaritzburg members of the Liberal Party was to go  
16 and talk to the fairly large number of Liberal Party members who lived in the country districts of  
17 Natal, and so from time to time groups of us would go to talk at places like Bergville, Ladysmith,  
18 the areas near Ladysmith - I'm not very good now at remembering the names of the particular  
19 places, but broadly speaking the Liberal Party membership in the Natal country districts came  
20 about because the Liberal Party had campaigned actively against the government policy of the  
21 moving of what it called 'Black Spots', so it was particularly where these so called Black Spots  
22 existed that there were often quite large numbers of Liberal Party supporters. So we would go up  
23 - say two of us, perhaps from the University. I remember going up sometimes with post-graduate  
24 students: we would find the place we were going to, and we would meet the local chairperson,  
25 and we would talk about what was going on in the country, the Liberal Party's reaction to what  
26 the government was doing. We would speak in English and somebody from the area would  
27 translate what we said into Zulu. Part of the ritual was that the Security Police always found out  
28 where these meetings were taking place: they had spies, they tapped telephones. For them it was  
29 a point of honour always to pitch up at these meetings to show that they were keeping tabs on  
30 everybody: they'd come to the meetings and they would use a tape recorder and tape everything  
31 that was said. This was partly for their records, no doubt, but was it partly also for ongoing

1 intimidation. so that it was made clear to everybody that anything that was said at a  
2 Liberal Party meeting was going to be noted by the police. There was often a certain amount of -  
3 well - partly hostile, but at times almost good-humoured banter between the Liberal Party  
4 speakers and the Security Police. I remember on one occasion when I was talking, saying that I  
5 was surprised that the Security Policeman was sitting on the platform behind me. Why didn't he  
6 sit in front of me, because when I spoke my voice came out of the front of my head and not the  
7 back of my head? This created a good deal of amusement in the audience and annoyed the  
8 Security Policeman who felt that as a white person he was being humiliated in front of a crowd  
9 of blacks. And it could be a few little incidents of that sort which made the Security Police  
10 determined to charge Liberal Party people from time to time. It was also part of their way of  
11 trying to discipline anything that was really opposed to apartheid. And what happened to me  
12 was that while speaking at one of these meetings, it was a meeting to protest the banning of Peter  
13 Brown (I think Peter Brown was banned in June or July 1964, so we had a meeting in August, or  
14 perhaps early September), I made the mistake of quoting something that Peter Brown had said. It  
15 was something quite straightforward and harmless like 'we must continue to strive even though  
16 members of our party get silenced.' It was a fairly innocuous thing, nevertheless I had said  
17 'Peter Brown said...' and then used these words, and of course I was breaking the law by doing  
18 that because you weren't allowed to quote a banned person. I discovered in the next week or so  
19 that the Security Police had seized upon this and that they were going to construct a case against  
20 me. Now they had my words on tape and so I would have thought that would have been enough  
21 for a court case, but presumably magistrates and judges are not always convinced that tape  
22 recordings haven't been messed around with, so they decided that they would try and get  
23 evidence from people who were at the meeting. We heard that they had gone round talking to  
24 person after person who was at the meeting, or who they thought was probably at the meeting,  
25 because of course they had tabs on almost all Liberal Party members and of course also  
26 questioning people was a part of the general intimidation process: if you went to a Liberal Party  
27 meeting somebody might get charged and you would be questioned by the police and maybe  
28 dragged into court to give evidence. I was, I must say, rather touched to hear that the police were  
29 finding great difficulty getting the evidence they wanted - that one person said that he happened  
30 to be at the house of the main group (?) and at the toilet when I spoke, and others said, no, they

1 couldn't remember my saying anything of this sort. And so they had quite a lot of difficulty in  
2 assembling the case. Nevertheless they were determined to go ahead with it, and about ten days  
3 or two weeks later I was called up to the CID headquarters in Loop Street and was solemnly told  
4 that I was going to be charged under some particular section of - I suppose it was the  
5 Suppression of Communism Act. The only thing I can remember about the name of the section  
6 they read out was that it ended with the word 'Bis' - and it was something to do with , you know,  
7 some legal formulation of an obscure and absurd sort. I had by then spoken to a Liberal Party  
8 lawyer, Simon Roberts, and he'd said 'Don't say a thing to them.' So when they asked if I  
9 wanted to make any statement, I said 'No: my lawyer has advised me to say nothing.' And they  
10 were very polite and they said 'No, I didn't mean to say...': they weren't trying to make me say  
11 anything. They just wanted me to know in good time that I was going to be charged with this  
12 offence. So I spent a few weeks waiting for the summons or whatever you would call it -  
13 whatever it would have been - to reach me. Meanwhile, Simon Roberts thought he would  
14 conduct his own little campaign of intimidation: so he spoke to me several times over the phone,  
15 knowing of course that both his phone and my phone were tapped - as all Liberal Party members  
16 were tapped in those days - and the point that he made, very vigorously, was that he was looking  
17 forward to the case because the police were going to make 'bloody fools of themselves..' as he  
18 put it a number of times - very emphatically. And I have often wondered whether it wasn't  
19 Simon Roberts's taking up that particular attitude which eventually made the police decide to  
20 drop the case. They may also of course have dropped it for strategic reasons: other cases of a  
21 more obviously high-profile nature were coming up. They may have felt that a petty charge  
22 against an otherwise respectable senior academic would not have been good for publicity. So the  
23 charge was dropped.

24 Another thing to say about these years was that I wrote a weekly leading article for the  
25 Natal Witness, from I think about 1962 to about 1964. And the articles I wrote were distinctly  
26 anti-government. There was no real problem about that from the Witness's point of view,  
27 because the Witness had maintained, by white South African newspapers' standards at that time,  
28 a fairly strong anti-government line. But of course it had been watered down in various ways and  
29 my leading articles were also regarded as on the whole going about as far left as one could - and  
30 at times I was aware of the fact that the Editor was not quite happy with some of the things that I

1 found myself saying. The interesting thing about the Editor, and about my conversations  
2 with him, was this: his name was Stanley Eldridge and he had come up I think through the  
3 Witness, through the newspaper industry. He was not, as far as I could see, a person with a  
4 university background - there was no reason why he should have been - but he seemed to have a  
5 bit of sense that somebody like me was a typical university type, and he used to talk from time to  
6 time about 'we people in town and you people on the hill in Scottsville..' with the distinct  
7 implication that he knew what was really happening in life and that we were living in an ivory  
8 tower and weren't really aware of realities. Another interesting thing about him was that he was  
9 a very large, thick-set man, and I suppose, not that I'm all that small, that I must have seemed a  
10 fairly small figure in relation to him, and after I had met him once or twice I remembered that we  
11 had met before - when I had played soccer at the University in the early 1950's. I was then quite  
12 young, and I suppose even smaller than I am now, and Stan Eldridge used to play - I was a right  
13 winger - he used to play left back for one of the Pietermaritzburg sides - Shamrocks - and we had  
14 a number of encounters in which the dodgy little winger tried to get round this solid fortress-like  
15 character whose job it was to prevent me getting close to the goal. So, I would try and dip and  
16 weave to get round him, and he would stand there more or less immovable - and quite often stop  
17 me getting past him, but not by any means always as far as I remember. And somehow as I  
18 spoke to him as Editor and tried to explain why I'd said something, some particular thing, in  
19 these leading articles I produced, and he objected that I was being 'too radical' or typical of  
20 'unrealistic university people', I just had a sense that this was as it were an intellectual equivalent  
21 of our earlier meetings on the soccer field, ten years or so earlier.

22 R:I am sure...

23 C:Alright, to come back to the Liberal Party - as I think I may have said (I'm not quite sure what  
24 is on the previous tape now) I found myself moving up the hierarchy of the Liberal Party - if you  
25 can call it that, if it deserved such a grand name - partly because Liberal Party people were  
26 falling by the wayside in the sense that they were being banned at an enormous rate. Between  
27 about 1961 or '62 and 1965, I think seventy or eighty leading Liberal Party people were banned -  
28 which meant that they were silenced; they were unable to live overt political existences. And so,  
29 yes, there was a lot of room for people like myself to move up. I became a member of the Natal  
30 Executive - I remember we used to go and have meetings at Alan Paton's house in Kloof - and  
31  
32

1 later I became a member of the National Executive. And in fact, curiously, at the time  
2 when the Liberal party finally decided that it had to close up shop - and I'll say a little bit more  
3 about that in a moment - I found myself Acting National Chairman. The National Chairman at  
4 that time was Dr Edgar Brookes, but he happened to be overseas, lecturing I think at Duke  
5 University at the time, and so there had to be an acting person - I found myself in his place....  
6 Now the reason that the Liberal Party closed was of course because of the so called Improper  
7 Interference Act - that's probably not its full name - and the government, of course, decided, in  
8 its apartheid madness, that a state had been reached where for white people and people of other  
9 races even to get together to talk about matters political, constituted an interference by one of the  
10 groups in the affairs of the other group! So it was taboo for a white person and an African to  
11 have a conversation at all... I mean if you look back on it: it meant that each was interfering with  
12 the other...

13  
14 R: Did it apply if you weren't having a private conversation with a black?

15  
16 C: Well, certainly it applied as far as official political groupings were concerned, so that, as I say,  
17 this is I suppose the ultimate point in apartheid - that for whites and blacks even to discuss  
18 politics was mutual 'interference', you see. Anyhow we decided at the Liberal Party that to hell  
19 with this: we were going to go ahead, and instead of bowing out graciously and carrying out the  
20 government's wishes, we would carry on and let them jolly well ban us or prosecute us or  
21 whatever. And that's what we would have done, but we found out - I'm not sure how we found  
22 out, but our lawyers obviously talked to Afrikaner lawyers whom they knew, who were in the  
23 know - and it became clear, and I'm sure this was so, that if we had continued, what the  
24 government would have done would be to have prosecuted the Black members of the Liberal  
25 Party.

26  
27 R: Oh, I see...

28  
29 C: So in other words, they would have made up their minds that the Liberal Party as far as they  
30 were concerned was a white party, even though I think the black and white membership at that  
31 time was probably roughly fifty fifty - they would have decided that it was a white party and  
32 therefore the blacks were interfering with the whites...

33  
34 R: Oh I see...

35  
36 C: ... to protest...

37

1 R:How clever too!

2  
3 C:Clever too - because what it meant then was that we all sat down in a room and decided - I  
4 mean a group of whites and fairly well-heeled blacks, professional Blacks - we could sit down  
5 and decide that we need go ahead with the party - but meanwhile it would have been particularly  
6 the Africans in places like Bergville and Ladysmith, the sorts of people who would refuse to hear  
7 when I had quoted Peter Brown - they would be the sort of people who would suddenly find that  
8 they had been breaking the law by being members, and we thought *that* really would be totally  
9 unacceptable. And so it was on the strength of that that we decided that we simply had to  
10 disband, to call the Party to an end, because we didn't want anything of that sort to happen. So it  
11 was in 1968 that the Liberal Party was blotted out. It wasn't quite the end of the Liberal Party  
12 because of course the liberals continued and they continued to hold their views: their views  
13 continued in various ways to permeate into society and of course if we look at the history of the  
14 years from 1968 to 1990 one finds that liberal views really, in the end, came out pretty well. I  
15 should say particularly about that vote: one way in which we decided that the Liberal Party *could*  
16 continue was by keeping the Liberal Party Journal...

17  
18 R:*Contact*?

19  
20 C:No, *Contact* had come to an end I think

21  
22 R:Oh...

23  
24 C:*Liberal Opinion*.

25  
26 R:Oh yes.

27  
28 C:There was a Liberal Party journal called *Liberal Opinion*. And we decided that it would be a  
29 little bit too provocative simply to call it 'Liberal Opinion' because it was very associated with  
30 the Party. One of the people in a lot of our discussions then was Tony Mathews, a Professor of  
31 Law, who was pretty good at working out what could and couldn't be done legally. We thought  
32 that if it was really essentially a journal or magazine, you could hardly prosecute a journal for  
33 being a political party. So what we did was we decided to change the name slightly to 'a journal  
34 of liberal opinion': we called it *Reality: a Journal of Liberal Opinion*. So people in the know  
35 realised that this was a continuation of Liberal Party activity.

36  
37 R:And the word 'liberal' was maintained in the sub-title.

38  
39 C:It remained - oh indeed - *Liberal Opinion* was maintained, and I have no doubt that the

1 government noticed this, and I have no doubt that their lawyers told them there was nothing  
2 they could really do about it: you couldn't say that a journal constituted improper interference!  
3 That would have been something their legal people would have drawn back from. Just to say a  
4 little bit about that. That journal was started the year that the Liberal Party had to close - 1968 -  
5 and it continued, I think, for the best part of twenty-five years. We finally came to the conclusion  
6 that it certainly wasn't hopeless, but there were other journals and magazines on the market that  
7 were doing a lot of the things that we had tried to do over the years. We carried on until I think  
8 1993: so it went on for almost exactly twenty-five years I think.

9  
10 R:That's a very good span isn't it?

11  
12 C:It did change a little bit. Just to say a little bit about that. In the 1970's and I'll say - I'll come  
13 back to this when I talk about Beyers Naude and the Christian Institute. In the 1970s there was  
14 of course a lot of development in political thinking within South Africa. There was a move away  
15 from traditional liberal thinking to what was felt to be more radical thinking. This radical  
16 thinking took various forms. There was the radicalness of Steve Biko and the Black  
17 Consciousness Movement. Of course they were quite critical of the Liberals who they felt were  
18 not prepared to push things far enough to really make a difference. There was also, in the 1970s,  
19 the radicalism of the Marxism which came onto the university campuses at about this time. By  
20 the end of the 1970s, all the universities had Marxist lecturers - or should we say, lecturers who  
21 were influenced by Marxist modes of thinking, in subjects like politics, sociology and so on. So  
22 in about the middle of the 1970s there was this move towards radicalism. Quite a discussion took  
23 place among the Board members of *Reality*. (I was a Board member, from first to last, right the  
24 way through - '68 to '93.) I was very much in favour of a change in our title, because I was  
25 afraid that if we carried on calling ourselves '*A Journal of Liberal Opinion*' at a time when a lot  
26 of the best thinking was describing itself as radical, and when liberals were beginning to seem a  
27 bit fuddy-duddy and old fashioned, and out of touch with what was going on - I was very much  
28 in favour of changing the title to '*Reality - A Journal of Liberal and Radical Opinion*', and that  
29 change was in fact made. I'm not sure exactly when we put it up, but round about the middle of  
30 the 1970s and...

31  
32 R:Yes, I remember that sub-title very clearly...

33  
34 C:So people clearly like Alan (Paton), though he accepted it, was a little wry about it and he

1 wrote a little poem about the fact that he was now not a liberal but a rad-liberal as he called it  
2 - an amusing poem which was published in *Reality*. But so much for *Reality*. Let me move  
3 then to something else and say of - I'm talking about myself: this is an autobiographical  
4 monologue - during the 1960s I had become a member of the newly formed Christian Institute. I  
5 think it started in '62 or '63, and I think I joined almost immediately; so I joined in '63 or so.  
6 The Christian Institute was a body started by Reverend Beyers Naude, who had been a high  
7 ranking member of the Dutch Reformed Church and (I don't need to say much about him: he's  
8 generally known about) he'd come to the conclusion that what the Dutch Reformed Church was  
9 doing, and what the government with the support of the Dutch Reformed Church was doing, was  
10 somehow wrong. He wasn't quite sure of the details of where it was wrong or what the  
11 alternatives would be, but he could no longer stand it all, and so he broke away. He was later  
12 kicked out of the DRC and he started this independent ecumenical organisation called the  
13 Christian Institute which would focus upon the implications of Christianity for the socio-political  
14 life of the country. And the interesting thing about Beyers Naude was that I really think at that  
15 stage he didn't really quite know where he was going. He just thought this was something that  
16 had to be done, and when the Christian Institute started it began as a very quiet sort of modest  
17 organisation. It invited people to join and to start up discussion groups within their area - where  
18 they were - and the focus of the discussion was bible studies, and they used to send out roneoed  
19 or photocopied (I can't remember) sheets suggesting questions that might be asked of particular  
20 biblical passages. I joined, I started a discussion group in Pietermaritzburg: it was non-racial,  
21 and people came and people went, and they didn't all come every time, and sometimes the group  
22 was only about six, but sometimes it swelled to about twenty. Broadly speaking it tended to be  
23 about fifteen and it was - yes, it was whites and Africans, more whites than Africans; there were  
24 some very notable African members and we used to meet once a month, I think, or was it once  
25 every three weeks, in St Saviour's Hall - and we'd get these - I'd get this information from  
26 Beyers Naude and the CI, and we'd hand them out and we'd look at a passage from the Bible and  
27 talk about it and discuss it in terms of the lives that they were living and the socio-political  
28 context. So it started in a very quiet way, but before long - it went on like that for several years -  
29 and then it became clear that people, particularly in Johannesburg I think, were saying that we  
30 must do more, we must organise other kinds of activities; we are not going to change the face of

1 South Africa by sitting around and having Bible Studies. So it began to become a little bit  
2 more activist and it moved away a little bit from the Bible-centeredness. It moved to other areas  
3 of discussion - topics were brought up for discussion which weren't necessarily religious in  
4 particular. I used to notice that Biblical references were always thrown in: Beyers had working  
5 for him. by this stage, a number of people who had left the DRC , so it managed to... Though it  
6 was ecumenical, and though it was obvious that people from a number of churches were joining -  
7 I mean some were Roman Catholic, and the people in the 'Maritzburg group tended to be mainly  
8 Anglicans or Methodists as far as I can remember... Although all the Christian denominations  
9 were beginning to get involved, still the leading members of the Christian Institute - as far as I  
10 know - at that stage were mainly disillusioned DRC ministers. So whenever they sent out  
11 something there were always lots of biblical references - so we were still remaining in that sense  
12 quite close to our biblical starting point - but it began to develop. And the Christian Institute  
13 became a slightly larger organisation and then they started - I can't remember the details of this -  
14 but people started beginning to be elected onto Committees, and I found that in 1970 (I think it  
15 was) I got elected - I'm not quite sure by what process - onto the National Board of  
16 Management. And so I began to go up, about every three months if I remember, to meetings of  
17 the Board of Management in Johannesburg, where the Christian Institute had its offices in  
18 Braamfontein - in Jorissen Street. I have to say that the Christian Institute always had money to  
19 pay for one's airfares to go up there ...

20  
21 R:Where did the money come from?

22  
23 C:The Christian Institute I think was fairly well subsidised by churches, particularly in Holland,  
24 Germany, and I know a variety of churches, I think Catholic churches, as well as the protestant  
25 churches. - you had a sense that this was something which was presented - as indeed it obviously  
26 was - as a Christian move against apartheid. So there were a lot of Christians in the outside  
27 world who were interested in this, and of course the fact that the Christian Institute got money  
28 from overseas churches to do what it was doing was one of the many things that began to  
29 infuriate the government... So when I started going to meetings in Johannesburg I got to know  
30 Beyers Naude. I had met him before, because he used to come on visits and he had met our  
31 discussion group once or twice I think over the period 1963 to 1970. As I say, when I got to  
32 Johannesburg I got a much more of a sense of what the Christian Institute was like and how it

1 was developing, and the interesting thing about the Christian Institute was the way in which it  
2 grew and changed from its starting point in 1963 to its ending point in 1977 when it was snuffed  
3 out - as so many things had been - by the government. And the central figure, undoubtedly, was  
4 Beyers Naude - although there were other very important people who worked with him - Theo  
5 Kotze, who was a Cape Regional Director of the Christian Institute; Brian Brown, a Methodist  
6 Minister who played an important part in the administration of the Christian Institute and was  
7 also a very committed Christian, determined to be involved in change; Manas Buthelezi, whom I  
8 later got to know very well. Manas Buthelezi, who is now a Bishop in the Lutheran Church, was  
9 appointed as the Natal Regional Director of the Christian Institute in the early 1970s and  
10 maintained that position until he was banned by the government. Beyers Naude, yes: he had  
11 begun as a DRC, very orthodox person with a totally conventional Afrikaner background, and  
12 suddenly he found himself, as it were, out in the cold: he put himself out in the cold. He didn't  
13 know quite what he was going to do. To start with I would say he was less aware of the socio-  
14 political realities and the socio-political connotations of Christianity than most of the Methodists,  
15 Anglicans and Catholics at the time were, but he was a remarkably alert person. He was a  
16 wonderful minister: he had a marvellously empathetic personality and he was particularly  
17 conscious of what was happening in the minds, not only of black Christians, but of blacks more  
18 generally; and from 1963 to 1977 he moved in what I think is a remarkable way - into a more  
19 and more radical position. He realised successively that there were more and more things in the  
20 whole setup that were intolerable. He found after a while that the things that he had objected to  
21 as a minister of the DRC were only the tip of the iceberg in the whole South African setup. Then  
22 he became more and more aware of the frightening injustices that Africans had to experience in  
23 their everyday lives. Particularly important I think is the way in which he responded  
24 sympathetically to the Black Consciousness Movement which began to develop of course in the  
25 1960s and early 1970s: he understood this very well and he went along with it. He felt that it was  
26 right that black South Africans and black Christians should do their own thing in their own way  
27 from their own point of view and that the job of white Christians would more and more become  
28 that of trying to turn other white people to a recognition of the true realities of South Africa. He  
29 believed at the same time - as indeed people like Steve Biko did - that blacks and whites had to  
30 have contact: they couldn't cut themselves off from each other as if each of them didn't exist.

1 and indeed the Christian Institute was - there were many throughout this period - a very  
2 good instance of a working black and white group. But nevertheless, the idea that at that stage in  
3 South African history black South Africans had to take the lead and had to devise their own ways  
4 of doing things was a view that the Christian Institute managed to promote, so much so that  
5 when the Christian Institute was banned on October the 19<sup>th</sup> 1977, it was one of sixteen  
6 organisations that were banned and the other fifteen were all explicitly Black Consciousness  
7 organizations: so as far as the government was concerned the Christian Institute had become a  
8 Black Consciousness organisation - even though of course it wasn't: it was a Christian  
9 organisation and it had plenty of whites in it and whites and blacks worked together within it.  
10 Now I became very much involved in the life of the Christian Institute and the Christian Institute  
11 in Johannesburg, because I spent quite a lot of time in Johannesburg. I used to go up for a whole  
12 weekend: that would mean going up on Friday afternoon and coming back late on Sunday  
13 evening, at least four times a year, sometimes six times a year. And from 1972 - I think it was  
14 '72 - until 1975, I was in fact the chairman, or chairperson as we would say nowadays, of the  
15 Board of Management of the Christian Institute, - so I met the national director, and I was rather  
16 touched when from time to time Beyers Naude would fly down to Pietermaritzburg to report to  
17 me on what was going on in the Christian Institute. I felt there was something a bit anomalous  
18 about that, because he was so obviously the leading figure and I was in a sense, a peripheral,  
19 interested academic.

20 R:Yes, but you...

21 C:Still, but still I was - I felt very much a part of the whole thing, and I have to say that my own  
22 thinking in these years was greatly influenced by the whole movement - the movement to the  
23 left, I suppose you could say - within the Christian Institute. Yes, let me just go off on a bit of a  
24 tangent and talk about another aspect of my own situation, and that was my being, throughout  
25 this period, a British citizen...

26 R:Oh yes...

27 C:If I could say something about that?

28 R:Yes, yes, do...

29 C:I'd come to South Africa with my parents and I arrived just too late to qualify automatically  
30 for South African citizenship because the Nationalist Government, when it came to power,  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36

1 wanting to stem the flow of immigrants from places like Britain, passed a retrospective law  
2 that you didn't become a South African citizen automatically if you had arrived in the country  
3 after a certain date - and I'd arrived, with my family, I think about two weeks after that date. So  
4 at the time I was a student at the University of Natal I was a British citizen, and I then went to  
5 Oxford for two years... I have to say by the way that I didn't say anything earlier about my  
6 Oxford experience. One of the effects of being at Oxford for two years and looking at South  
7 Africa from the standpoint of Europe was that I became more determined to return, and I became  
8 more determined than I had been before to get involved in, in some way, the political life of the  
9 country - from a radical point of view... So when I came back to South Africa to lecture at  
10 UNISA, I decided I would become a South African citizen after all. It didn't make sense to get  
11 involved in the life of a country and not be a citizen of the country. I seem to remember that I  
12 went to the Union Buildings. I went to some official, asked to become a South African citizen,  
13 told him my background, and he said that unfortunately I had been out of the country for more  
14 than two years - sorry: for more than one year - and that therefore I had to wait six years before I  
15 could even apply.

16  
17 R:Oh goodness me, yes?

18  
19 C:So that was 1957. so I would have had to wait till 1963 before I could apply. And by 1963 I  
20 was very fully involved in the Liberal Party and I think that to have applied for South African  
21 citizenship then would have put me in danger of simply being deported - because that happened  
22 to a number of people who got involved in politics in one way or another. So throughout the  
23 1960s I was in the position of wanting to be a South African citizen but feeling that it would be  
24 unwise to ask to be. Then in 1972 - which happened to be the same year as the one in which I  
25 became, as far as I remember, chairman of the Christian Institute Board of Management - I  
26 became professor on the campus, and I thought, 'Well, now that I'm a professor, perhaps I can  
27 safely apply for South African citizenship, as I wouldn't be a very easy person to deport.' So I  
28 spoke to Tony Mathews who was a member of the Law Faculty - a personal legal advisor. I  
29 suppose - and he said no, he thought it would be pretty reasonable for me to apply for South  
30 African citizenship. So I began the process of applying. The first thing I had to do was to send  
31 one's name to Pretoria and one's name got published in the Government Gazette, where it had to  
32 be displayed for a month before you could take the next step, which was filling in various forms

1 and sending them through to Pretoria, and getting police clearance and all sorts of  
2 horrible things of that kind. So anyhow that went ahead, but it was during the month in which my  
3 name was displayed, as it were, in the Government Gazette that the Christian Institute, of which I  
4 had by then become the Chairman, the Chairman of the Board of Management - the Christian  
5 Institute decided to defy the Schlebusch Commission, which was one of these nasty little  
6 commissions the government would set up in order to try and make respectable its desire to  
7 clamp down on certain bodies. It didn't like the Christian Institute as early as 1972, and they had  
8 this Schlebusch Commission, and the members of the Board decided they weren't going to have  
9 anything to do with it: they didn't believe in it. it was a sham: it wasn't a real commission. it  
10 was a totally government-orientated thing and it would be just a way of wanting to make the  
11 government's dislike seem respectable. That's why - I remember the *Sunday Times* had this  
12 headline: 'CI defies Schlebusch,' or words to that effect, so the whole country knew that there  
13 would be a battle between the Christian Institute and the government. And the next day, I think it  
14 was - the Monday - I went to Tony Matthews and said 'Well, you know I've started to apply for  
15 South African citizenship, but I've found myself as Chairman of the Christian Institute. Do you  
16 think I should go ahead?' He said, 'You can go ahead if you like, but I think you'll remain in the  
17 country for forty-eight hours.'

18 R:Yes, I'm sure he was right.

19 C:So I decided I was going to drop it. So I didn't go ahead with stage two and stage four. That  
20 was why I remained a British citizen - which was a bit awkward if the Security Police knew  
21 about it... There was one occasion I remember in the late 1980s, during the State of Emergency  
22 - when the UDF, which I was then involved with (that's a later part of the story) was banned -  
23 they came to me and asked to see my passport and made it quite clear that they knew that I had a  
24 British passport... So that was a threat that hung over my head. It was only in 1992 when ...

25 R:Goodness, Colin...

26 C:... that I decided that I felt I could safely become a South African - which I did, and which I  
27 now am..

28 R:Well, thank goodness for that...

29 C:So now that is a little inset into my story..

30 R:But how long!

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1 C:Yes, but - so to come back to the Christian Institute. It became more and more radical.  
2 The statements made by leading members of the Christian Institute - particularly Beyers Naude -  
3 annoyed the government more and more. For example the CI began to call for economic  
4 boycotts, and it began to invite the outside world to disapprove of the government in ways that  
5 the outside world hadn't yet got round to working out, and so in a general way - though I really  
6 have to say there was no explicit contact, or no explicit contact that I am aware of, between the  
7 Christian Institute and the ANC (there may have been a few private contacts, like CI people  
8 going overseas) ...

9  
10 R:But in those days it was so dangerous to mention the ANC...

11  
12 C:Yes quite, but looking back on it one can see that the line that the Christian Institute was  
13 taking, both inside the country and as far as the attitude to the outside world was concerned, was  
14 a very radical one. It happened to coincide in many respects with the ANC one, and the  
15 government clearly decided that the Christian Institute was not a body that could be tolerated. I  
16 think it was embarrassed about it - and indeed many of us inside the Christian Institute felt that  
17 the government, whatever else it did, would not dare to ban something which was called the  
18 'Christian Institute'.

19  
20 R:That was a thought crossing my mind - with ...

21  
22 C:It was run by people who so obviously were Christian: I mean you couldn't possibly say that  
23 Beyers Naude or Brian Brown, or Theo Kotze or Manas Buthelezi was somehow not really  
24 Christian - they were so obviously Christian - but in spite of that, they did it: they banned the  
25 Christian Institute. as I say, on October the 19<sup>th</sup>, 1977. And, well, it was a dramatic moment.  
26 They also banned a number of individual people: they banned Beyers Naude, they banned Brian  
27 Brown, who shortly afterwards went overseas and has become quite an important Christian  
28 activist in Britain. They banned old Theo Kotze who later escaped from the country. Manas  
29 Buthelezi they had banned already. So that brought to an end that particular phase of my  
30 involvement, although I have to say of the Christian Institute - I would say of the Christian  
31 Institute as I would say of the Liberal Party - that the things that it was, that it had been doing,  
32 carried on working, effervescing in South African society. The government's desire to chop a  
33 body off, and in that way bring its influence to an end forever, was one that was totally  
34 unfulfilled in that all of these influences continued to work, and people like myself - I am a very

1 humble example - continued to work in other areas, activated largely by the ideas that had  
2 been generated. I went into the Christian Institute, inspired as it were by my Liberal Party ideals.  
3 I went into other activities after 1977, very much inspired by the things that had happened to me  
4 while I had been involved with the Christian Institute..

5 R:Would you like to...?

6  
7 C:...continue talking?...

8 R:.. pause just for a minute because you've been talking for a little while...Colin, what did you  
9 do once the Christian Institute had been brought to an end?

10 C:Well, by then I was a deeply ingrained activist and I certainly wasn't prepared to sit at home to  
11 carry on entirely with my academic life and nothing else. (I'll say something later about my  
12 academic life which forms a parallel strand to all the things that I'm talking about.) I wasn't  
13 prepared to simply sit back, because I felt that if I did that I would be doing exactly what the  
14 government wanted: 'Let all these Christian Institute people - those whom we haven't actually  
15 banned - go home and be nice quiet citizens, and everything will be peaceful again, and we can  
16 carry on with our world of apartheid.' So: many things cropped up. One was that I had for some  
17 time been involved in a moderate sort of way with the South African Institute of Race Relations:  
18 that was a body which like the Christian Institute had a central committee in central areas - with  
19 operations in Johannesburg - and like the Christian Institute it had local branches. So there was a  
20 branch of the South African Institute of Race Relations in 'Maritzburg; there was one in Durban,  
21 one in Cape Town, East London, and so on, and I decided that I would see what one could do  
22 through the Race Relations Institute. It was a body which had maintained liberal ideas; it was a  
23 body some members of which had taken something of a radical move that had been developed  
24 within the Black Consciousness Movement, and the Christian Institute during the 1970s, and I  
25 remember going to a number of meetings....

26

27 (End of second side).

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