

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 Roy Bunwarie
conducted by Christopher Merrett
on 23 September 1999
in Pietermaritzburg

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KWAZULU-NATAL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**INTERVIEW WITH ROY BUNWARIE,
CONDUCTED BY CHRISTOPHER MERRETT
ON 23 SEPTEMBER 1999
(Subject: AURORA CRICKET CLUB)**

(‘B’ SHALL SIGNIFY THE INTERVIEWEE AND ‘M’ THE INTERVIEWER)

M: The challenge of non-racial cricket, the apartheid state of the mid-1970s.

These are the proceedings of an interview conducted by Christopher Merrett with Roy Bunwarie, the first President of AURORA Cricket Club, in Pietermaritzburg on the 23rd of September 1999. Okay the first question I want to ask you is how did the match that was played in April 1973 between - there was a White and mixed team, played, I think at the University. Can you remember how that came about because I think you were a participant?

B: Ja, I think Mike organised that match with the University students and at Daljee, I think - that was their home ground I think. ja. But that was a friendly match, right? And the police arrived?

M: In April 1973?

B: I'm sure. ja. And warned us that only players and officials, no spectators. Confirm that with Mike, if I recall correctly.

M: Were there any spectators there?

B: Ja, there were a few spectators.

M: Did the police chase them away?

B: No, no no...but they stood at that double gate there and prevented quite a few people from entering..

M: ..from coming in ja. Can you remember what's the background of the people who were playing there? Obviously on one side there were the University students, but from your side?

B: Well, most of these guys here - like Amos Cassimjee and all these chaps. They just decided

- 1 to play for us and I think most of these chaps here? were involved..
- 2 M: So they were involved in that friendly match?
- 3 B: Ja, this register from 1973 will give you an idea of who - I don't know - but if you look
4 through it you'll get some ?
- 5 M: Okay, fine - thank you very much. After that match you decided to set up AURORA as a
6 club, sorry - I'll just stop for a moment. Can you remember what passed between AURORA
7 and the NCU when you first applied to affiliate?
- 8 B: That's the watch union hey?
- 9 M: Ja, okay.
- 10 B: At first - what was his name - who was the President of..? Neville Marcum (Malcolm?). At
11 first Neville Marcum was flipped? hut not reluctant. He seemed to be evading us so much
12 so that we'd have to, you know, he used to try to dive out through the back door. So, I mean
13 we had somebody standing by there to accost him you know on this issue, ja. But thereafter,
14 when Marcum met us at Mike's house. Mike's father was partly responsible for NCU
15 accepting us because he applied pressure on Neville Marcum, but there wasn't much
16 opposition from the White cricketers on the Administrators, I mean we actually - they were
17 quite happy to have us under their banner.
- 18 M: But they were quite nervous?
- 19 B: Yes, yes. Because I think, well, Neville Marcum eventually became a very good buddic of
20 mine. He used to bring his brother friends here and ? you know and that kind of thing. But
21 that is after he realised that I can be very aggressive, which in fact I wanted to - ? an account
22 and ? cross...so type of mayor helped us along???? (They chuckle).
- 23 M: Okay, ja, you decided to affiliate to the White Union, but was any thought given to the
24 possibility of AURORA, in 1973, affiliating to the non-racial?
- 25 B: No, we wanted to create a crisis, or a ? to see what the stance of the White Officials would
26 be. What they did at that stage is that they passed the buck on - they start that 'Natal must
27 rule' and then Natal says 'No, South Africa must decide and so on.' So eventually I think
28 the 'Maritzburg people decided 'No, fine, that's it - accept, because everybody's throwing
29 the buck around.' So... they had to accept us.

- 1 M: ja. but what you did was a deliberate challenge?
- 2 B: Yes. ja..
- 3 M: ..to the White cricketers in Pietermaritzburg?
- 4 B: mmm. It was a bit disappointing at one stage, but even Mike may have told you this too.
5 Mike had said to me initially when I met him - I first met him when together on Michael's
6 farm. And he said 'No, Roy, you're a teacher.' My cousin told him I was ? a teacher in
7 'Maritzburg so I tried to approach, at least get the contacts. So all the Indian guys that I
8 approached agreed to be part of our club. But then Mike took us to Durban and he says
9 'Bruyn'. Ja, Andre Bruyn and who is the other guy?
- 10 M: Gansey.
- 11 B: Gansey, yea. But, the guy from ? he was running an insurance company somewhere in
12 Johannesburg - now we went to ? but it's all documented somewhere I think, we went there
13 and they invited us to have some beers and so on. Now they are talking about starting
14 ACOSA, of the Club of South Africa. And they're talking about tours overseas and
15 Zimbabwe and I remember where not and where not - we said.... They said but they not
16 prepared to join the club, but they'd be very happy to be part of the club if we are not going
17 to claim ? And there were about four of us that day and after ? nobody is saying a thing, so
18 we went to Goodwill Café - the famous Goodwill Café in Durban and I said 'Guys we must
19 take a decision now please.' 'Arc you guys agreeable to form a club on their conditions?
20 Where just merely touring and you know...?' And they thought about it and they said 'No,
21 Roy, we don't like their part of the club - but you must phone them and tell them that.' And
22 I did phone them and tell them we're not interested in your club and your grandiose plans and
23 all that - you know.
- 24 M: Which never came to anything anyway.
- 25 B: That's right and they said they'll get thousands of rand - you recall to form this club and so
26 and so on. But nothing developed.
- 27 M: What do you think their motivation was? What were they trying to prove?
- 28 B: You know that's a very good question. I don't know?
- 29 M: Do you think there was some hidden agenda there that they were set up by someone to divert

- 1 you?
- 2 B: Ja, ja that was a possibility. Maybe United Cricket Board or whatever they call themselves..
- 3 M: SACOB - South Afrieian Cricket ?
- 4 B: Ja, you know...but we didn't - that can't be done with the correct - definitely the few?
- 5 M: Okay I was, my next question was going to be about the Cricket Club of South Africa, so you
- 6 sort of pre-empted me.
- 7 B: Okay.
- 8 M: Okay the winter went on, 1973...
- 9 B: Right?
- 10 M: ..towards the point where you would join the NCU in the second division, okay? I believe
- 11 that the NCU applied for a permit so that its officials could attend your AGM? Do you recall
- 12 that? Because you, you ...
- 13 B: I don't think ...
- 14 M: ...you had an annual meeting and obviously - presumably you invited the NCU officials to
- 15 come along?
- 16 B: Nobody came?
- 17 M: No one came? Really?
- 18 B: Ja, but I can't recall - AGM, 1973?
- 19 M: Ja, now this must have been before you actually started playing as a club - you had some sort
- 20 of general meeting anyway..
- 21 B: Tbat's right.. We had meetings here...
- 22 M: Okay, well I can check that..
- 23 B: Oh, okay. I'll check that in the documents...thanks very much. Okay. But the newspaper
- 24 said that they`s applied for a permit to come to your meeting. And I just wondered what
- 25 view AURORA might have taken of that because I mean that was going against everything
- 26 that you stood for..
- 27 B: Ja, because wc did not - where did we have the AGM - I think at Valishee`s home? it was -
- 28 or at my home. We didn't use our - but we went to supper - or we had a dinner - all the
- 29 hotels you know - okay???

- 1 M: Okay about the same time there was a lot of noise coming from Piet Koornhof about the
2 possibility of you playing as a mixed time in the NCU's league. How did you feel about
3 Koornhof? What were your feelings about him?
- 4 B: Okay, eventually, agreed to meet a delegation, ja okay and ? the three C's.
- 5 M: Ja, Churton Collins, Chris Nicholson, and another guy went as ?
- 6 B: Davis..
- 7 M: Chris Davis.
- 8 B: Ja..
- 9 M: Okay, so we had them in the paper the night of the K take K?? (They chuckle). In the end
10 they phoned us from - no, we were not demanded a reply - are you guys going to disband -
11 otherwise Proclamation Number ...
- 12 M: Ja, 22 something...
- 13 B: ...something like that, okay. So they said 'Listen, right - we're just a delegation, we have to
14 call in the team of the club - a general meeting, and only that body is - could either disband
15 the club - but we cannot just give you that undertaking and at the same night we were having
16 a big braai at somebody's house - Mike Hickson's or somebody. And then he issued this
17 Proclamation and he said 'No`.
- 18 M: Because they had no mandate?
- 19 B: That's right.
- 20 M: ...from the club when they went up there.
- 21 B: That's right.
- 22 M: Okay.
- 23 B: And we warned them 'Don't commit yourself to anything at that meeting.' Right? And they
24 got so annoyed and so furious - he drove them through Pretoria in the middle of the night..
- 25 M: What for?
- 26 B: Because now these guys are not budging? They had maintained the same stance all the time -
27 'sorry we'd have to report to a general meeting..'
- 28 M: Because they stayed at his house in Pretoria?
- 29 B: No, they - he offered them accommodation, but when he saw that these guys were not

- 1 playing ball with him, uh, uh...
- 2 M: So he took them out?
- 3 B: Ja..
- 4 M: Really?
- 5 B: Ja.
- 6 M: Because I haven't spoken to any of those three..
- 7 B: Oh, right, okay..
- 8 M: ..so I didn't know that sort of absolute detail, oh I see - so his sociability sort of evaporates..
- 9 B: That's right, immediately.
- 10 M: ...when they said they were sticking to their guns, right. How did you feel at the time about
- 11 the hoycott and South Africa's isolation from world cricket?
- 12 B: Oh, I was excited about it. You know because, again, I think why I was excited about it
- 13 maybe I mean not have - but when they implemented the Group Areas Act and two properties
- 14 of ours - you know - were bulldozed, that annoyed me - Right?
- 15 M: This was at Pentridge?
- 16 B: On, we had a property in Pentridge and we had a property in Burger Street..
- 17 M: Oh right, okay...
- 18 B: Well, then eventually, I mean it led to the disintegration of my family - the extended family -
- 19 you know what I mean?
- 20 M: Yes, yes..
- 21 B: My father had until his death, had to rent premises, because the money wasn't adequate for
- 22 him to purchase another piece of land. At that stage, as soon as the Group Areas Board was
- 23 established, land prices soared around Maritzburg or any other Indian area. Like in
- 24 Mountain Rise - all the Whites - I mean they got thousands of rands for their property... here
- 25 in Allandale. I was just conferring the other day - we had a similar size property - say in
- 26 extent of about 10 153 square feet and in Pentridge the same extent - but Pentridge had a
- 27 four-bedroomed home and the Group Areas Board gave my father a thousand five hundred
- 28 rand for the property and the land. Whereas here now, this was a White farmers' - it was a
- 29 huge farm here - and he used to plant some nut trees that they extract oil from, and we were -

- 1 we paid thousand five hundred rand in those days and I was earning twenty five pounds six
2 shillings and halfpence in 1969..
- 3 M: Okay, right, so it was '69 that you had to leave Pentridge?
- 4 B: '63, '64 -
- 5 M: Oh, I see...
- 6 B: ...round about then...
- 7 M: Okay, alright...ja. Ja. Tough times.
- 8 B: Yea, ja, ja. And I didn't tell you about the other thing which only annoys me now. The last
9 bus from the City Hall to Pentridge was at nine o'clock. Now it only struck me last week,
10 'Roy, there should be a curfew in town for the Blacks or the Africans and the hooter went
11 and all that and in a subtle manner, the Council got the Indians, right so they they can make
12 the central hecamc the exclusive domain of the Whites at night...
- 13 M: After nine o' clock, effectively.
- 14 B: That's right. And if you went to Grand Theatre, you had to walk, past the prison and so on.
15 The poor waiters - there were Indian waiters all around - they had to walk.
- 16 M: Ja. apartheid became both blatant and subtle, and subtle forms, hey - ja, we know all about
17 that, ja. Well, okay that's very interesting. Thanks. Now the South African Cricket Board
18 of Control hasn't held its - well, it was called that wasn't it in '73?
- 19 B: Ja.
- 20 M: Okay. They weren't entirely happy about AURORA were they?
- 21 B: Uh uh.
- 22 M: ..because you were applying to play in a White league..
- 23 B: Right.
- 24 M: ...they weren't terribly happy about that..
- 25 B: And they thought that we were in cahoots now with the state or something like that, you see.
- 26 M: Ja, what sort of contact did you have with them, I mean - was there any personal contact or..?
- 27 B: We had friends like Casima Naidoo, JM Singh - he was an active stalwart of ? and then you
28 had the other guy - his partner - I forgot his name - but you have also ? Naicker - he was
29 banned for a while - he couldn't help ? to people. But they were also talking to the guys and

- 1 you know softly? And eventually, when we then decided to apply now to the local NDC and
2 then we went to a Natal meeting, to put our case forward and they accepted us.
- 3 M: Now this was in 1979? Much later at that stage - much later, ja, okay. But back in 1973, you
4 lost a few players. I think there were some Italian players, who had joined, who had been
5 part of AURORA, but decided to pull out because of SACPI? Pressure. Is that right?
- 6 B: Ja, ja, correct.
- 7 M: Can you remember who they were - oh is it in there? It's probably under..
- 8 B: Ja it should be there ...
- 9 M: It's in there? Okay, alright.
- 10 B: ...it should be there.
- 11 M: That's alright, don't worry, I'll find it. Was Nicia Naidoo one of those?
- 12 B: No, no no.
- 13 M: He wasn't? No.
- 14 B: Thank God, too...
- 15 M: Mmm?
- 16 B: I said 'thank God, too.'
- 17 M: Oh, no I just wondered that's all.
- 18 B: No, because there was a meeting last week at Eddels? The finals is the problem with finance
19 - management and so on - he stood up and told one gentlemen who had asked a pertinent
20 question 'If you don't stop asking me those questions, I'm going to throw you out right
21 away.'
- 22 M: Nicia?
- 23 B: Ja, sure ...
- 24 M: Strange hey - ja, okay, on the 16th of September 1973, you had another friendly match at
25 Dalrey Park..
- 26 B: Did we have another match there as well? Or was it a first match?
- 27 M: Ja, no, maybe this was the match you were talking about earlier?
- 28 B: The Dalrey one was first okay?
- 29 M: That was in April..it was a sort of 'testing the waters' match - but there was another friendly

- 1 match in September, 1973, at Dalrey...and that's the one where you were worried about -
2 there was worry about prosecution because of the spectators and so on and so forth and I just
3 wanted to know how carefully the spectators were controlled, admittance and so on?
- 4 B: I'm a bit hazy on that issue, but you know the other match - the first match when they took
5 our names and so on?
- 6 M: Well, ja that one came on the 13th of October - that was later..
- 7 B: Okay, alright.
- 8 M: I'll get to that in a minute - how seriously did you take the possibility of being prosecuted and
9 fined and even the possibility of being imprisoned?
- 10 B: Ja, uh...
- 11 M: I mean that was a real possibility wasn't it?
- 12 B: Ja, I was on vacation at Tugela again - right I used to go there - ? there's a boat and used to
13 go rowing and so on. That was in July, ja. I see a note on my door, on the door to say 'that
14 you are - you'd have to meet with your Inspector immediately, as soon as you arrive. Five
15 o' clock -
- 16 M: This is when you got home?
- 17 B: When I got home from holiday.
- 18 M: Ja.
- 19 B: So I phoned the Inspector, Mr TC Nel, he's PRP Nel's brother - in fact he's the Director, so
20 this was my ? Inspector. So he calls me in and he says 'You know, you are breaking the
21 law.' I said 'There is no such law Sir.' Right? I said 'We got an opinion from two
22 gentlemen -' the one guy passed away now 'and Justice Mohammed... he's an advocate...
23 even this guy's funeral oration, I think..' the guy in Durban, what's his name - what was his
24 name? I've just forgotten, Mike will tell you. That the key word in that document was
25 'occupation'. So we questioned and it was - I mean when we got the opinion of these two
26 guys, and we told the cops 'Listen, there's a - an opinion we got from these two advocates,
27 and that's it.' Right? We can occupy the ground for three hours, five hours, eight hours -
28 even midnight, okay?
- 29 M: What is occupation?

- 1 B: Ja.
- 2 M: So how did Nel respond to all this?
- 3 B: Right, then he put the Special Branch on to me - we were upstairs in the same building - you
4 know Market Street - you know that double storey thing?
- 5 M: Yes, mm.
- 6 B: On Monday I get this guy - Detective Sergeant Naidoo - he knows me - him and I lived in
7 Pentridge together. He says 'Roy, I'm advising you - you write the letter right now of
8 resignation, otherwise we're coming to reel you in.' So then he left, he says 'I want an
9 answer within a week.' So I said 'Okay I'll have to discuss it with my committee - I can't
10 just resign like that.' Then he came back - then I gave him the letter ...
- 11 M: Right, okay..
- 12 B: So, on paper I wasn't the President. I became ?
- 13 M: Ja, okay - but you never signed the letter - did you sign the letter?
- 14 B: ...not to sign the letter (They chuckle).
- 15 M: Mike told me some story about he went away with a flimsy or something - the copy of the
16 letter which you hadn't signed anyway.
- 17 B: That's right, that's right.
- 18 M: It wasn't really valid - it was all a bit of a fiction..
- 19 B: And the guy said 'Why you all supported it?'?? I said ? joked with me and so on - it's a joke
20 - that's why I said ? in sport - if the Afrikaner can understand that - you know ??
- 21 M: And did they bring any further pressure on you the Education Department?
- 22 B: Ja, okay for about five years they didn't promote me, although I was promotional material -
23 but I knew that place - stay in ?? Ja, for quite some time. Then after five years I said 'No,
24 guys, let's have a look here at my promotion.'
- 25 M: Okay, well my next question really is along the same lines. I mean - how seriously did you
26 feel fear that you might lose your job, for ??? Was that a real fear? So it was quite a
27 challenge..
- 28 B: So, well, I laid for law - but still attended the meetings and so on..
- 29 M: But you still played in that first match - the photograph's there - in that bumper album, ja.

- 1 ja. What, okay there were all these threats to you and in fact you actually came face to face
2 with that in the sense that the police visited you...but what gave you the part - what gave you
3 confidence to go ahead? What was the sort of..?
- 4 B: I said, I said to myself "Roy, it's high time now I stood up for ?" I said to myself 'I hate this
5 Government, and if they throw me in jail, that will make headlines.' Then we get more
6 international coverage. So...
- 7 M: Ja, ja. Okay now we come to the actual first match in the league - you wrote it was
8 postponed because on the first weekend it rained and then you had to start again on the 13th
9 of October - that's in '73.
- 10 B: It was where?
- 11 M: Ja, okay, that was at Alexandra.
- 12 B: Ja.
- 13 M: Ja, okay.
- 14 B: That's right, yes.
- 15 M: How did you feel about what the police did on that day? You've seen that official report and
16 everything but how did you see it from your point of view - as a player.
- 17 B: Well, I didn't play that match - I was just a spectator. And you saw that photograph of the
18 cop sitting in the tree there?
- 19 M: I've seen some of the photographs that appeared in the newspaper and I gather they were
20 lurking sort of on the ...
- 21 B: So we saw this guy - an Indian guy from the CID Branch and then we told the photographers
22 to photograph this guy and you must have seen the one famous one where this CID's - not
23 a white man - ? ...
- 24 M: His name was Saddler, or Snaddler, or something like that, ja..
- 25 B: But they come and took down all our names. But that was the last we heard of it.
- 26 M: Really?
- 27 B: Mmm.
- 28 M: Mmm. Okay. Because I gathered that what Chris Nicholson said to the cops that day was
29 that 'You know - you can take our names, you know there's nothing secret about what we

- 1 are doing and if you wanted to know we would have given you the names beforehand of the
2 ten..'
- 3 B: But then you had to lose the - score. The next week, the next week on Monday.
- 4 M: Okay, but now they wanted to seize it at the ground?
- 5 B: Ja, we said 'No.'
- 6 M: You said no. You said 'We'll bring it on Monday.' Okay, so the score that went to the police
7 station on Monday, okay. Now, as far as I gather from then on for a short while, before every
8 match, and after every match, AURORA supplied a list of who had played to the cops, is that
9 right? Can you remember how long that went on for?
- 10 B: I don't think for very much longer. About half - went through the season, I think.
- 11 M: Ja, okay - did they have it before the match or after each match?
- 12 B: After each match.
- 13 M: After each match, alright. How did you feel about doing that?
- 14 B: You should register, appease these characters - I don't know what they doing with those
15 names - but if they want - I'm going to put them on paper, that ?
- 16 M: Ja. Now as the season went on 1973/'74 in the second division, there was one club that
17 didn't fulfill its fixture ..
- 18 B: Voortrekker..
- 19 M: Voortrekker - they didn't fulfill their fixtures ...
- 20 B: Or SAP - I'm not too certain about this..
- 21 M: I don't think you played, I'm not sure if you played the police - that will be in there won't it?
22 But definitely you were fixtured against Voortrekker and they didn't pitch.
- 23 B: I think the Police played against us..
- 24 M: Did they?
- 25 B: Ja, Voortrekker didn't..
- 26 M: And they presented all sorts of excuses.. Ja, what did you feel about that?
- 27 B: We knew about the ? racist attitude...mmm
- 28 M: Ja, they seemed to find excuses...
- 29 B: Yea, ja...

- 1 M: ...for not playing you, ja, ja. I gather on one occasion they said they wanted to go and watch
2 a cricket match in Durban or something.
- 3 B: That's right ja.
- 4 M: But I think Derek Robbins Eleven was touring - ja.
- 5 B: Right.
- 6 M: Okay, can you remember - you had a dinner at the end of the season - 19 - '73, '74... and the
7 newspaper said that you'd applied for magisterial permission to hold that dinner? Do you
8 remember that - it seems out of character?
- 9 B: Ja, no, we never did.
- 10 M: No, you wouldn't have done that..
- 11 B: No, no, definitely.
- 12 M: Okay, presumably there'll be something about that in the document, ja. Okay, and I think
13 we've probably covered this question already, but did you have any further contact with
14 SAPPI and Hassan Power? during that season, I mean there was some - there was obviously
15 some contact before AURORA actually started playing, but I just wondered if there was any
16 further contact with them.
- 17 B: ...then thereafter - no - until we again re-applied to join them..
- 18 M: ...to join them, ja, okay. Now after the '73/'74 season you went on playing for several
19 seasons under the banner of the NCU - there are various references and bits and pieces that
20 I've read to - well, first of all you had an unhappiness about the degree to which Black
21 debutantes? were being encouraged to join what was so called normal cricket. Can you
22 remember any particular incidents of racism or things that you were unhappy with when you
23 played in the White league in the late 1970s that led to your decision to join - to join up with
24 ??
- 25 B: You know, I think we must be quite honest, you know, we didn't have a lot of flack from this
26 ? side - you know, we played in good spirit, you know, ja.. And there were no racist insults
27 and ...
- 28 M: No, there were any problem with the facilities - toilets and changing rooms and stuff like
29 that?

1 B: No, no.

2 M: Because I remember Tommy Naier telling me at one stage that they went on - that's ? School.
3 isn't it - they weren't in the White league, but they obviously played some sort of multi-racial
4 cricket - or against White teams or something and he told me once that - once they'd had to -
5 on one match they had to change in the car or something like that because they weren't
6 allowed into the clubhouse or the changing rooms and so on...

7 B: Right, right..

8 M: You didn't have anything like that?

9 B: No, no, but we were not allowed to drink in the pub and all that - that we ??

10 M: What did you do? Did you just pack up and leave?

11 B: Ja, or the guys took it off and came here - we were meeting quite regularly in ?? We had
12 meeting upon meeting ...

13 M: Did the White guys join you after that - just for a drink.

14 B: With some of the teams, ja, but not the majority...

15 M: But you just had to have it sort of out in the open - just by the ground, but not in the
16 clubhouse?

17 B: That's right, yes.

18 M: Okay, well thanks, Roy, those are the gaps that I wanted to get some personal opinions on
19 and just fill in a few gaps in my knowledge etcetera - so that's..

20 B: But as I said, this will...

21 M: Ja, okay, alright...

22

23 There is nothing further on this side of the tape and nothing on the other side.

24

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