

‘Don’t Play with Apartheid’: Anti-racist solidarity in Britain with South African sports

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Introduction

Anti-racist resistance against the apartheid regime in South Africa was one of the critical points of solidarity for the British (and international) Left during the long ‘radical sixties’. Black resistance in South Africa itself was at a low ebb in the aftermath of the Sharpeville massacre in the Transvaal on 21 March 1960, when police opened fire on a crowd of thousands peacefully protesting against the oppressive pass laws; 69 people, including women and children killed, and around 180 injured.¹ In the words of Ronnie Kasrils, a founding member of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC), the 1960s were ‘possibly the darkest days of apartheid, following the South African security police crackdown of 1963-66, which led to an entire liberation movement leadership being incarcerated in prison or driven into exile’. Kasrils himself would escape to London in 1965, where he would engage radical British students to undertake ‘underground work’ delivering propaganda for the ANC back in South Africa (the ‘London Recruits’).²

In words later made famous by Bob Marley, Haile Selassie described apartheid South Africa at the UN in 1963 as one of those ‘ignoble and unhappy regimes that holds our brothers...in subhuman bondage.’ which needed to be ‘toppled and destroyed’. This call was heard in Britain as it was internationally.³ Many young anti-apartheid activists internationally were inspired by the advance of guerrilla fighters in Mozambique and Angola, and in 1967 and 1968 by the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns, when MK joined fighters from ZAPU (Zimbabwe African People’s Union) to fight their way through Zimbabwe into South Africa. The dialectical relationship between the internal struggle against apartheid in Southern Africa and the external struggle in Britain – a key international ally of the apartheid regime - has parallels with the relationship between anti-colonial resistance in the British Empire and anti-imperialist dissent in the imperial metropole of Britain itself as elucidated by Priyamvada Gopal. Indeed as we will see anti-apartheid activism in Britain itself had roots in this earlier anti-colonialist tradition.⁴

This chapter explores how South African anti-apartheid activists in exile worked with British activists and campaigners to build up anti-racist solidarity with black South Africans in one critical area - the field of sports. In the process, it will illuminate how sport can act as a site of political struggle, and so expand our understanding of forms and cultures of solidarity. What began as a limited liberal campaign based on a strategy of ‘respectability’ and appeals to British ideas of ‘fair play’ by elite figures in the world of British politics, sport and civil society became a grassroots mass movement of international solidarity. Amid the wider radicalisation and politicisation of the late 1960s, this movement included non-violent civil disobedience and militant direct action on a scale not previously seen in Britain in the world of sport.

The organisation at the heart of this new movement in Britain was the Stop The Seventy Tour Committee (STST), founded in 1969. Focused mainly on the protests against the South African rugby union tour of Britain in 1969-70, the STST was a campaign that in defiance of police brutality and violent racist intimidation successfully achieved its aim of halting the white South African cricket tour of England in 1970, a remarkable victory for anti-racist politics. As leading STST activist Peter Hain (whose family’s anti-apartheid activism had exiled them to Britain in the 1960s) once recalled, ‘for the first time in ten long bitter years since Sharpeville, black South Africans and whites involved in the resistance had

something to cheer about. There were people abroad prepared to risk a great deal in standing up for their rights. This was a clarion call in the wilderness, a flash of light in the dark'.⁵

The STST campaign has been somewhat neglected by scholarship on 'the radical sixties' and indeed histories of anti-racism in Britain. Hain wrote about the campaign in its immediate aftermath, and the fiftieth anniversary of the STST victory in 2020 prompted a number of new studies, although we still arguably lack a definitive history of the campaign itself.⁶ Yet the STST was to anti-racism in this period in Britain what the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign was to anti-imperialism, and the Miss World protests in 1970 were to women's liberation. This chapter will not dwell on the STST itself but attempt to recover what David Featherstone has called 'the hidden histories and geographies of internationalism' in relation to the politics of South African sport in 1960s Britain.⁷ It will recover the roots of the STST campaign in earlier struggles, such as the West Indian Campaign Against Apartheid Cricket, the Campaign Against Race Discrimination in Sports (CARDS), and the Movement for Colonial Freedom (MCF) which – like the STST – remain generally marginalised in the scholarly literature.

'A Slow Coal Train Coming': the roots of STST

The history of racism in sport, and protests and boycotts against it, is a long one. There was a struggle against racist sport in South Africa before the apartheid era. But when thinking about international solidarity with black South Africans under apartheid in the field of sport in Britain, the high point of militancy of the STST was, with apologies to both Bob Dylan and Hugh Masekela, 'a slow coal train coming'. It rested on over a decade of prior campaigning and activism.

During the 1950s, there had been successes in some minor sports most notably table tennis. Here, thanks to the work of former table tennis champion (and left-wing filmmaker) Ivor Montagu, the International Table Tennis Federation removed the all-white South African Table Tennis Union from membership and recognised the non-racial South African Table Tennis Board as the sole controlling body in South Africa.⁸ Yet when it came to major sports like rugby union, cricket and football, it was not until the late 1950s, after Father Trevor Huddleston raised this as an issue in Britain, that the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination in Sport (CARDS) was formed in 1958.⁹

Trevor Huddleston was an English priest who had lived in South Africa from 1943-56 and had won respect through challenging apartheid, while CARDS was established by figures around the MCF which had itself been formed in Britain in 1954. The MCF (later called Liberation) involved leading members of the Labour Party including later party leader and prime minister Harold Wilson, Barbara Castle and Tony Benn. Its leading figure was the veteran socialist, campaigner and Labour MP, Fenner Brockway, who later recalled 'South Africa represented everything to which we were opposed'.

Though independent it was an occupied country, a white minority denying the non-white any political rights. The distinction between its racism and the rest of the world was that, though many nations practised some discrimination, most were ashamed of it, whilst South Africa on the other hand boasted of apartheid, applauding it as the basic precept of her political philosophy... Sport was crucial because to white South Africans rugby, football and cricket are a religion.¹⁰

The liberal objectives of CARDS were set out by its secretary Anthony Steel in 1959, who wrote of 'the contribution that the Campaign hopes to make towards the recognition by South Africa of the international principle that the only criterion for judging a sportsman is ability and keenness, and not the colour of his skin'.

The first step in establishing our Campaign was to gain the support of distinguished British people, so that it would have a considerable status. The first to lend their names as sponsors were Fenner Brockway M.P., J. P. W. Mallalieu M.P. (both Labour), Jo Grimond M.P. (Liberal), E. Bullus M.P. (Conservative), [the novelist] J. B. Priestley, Prof. A. J. Ayer (Professor of Philosophy at London University), Sir Julian Huxley, the Archbishop of York, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Liverpool, and the Chief Rabbi. We then felt able to approach leading British sportsmen with the suggestion that they sign a letter which would be sent to the *Times*, condemning the colour-bar in South African sport, as reflected at the Empire Games; and calling upon all sportsmen to work to persuade the international federations controlling each sport to adopt the Olympic principle. Twenty great sportsmen, known to millions all over the world, signed the letter published in the *Times* on 17th July 1958, two days before the start of the Empire Games.¹¹

This CARDS letter in *The Times* deplored the presence of the exclusively white South Africans at the British Empire and Commonwealth Games in Cardiff which meant that ‘the policy of *apartheid* should be extended even into international sport’ and urged ‘athletes and sportsmen in this and other countries should take active steps through their clubs and their national associations to obtain the endorsement by their international federation of the principle of racial equality which is embodied in the Declaration of the Olympic Games’. The famous sports stars who signed were leading footballers Walley Barnes, Danny Blanchflower, Johnny Haynes, Jimmy Hill, George Knight, Stanley Matthews and Don Revie, the motor racing champion G.E. Duke, athletes Geoff Elliott, Mike Ellis, Thelma Hopkins, Derek Ibbotson, Ken Norris and Frank Sando, the boxer Joe Erskine, the cricketers David Sheppard, M.J.K. Smith, Maurice Tremlett and Alan Wharton and tennis player Bobby Wilson.¹²

As Dennis Brutus, the South African poet and anti-racist campaigner, noted in 1959,

At the time of the Commonwealth Games at Cardiff last year, a protest was organized by Mrs Gladys Griffiths of Penarth, and more than a thousand signatories protested at the exclusion of non-Whites from the South African team ... the Movement for Colonial Freedom held a meeting in Cardiff on the eve of the Games. Through the valiant efforts of Welsh sportsmen, the matter was placed on the agenda at the meeting of the [Olympic] Federation, but London officials suppressed it in “the interests of harmony”, and the absence of representatives of four-fifths of the South African population was ignored at this meeting of the “great family of nations.”¹³

CARDS lobbied British football clubs to adopt the Olympic principle, and then lobbied the International Olympics Committee (IOC) to press for the expulsion of white South Africa. As Anthony Steel recalled,

At the meeting of the I.O.C., India, Egypt and the Soviet Union strongly supported the memorandum sent by the South African Sports Association and by this Campaign. To avert the possibility of expulsion, the South African official representative gave an undertaking (since confirmed by the South African Olympic and Commonwealth Games Association—SAOCGA) that his association would do all it could to further the interests of non-white sportsmen in the Union, and would certainly have no objection to their inclusion in future South African Olympic teams, if they were good enough.¹⁴

One athlete, Nicholas Stacey, wrote to explain why he had joined CARDS:

I recently accepted an invitation to join the Committee of the Campaign Against Race Discrimination in Sport for two reasons: As an ex-International and Olympic athlete, I know that international sport becomes a farce and mockery unless in the words of the Olympic Charter “no discrimination is permitted on grounds of race, religion or politics”. If a national team is not made up of the best possible sportsmen available it ceases to be a truly national team. The aim of every aspiring sportsman is to represent his country. That some people should be denied this honour simply on grounds of their colour is as unfair as it is nonsensical. For years I ran fairly consistently second to one of the greatest sprinters in the world - Mr. Macdonald Bailey, a coloured man. Because of him I was denied almost every major athletic honour. But I would not have had it any other way. He was a better runner than I was. If we had had race discrimination in sport in England, I should have won many titles, but they would have been hollow and valueless victories. Race discrimination in sport is really a misnomer, because if there is race discrimination it ceases to be sport. In sport there should be only one criterion; that of ability.¹⁵

A dialectic of protest was now in play. From above, celebrities and leading figures in the world of sport and civil society lobbied elite sports officials via open letters, and from below mass petitions against a betrayal of ‘sporting’ or ‘Olympic values’ were organised, at times backed up by protests outside the grounds. In response, representatives of white South African sport would try to promise inclusion of black sports players ‘if they were good enough’. This of course was a promise never realised given the white supremacy underpinning South African sports policy, one which echoed those of Nazi Germany. Ritter von Halt, the Nazi sports official, when explaining why the German Olympic team was exclusively Aryan had said ‘the reason that no Jew was selected to participate in the Games was always because of the fact that no Jew was able to qualify by his ability for the Olympic team’.¹⁶ In fact, the link to Nazism was even more direct, as politicians who had been members of the Afrikaner Broederbond - apologists for Nazism - at the time of the Second World War in South Africa (when they had been imprisoned for sabotage and subversion), were now in positions of power and authority in apartheid South Africa in the highest posts of government and their brutal security apparatus, the Bureau of State Security.

Protesting the 1960 South African Cricket Tour

Soon three new factors emerged, which emboldened the small but growing campaign in Britain. Firstly, there was a developing movement among black South Africans in sports activism, spearheaded by Dennis Brutus. In October 1958, Brutus had helped form the South African Sports Association (SASA), with the writer Alan Paton, author of *Cry, the Beloved Country*, as patron, and the inaugural conference of SASA was held in South Africa in January 1959. In October 1959, SASA successfully blocked an all-black West Indian international team led by Frank Worrell from touring and playing against a set of black teams in South Africa. This was a controversial move by the SASA, as defenders of the idea of the Worrell tour (including the West Indian Marxist C.L.R. James) argued that it would allow black cricketers in South Africa the opportunity to play against a world class international test team, the West Indies, led by an inspiring black captain. The successful blocking of the Worrell tour laid down an important marker about the importance of rejecting anything that could be interpreted as legitimising the apartheid division of South African sport.¹⁷

Secondly, the Indian government also took a position against the Worrell tour, and so pressure from newly independent countries was now another new critical dimension that opened up amid the wider process of decolonisation underway. This force was growing in power and would later be harnessed by the formation of the South Africa Non-Racial Olympics Committee (SANROC) by Dennis Brutus in 1962. Both SANROC and Brutus would be based in London by 1966.¹⁸ The rise of new independent black African states and the rise of African stars in fields like athletics culminated in the formation of the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa in 1966 at the Bamako conference, shaped by Brutus and the white South African weightlifter and treasurer of SANROC Chris de Broglio. Black American athletes were also coming to fore in the 1960s, symbolised by the courageous and inspiring stance in solidarity with the wider Black Power movement taken by Tommy Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Mexico Olympics and the prospect of black American stars boycotting future Olympic Games if white South Africans were present became another new factor.¹⁹

Thirdly, the bloody Sharpeville massacre on 21 March 1960 exposed the brutal, barbaric nature of the apartheid system worldwide. When the white South African cricket team toured England in June-August 1960, in the immediate aftermath of the massacre, CARDS were therefore pushing at an open door when they began to think about raising voices in protest. By this time, CARDS had as its President His Grace the Archbishop of Cape Town (Joost de Blank), Professor A. J. Ayer as chairman, Anthony Steel and Derrick Silvester from MCF serving as joint secretaries, and headquarters at the London surgery of black civil rights activist and doctor David Pitt. The Rev David Sheppard – an English Test cricketer - made a pioneering stand by refusing to play against the South Africans. The Rev Nicholas Stacey, the former Olympic athlete, also declined to preach the ‘sportsman’s service’ before the first test at Edgbaston.²⁰ CARDS did not call for people to boycott the matches, perhaps fearing this would be going too far against the mainstream of public cricket-going opinion, but they did organise a petition to Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC), then the governing body of English cricket.

We the undersigned regret that the South African Cricket Association did not see fit to consider for inclusion in the touring side players of non-European stock and urge the M.C.C., not to support fixture tours conducted on such a basis. We are sorry that the M.C.C. should have appeared to condone the application of the principle of Apartheid in sport.²¹

As at the British Empire and Commonwealth Games in Cardiff, there were some protests and leafletting organised outside grounds before matches, asking spectators to protest to the South African Cricket Association at its selection of an all-white team. There was also the embryo of a more militant approach emerging amongst some activists. In Sheffield, a group of activists prepared to paint anti-apartheid slogans on the walls of the stadium one night, but the police were waiting as they arrived and arrested many of them.²² There was some labour movement support, particularly in Wales where the Welsh Council of Labour and the South Wales National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) called on Glamorgan to cancel their match.

However, the level of protest at this tour (and also at the South African rugby union team – the ‘Springboks’ - tour of England of the autumn of 1960 and spring of 1961) was in general very low, certainly compared to say the tens of thousands who attended contemporary protest marches organised by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in this period. CARDS did make a small impact however, perhaps if only through their novelty. For example, the young white South African journalist Donald Woods recalls being surprised at the protests and arguing with protesters outside Lords, defending the segregation of South African sport

and questioning whether it was right to target the matches given the players were arguably not the main enemy, 'they are sportsmen not politicians'. It was only when the former South African cricketer Jackie McGlew joined the ruling apartheid National Party and stood as their parliamentary candidate in the late 1960s, that Woods started to question the doctrine of 'keeping politics separate from sport'. As Woods put it in retrospect, this doctrine was 'a lunatic view, since sports is a part of life, and all life is connected to politics'.²³ Perhaps less as a result of the protests and more as a result of the wider feeling of public disgust among many cricket supporters after Sharpeville, the 1960 tour was the first tour of England by South Africa since 1912 to make a financial loss, suggesting a limited informal boycott had taken place.²⁴

The Anti-Apartheid Movement and the 1965 South African Cricket Tour

In the early 1960s, the formation of the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) in Britain, in which many South African exiles played a leading role, meant the campaign against racist sport begun by CARDS was now waged under the banner of the AAM.²⁵ The AAM already utilised a range of tactics including boycotts and protests, but now sport became a site of struggle as well. As Christabel Gurney – a AAM activist herself from 1969 - records,

Throughout the 1960s AAM supporters demonstrated at sports events involving South Africans. Cardiff and Glasgow City Councils refused to entertain a South African bowls team, there were protests against tours of South Africa by the Welsh Rugby Union and Arsenal Football Club ... At an international level the AAM worked with the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (SANROC) to ensure that South Africa was excluded from the Olympic Games. It wrote to 118 national Olympic committees and [AAM secretary] Abdul Minty lobbied at the International Olympic Committee's 1963 conference in Baden-Baden. As a result South Africa was excluded from the 1964 Tokyo Olympics.²⁶

With the successful reimposition of South Africa's ban from FIFA membership in 1964, international football as well as the Olympics were effectively closed off to apartheid South Africa. In South Africa, the Rivonia Trial saw ANC leader Nelson Mandela and others imprisoned for life, leading to a growing number of student protests in Britain over the question of apartheid. For example, at Oxford University, on the 12 June 1964, five hundred people, mostly students (including the Pakistan-born radical Tariq Ali, later a leader of the wider student revolt in Britain) joined a picket organised by the local AAM group with the support of the Labour Party after the South African Ambassador, Carel de Wet had been invited to speak by the Oxford University Conservatives. This meeting took place on the very day Mandela was imprisoned, and as Ian Birchall recalled, 'students organised a large demonstration against the ambassador. The Oxford Union's hall was plunged into darkness when a future editor of *International Socialism* journal [Peter Binns] removed the fuses'.²⁷ As Binns recalls, 'the ambassador had been invited to speak at the Union and that that was the reason why I and others thought that sabotaging the event by plunging it into darkness was the thing to do. Removing the fuses (which were in an ancient fuse box and irreplaceable) made sure that the event could not just be postponed to later in the evening but had to be abandoned altogether.'²⁸ As Birchall remembered:

A "mob" – which I am proud to have been part of – surrounded the ambassador's car and let the tyres down ... The response of the University proctors was to place concern for petty regulations before justice in South Africa. A number of students (including Tariq

Ali) were victimised by suspension ... These events led to the launching of a campaign for student rights, which was the first stage of a movement that was to reach culmination in 1967 and 1968.²⁹

October 1964 saw the election of a Labour government under Harold Wilson, a supporter of the AAM, though nominally overseeing a British capitalist state with historic trade and military links to the apartheid South African regime. This would in time lead to a tension over approaches within the AAM, between lobbying the Labour government ‘behind the scenes’ and campaigning through ‘respectable’ protest on the one hand, and the need to hold the Wilson government to account through grassroots pressure and direct action. In response to the 1965 South African rugby union tour of Ireland and Scotland, the AAM put out a public statement in April 1965 urging a boycott signed by figures including Oliver Tambo, acting president of the ANC, leading parliamentarians like David Ennals MP (chair of the AAM), Jeremy Thorpe MP (the future Liberal Party leader), Lord Brockway and Eric Heffer, and the writers Basil Davidson, Ethel Mannin, Bertrand Russell and Leonard Woolf.³⁰

In the summer of 1965, the AAM advocated a boycott of the South African cricket tour, organising protests and pickets outside every tour centre – the most effective intervention around sport by the AAM to that point. A mass protest petition, posters stating ‘Going to see the South African “Whites Only” Cricket Team? (It’s Not Cricket)’, campaign badges, leaflets, stickers and balloons all circulated.³¹ This had the feel of a movement getting under way, but as the potential ability of students to mobilise *en masse* during the summer months was limited, it fell mainly on established Left networks in various localities to organise opposition. In Derby for example, Tom Pendry, then a young trade unionist with National Union of Public Employees (now UNISON), helped co-ordinate a 100 strong picket in Chesterfield with the local Derbyshire branch of the National Union of Miners when the South Africans played Derbyshire on 28 June 1965 after being contacted by the AAM executive secretary Ethel de Keyser. ‘The line not only had miners, with Dennis Skinner at the fore, but other workers in the area, as well as Anti Apartheid supporters from Derbyshire and Yorkshire’, Pendry recalls. De Keyser then invited Pendry to speak the next day at a national AAM rally in London’s Trafalgar Square alongside national and international figures such as Nobel Peace Prize winner Philip Noel-Baker MP, the former Bishop of Johannesburg Ambrose Reeves, David Ennals MP, the actor Patrick Wymark, Jeremy Thorpe MP and the South African Communist activist, scholar and campaigning journalist Ruth First. ‘My part in the rally was small but well received, as it demonstrated that sport-loving people were prepared to forego their natural desire to attend a favoured sport in the interest of a greater ideal – namely, the conquering of racism in sport, and we would do so wherever racism reared its ugly head’. But Pendry remembers Ruth First’s ‘eloquence and passion, saying that South Africa was isolating itself from the world’:

“You must pass from verbal condemnation to practical action”, she urged. “The people of Britain must see that their government stops dragging its feet at the United Nations whenever the question of South Africa comes up. The guilty men of apartheid are not only those who make the laws in South Africa, they are among us here in Britain – those who draw the profits from apartheid”.³²

As with David Sheppard before, one cricketer in 1965 publicly refused to play the white South Africans, Stanley Jayasinghe, from Sri Lanka. ‘I’m a bit of a rebel’, he told *Anti Apartheid News*, ‘I decided five years ago I’d never play the SA team again’ after his experiences in 1960, when:

‘afterwards, at the socials, they were standoffish with a lot of us chaps from the Commonwealth. I’d been boycotting South African goods even before that, but decided this wasn’t enough...You can call it childish but I think of millions of dark fellows in South Africa who get no chance to exercise their rights, who carry passbooks around like dogs wearing a collar, of the torture in the jails, and I used my freedom to express my disapproval of the whole SA system.’³³

As well as a higher level of public protest, another new dynamic began to emerge in the mid-1960s as black Britons start to organise against apartheid. In November 1966, a ‘West Indian Committee Against Apartheid’ led by W. Wilkie organised a protest about the ‘Rest of the World’ against Barbados match set for March 1967 as the ‘Rest of the World’ included a Rhodesian player and two white South Africans in its team. Their leaflets quoted the West Indian former cricketer and civil rights campaigner Sir Learie Constantine, ‘Must we be hosts to people whose guests we can never be?’³⁴ Rising black British protest amid the growth of ‘Black Power’ would play an increasingly important role in the anti-apartheid movement, linking the struggle against racism in South Africa with the need to fight racism and break the ‘colour bar’ of institutional racism closer to home.

The ‘Spirit of 1968’ and the turn towards direct action

1968 was famously marked by a series of demonstrations in Britain, with students at their heart, from the Hornsey College of Art occupation to the growing anti-Vietnam War demonstrations, including a march on the US embassy in Grosvenor Square in March 1968 which saw violent clashes with the police.³⁵ Some of the earliest student protests that year in Britain took place against apartheid, and in their new militant tactics epitomised the wider revolutionary ‘spirit of 1968’.

In January 1968, the white-only University of the Orange Free State rugby union team, known as the Shimlas, arrived from South Africa for what was originally scheduled to be a tour of ten different rugby university teams. Campaigning by student unions and anti-apartheid students meant most of these were cancelled before their arrival, and only three games remained lined up to play.³⁶ The first was scheduled for 31 January 1968 against Newcastle University at Gosforth. Fifty students from Newcastle and Durham led by one young student with a megaphone organised a protest with placards, but about fifty police placed on duty ensured they were kept away from the game itself unless they discarded their placards. Frustrated that they were unable to prevent the match from going ahead, students bought tickets and entered the ground. During the match Ian Taylor, a member of the International Socialists (IS) and student from Durham said to his fellow Durham student IS member Anna Paczuska, ‘It will be no more than ten pound fine to run on the pitch and stop this. Are you up for it?’ Yes, came the answer. ‘Good. Pass it along’. Five minutes later, thirty student protesters, including several black students, then did something up to that point unheard of – they rushed onto the pitch – and again twice more during the game as well.³⁷ They made the national TV news. The *Daily Telegraph* reported ‘the semi-comic atmosphere of siege’ in which the game was played, and that:

‘the incident provided the crowd with some light relief as young men and girls in jeans and miniskirts played a game of “catch me if you can” with burly, heavy-coated policemen...In the second half a girl dressed in green tights and jumper with a snappy red waistcoat ran onto the pitch and almost playfully, invited half a dozen young policemen to catch her. She led them a merry dance until she tripped and then

was transported bodily to the sidelines. The crowd watched it all with good humour'.³⁸

There were no arrests. About thirty protesters were escorted out of the ground by police, and one publication reported how 'fifty policemen stood by while the demonstrators chanted "apartheid is nasty" and paraded with banners saying "for pity's sake stop it" and "we must oppose"'.³⁹

The second Shimlas game was up at the University of St Andrews in Scotland on 2 February 1968, despite the public opposition of David Steel, the Liberal MP and AAM president, and the university rector-elect, Sir Learie Constantine. Constantine wrote a telegram to St Andrews students:

Fixture with South Africans deplorable. Government which by legislation reduces human beings to lower animals unworthy associate with decent governments and people. Statement that our attitude brings politics into sport highfalutin nonsense. South African government began by taking away discretion sporting bodies by legislation.⁴⁰

Once again about 100 student protesters from across Scotland and the North of England mobilised, with banners declaring the match was 'a disgrace' to 'human rights' and slogans including 'we say no to apartheid every time', 'the rugby club does not represent us', 'Anti-Apartheid' and 'this match is deplorable'. The Durham University student paper, the *Palatinate* reported how after the second scrum which was the signal agreed on beforehand fifty student protesters ran onto the pitch, occupied it and so halted play, supported by scores of St Andrews students in their red gowns on the touchline (St Andrews University students had been threatened with severe disciplinary action if they invaded the pitch themselves). After the pitch invasion, the vice-principal Professor Norman Gash, a Conservative historian, strode onto the pitch and requested the students to leave: 'I fancy you are not members of this university. You are guests. I would like you to behave as guests. You have made your demonstration and will you now please go? I don't want to have to bring in the police'. *The Palatinate* reported how 'the professor's voice was drowned in shouts of refusal'. Gash threatened the protesters with police dogs. Protesters jeered asking how the dogs would know the difference between protesters and players. Gash called for the police and left the pitch. At this point, a section of the wider rugby-supporting crowd (including a racist element who called the protestors 'nigger lovers', a sign of the wider racist backlash which would receive encouragement from the Conservative MP Enoch Powell's infamous anti-immigration 'Rivers of Blood' speech two months later) began shouting 'off' 'off' at the protesters. Declaring 'let us rush them off the pitch', this element proceeded to link arms and charge the protesters. While many demonstrators were violently cleared from the field in this manner (with one Durham female protester assaulted in the process), a minority of the protesters managed to re-assemble again in the middle of the pitch, disrupting the game for twenty-five minutes in total before the police arrived and arrests were made.⁴¹ Even after the match finally re-started, individual protesters tried to interrupt play at various times by running onto the pitch but they were ignored by the players, who even knocked one such protester to the ground. Twelve students in total were arrested from a range of universities including Durham, Newcastle, Edinburgh and Dundee, and were held for four hours, charged with trespass and breaching the peace under Scottish law. Funds were raised to pay for their fines, though it seems all charges were eventually dropped.⁴² In the aftermath of these two disrupted matches, both which achieved a high level of media attention due to the new tactics

of direct action, the third match set to be held in Lancaster was abandoned. This cancellation signalled a clear victory for the protesters.

If David Sheppard was right to describe cricket's relationship to apartheid and racism as the biggest challenge to face cricket in its history, this relationship was now in the national spotlight as a result of the controversy around the South African 'Cape Coloured' player Basil D'Oliveira. D'Oliveira had been unable to further his career under apartheid and so moved to England, where in 1966 he was selected to play in the Test side for England against the West Indies. In September 1968, D'Oliveira was refused permission to enter South Africa with the MCC team as part of a tour, with South African Prime Minister John Vorster declaring that with D'Oliveira in the side 'it is not the MCC team – it's the team of the anti-apartheid movement'.⁴³ This provoked a diplomatic incident of sorts, and British Prime Minister Harold Wilson condemned the D'Oliveira decision, which had led to the cancellation of that tour, stating: 'Once the South Africans had said that they were not taking a player we wanted to send, I would have rather thought that put them beyond the pale of civilized cricket'.⁴⁴ Yet in December 1968, the MCC voted 4,664 to 1,214 to continue hosting tours from South Africa, even if there was still no meaningful progress being made towards non-racial cricket in the country.⁴⁵

In 1969, with another cricket tour from South Africa planned for the summer of 1970, the AAM once again initiated a protest petition. By mid-July 1969, some 2,000 signatures had been collected, but there was a growing mood among many younger activists that more militant action was needed.⁴⁶ Peter Hain, a leading member on the radical wing of the Young Liberals (the youth group of the Liberal Party), and other students, mostly around the Young Liberals and AAM networks, had led disruptive pitch invasions against the white South African Wilf Isaacs Invitation cricketing XI in July 1969, and also protests at the tennis Davis Cup between Britain and South Africa in Bristol.⁴⁷ In a press release issued during these Wilf Isaacs protests, Hain wrote:

'our protest will take the form of a non-violent token disruption. Its aim will be to demonstrate the seriousness of our intention to massively disrupt the 1970 tour, and at the same time to give the MCC an opportunity to call off the tour. We regard the tour of the white South African team to Britain as an outright capitulation to racialism and an affront to Britain's coloured community. And we will do all in our power to ensure that this tour is a failure, should it take place.'⁴⁸

Their sense that there was now the need for a formal organisation to co-ordinate such militant direct action would culminate in September 1969 with the formation of a new group, the Stop The Seventy Tour Committee (STST), with one aim: to stop the cricket tour next summer, and by any means necessary.

The Stop The Seventy Tour Committee

This is not the place to discuss the subsequent history of the STST, and the important anti-racist victory it achieved in 1970 through protests and direct action during the Springboks rugby tour of 1969-70. There were of course wider factors than simply the STST campaigning which forced the British government to cancel the 1970 South African cricket tour, including the deepening anger among Britain's black community at apartheid (as evidenced by the formation of the West Indian Campaign Against Apartheid in Cricket). On 3 February 1970, the trade union leader Frank Cousins, chair of the Community Relations Commission said in a letter to the Home Secretary the tour would do 'untold damage to community relations'.⁴⁹ The West Indian Campaign Against Apartheid in Cricket discussed

one day strike on London transport by black West Indian workers to coincide with the first match at Lord's.⁵⁰ Ethel de Keyser argued that black British pressure 'tipped the balance at Lord's' in favour of the protesters among officials.⁵¹ Finally, growing international pressure in the arena of international sport amid decolonisation so brilliantly mobilised by Brutus and SANROC was also increasingly making itself felt. In March 1970, the general assembly of the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa met – and this led to a coordinated boycott threat of the upcoming Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh by many independent African states.⁵²

Nonetheless the militancy, creativity and scale of the STST was central to the victory, with an estimated 50,000 people taking part in protests at 22 venues during the Springboks tour from 30 October 1969 to 2 February 1970 across Britain and Ireland. Up to 100,000 people were expected to march on Lord's in the event of the 1970 cricket tour going ahead. Though the STST prioritised direct action, it also attempted to build alliances with other organisations where possible, and its partnership with the AAM, which produced around 200,000 leaflets and posters, was particularly important.⁵³

In short, the AAM and STST worked together to build a mass movement, which mushroomed to the extent that, at its height, there were some 400 local action groups.⁵⁴ The STST's eye-catching direct actions on the sports field meant it made a massive impact on the mass media, while the AAM's poster highlighting South African police brutality against women at Cato Manor in Durban in 1959 - 'if you could see their national sport, you might be less keen to see their cricket' - was hugely popular and powerful.

The radical Jamaican-born sociologist Stuart Hall and his co-authors of *Policing the Crisis* (1978) evocatively analysed the 'tactically brilliant' STST campaign, noting it was part of 'the transmission of the spark of student politics to a wider constituency and field of contestation - the "politics of the street"' underway at the time, which 'somewhat resembled some wild anarcho-libertarian scenario' where 'in truth there was no recipe' in 'the classical revolutionary cook-books'. For Hall and his co-thinkers, STST 'exhibited all the concentrated force of a single-issue campaign, limited in scope, but wide enough to involve young liberal people.'

It provoked - such was the atmosphere of the moment - a vigorous and on some occasions a vicious response (at Swansea the police appeared to make room for anti-demonstrator vigilantes to rough-house the protesters; the Home Secretary had subsequently to intervene to limit the scope of the rugby "stewards"). STST was a strange enough coalition of forces, to be sure. The South African paper, *Die Beeld*, classically described it as a "bunch of left-wing, workshy, refugee long hairs", neatly catching all the clichés. But very considerable numbers of young people, sensitised by the events of 1968, were recruited into the politics of the demonstration by the clarity of its anti-apartheid appeal ...⁵⁵

Hall and his co-thinkers were correct that 'there was no recipe' for 'the transmission of the spark of student politics to a wider constituency and field of contestation' in 'the classical revolutionary cook-books' – for the simple reason that until the 1960s, students in Britain (and across Western Europe) had been a very privileged layer comparatively and so in general 'student politics' had tended to be as much associated with reaction (as in the 1926 General Strike in Britain) as revolution. But the presence of revolutionary students within STST activism and indeed throughout wider AAM activism, and with the protests backed by the National Union of Students testifies to how student politics had been transformed in the aftermath of 1968, but also to the revolutionary creativity and audacity of the best of this radical generation.⁵⁶

Critically, as Peter Hain later wrote of the STST, ‘the most important factor in its development and amazing depth of support and commitment was that it gave expression to a deep and almost enraged opposition to racialism amongst many people in Britain’.⁵⁷ For the first time since Enoch Powell’s racist speech in 1968 there was mass militant anti-racist resistance on the streets. The STST victory inspired further anti-apartheid activism internationally and future anti-racist and anti-fascist activism in Britain. Hain would go on to form the short-lived Action Committee Against Racialism and then help found the Anti-Nazi League in 1977 which played a critical role in confronting and defeating the rising threat of the fascist National Front. STST proved to be a model for the Australian Campaign Against Racialism in Sport (CARIS), which (alongside activists in New Zealand) organised mass protests against the Springboks rugby union tour of 1971, successfully stopped the 1971 cricket tour of Australia, and made an impact directly on South African sportsmen who now came to understand full reality of apartheid situation once isolated.⁵⁸

The STST protests therefore helped pave the way for the future victories of multiracial sporting teams in South Africa after apartheid’s fall, including the Springbok’s inspirational Rugby World Cup victory in 1995 with black captain Siya Kolisi. Yet perhaps the most vital impact was made at the time among those in South Africa fighting apartheid on the front line. As Tennyson Makiwane of the ANC told a meeting of Surrey AAM activists in London in December 1969, Africans rejoiced at seeing the ‘White supermen’ of Springboks ridiculed by the protesters.⁵⁹ The protests gave a huge morale boost to prisoners of the apartheid regime. The white liberal Hugh Lewin, imprisoned in Pretoria for his activism in the African Resistance Movement had a news blackout, but heard his rugby-supporting warders swear about the ‘betogers’ (demonstrators) and ‘that bastard Peter Hain’.⁶⁰ Moses Garoeb, a leading freedom fighter in the South West African People’s Organisation (SWAPO) later told Hain that STST had been an inspiration to SWAPO cadres in the African bush as they heard the news on their radios. Hain’s reply, that ‘it was the dedication and sacrifices of people like them which inspired us to campaign even more vigorously’, might stand as testament to the bonds of solidarity forged during the anti-apartheid struggle during the radical 1960s.⁶¹

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Endnotes

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