**VOICE FILE NAME: COHP Cart Wright (Part Two)**

Key:
**SO: Sue Onslow (Interviewer)**
CW: Carl Wright (Respondent)
s.l.: sounds like

**SO: This is Sue Onslow talking, again, to Mr Carl Wright at the Commonwealth Local Government Forum on Northumberland Avenue on Tuesday 12th March 2013. Carl, thank you very much indeed for agreeing to talk to me again. I wonder if you could begin by saying, please, how did you come to be involved in things Commonwealth in the first place?**

CW: Well it goes back a long time. I think my very first Commonwealth engagement, if I remember correctly, was about April 1980 when I attended the Zimbabwe independence celebrations on the splendid occasion with Bob Marley. But how did I get engaged? Well, at that time I was just taking up my new post in a brand new Commonwealth body called the Commonwealth Trade Union Council, which had just been newly set up. I was the founding Director of that organisation back in 1980. How I got involved with that was I was previously working at the World Trade Union Organisation based in Brussels called the ICFTU, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, which was the main western world body on trade unions. This obviously got me involved in quite a few Commonwealth countries – like Sri Lanka and others at the time – and that organisation, where I was the Economic Secretary, had a lot to do with the International Labour Organisation, ILO, in Geneva, and ran conferences. For some years I was the Secretary of that annual conference at the ILO. During that ILO conference the British TUC used to organise a meeting and a dinner for Commonwealth delegates, which I got increasingly drawn into. I guess that was through my first formal contact. You're talking about informal Commonwealth trade union meetings in the mid to late '70s.

**SO: Yes, so had you been involved at a much more grass roots level in organising protection for workers' rights, etc?**

CW: In so far as I was quite engaged at the international level, but I involved myself in doing things like running around tea estates in Sri Lanka and other

places in the world, trying to help with labour rights and grass roots issues. But it was always from the international angle, as it were.

**SO: You said that the British Trade Union Council was particularly influential in helping to set up the CTUC.**

CW: CTUC, yes. In fact we were based at Congress House headquarters in the UK, but others were influential as well. I think the other organisation which was very instrumental was the Canadian Labour Congress, which was the equivalent body in Canada, and CTUC was a Commonwealth body. The other trade union organisations from Africa and Asia all took part in it, and Australia, and places like that.

**SO: Did you have any 'below-the-radar contacts' with South African trade union organisations at this particular point?**

CW: We did at the ICFTU in Brussels. There was already a committee in the mid-'70s which was already doing some early stuff on sanctions and at that time I was very actively involved in the whole sanctions campaign; and that then naturally led us to continue that engagement when we established a Commonwealth Trade Union Council.

**SO: So how was this funded? Was this funded by dues from national trade union councils?**

CW: Yes, primarily, and we did get a little bit of programme money from the old ODA, which was of course the old DFID, for actual training work and activities of that nature.

**SO: What were your principal responsibilities for organising international – or, rather, transnational – collaboration? To ensure that there was a degree of standardisation of protection of workers' rights, trade bargaining mechanisms?**

CW: Yes, it was linking in. I mean, as I say, the world body I was working with previously was heavily involved in ILO labour standards, which are formal conventions on child labour and that kind of thing, and trying to enforce those and make sure that those were duly respected. But, being a Commonwealth body, our focus was really establishing links with the Commonwealth Secretariat: getting advocacy underway, making sure that trade union policies and inputs were taken into account by the Secretariat. And we were very successful in that. I'll give two examples. I served on two quite important expert groups that the Secretariat set up in the '80s: one was on youth employment issues globally, which reported to CHOGM, and then the other one, if I remember correctly, was at the time quite a revolutionary group. It was on new technologies, and you're talking now about the mid-'80s when that was still a very pre-internet age. It was quite an inventive working group and I put the trade union views to both those groups – which were official expert groups set up by, I think, the Economic Affairs Division. Then what we were able to instigate as a result of that advocacy – I think we set it up within a few years – was a formal meeting of Commonwealth Ministers of Labour which took place, again, during the ILO conference in Geneva. That was obviously the time when all these ministers were together and we were able

to up the ante from what was purely a trade union meeting to a formal meeting of Labour ministers convened by the Secretariat.

**SO: This must have been a challenging time in political terms for you, because this is the 1980s – the heyday of the Thatcher/Reagan "revolution".**

CW: Indeed, it didn't help matters. But, of course, Britain was only one of many countries in the Commonwealth and, of course – as we found out fairly imminently on the whole South Africa business – it was very much isolated in the Commonwealth. We had some strong allies like Bob Hawke of Australia who, at one stage, when he had been a trade union leader, before he became Prime Minister, had served on my board.

**SO: So you had particularly good links with a key political persona?**

CW: Exactly. And other Labour leaders from other countries who went in to Parliament or became ministers. Another example of somebody quite prominent who served on my CTUC board was Joseph Rwegasira who, after being Trade Union Leader in Tanzania, went on to become the Foreign Minister of Tanzania.

**SO: At this particular time, then, did you also try to foster good links with the Trade Union movement here in this country? Because the mid-1980s is the time of the miners' strike. It was very much the agenda of the Thatcher government to "roll back" the position of the unions.**

CW: Yes. We didn't, I guess, get too involved in what was obviously a very domestic issue in the UK. It did have ramifications, of course, for the wider engagement, but there was always a very strong commitment, even at that difficult time, for the British Labour movement to international work, whether it was in South Africa, whether it was all the Labour rights. A lot of the top Labour leaders at the time – from individual unions, apart from the TUC itself – were very engaged internationally. There was a TUC International Committee which I sat on and which I reported to, and so, although all this business was going on domestically with the miners and the anti-trade union legislation, our focus all the time really was on the international side. And I must say, to the credit of British trade unions, they were heavily supportive of the international work throughout.

**SO: Dennis MacShane has commented that the South African Labour movement looked – particularly in this time – to the model of Polish Solidarity as a particular form of non-state Labour organisation. Is that your recollection as well?**

CW: Solidarity, of course, was very much in the news. I'm not sure how far the South African trade unions were necessarily copying that. I mean, there were two major strands, as I'm sure you know. One was the UDM internal structures which, I think, had some elements perhaps similar to the Solidarity movement. But, of course, they were also very closely linked to the exiled ANC, more Moscow-orientated trade unions, and that was a problem at that time. This was still the days of the old Cold War and there was a division in the International Trade Union Movement between the West and the Eastern blocs. Being very frank, one of my problems as a Commonwealth body was

[that] we didn't discriminate between any kind of ideological groupings. So we had, for example, some Communist unions from India who were members, although the majority were western – what we would class as, perhaps, more 'normal' trade unions. But ultimately, as a Commonwealth body, we didn't differentiate between ideological blocks and that occasionally ran into some difficulties, not least when – certainly in Britain – there was still quite a strong western orientation and nervousness about Communist links and the East.

**SO: In what ways were these tensions manifested?**

CW: Let me give you an example. One thing, I guess, I can claim personal credit for…well, with help from some other friends…was that I was able to engineer what was the first official meeting between Oliver Tambo, who was then of course Head of the ANC, and the British trade unions. I think it would've been about 1985 and things were really hotting up in South Africa and the reason there had never been any links between Oliver Tambo and the ANC and the trade union wing of the ANC – called SACTU – was because the British TUC regarded them as being too close to Moscow.

**SO: Because of the South African Communist Party's close cooperation with the ANC?**

CW: Yes, exactly. And so what we were able to do was to overcome some of those fears and say: "Look, what we're concerned about is the apartheid problem. We're not playing international politics in terms of East and West". I think we were able to have an opportunity of overcoming that a bit.

**SO: You then acted as a facilitator or as a bridge?**

CW: Yes. And it gives me the chance to give you the famous quote which I got from Oliver [Tambo] at the time, which was something I remember when he said to me, it was about '85 in Geneva: 'Of course, comrade Wright' – as he used the 'comrade' term of course – 'South Africa is still a member of the Commonwealth'. Which I was a bit perplexed by. And then he qualified about saying…because I then said to him, 'I thought we'd kicked the bastards out!'

**SO: In 1961, indeed!**

CW: Indeed and then he qualified this saying: "Oh no, that was just the regime. The people are still members of the Commonwealth". Which I thought was rather nice, coming from him ,and also there was a political message there to the Commonwealth.

**SO: That was a political message he'd given Sonny Ramphal, as well.**

CW: Indeed, he used the same terminology.

**SO: Yes and Ramphal was enormously relieved to have that message from Tambo.**

CW: Yeah. The other little episode…I don't know if you want to go on to the EPG… Well, again, without blowing my own trumpet, the CTUC trumpet I should say, if you read Sonny Ramphal's memoirs, he's very, very gracious in attributing the original context of the EPG to the Commonwealth Trade Union Council,

because it was something which we had conceptualised as a compromise between sanctions and negotiations and linking the two together as an alternative to 'only sanctions' or 'only negotiations' which, of course, the British wanted. We came up with the idea just before the CHOGM in the Bahamas in1985. We talked about it with our friends – who happened to be Bob Hawke, who was then Prime Minister, and Salim Salim of Tanzania, the Foreign Minister – who then talked to Sonny. And then, of course, Sonny picked up the ball and ran with it and he deserves full credit for making it happen. But in his memoirs, he does actually attribute the idea to us, which was rather gracious of him.

**SO: If I could go back to just where this idea of an EPG came from. Was it something that you discussed over an informal meeting that then acquired shape and form over these informal and discreet discussions? Or was it like Anthony Eden, in his bath, coming up with the idea of German rearmament in NATO by expanding the West European Union in 1954?**

CW: Oh no, it was something done in close consultation with our South African friends and clearly there were different views there – particularly the ANC and SACP who would be much more insistent on sanctions. I think the UDM group also were keen on sanctions but saw there was maybe some case for having some pressures and negotiations linked to that. What we wanted to do was to have a compromise which would allow us to move forward, and if the EPG failed, then sanctions would clamp in, which is exactly what happened of course.

**SO: You've mentioned the ANC. I know this is very much the era when the ANC was pushing to be recognised as the sole voice of black South Africans. However, there were tensions with UDM, as you've mentioned, from its formation in 1984, and also the long standing animosity between the PAC and the ANC. How did you deal with all of this?**

CW: With great difficulty. But we actually were the only body – certainly trade union-wise – that managed to bring everybody together. So, we were able to bring together the ANC trade union wing, of course very closely allied, as I mentioned already, at the meeting with Oliver Tambo. We managed to bring together the PAC trade union wing and also, obviously, the UDM and organise joint meetings where we were able to meet and that continued subsequently into the late '80s, when I moved on to the Secretariat, with some resources from the Secretariat. So, the Commonwealth, whether in the shape of the Trade Union Council or the Secretariat, was playing quite a major role in bringing together the different factions in South Africa and outside South Africa and allowing them to develop joint strategies. Which, incidentally, is the same thing we were doing within Namibia, as well with SWAPO.

**SO: With SWAPO and SWANU?**

CW: Yes.

**SO: How did you go about this? Did you invite them to meet you in Lusaka? Did you invite them to meet you in Gabarone? After all, you'd have to get the political personalities together.**

CW: Well the easiest, of course, was – as I mentioned a minute ago – Geneva, because everybody came to Geneva. The ILO had a standing committee, if I remember correctly, which was looking at the whole apartheid thing like all of the UN bodies. So, they had been inviting and the ANC came to Geneva; so, that was the initial place where we got people together, and then from that we had meetings elsewhere in London and other places, and eventually as we moved towards the late '80s then we were using a lot of Front Line States. I remember we must've done at least a dozen trade union workshops in Harare where we brought people from Lusaka and from inside South Africa: people like Cyril Ramaphosa, Sydney Mufamadi and Jay Naidoo.

**SO: Was the British government, in any way, trying to use these transnational networks as a way to make discreet contact with the ANC? After all, governments talk to governments. I've listened to Jonathan Powell emphasising this, and I understand that particular approach. However, junior officials have responsibility to talk to all sides, so, was there a degree of exploiting your particular lines of contact?**

CW: Not at any political level. If anything, don't forget, this was the heyday – as you rightly said – of Thatcher and her position was very clear on the ANC being a terrorist organisation. I always remember a wonderful little anecdote… Receiving a letter from Number 10, where we'd written on behalf of the CTUC calling for sanctions, and we'd had the standard Foreign Office reply signed by Thatcher back about why they didn't support sanctions. But there was a nice little personal touch because the key sentence was: "… therefore, the British government does not support sanctions" and the word 'not' was underlined about three times in red ink.

**SO: What about the British Labour Party at this particular time? Up to 1983-4, of course, its leader was Michael Foot, and then Neil Kinnock. Was Kinnock particularly active and politically supportive?**

CW: Very much so and, of course, Glenys Kinnock also. Both very involved in the anti-apartheid movement, so there's that very strong link with the anti-apartheid movement. I certainly recall about '86/'87, having various meetings where he took part in Congress House, and there was – from the opposition, certainly – a lot of support for some of this work.

**SO: You mentioned the difficulty of getting the differing elements of the PAC, UDM and ANC and the varying trade union organisations wings together in the same room. To what extent do you think that that, in those early days, helped to establish contact between them, with a view to moving to the negotiations post-1990?**

CW: I think it was significant. Let me give you examples of what we concretely did in the Commonwealth context. When we had CHOGMs, and certainly by the time we had the CHOGM in Vancouver in '89, we had a delegation which was composed of the different sort of trade union wings – certainly PAC and UDM wings. We also had meetings in London, as I said earlier, and I think it did bring them together quite a bit and allowed them to develop joint strategies, and that obviously continued subsequently. Maybe I'm delving too much into anecdotes, but my other interesting little story was when we had Jay Naidoo – who, you may know, was a senior minister in the Mandela government, but at

that time led the trade unions. When he came to London, we put him up in a little hotel in Russell Square and the very first evening he was there we went out for dinner and came back to find his hotel room totally ransacked in a very obvious way. It was clearly the South African security who were telling him, as a message, 'You're maybe with your mates but we're keeping an eye on you.' So, things like that went on, even in London.

**SO: Carl, when you joined the Secretariat in 1988, did you continue with these trade union contacts through the Commonwealth Trade Union Council or did that side of your responsibilities lapse?**

CW: No, very much so. I did other things, as well, on Mozambique and other areas of work, but no, if anything, it has continued in quite a substantial way. I think, between '88 and maybe '92, I would say the Secretariat must have funded anything up to about 20 trade union events in Front Line States which were designed exactly to develop those kinds of policies, which I helped to coordinate.

**SO: The story of South Africa is, of course, much better known and researched than the story of Namibia. The December of 1988 agreement between South Africa and Cuba stipulated there should be a mutual withdrawal from Angola and also the associated parallel negotiations for Namibian independence. Were you intimately involved in that side of things?**

CW: Not directly in the negotiations, but again, gently, through the trade union wings. So, again we were bringing together the exiled wing and the internal organisers and we were doing the same sort of thing in two ways. We were, through the Secretariat, funding scholarships for key people in places like Tanzania and other Front Line States, but also we had exactly the same strategy on a smaller scale as we subsequently did for South Africa, where we organised events in places like Harare, where we allowed the two to come together and, basically, although there was a formal agenda of course, it allowed them the opportunity to do a lot of their joint strategies and exchange views and come closer together.

**SO: I do know that, between 1991 and 1994, Moses Anafu at the Secretariat was intimately involved in trying to contribute to the discussions and, particularly, to persuading Inkhata that it shouldn't withdraw totally from the negotiations. Were you in any way supportive of these efforts? And, did Inkhata have a particular trade union wing or affiliation?**

CW: Well, certainly there were meetings I attended in various country houses in the UK where Inkhata and others were present. So, I was a little bit on the periphery of some of these goings on and I was invited to various events.

**SO: So are you talking about Mells Park?**

CW: No, this is more in Wilton House and places like that, or at separate meetings. I wasn't involved in the Mells Park one. So, it is a bit on the periphery, I guess, but at that time, of course, there was the push from British government to support Inkhata as an alternative, and they were being promoted. But, again, there was an attempt to try and, I guess, bring the different factions together.

**SO: So, obviously, you paid close attention to the observer group team that went down there. Did you provide any briefing paper to support the CODESA team or anything like that? I just wondered if, in any way, that you were aware of the CODESA meetings with Mandela, De Klerk, and the contribution of the Secretariat?**

CW: Only in very general term. I can't say we were involved in the intimacies of it. I mean, we were more really acting as a facilitator to continue the outside pressure as much as anything and continue. I did go to South Africa once or twice in that time – both in my CTUC days and subsequently, of course – and had links with various people.

**SO: What was your particular opinion of Cyril Ramaphosa as, after all, a leading trade unionist?**

CW: Very high opinion. At the time, he was probably the leading light and, of course, subsequently – as you know, [when he was] Secretary General of the ANC – did most of the negotiations with Rolf Meyer and I think, certainly as far as I can see, he really drove that whole exercise in a very big way. So, yes, I have a very high opinion of Cyril.

**SO: Did you, in any way, provide supporting briefing material? Or, in these negotiations, was he able to draw on his own particular negotiating skills, his own intellect, his own experience?**

CW: No, we didn't directly. Go back a step: a few years earlier, I think I can say, I organised Cyril's first overseas trip which was one of our trade union meetings in Harare and some of the initial – maybe, if you like – background which then led on to a bit later to CODESA stuff; [this] was probably where we made a contribution. But I wasn't directly involved in the CODESA things in any way.

**SO: I was talking to Ambassador Abdul Minty on Friday. His comment was that he felt that the Commonwealth played a significant and unrecognised role in the transition of South Africa to black majority rule, and that this was not simply in the International Solidarity Movement to try to exert pressure on sanctions and also disinvestment, etc., but that there was a much more positive role between 1990-1994.**

CW: In a sense I have skipped quite an important chapter, and again it depends how much this was directly used in CODESA – I'm not sure. But I think we touched last time, already, on the Commonwealth report on human resource developments for post-apartheid, which I think gave some useful resource material to the negotiators. When it came to issues around black empowerment and the public service, or even in education and universities, the report tried to document as far as we could at the time what were the issues, how they could potentially be overcome, and we also did actually do some number-crunching. I don't know if you had a chance to look at the report, but at the time I think it was quite a detailed document which Penguin published as a paperback. What it was really meant to do was to set out the agenda for the post-apartheid transition. That work, I think, started around '91/'92, and then I was commuting to South Africa very regularly while the CODESA process was going on. As I said, I didn't input into it directly, but I

think indirectly, I'm sure, some of the work that came out of the group contributed – although it wasn't really finished until about '93 or thereabouts, so it was really a bit late in the negotiations. But it was meant to provide the basis for the post-apartheid transition and I think it was used quite a bit. Indeed, the main use of the report – which was done in collaboration with the UN, but it was a Commonwealth initiative which I was basically the Secretary to – was the convening of the post-April '94 International Donors Conference in Cape Town, in late 1994, which brought resources from different donors for the post-apartheid transition, of course, which was still very important for those early years.

**SO: Did you have an official view when South Africa changed from its socialist agenda immediately post-black majority rule and then went much more for an economic liberalisation and market reform strategy?**

CW: Well that kind of happened – or, should I say, I think it happened over time. I think there was quite a strong period in '94/'95 when there was quite a lot of affirmative action, when there was the RDP, Jay Naidoo was responsible for [this] as Minister of the Reconstruction and Development Programme, which did have quite a strong interventionist element to it and the liberalisation didn't come until a little bit later. There were some elements of it – and it was partly to reassure the Afrikaaner, of course. But I think the real stronger liberalisation, I think, maybe came a bit later.

**SO: Did the Commonwealth, as far as you were aware, continue to offer expert advice? Or was this now an era of South Africa financial and economic sovereignty?**

CW: I changed hats, of course, at that time. I finished the Secretariat in '94 just after we'd completed this exercise on post-apartheid and switched over to the Local Government Forum. One of the first things we did was to take experts to the South Africans to help them with their local government system and the local government structures.

**SO: Or lack of local government structures?**

CW: Well, lack of them. Still very much apartheid-based, with a lot of white structures and parallel black structures, and trying to bring them together and… To give you one concrete example – which, actually, I'm very pleased it found its way in to the new legislation… We had a colleague from Australia at the time, a local government colleague who was involved and we sent him out. He had this, I think, rather nice little concept which he always said there are no such things as 'levels' of government because levels implies tiers and hierarchy and why should local government be at the bottom of the level? You know, it has its own sphere of responsibility, and so we don't believe in levels, but we believe in 'spheres' of government, where each sphere – local, provincial, central or federal, if you like – has its own area of responsibility. Sure enough, the concept of 'spheres of government' found its way into the legislation and is reflected in the South African constitution. So, we did have an input.

**SO: But one of the key challenges, it strikes me, with South Africa's transition from apartheid is to address this lack of local government, particularly in the form of "Bantustans"…**

CW: Sure.

**SO: …and so if there isn't a strong state at local or indeed regional level, how do you begin to build the political cultures that support this?**

CW: Exactly. And if you go back to the report of the Commonwealth post-apartheid, we did have a chapter already in there on local government as well as central government and the importance of having that transition from the apartheid structures and having more integrated, non-racial local government structures. And that transition took a long time and you could argue that some of it is still with us.

**SO: You've mentioned a number of key personalities today. I'm going to suggest to you that the Commonwealth is very much a personality and network political organisation.**

CW: It has its role.

**SO: You've mentioned Neil Kinnock and Glenys Kinnock, Cyril Ramaphosa. Also, Bob Hawke, of course. But were there any other particular leading lights within the International Trade Union movement that contributed to South African transition through the Commonwealth?**

CW: Not to forget I mentioned Jay Naidoo. The other key South African personality, was Sydney Mufamadi who, of course, became subsequently, much later, the Minister of Local Government. But he was a leading trade unionist as well. I think he was on the CTUC delegation, we had in Vancouver at the CHOGM back in '87 together with Jay Naidoo, but that's on the South African side. On the international side, I mean, there were lots of people who were very engaged. There was a guy from Barbados who was probably one of the most senior trade unionists in the Caribbean called Frank Walcott – not the cricketer, but anyway… He was very engaged in all this work. We had a very strong delegation at the Bahamas CHOGM, obviously, when the EPG was being formed. I think I organised one of the first, certainly, ANC-led delegations to Jamaica back in the '80s which was one of the first links they had with Jamaica. So, I think the Commonwealth played quite a role in making those links. But, coming to your question about personalities… I think on the PAC side it probably would be unfair not to mention Piroshaw Camay, who you may have come across in a new incarnation. He now does a lot of work on NGO in civil society in South Africa where he was the leading PAC trade union person at the time.

**SO: You mentioned helping to arrange for Sydney Mufamadi and Jay Naidoo to come to Vancouver. It strikes me as another example of a Commonwealth organisation providing a reason for opponents of apartheid South Africa to meet Commonwealth leaders, rather as Abdul Minty used the Commonwealth Journalist Association – because he was the Editor, of course, of Anti-Apartheid News. In that guise he was able to attend CHOGMs and, although obviously not intimately involved in discussion with leaders, was able to use the space around meetings.**

CW: We did actually have a meeting with Geoffrey Howe in his official capacity as Foreign Secretary where myself and colleagues let him know, in no imprecise terms, what their view was of the British policy at the time.

**SO: And do you recall how Geoffrey Howe handled that?**

CW: With great caution. No doubt duly briefed.

**SO: I've also heard it said that – for all Mrs Thatcher's passion 'to play the pantomime villain with relish' – Geoffrey Howe, in fact, deliberately adopted a much more cautious and pragmatic, but also approachable, style as Foreign Secretary.**

CW: He was there, he would listen, he wasn't confrontational and – [though] I am not sure the meeting achieved a lot – at least there was an opportunity for our South African colleagues to present their views to him on behalf of the black trade union movement.

**SO: And then there was of course Mrs Thatcher announcing that Britain hadn't, in any way, compromised its stance. Mrs Thatcher certainly had robust views on the issue of sanctions whereas she was no supporter of apartheid. And yet she's held up as the villain of the piece.**

CW: I think sometimes her public pronouncements were a bit different than what was going on behind the scenes, obviously, as we saw subsequently in the later years.

**SO: Yes. Did you remain in very close touch with the Labour Party figures? You have made reference to Neil and Glenys Kinnock, but what of other leading Labour Party figures?**

CW: Obviously, less in an official capacity when I moved to Secretariat because I was technically in a diplomatic position, so, I had to be a little bit more neutral. I had various private contacts and, indeed, at one stage I was Treasurer of something called One World Action which was a charity of which Glenys Kinnock was the Chair. But that was doing work on charitable things throughout the world.

**SO: So one of a number of organisations that contributed or added its pebble to the pile of transition in South Africa?**

CW: Well, I hope so.

**SO: Yes, indeed. Carl, thank you very much indeed for helping with this oral history project.**

CW: I'll give you one last little quick story which may be worth mentioning, on some of the interplay that went on behind the scenes. I was invited in probably about '86, I think, for my first ever visit to South Africa and at that time, of course, the official policy of trade unions was to boycott. The invitation had come from UDM – COSATU, in fact – which was our main partner. And I was asked to speak at the COSATU Conference which was at Wits University in '86 and it was at a time – just to set the scene a little bit – when COSATU headquarters had just been bombed by the regime. Various

officials were having car bombs, the President of COSATU had his arm in a plaster where he'd been beaten up by the police, so it was pretty rough days. It was intimated to me by the South African Embassy here that, although having a British passport, it was highly unlikely that I'd get much beyond the gates of Jan Smuts airport. I was also travelling with Norman Willis, by the way, from the TUC.

**SO: Well it was a state of emergency there then, wasn't it.**

CW: Yes, exactly. So very, very tough, difficult times. Anyway, to cut a long story short, there was a behind the scenes intervention by the British government to make sure that we got a limited three day visa by the regime and we were duly allowed entry for a very short period – spent sort of 24 hours a day running around doing things and then went back again.

**SO: So this is 1986?**

CW: I think it was about '86, yeah. The second COSATU Congress.

**SO: So the British Ambassador would have been, I think, Patrick Moberley. So it was just before Robin Renwick came in.**

CW: I think so, yeah. But the intervention, I think, came from Linda Chaulker at this end. So, there was a case where the British government was playing – behind the scenes – a positive role to allow, on the quiet, something that they wouldn't do normally …

**SO: Trying to create policy space, yes. Mr Wright, thank you very much indeed.**

CW: Pleasure.

[END OF AUDIOFILE]