

Interview with E. S. Reddy conducted by Lisa Brock

This interview was conducted as research for the book *No Easy Victories: African Liberation and American Activists over a Half Century, 1950-2000*, edited by William Minter, Gail Hovey, and Charles Cobb Jr. (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2007.)

" In India, in our generation, we're all influenced by Gandhi. So there is Gandhi under the skin ... We're influenced by Nehru. ... We wanted to have a society which is socialist, like Nehru wanted to have. So it was that kind of a radical outlook. ... Coming from that background, with both Gandhi and Nehru, ... we had a duty, not only to get India's freedom, [but that] India's freedom should be the beginning of the end of colonialism." — E. S. Reddy

" It has been my privilege to work with E. S. Reddy for close on 20 years, and ... there is no one at the United Nations who has done more to expose the injustices of apartheid and the illegality of the South African regime than he has. E. S. Reddy has done so with tremendous courage and ability. ... He dedicated his entire energy and skills to the liberation from oppression of the people of Southern Africa. He had to face many obstacles and antagonisms, coming from the Western Powers mainly, but he had the skill, courage and determination necessary to overcome the systematic overt and covert opposition to the liberation of the people of Southern Africa." — Sean MacBride, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize and former United Nations commissioner for Namibia [1]

Introduction

Coming to the United States from India in 1946, E. S. Reddy was a witness to and an important participant in half a century of the international struggle to end colonialism, white minority rule, and apartheid in Southern Africa. In 1949 he went to work for the United Nations Secretariat and served there for 35 years. From 1963 to 1984, he was the UN official in charge of action against apartheid, first as principal secretary of the Special Committee Against Apartheid and then as director of the Centre against Apartheid. When he retired in 1985, he had achieved the rank of assistant general secretary of the United Nations.

Beginning with his position as secretary of the Special Committee Against Apartheid, and in the face of opposition from the Western powers, Reddy facilitated the work of the small countries who were members of the Committee and who had taken up the responsibility of working to end apartheid. It was Reddy who supplied them with suggestions for action, draft resolutions, speeches, and reports. As director of the United Nations Centre against Apartheid, he played a key role in promoting international sanctions against South Africa and organizing the world campaign to free Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners. Recognizing the importance of public action for the effectiveness of the United Nations, he worked with and supported anti-apartheid movements around the globe. He brings special insight to the discussion of support movements for African liberation in the United States because he saw numerous organizations at work over more than 40 years. He observed the power of American

racism to influence not only U.S. government policy but also the support movements themselves. Throughout, he used the resources at his disposal to help bring an end to apartheid.

E. S. Reddy had brought with him to New York an interest in South Africa, where nearly a million people of Indian ancestry were living. With an undergraduate degree from the University of Madras, he received a master's degree in political science from New York University in 1948 and continued his studies at Columbia University. During his student years, in his effort to stay informed, he began going to the library of the Council on African Affairs, which had newspapers from Africa, including South Africa. His involvement with African issues continued through his involvement with the Council. He brought a delegation of Indian students to a Council-sponsored demonstration at the South African consulate in 1946 and met African leaders and American activists at Council-sponsored events.

In New York and at the United Nations, Reddy was connected to generations of diplomats, scholars, and activists, from Paul Robeson, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Alphaeus Hunton at the Council on African Affairs to petitioners like Tanzania's Julius Nyerere and Mozambique's Eduardo Mondlane. He worked closely with Diallo Telli, ambassador from Guinea and chair of the Special Committee, who went on to become secretary general of the Organization of African Unity. He traveled to many countries around the world, often with the chair of the Special Committee. They spoke with presidents and foreign ministers, making the case for support of liberation struggles in South Africa. They also met with leaders of liberation movements and anti-apartheid movements.

Working with those movements in the United States and Europe especially, he collaborated on dozens of seminars and conferences. He was involved through the entire period, from the Council on African Affairs to the founding of the American Committee on Africa in the 1950s to the Free South Africa Movement demonstrations at the South African embassy in Washington in the 1980s. He observed the dynamic activism as well as the divisions within the American movement, staying focused on the goal of ending apartheid.

A collection of Reddy's articles, papers, and speeches is available on the African National Congress website: <http://www.anc.org.za/un/reddy>. His papers are divided between Yale University Library in the United States, the Nehru Memorial Museum in New Delhi, and the Universities of Witwatersrand and Durban-Westville in South Africa, as well as several other institutions.

The following interview with E. S. Reddy addresses the importance of India as his place of origin both physically and ideologically, and as the source of his interest in Africa. It presents his work at the United Nations and his observations on American support for African liberation. The interview was conducted on July 20, 2004 at Mr. Reddy's apartment in New York City by Dr. Lisa Brock. Nigel Scotland videotaped the interview.

Gail Hovey
September 2004

Transcript

Interviewee: E. S. Reddy

Interviewer: Lisa Brock

Location: New York, New York, USA

Date: July 20, 2004

Videographer: Nigel Scotland

Q: Mr. Reddy, could you state your full name for me, and your date of birth, your age now, and where you were born?

REDDY: My full name is quite long: Enuga Sreenivasulu Reddy. In south India we have the surname first, so Enuga is really my surname. And it's a long name. But most of the time I've been using E. S. Reddy. I was born in a small village called Pallapalli in the south of India. And I studied in India, got my BA in India. Then I came to the United States in 1946 for further studies.

Q: And when were you born?

REDDY: I was born in 1924. I suppose that makes me 80.

Q: That's great.

REDDY: It was on July 1, it's supposed to be.

Q: Where were your parents born and what did they do most of their lives, in terms of work?

REDDY: Well, my parents were also born in India. My father was a businessman, he was in the business of mining and exporting mica, mostly to Britain. He was originally from a farming family. India is made up mostly of—dependent on agriculture for most of the people. And during the Depression, or shortly before the Depression, when they got into a lot of debt, he found a job in a mine and from then became a shareholder in a mine and exporting company and so on.

Q: And your mother?

REDDY: My mother was a "housewife." She worked at home.

Q: Did you have brothers and sisters?

REDDY: Yes, I have four brothers and a sister. Three of my brothers and my sister are alive.

Q: So you came here, you said, in 1946?

REDDY: Yes, March 1946.

Q: Can you give me a little bit of background about how you ended up here for your studies and what you were studying when you came?

REDDY: Well, I finished my BA in India in 1943. It was wartime and I wanted to come abroad. I wasn't particularly interested in going to England. Going abroad had a value in India in terms of education. Especially because England was the colonial power for us. So I thought the alternative was the United States. A cousin of mine had been here before. I was told you could go to the United States, you can study and you can work and finance yourself, your studies by work. So I was interested, I came over.

I came actually to study chemical engineering in Illinois, but my boat was late; it was very hard to get a boat after the war. By the time I came here it was the middle of the term, it was March 20. And I didn't want to go all the way to Illinois and out of the way. I wanted news from India; I was very much interested in politics in India. So I decided to stay in New York and look for some course. By that time I'd already left my BA in '43, and I forgot my maths. So I decided to go into political science and joined the New York University. I got my masters there in 1948 and then I moved to Columbia University and after a year I got a job in the UN

Q: And how did you get a job at the United Nations?

REDDY: There was a first internship program at the UN in 1948, an international internship program. I applied for it, I got it. It was a two-month internship. So I came to know the people in the UN And I applied for a job and it took me a long time. It so happened that an Indian was leaving the UN and I was interviewed for that post. I suppose some others were interviewed. I was chosen for the job. It was just a matter of luck when I was utterly broke.

Q: You were what?

REDDY: Utterly broke.

Q: Utterly broke [laughter]. And so you got this job. All right. So you're in the United Nations as an intern in 1949.

REDDY: '48. And then I got a job in '49, May 26.

Q: What was the job in '49?

REDDY: It was called political affairs officer. It was mostly a research job. I was in the section on Africa and Middle East. We were doing some research on that, but not of any great significance. But it gave me an opportunity to read newspapers from the area, including South Africa.

Q: And is that how you got involved in African solidarity work or supporting the South African struggle?

REDDY: Not really. I was interested a long time before, already in the '40s, when the struggle [in South Africa] took on new forms and Indians and Africans were cooperating in the struggle. During the war, the West, the United States and Britain, talked about four freedoms and all kinds of things, Atlantic Charter, but it didn't apply to India or South Africa. So there was a resurgence, a movement in South Africa.

So we were very much interested in South Africa in India, because a lot of Indians were there in South Africa. And apart from that, Gandhi was there, had struggled a long time before. So there was this memory and sentiment about South Africa. And of course Nehru was talking about South Africa, Gandhi was talking about South Africa and so on.[2]

So I was interested in South Africa. I was interested in the struggle. I had heard a little about the story—in the papers—about the struggle. And when I came to New York in 1946, that was the time when the Indians, because of a new law against the Indians, they decided on a mass passive resistance struggle in which 2,000 people went to jail. It started in June 1946, but it was developing from March on. And in July, India stopped trade with South Africa. In June, India wrote to the UN to discuss the question of South Africa. So when I came to New York this was very much in the news. And I wanted to find something [about] what's going on. I was very much interested. And the newspapers, New York Times, you might get a small paragraph once in a few days. It wasn't very much.

Then I learned from a friend that there was a Council on African Affairs in New York with a library and they get some newspapers from Africa and South Africa.[3] So I went to the Council on African Affairs and started looking at the newspapers. There was a newspaper called Bantu World. And there was another newspaper called Guardian, I think it was a communist newspaper. So they gave a lot of news about what was developing, not only in terms of the Indian struggle, but also about the African part of the struggle. Later, of course, in August, there was the big African mine labor strike. So every week I used to go and look at the newspapers. That is how I met Dr. Alphaeus Hunton, a very fine man. He was head of research[at the Council on African Affairs] at that time, later executive director. We became good friends. So I became a regular visitor to the thing. I used to take notes about the struggle, and I don't know for what purpose, because I was so much interested about—from the newspapers and so on.

So it happened that the matter was raised in the United Nations in '46 by India, discussion started in November 1946. So in November the people in South Africa, the Indians in South Africa, raised some money and decided to send a delegation to the UN to help the Indian delegation and lobby with other delegations. So they got, they persuaded easily Dr. A. B. Xuma, the president of the African National Congress, to lead the delegation. And there were two Indians and a white.

So the delegation came to New York. The Council on African Affairs hosted the delegation. They had a reception for them. They had a meeting where they brought a number of trade unions and others so they could brief them. And there was a meeting in Harlem, a rally in the Abyssinian Church.[4] I was at the reception and the meeting there. At the same time, of course, the delegation from India came, which was very much interested in the problem in South Africa. Not only South Africa, racism in South

Africa, but the question of South West Africa, Namibia. India really took the lead in fighting South Africa on Namibia.

So that is how I got involved. At that time the Council on African Affairs organized, decided to have a demonstration in front of the South African consulate in New York. I was in contact with the Council, so I took a group of Indian students to join the demonstration.

Q: And these were Indian students that you knew from—

REDDY: Not only NYU but Columbia. I met them in the International House. One of them was actually in a photograph with me, she was a student visiting from Michigan. So we went and joined the demonstration. I suppose if you talk about activism, activity, that's my first activity in terms of doing anything about South Africa.

Q: Was there an Indian student meeting place in the city and that's how you knew them?

REDDY: Not a student meeting place. I don't know if I was still at the International House in New York. But many Indian students were there, living at the International House, so we would meet there. I knew the students who would be interested in political things of this kind. And also it was sort of a national honor. So we talked to a few of them and went to the demonstration.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit more about the Council on African Affairs and who else you met there and your relationship over time with the Council.

REDDY: Well, as I said, I went to the Council on African Affairs mainly because of my interest in news about South Africa. That was fairly early in 1946, maybe May or something of that kind, '46. The Council on African Affairs was on 26th Street, just west of 5th Avenue. It was a building owned by a man called Fred Field. And the Council, I think, had two floors. One floor was the library where they got a number of African newspapers, and a small room for receptions and things of that kind. I think the library they used as a reading room, they used it for receptions and so on, meetings. And upstairs were offices.

Paul Robeson was the head of the Council on African Affairs, but I don't think he had an office there. But he gave an office to Dr. Du Bois who had left the NAACP[5] at that time because of some differences. And Paul Robeson gave him an office where he could work in peace and do his research. He wrote his book, *The World in Africa*, in that office.

Then there was a man, one of the founders of the Council on African Affairs, called Max Yergan, who used to be a YMCA missionary in South Africa. Later he went to the opposite side and became part of the Katanga lobby and it was quite disgraceful. He was executive secretary at that time. And then there was Dr. Alphaeus Hunton who was the research director at that time, who did most of the work there. I think he used to be a teacher and teaching at the Howard University and left to join the Council on African Affairs. He was a fine man. He left later for Africa and lived in Guinea, Ghana and Zambia. And he died in Zambia. I came to know Alphaeus Hunton very well and I used to be in touch with him for quite some time.

Q: What are your memories of Alphaeus Hunton, what can you say about him? You say he's a fine man. What can you remember about him that makes you say that?

REDDY: He was the man who really did all the work in the Council on African Affairs. Max Yergan was executive director, was most of the time out. And he did a lot of research, he published a bulletin, he published a book, he published a number of papers, pamphlets and other things. And he was the one, also, who kept in contact with the United Nations. There was a man called Chapman, Daniel Chapman, in the United Nations Secretariat at that time. And Alphaeus knew him well so he used to go to see him and through him make other contacts. Daniel Chapman—after Ghana became independent, he became the first ambassador of Ghana to the UN.

At that time, the problems were South Africa, racism in South Africa, and also the proposal by the South African government, the Smuts government, to annex South West Africa, Namibia, so that it wouldn't be a different country. And nobody knew anything about South West Africa. And [the proposal] would have gone through easily. None of the delegates, none of the other governments, except a few Western governments like Britain and the United States, had any information. But Alphaeus, because of his research—he was a very good researcher—he was able to put together the information, and that was passed around to the delegates. And the other side was, on the other hand, the Indian delegation knew a lot about South Africa. And it included one person who used to be Indian representative, I think it was called agent-general in South Africa, Sir Maharaj Singh. And he lived in South Africa, stayed in Durban for a couple of years, three years. He knew the conditions in South Africa.

So when the debate started in the United Nations General Assembly, Sir Maharaj Singh says, "I know South Africa. Whichever African would want to join South Africa with that kind of lack of rights?" and so on. So that immediately set the tone for the whole debate. So one by one the Asian countries and Latin American countries and others started opposing this. And of course they have some information from Alphaeus Hunton.

Then, of course, the Western powers had to withdraw, especially the United States, which stopped the debate. Discussion was postponed, and that saved South West Africa. Otherwise South West Africa would have been gobbled up a long time ago. I would give a lot of credit for that to Alphaeus Hunton, one of the few people who could feed the information to the delegates and people in the United Nations. Later, of course, as a personal friend, I have very good, warm feelings about him. But also about his work.

But later the Council on African Affairs came under attack by the government, when McCarthyism had started. The Council on African Affairs was declared a subversive organization. I think there was a Subversive Organizations Control Act. And then the leaders of the Communist Party in America were put on trial for sedition or something of that kind, there was the Smith Act. And Alphaeus Hunton and a couple of others, Dashiell Hammett, who was a novelist, they started a fund for the bail. Then there was some investigation—I don't know how it happened, they were taken to jail. So Alphaeus Hunton was in jail for some time. So that disrupted the Council on African Affairs very much.

But after he came back from jail, it must have been about late 1950 or '51, the Council moved to Harlem and survived for a little while nominally. They sent some money for the Defiance Campaign in 1952.[6] But shortly after that they disintegrated.

Q: Can you say a little bit more about the role of India in the context of being one of the first countries at the United Nations that could speak for South Africa and Africa in general. Can you say a little bit about what India did, the role it played?

REDDY: Well, the situation of racism in South Africa was an issue in India for a long time. When Gandhi was there he fought against racism. Thousands of people went to jail and so on. So that's part of our memory. And it was a national issue; everybody agreed on it. Because it was a national humiliation that an Indian, because he's an Indian, because of his color, he's treated as second-class citizen or worse. This goes back to end of the nineteenth century, because many of the Indians went to South Africa as contract laborers. There had been conferences between India and South Africa a couple of times. But they never solved the problem because the South Africans couldn't accept Indians with equal rights or even slightly equal rights, because then the Africans will get ideas and so on. So they wanted to put the Indians in their place.

But then in the '30s there was a more radical movement developing among Indians. Before that they were settlers or something of that kind. But in the '30s there was industrialization, there were Indian trade unions being formed. Many of the Indians became communists, and some Gandhians and communists joined together with the idea of having a more militant resistance instead of compromising all the time. And also they felt that Indians cannot earn their rights by themselves, they are a very small group. They had to join with the Africans. So that was the outlook with which people—both communists, many of them became communists, and many of them became followers of Gandhi, pacifists. And they both agreed on that. And that developed into a struggle, in 1946, the first real mass struggle in South Africa, when 2,000 people went to jail. Modern type of mass struggle. And later, of course, it developed into a much bigger thing with the Africans, the Defiance Campaign in '52.

So the Indian sympathies were definitely with the Indians in South Africa. But now a new element was coming: the Indians in South Africa wanted unity with the Africans. So there was some hesitation, but really people like Nehru and others always believed that Indians have to join with Africans, not only in South Africa but all over Africa. That the African interests are paramount and you had to become part of it.

So there was full support in '46, in the whole of India. And in fact the embargo on trade with South Africa was imposed in July '46. It was [done] by the government of the British Viceroy, because there was such national feeling. The government, the real national government, a democratic government, came to power only in September '46. When in September '46 the government was formed, Nehru was prime minister. And one of the first things he talks about is we can't tolerate this. And also there was a strong feeling in India which was instilled by Nehru in a sense, and Gandhi, that India's freedom should be the beginning of freedom of all the colonies. That we have a duty to all the colonies.

So when the Indian delegation came to the United Nations in '46 for the first time, the free Indian delegation, they said the main issues in the world for us are colonialism and racism. And that is what they were looking at. They were not interested in the Cold War and other things. [Those issues] were relatively minor, in a sense. And so India felt very strongly. And India took it up, the question of South Africa, and as I said also about Namibia, and tried to get support from other countries. And, in fact, build up support in the public, because the Indian struggle for freedom itself has gone on for a long time. And it had developed a solidarity support in Britain. There was a fascination with the Indian struggle for freedom because of Gandhi, in many countries and so on. Many people got involved in supporting Indian struggle for freedom and in praise of Gandhi and so on.

Now everybody who was for Indian freedom, they were supporting African freedom, because it easily transfers itself, in a sense. So you find the solidarity movement developing. The people who are in the solidarity movement were the people who were in the solidarity movement with India, in those days, early days. And they start promoting other things. And India was outspoken constantly on this problem. And that helped develop support in the United Nations and in the public.

Q: How did the United States respond, in the UN, to India's role and the increasing interest of the UN in the South African situation, and the African anti-colonial struggle in general? Do you have any memories?

REDDY: I have memories, but people might disagree. Some people think U.S. is a very liberal country with human rights and all kinds of things. But in 1946, as I said, India brought this question of racism in South Africa. So India was against General Smuts[7] and South Africa. [Smuts and South Africa] were great allies with the West, United States and Britain. South Africa had all the uranium. And of course General Smuts was a great leader of freedom and everything else, holistic theories, philosophy and so on. And as Du Bois said a long time ago, General Smuts, standing on the neck of the black man, is shown in the world as an outspoken exponent of freedom and all that. So they didn't like that at all.

And then you had India in the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly dealing with colonialism, taking up the issue of all the colonies and trust territories and all that. The United States and others wanted to have their trust territories [under] full control and military bases and everything else. And India was against it because of the policy against colonialism. And India was fighting on South Africa and Namibia. So they didn't like it at all.

That was in '46, November and December. And in January or February '47, I think it was January, John Foster Dulles,[8] who was an alternate delegate of the United States to the United Nations General Assembly—he was a Republican and Truman had appointed him—he made a speech here, maybe at the Council on Foreign Relations. He called India "that Hindu Communist government of India." That is something that really made India mad against the United States.

Q: A Hindu Communist country.

REDDY: Yes. The government, the Hindu Communist government of India is veering towards the Soviet Union, or whatever it is. And everybody in India knew Nehru was not a communist or the government

was not communist. And it was not a Hindu government; half of the members of cabinet were Muslims. But this is the type of reaction you get. So I would say that people attack India for its becoming non-aligned, not joining with the West against the Soviet Union. There was no reason for us to join one side or the other. India's policy was almost like George Washington's in the United States. We wanted to be friends with everybody, and not get entangled with alliances.

But quite apart from that, this type of reaction in the West for the things which are of vital concern to India, [such as] the issue of colonialism, sentimentally, maybe, or practically. That forced India into a certain position.

Q: India found general hostility from the United States during this period as it tried to support the people of South Africa?

REDDY: Yes. Or at least India felt it found hostility.

Q: So tell me, after you began working for the United Nations in '49, '50, how you ended up working with the UN Special Committee Against Apartheid and how that came about and when.

REDDY: Well, the UN is a career civil service. It was 1949 when I joined the UN I was in the Middle East and Africa section. So I was doing research on Middle East and Africa, Palestine question, Libya, Italian colonies and South Africa. But most of the time for the next several years—in '56 I went to Egypt, I was sent to the UN force in Egypt, so then I started working more on Middle East. I worked on the Far East for a while. But I kept my interest in Africa even when I was doing Far East.

When the Special Committee was formed in 1963, the director, my director at the department, a much higher official, he was going to be the secretary of the committee and he asked me if I would be the deputy. I said no, because I don't agree with you. He was a very good man, an honest man, I could say that. But then the Western countries decided not to join the committee. He was no more interested in the committee, because it is not going to be a very important committee. So then they started looking around. I don't know how they thought of me. The head of the department was a Russian, called me and said you should be secretary. I said, yes, if I'm secretary that's a different matter, and be secretary. So that's how it happened.

But long before there was a committee, in 1952, India brought up the whole issue of apartheid. Until 1952 it was a question of discrimination against Indians in South Africa. [The Indian government] felt that's the only thing they can discuss in the UN as an international problem. But in '52 in South Africa, the African National Congress decided on the Defiance Campaign, then India and some Asian and African countries got together and brought up the whole question of apartheid as another issue. That it's creating tension, it's creating tension in South Africa, it is leading to conflict, it is a serious problem, so the United Nations should discuss it. I think they wrote the letter in June or July.

At that time my boss called me, he wanted to have a chat with me. And he said, " You know, don't you think that's illegal to bring that up? It's an internal problem." So I said, " No, I don't think so. I think it's a matter of how you interpret the charter." Because you know when the UN charter was signed, India was

not there, the real India was not there. And we had an attitude, a different attitude towards the charter than some of the Western countries; it's a psychological thing. He didn't like that at all. He said I was prejudiced, you see I'm not objective. Supposedly UN staff should be objective, neutral and all that sort of thing. So he moved me from research on South Africa to Middle East.

Two or three months later the General Assembly by majority decided to set up a commission on the racial situation in South Africa. It was there for about three years. So what do they do? They appoint him as secretary. He calls me and says I need your help, can you come and help me. So I had to do some research into the background and other things for him.

So this is how the UN was. We had McCarthyism in the UN The atmosphere in the UN was terrible for many years, until the '60s. The atmosphere in the UN changed because so many African countries became members. The majority of the membership became Third World membership. So that also had an effect on the whole atmosphere inside the UN Secretariat also. Not completely, but there was [a change]. So it was a much better atmosphere I could work with in the Special Committee, particularly since the Western countries had boycotted and only the small countries were members. And we all thought alike, we're all against apartheid and so on. We didn't have the Western problem, so we could work together very closely.

Q: Can you remember any African individuals who came to the UN as the movements were emerging in the 1950s in Africa. You mentioned Xuma coming in the late '40s. But what about the 1950s? Did Nkrumah come? Did Nyerere come?[9] And were you involved at all in helping them meet and address the United Nations?

REDDY: Well, I was not directly involved because I was with the political department. Colonial countries were a matter for another department, it was called the Trusteeship and Non-Self-Governing Territories Department. But I used to meet people in the corridors and so on, or in the cafeteria. They were not very rich to go to the more expensive restaurants. So I would meet them. They were remarkable people. Nkrumah didn't come at that time because it was, the emphasis was more on trust territories, and the colonial territories didn't have so much voice in the UN in those days. Much later they got a greater voice. At that time there was a Trusteeship Council, and people from trust territories used to come, and there were some remarkable people.

Q: Who did you meet?

REDDY: One was Olympio from Togoland.[10] And he knew so many languages, so whatever language they asked him a question he could answer in that language, whether it was English or Spanish or German, whatever it is. He was a remarkable man. He was assassinated. It was a tragedy for Togoland, since then it is not the same.

Nyerere came several times. At that time Nyerere was considered a moderate for some time. Sometimes a radical; it depends on what suited the British to call him. Then there were people from Uganda whom I met. There was Eduardo Mondlane from Mozambique.[11] He came here as a student and studied at Northwestern University and got a very junior job in the UN That is how I got to know

Mondlane. And he went on home leave around 1961 or '62 and people had asked him to lead them in the movement. He was already very much committed, so he resigned from the UN, went to Syracuse, got a job and became the leader of the FRELIMO. But when he was in the UN, I used to know him very well. In fact, they used to live very near our place, he and Janet Mondlane.

Q: Can you tell me anything more about Eduardo Mondlane, what you remember of him and what he was doing at the United Nations?

REDDY: At the United Nations he had a very junior job, and the atmosphere in those days was very restrained. I remember once a Rwandan came to the Trusteeship Council and he was making a speech and Mondlane got the speech typed by his secretary. So he was called up and scolded by head of the department and so on. That was the type of atmosphere. But he could approach Dr. Bunche, Ralph Bunche was at the UN in a fairly high position.[12] In fact he consulted Dr. Bunche when he wanted to leave the UN and go join the FRELIMO. And he wrote a report about his visit to Mozambique at that time, which was decisive in his life. And he gave me the report but I lost it. It was something very precious. He was a fine person, he was a very good scholar, and very modest. And I met him later many times.

Then there was someone from Cameroon who was assassinated. A young man who became friendly with me, I forget his name. And he was assassinated later, in Geneva, I think. There was a lot of atmosphere of conspiracy in those days among, in relation to the liberation movements. This type of assassination, things of that kind. Many of them were congregated in Cairo. The Egyptian government gave them offices and gave them a little money, so they used to have their offices in Cairo. There was an Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization in Cairo.

So I used to meet many of them occasionally, when I went down for a coffee break or a lunch break or something of that kind. But I didn't have anything to do with them officially.

Q: What can you tell me about your vision, your thinking? When I was talking with other people and reading about other people's actions during this period, it was clear there were pacifists who were motivated by that ideology. And of course you have left- thinking socialists and communists who were motivated by that ideology. I'm wondering how you would define yourself politically and ideologically. You said you're not an activist, but it seems it is in your gut to struggle for freedom. And you came here as a student and you found your feet very quickly in terms of being a political actor on the scene at the United Nations and the desire to help Africans and assist the liberation struggle. So I want to know how you would define yourself and frame yourself politically and ideologically, and what motivated you and motivates you?

REDDY: Well, I wouldn't call myself a pacifist. At least at that time. Now I'm more of a pacifist. But in India, in our generation, we're all influenced by Gandhi. So there is Gandhi under the skin. So there is pacifism in the system. Then we're influenced by Nehru, who was a socialist. The younger people were greatly influenced by Nehru. So I would say I was radical. In terms of the type of struggle against the British to get freedom, we believed in mass struggle—Gandhi also believed in mass struggle. But [the emphasis for us was more on] organizing the workers, peasants and so on. We didn't have much

spiritual attitude towards violence the same way as Gandhi. And we wanted to have a society which is socialist, like Nehru wanted to have. So it was that kind of a radical outlook.

Now I come to the United States. In '46, as I said, there was this movement in South Africa which was a combination of Gandhians and communists. So the South African struggle all through the years of the struggle, from '46 on, has been a combination of pacifists, communists, and various other types of people. It was a sort of united struggle. Our own struggle in India was also a united struggle, except at certain times during the war when the communists and the nationalists couldn't get along, had problems. So that was the outlook.

I would say that coming from that background, with the influence of both Gandhi and Nehru, there was a feeling that we had a duty, not only to get India's freedom, [but that] India's freedom should be the beginning of the end of colonialism. And I would say, rightly or wrongly, I had a feeling that I did not do enough. I did not make enough sacrifice for India's freedom, so I should compensate by doing what I can for the rest of the colonies. That feeling was in the back of my mind.

Now the real opportunity—I could go on a demonstration in New York, it didn't hurt very much in '46. But the real opportunity came when I became the secretary of the Committee Against Apartheid. So I wanted to give the best I could. And I would say from the time I became the secretary, I did. The committee was composed of small countries, small delegations. So I met with them, I had private meetings with them. The chairman was from Guinea, Diallo Telli, who became secretary general of the Organization of African Unity.[13] And I explained to him what the situation was in South Africa, what they could do, my own views. He thought I was very bright. He said, " Look Mr. Reddy, we are small delegations, we are terribly busy with so many things, so many issues and meetings and so on. We don't have time to do this study and the research and thinking. So you study it, you propose to us what we should do, explain to us, and we'll say yes or no."

So it was a kind of relationship that developed into tremendous confidence. So I had the opportunity. Most of the resolutions were written by me. Reports were written by me. Speeches were written by me for many years. All the initiatives came from me, originated from me. But I can't claim the credit for it because nothing would have happened unless they took the responsibility. They were the people who were responsible. And I had the same relationship with all the chairmen who followed. There were many Nigerian chairmen and some others. So I was able to do very much.

And since there were no Western countries in the committee, there was nobody going to bother me in the committee. And I told them, look, I'm a very junior official in the UN, so there is a limit to what I can do. I will get into trouble if it gets known that I did this or that. You have to take the responsibility for everything. Cover me up. Which they very loyally did. And of course it gives them credit also, that it's their job. So with their protection I was able to do—for instance, I would talk to the liberation movements and discuss with them what can be done and so on. Any proposals like the ideas to do, if it got known that I had done this and got on paper then I would have been fired. I could have been fired in the UN, removed from the job, because I was not neutral. Because much of the time they were talking about they should attack the United States or attack Britain or somebody else for something or other they were doing. So that protected me for 20 years.

Q: So you were with this committee—

REDDY: So for 20 years I think I gave up half my leave, I worked seven days a week, 10 hours a day and so on.

Q: From 1963 to 1983?

REDDY: 1984. I was very lucky that I had a job in something I believe in, it has given me a lot of satisfaction. So I was able to do this. And in the process of doing this I was able to not only help the liberation movements, I helped the anti-apartheid movements all over the world a great deal. It could have been an extremely frustrating job because you are doing things but things are getting worse in South Africa. It was never getting better. Every day it was getting worse. And things went on and on and on. But I was not frustrated. Once I remember something went wrong in the UN and I was very frustrated and a leader of the African National Congress was with me. He said, " E. S., why are you frustrated? We are not frustrated. It's none of your business to be frustrated. We are going to win." So I kept that in mind.

But apart from that, for instance, we set up a fund for scholarships, we set up a fund for the prisoners and their families, political prisoners. And it developed into big things. This fund for the prisoners was my idea. And millions of dollars started coming in after a while. So every day we could see we were helping this prisoner, we're helping this trial and so on. There was a feeling of whatever else was going on, we were able to do certain things, at least you had some satisfaction at least. And so long as you had faith that we are going to win, and that faith never left me.

Q: When you were 21 years or 20 years old and you were involved in this, did you have contact with solidarity movements in other parts of the world?

REDDY: Yes. All over the world. Well, I traveled very much to Europe and Africa. A little in the Caribbean. So I met them there. But we used to have meetings or conferences where we invited them and they came. I used to meet them, I was in correspondence with them, so they all became very close, personal friends.

Q: Where did you travel?

REDDY: I used to travel on official business to, mostly to Europe, western Europe, eastern Europe. And I went to Addis Ababa many times for the Organization of African Unity meetings. Dar es Salaam to meet the liberation movements. Of course, [this was] after about 1970. In the beginning the committee had very little budget, but later, after '70, they got some budget. And we arranged for the chairman to go to a number of countries to talk to the governments and so on. I used to go with the chairman. We talked to the governments, to the foreign minister, president and so on. But at the same time we would meet the anti-apartheid movements in their countries. In fact we got advice from them what to talk to the governments and so on. So we had a lot of missions like that. So I used to be on those missions.

And then we had many conferences and seminars organized, maybe about 40 organized. There you get the anti-apartheid movements and others in many countries. So even the Western countries slowly—in the beginning none of the Western countries supported sanctions. In the beginning it was very hard to get any Western country to vote against South Africa. But later smaller countries started changing. And in the '60s, first the Nordic countries, the Scandinavian countries, and then other Western countries like Netherlands and others started changing, becoming more friendly, contributing money for the prisoners and so on, saying that sanctions are good but that everybody should agree, although nothing would happen but at least they agree in principle. Which meant, we are trying to get them on our side, to isolate the few countries which had the most trade with South Africa and most military contact with South Africa and so on. And so that strategy worked.

And so I had, by the '60s, late '60s, I had many friends in the Western countries, in the delegations, governments, and so on. And I would say even in the United States, Britain and so on, although they were voting against us and all that. In the delegations and governments, there were liberal people. Nobody wanted to be for apartheid. So we had some good relations with them, although at the governmental level, it's not very good.

Q: This has been really great. Is there anything else that you want to say about this period, the '50s or the '60s or your work that I didn't touch on.

REDDY: Well, not about my work so much. I just wanted to mention that in the '50s —two things. First, in the '50s when the American Committee on Africa was formed, it was an important thing.[14] And the American Committee on Africa over the years did very good work. But there were, I remember, a small group called the Episcopal Churchmen for Southern Africa. Bill Johnston.[15] Very few people, working hard. They worked for years and years with so much dedication. For instance, arranging meetings for leading churchmen who were coming here like Trevor Huddleston, Bishop Reeves and others. And publishing bulletins about the church's conflict against apartheid, their opposition to apartheid and so on. So I have tremendous respect for the dedication of Bill Johnston, as I have respect for George Houser.

Another one I knew in those days was a man called Keith Irvine. He published a bulletin called Africa or New Africa or something of that kind, news about Africa and so on. In those days for anybody to publish anything on Africa was an unusual thing. But he was so much interested in Africa and devoted to Africa. Then when Ghana became independent, he became the research officer in the Ghana mission to the United Nations. So I used to see him in those days. Then he left and joined the Encyclopedia Britannica. So here is another dedicated person who was there. That is one thing I'd like to say.

The United States is an enormous country. No one organization can cover it. American Committee on Africa was the organization which has been there for a long time and they tried their best to be the central organization in a sense. But there are many other organizations. Later, of course, in the '70s and '80s, there were so many local groups all over the country, hundreds of them.

The second thing I would like to say is I brought in the Council on the African Affairs, I suppose, because I'm one of the older people who remembers that. But also the Council on African Affairs was headed by

Robeson and it had a major effect, an organization led by African Americans. I mention this because I heard one or two people sort of implying, recently, African Americans, that the American Committee was a white organization, not so much in Harlem and so on. Later, of course, Randall Robinson and others come and the African Americans are active in leadership in the struggle, with the Black Caucus in the Congress and so on.

The movement here was, for a long time, led by African Americans. If you take way at the turn of the century and so on, it was the people like Du Bois. There were of course white missionaries who brought students from South Africa. But they were not active politically. And if you take the '20s it was Marcus Garvey and Du Bois and when Sol Plaatje[16] came here. And then the Council on African Affairs, which as I said, had that image.

Now, I mention the remarks because it is unfair to George Houser. George Houser was a founder of CORE.[17] He started working with the Africans from the very beginning in the movement for African American liberation. And he was very friendly with many African American leaders. He brought them to be active in the American Committee on Africa, like Reverend Martin Luther King and others, Bayard Rustin and others. And this has been true over the whole period of his work. But, for instance, when there is a declaration of conscience against apartheid signed by a number of people—he managed to get Eleanor Roosevelt to sign it. She's not African American but she was very important, her name was very important.

And George Houser tells me he knew Alphaeus Hunton and their relations were friendly, although they were working in different organizations. So I don't think it is fair to regard the American Committee on Africa as some organization removed from the black American leadership. In fact the first campaign after I became secretary to the Special Committee was about bank loans to South Africa. And the campaign was led by a man in Harlem who later became a city councilman, Wendell Foster.

Q: But this leads me to another question, a question that I had wanted to mention to you when we first started talking off camera. You talked about coming to the United States and hearing about lynchings. And now you're talking about the role of race in the American political scene, even in the African solidarity movement. So I'd like to hear your view on that, you coming from where you came from, coming to the United States as a student and hearing about lynchings, what you thought about that. And then also trying to organize in solidarity with Africa and having this American scene be racially divided in some instances, not all instances, but some instances.

REDDY: Well, the situation in the United States in '46 was terrible for an Indian coming from India. The lynchings were right after the war. The war is supposed to be for freedom and all kinds of things. We never thought—we thought they were all hypocritical anyway, we didn't get freedom in India. Gandhi was put in jail, the whole country was in flames and so on. So you come to the United States and talk about freedom and these lynchings going on, and who is the secretary of state? Jimmy Byrnes,[18] who later goes and becomes governor of South Carolina and he is fighting the school desegregation and all that. So there's a lot of hypocrisy here going on.

So that meant that we Indians had most sympathy for Paul Robeson when he was being attacked for being radical, or Du Bois or others and so on. But this question of African/non-African, African American/non-African American leadership in the movement didn't arise at that time. I didn't hear about it in the '50s. In the '50s there was this Cold War, McCarthyism and all, there was so much silence, it was hard to get anything going in the movement. So anybody who started a movement, did something, a picket line, was brave. What I heard was more recently in the '70s, early '80s and '90s and so on. Not at that time. And also I would say that the African Americans were cowed down.

Q: Were what?

REDDY: My complaint would be to some extent at that period against the African Americans because, first of all, because of their attacks on Robeson and Du Bois and others. The leadership of the NAACP and others wanted to show that they were patriotic, and so they support the State Department, go on tours abroad to do propaganda for the United States and so on. So every time an African American went to India he was heckled all over the place in those days. Because India liked Robeson, he was a friend of Nehru, so there was a feeling for Robeson.

Q: That's interesting. Can you say any more about that? Those special delegations.

REDDY: Well, the State Department used to send people on tours abroad. Among those people they sent there were some African Americans. Some of them are quite good people. But because they didn't denounce the United States government in support of Robeson or something of that kind. And any black coming under State Department auspices to India ... The feeling in India on this problem was quite emotional, because there was a feeling for Robeson. Robeson was a friend of Nehru, close friend of Nehru from the early '30s when he was in London. So anybody who goes and speaks in the universities and so on, people would get up and ask him questions, very awkward questions about racism in America, to force them to say something against the United States government. And so they would heckle him. This happened to several people. I can't remember all the names. I think one of them was Reddick^[19] from Atlanta. There was somebody from Chicago, a woman from Chicago, I think, and so on. And so that was the atmosphere at that time.

So coming back to this question of African Americans. The African Americans hardly did anything about South Africa, except those George Houser brought into the American Committee on Africa, like Bayard Rustin and people like that, [but nothing] as a group or organization. In fact NAACP didn't support sanctions against South Africa until maybe late '70s or '80s. There's also, I suppose they felt against apartheid, I would say every black felt, but they didn't come out. Maybe it was their foreign policy consideration, going against the American policy and so on. So not until the '60s, until the African countries came to the UN [after] they became independent. And so the African Americans couldn't avoid, in a sense.

The African Americans [later] got active. One of the first things they did was to help set up this leadership conference, African American Leadership Conference, and ask the United States to stop sending warships to South Africa. But that was, in fact, George Houser who organized that, who promoted that. That was around 1964. But the African Americans actually coming into activity was more

in the '70s when there were African Liberation Day demonstrations in Washington and things like that. A little in the SNCC, Jim Forman and others in the late '60s, but not major activity.[20] But it was only the '70s. And then it was much later, a few years later, out of that came this TransAfrica being formed and then Randall Robinson, so they're doing activities. And they became important, really central, in '84, 1984 when they had a sit-in at the South African embassy, when they used nonviolent protest.[21]

Q: Well, thank you very much. I've learned a lot.

REDDY: Very nice to talk to you. Thank you.

[1] Sean MacBride, introducing E. S. Reddy at a public meeting of the Irish Anti-Apartheid Movement in Dublin, March 19, 1985, <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/people/macbride/irishaam.html>.

[2] Jawharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, governed from 1947 to 1964. Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948) was in South Africa from 1893 to 1915 and led a passive resistance movement (Satyagraha) of Indians against racist laws.

[3] For the Council on African Affairs, see Hollis Lynch, *Black American Radicals and the Liberation of Africa: The Council on African Affairs, 1937-1955* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Africana Studies and Research Center, 1978), and Dorothy Hunton and Alphaeus Hunton, *The Unsung Valiant* (Richmond Hill, NY: D. K. Hunton, 1986). The Council is also featured in several recent books on this period, including James H. Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); and Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race and Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997). References can also be found in the voluminous biographical literature on W. E. B. Du Bois and Paul Robeson.

The papers of Alphaeus Hunton are in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture of the New York Public Library. For references see <http://www.africanactivist.msu.edu>.

[4] The Abyssinian Baptist Church, one of the leading churches in Harlem, was headed by the Rev. Adam Clayton Powell Sr. (1865-1953).

[5] National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, founded in 1909, is the oldest and largest U.S. civil rights organization.

[6] The Defiance Campaign against Unjust Laws was launched by the African National Congress in June 1952 and was suspended in April 1953. See <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/struggles/defiance.html>.

[7] Jan Christian Smuts (1870-1950), was prime minister of South Africa from 1919 to 1924 and from 1939 to 1948.

[8] John Foster Dulles (1888-1959), was a leading figure in the U.S. foreign policy establishment. He was secretary of state in the Eisenhower administration from 1953 to 1959.

[9] Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere were the first presidents of independent Ghana and Tanganyika respectively.

[10] Sylvanus Olympio, first president of independent Togo, led the country from 1960 until his assassination in January 1963.

[11] Mondlane was the first president of the Mozambican Liberation Front (FRELIMO), serving from 1962 until his assassination in February 1969.

[12] Ralph Bunche was in charge of the UN Department of Trusteeship. He won the Nobel Peace Prize for 1950 (<http://nobelprize.org/peace/laureates/1950/bunche-bio.html>).

[13] Diallo Telli (1925-77) was the secretary general of the Organization of African Unity from 1964 to 1972.

[14] The American Committee on Africa (ACOA) was founded in 1953. See the interviews with Bill Sutherland and George Houser in this collection. Also see George Houser, *No One Can Stop the Rain: Glimpses of African Liberation Struggles* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989). For references to the ACOA archives, see <http://www.africanactivist.msu.edu>.

[15] See Edgar Lockwood, "One of God's Irregulars: William Overton Johnston and the Challenge to the Church to Divest from Apartheid South Africa, 1954-1971," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 71, no. 3 (2000): 411-37. The archives of the Episcopal Churchmen for South Africa are at Yale University. See <http://www.africanactivist.msu.edu> for a short description and <http://webtext.library.yale.edu/xml2html/divinity.102.con.html> for a detailed listing.

[16] Solomon Plaatje, 1876-1932, the first secretary-general of the African National Congress, visited the United States in 1920-1922.

[17] Congress of Racial Equality.

[18] James Byrnes (1882-1972) was secretary of state under President Harry Truman from 1945 to 1947. He was governor of South Carolina from 1951 to 1955.

[19] Probably historian Lawrence Reddick, who accompanied Martin Luther King Jr. on a trip to India in 1959.

[20] Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. There is a rich literature on SNCC and its role in the civil rights movement of the 1960s. See, among others, Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981) and James Forman,

The Making of Black Revolutionaries (New York: Macmillan, 1972). Forman, 1928-2005, was the executive secretary of SNCC from 1961 to 1966.

[21] Randall Robinson was the founding director of TransAfrica from the organization's founding in 1977 and headed the organization until his retirement in 2001.