

Roger Hällhag

Student organisations, The Isolate South Africa Committee (ISAK) and social democratic organisations

Hällhag first got in contact with South Africa in 1980/81 when living down south of Sweden, in Gothenburg. At that time he was very active in the secondary school students' movement, SECO, focusing on school politics and student interests. There was a strong tradition in the organization of international solidarity campaigns through Operation Dagsverke, Operation A Day's Work. In the early 1981 there was a fund-raising campaign for the ANC School in Tanzania, near Morogoro, the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College and through that, Hällhag was introduced to the plights of apartheid South Africa. In 1985 he started to work fulltime at national level in the Students Union and was responsible for the Swedish campaigns and coordination with other Nordic countries with the goal to raise funds for the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College and for training schools in Zimbabwe. He later continued within the National Council of Swedish Youth Organizations (LSU) and as chairman of the Isolate South Africa Committee (ISAK). As member of the LSU, travels to the SADC countries and clandestine meetings with youth leaders from Soweto, who would later create the South African Youth Congress, were made. He also worked together with the youth sections of Frelimo in Mozambique, the MPLA in Angola and with the Namibia National Student Organization (NANSO).



Roger Hällhag

Madi Gray: This is an interview with Roger Hällhag in his office at International IDEA in Stockholm on 30 June 2005. You started your political career when you were very young. As a student union activist from the age of fifteen, you were involved in the struggle against apartheid?

Roger Hällhag: Yes.

Madi Gray: Why?

Roger Hällhag: A very good question, I am not sure I fully know myself but I first got involved with South Africa in 1980/81. At that time I was very active in the secondary school students' movement, SECO, and that was political activity, not party political but political activity. We were focusing on school politics and student interests. There was a strong tradition in the organization of international solidarity campaigns through Operation Dagsverke, Operation A Day's Work. That was the activity that started me up. We had an Operation Day's Work in early 1981 with a fund-raising campaign aimed at the ANC School in Tanzania, near Morogoro, the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College. At that time I was an activist in my school and my city Gothenburg.

Madi Gray: You were living in Gothenburg at the time?

Roger Hällhag: Yes.

Madi Gray: If it had been for Chile, you might have gotten involved in Chile instead?

Roger Hällhag: Sure, I was loyal member of the organization but it is clear that South Africa and the struggle against apartheid got a lot of attention in Sweden at that time and it would get even more a few years later. In the early 1980s South Africa was high on the agenda in Sweden and as politically interested young people, it was natural to look at Southern Africa.

Madi Gray: You say at the beginning you were involved with the secondary school students' organization, SECO, but in fact you've been involved in a number of politically based organizations.

Roger Hällhag: Yes, it all started in SECO. At the same time I was a member of the Social Democratic Youth, but not an active member, though later I got more involved in party politics. Before that I continued to be increasingly involved with anti-apartheid work, but still with a basis in the students' movement. From having a been a local organizer of the fund-raising and awareness campaign in 1981, I started to work fulltime at national level in the Students Union¹ and was responsible for the Swedish campaigns and a coordination with other Nordic countries when we worked together in 1985. The target was the same, to raise funds for the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College and a smaller part was for training schools in Zimbabwe.

After that I took up other responsibilities in LSU, the National Council of Swedish Youth Organizations, and as chairman of ISAK, the Isolate South Africa Committee.

Madi Gray: How did you become ISAK chairman? Were you not chairman of the Isolate South Africa Committee when you were still on the board of SECO?

Roger Hällhag: I was a very old school student but formally I still represented school students in SECO in 1987 when I was elected chairman of ISAK. I was 25 years old and not really a school student any longer. I think it was a direct consequence of first being one of the leaders of the work in the Operation A Day's Work and then I was a vice-president of LSU, the National Youth Council.

Madi Gray: I see.

Roger Hällhag: I was recruited to the post of Chairman in the Isolate South Africa Committee from there and ISAK was always mainly based on the youth organizations. (In April 1982 SECO (Sveriges Elevers Centralorganisation) and Elevförbundet merged to form Elevorganisationen i Sverige – The School Students' Union of Sweden remaining the name in English). There were also some trade unions, Christian and other organizations, but the youth organizations always provided the core of the Isolate South Africa Committee together with the Africa Groups.

Madi Gray: That's very interesting. I didn't realize that the youth organizations were that important.

Roger Hällhag: Yes, they were in different ways. First of all probably in the level of activity, because the anti-apartheid movement in Sweden was very much a youth movement and it was only in the Africa Groups that we met older people who were equally active. Then trade unions and churches made their very strong and important contributions but as a popular movement with voluntary activists I would really say that it was youth organizations that provided that activity. The youth organizations also provided the political broadness of the movement. All the time, all the party political youth leagues except the moderate (or conservative party) were involved.

Madi Gray: That was also true in terms of adult politics - the conservative party hardly ever joined the anti-apartheid campaign work as far as I know.

Roger Hällhag: They didn't cooperate and were actively against sanctions. They always had excuses for saying "No" to sanctions, but apart from that they really just took a distance.

Madi Gray: They remained neutral.

Roger Hällhag: Yes, it was not that they wanted to defend the apartheid regime, but they were not comfortable with really any radical means of putting pressure on the regime.

Madi Gray: What do you think motivated you and was the driving force behind you, and behind the youth organizations you were involved in?

Roger Hällhag: Each time, each era has its particular rallying points for young people to be politically involved and during the 1980s it was very much the anti-apartheid struggle that captured the imagination of a lot of young people. It was a conflict that was easily understood, for want of a better expression, it was 'black and white' in a sense. It was clear on whose side one should reasonably be in Sweden, because of a lot of opinion leaders and opinion moulders were taking a stand. There was very strong support for the liberation movements and not much questioning of the liberation struggle. There was some, but that actually served to get us even more involved because, if there had been total consensus, it would not have been as exciting. We needed the fact that we had to fight against some forces at home, so it was helpful in mobilizing.

As in everything when one gets involved, it is easy to get more and more engaged and I had the luck to be allowed to do very stimulating things. I had very interesting tasks in the organizations in Sweden where I was involved. I had the opportunity to travel a bit to Southern Africa and also meet members of the anti-apartheid movements from other countries, and so on. I got increasingly stimulated by my involvement, so there was nothing to stop me.

Madi Gray: No, I remember you were very committed. You had several different roles in the various organizations that you worked in. You mentioned you chaired ISAK, the Isolate South Africa Committee for two years?

Roger Hällhag: Two years yes, from 1987 to 1989.

Madi Gray: You were vice-president of the National Youth Council from 1985 to 1988 and in 1985 you ran a Nordic campaign for schools for 'Operation Dagsverke' for the ANC School. Were there other organizations that you subsequently became involved with? Did you go to South Africa or Namibia as one of the election monitors or anything like that?

Roger Hällhag: No, but I can mention the visits I made to Southern Africa because that was part of the picture. I had my first opportunity to go to South Africa in early 1986, in the spring in the North.

This was a very tough period of apartheid repression in South Africa. I went with a student delegation that more or less clandestinely sneaked in. We attended an Education Crisis Conference held in Durban. That was an attempt by the UDF to take control and direct the school strike, the school boycotts, and it was held under a very tense atmosphere. The venue was attacked by Inkhata and there were people killed there on the Inkhata side and on the UDF side others were wounded. That was the atmosphere, the setting. We met COSAS, which was our direct counterpart, the Congress of South Africa Students. We brought Lulu Johnson, the President, back to Johannesburg from the conference. That was something very memorable. He was later arrested, tortured and detained for long. I had a second opportunity to go to South Africa later in 1986. In the National Youth Council we were part of an exchange

between the Youth Councils of the Nordic countries and the SADCC countries. Nordic youth delegations travelled to various SADCC countries in mid-1987 and had a joint conference together with Southern African youth organizations in Livingstone, Zambia. A few of us also went to South Africa. We went to South Africa and met clandestinely with the youth leaders from Soweto, who would later create the South African Youth Congress. We established very early contact.

Madi Gray: SAYCO?

Roger Hällhag: Yes, SAYCO which later became ANC Youth League. In 1987 I was elected chairperson for the Isolate South Africa Committee, the umbrella organisation of the Swedish anti-apartheid movement. Since then, for almost four years, I was told by the South African Legation in Stockholm that they knew me too well to issue another visa, so for some years I couldn't go back, even if I continued to visit Front Line States.

Madi Gray: You would meet up with South Africans in your Front Line State visits?

Roger Hällhag: Yes, we had very frequent contact with the ANC, internationally and with all the internal structures. That was never an issue. We met them here and in the Front Line States and everywhere. Everything we did were closely consulted with the ANC office in Stockholm all the time, Lindiwe Mabuza and her successors as ANC representatives.

Madi Gray: You've mentioned the word 'clandestine' a couple of times, in other words you did things in secret. Were you also carrying money, were you one of the couriers taking material assistance to South Africa?

Roger Hällhag: Yes we were involved in that, not so much with the technical transfer of money, others took care of that. I was once asked to carry some money but I failed miserably. It was during my second trip in 1987 and I brought money for the Alexandra Art Centre but a burglar broke into my car and took the money.

Madi Gray: It was sheer robbery, it wasn't anything else?

Roger Hällhag: No, it was robbery, I am quite sure. So I was not successful in that and I was not asked again.

Madi Gray: Can you tell us more about the clandestine contacts because obviously they were very important.

Roger Hällhag: Obviously during those hard years, one could not enter the country in any fashion other than saying that one was a tourist, and pretend to be a tourist, and the apartheid regime was quite eager to receive tourists. So it was not too difficult to enter in that way. We prepared ourselves so that we could make contact with those who were on the run, who had

to hide from the police, who were active and represented banned organizations. As young and inexperienced people I hope we didn't subject those people to too much risk, but we tried to make those contacts in such a manner that it was them and not us who decided the level of risk taking, so we shouldn't expose them unnecessarily. At the same time it was very clear that they were eager to have contact with us and were thankful that we related to them and met them. It required some care, obviously.

Madi Gray: What would you say were highlights of your commitment or of your involvement in these organizations? I would imagine that these trips were among the highlights.

Roger Hällhag: Yes, absolutely. For me personally it was tremendous to experience a very different reality from life at home. That personally had a very important impact, also the experience of work, being active in a political movement that was successful. On the political scene in Sweden the anti-apartheid movement had the initiative. There was strong public and official government support for the liberation movements but in the anti-apartheid movement we said that there were more steps to be taken and tighter sanctions to be applied and one could always ask more and more from the government.

When it came to the economic sanctions, the government was always hesitating to take new steps. There had been the ban on new investments in 1979 and then in 1986 there was the ban on trade with South Africa and occupied Namibia. But there were always loopholes that we wanted to tighten up and expose. We were pushing both business decision-makers and political decision-makers, the government, to take new steps and to either divest or stop trading or, on the part of the government, introduce tougher and tougher legislation. As regards direct support for the liberation movement, political, material, etc., I think the government already did almost everything possible so on that front there was not so much to ask for, but one could always suggest new steps to be taken in the UN and things like that. It was a very successful interaction between a popular movement and political decision makers.

Madi Gray: It's interesting that you feel that it was successful, I would probably agree with you. Very interesting in the light of the rest of the world if you place the Swedish role in the context of what happened in other countries. Even so, there must have been some important controversy, some point of conflict that affected your work and affected you personally.

Roger Hällhag: The main conflicts were with the companies that were doing business in South Africa and to some extent with the trade unions that organized the workers in these companies. Sometimes those companies and the unions argued a different line that it was better to be there and be part of a constructive engagement to try to make things better from the inside, rather than to run away and leave the businesses to less nice guys to take care of. That was always their argument. I know that in places this was quite tough, for instance for Asea Brown Boveri, ABB, a huge engineering company with a very strong industrial basis in the city of Västerås. It was a highly controversial issue and there was a fear of losing export markets, losing jobs because of not being able to trade with or have subsidiaries in South Africa. The same happened in other places where South Africa-related industry was present.

Those were controversies.

Another key controversy was around Shell. There was an international campaign against Shell to put pressure on them to get out of South Africa. Here in Sweden and elsewhere we advocated a boycott of Shell, most visibly not buying petrol from Shell. This made the owners of Shell service stations, that had them on a franchise basis, very nervous and very angry. They said that we were witch-hunting small businesses that only had a very distant relationship with South Africa. It was not because of them that the apartheid regime got energy, but it was a corporate decision by Shell that they had no influence over. That caused sharp controversies and they managed to gain some sympathy in the public debate. We had a very tough discussion with the liberal youth. They did not want to support a boycott of Shell petrol stations in Sweden.

On the other hand we had radical anarchist groups that wanted to use violent sabotage against Shell stations, which was a method that we in the Isolate South Africa Committee completely rejected. There were a few cases where their supporters burnt or at least attempted to burn down petrol stations and our view was that that would give sympathy to Shell and would not help the boycott campaign. So there was a strong controversy. We also had some internal controversies in ISAK about to what extent we should be tough on those advocating sabotage actions. There were some groups who had more understanding for them or at least didn't want us to cooperate with the police, while I and others wanted to maintain a tough line.

Madi Gray: I remember a discussion one evening in my own kitchen with some young people. I was very lucky that two members of the ANC happened to be visiting me. When I realized what the discussion was about, I asked the young people whether they had ever asked a member of the ANC or from the internal structures of the mass democratic movement if they supported sabotage. They said no, I replied that this was important and introduced the young people to the two visitors and they spoke for many hours.

My experience was that ordinary people in South Africa couldn't understand why Shell was chosen and they certainly didn't want anyone to sabotage Shell in Sweden or in South Africa. When you spoke with South Africans did you come across a lack of understanding of why Shell was chosen?

Roger Hällhag: No, the ANC was always pretty clear that it was a good thing to target Shell.

Madi Gray: It was a good thing to target Shell, but not to blow them up?

Roger Hällhag: No sabotage. Absolutely not. When I first got the chance to come back to South Africa after the unbanning of the ANC and there were fewer restrictions, that was at the beginning of 1991 when I came back to South Africa again, I met with the student organizations and the recently reestablished ANC Youth League and we spent lots of time talking to them and we travelled to a meeting at the University of the North. They went into Shell stations in South Africa to fill the car up and we started to discuss about Shell. They

didn't understand why had we picked at Shell and they were not aware of the international campaign. Maybe it was more an international campaign than anything that really came out of the struggle in South Africa.

Madi Gray: I have another theory. Shell was running ads every week in many of the alternative grassroots newspapers. They had a large advertisement and I would be very surprised if they had had that advertisement if there hadn't been an international campaign to isolate them.

Roger Hällhag: Exactly, that is very true and it is important to say that the campaign against Shell over South Africa and apartheid, their collaboration with the apartheid regime, and later the campaign against Shell because of the environmental consequences of their business in the North Sea and the social and political consequences in Nigeria, put a lot of pressure on Shell. I think Shell more than any other oil company has tried subsequently to put up an image of social and environmental responsibility and being a progressive company. I am not able to judge whether they are better or worse than other oil companies but they have certainly made an effort and this already started in the apartheid days. They tried to show themselves as a responsible company that was in favour of change and at least liberalization in South Africa. It would be strange if the fact that Shell put money into the alternative press through advertisements did not give them a positive image in the country where lots of other businesses tried to stay as far away as possible, or directly supported the regime. In that way the international campaign had a bearing on what happened in South Africa and maybe they cleaned up their act to some extent.

Madi Gray: You've mentioned that you were involved in Nordic cooperation with the student organizations. Were you involved in any other Nordic cooperation and what do you think the significance was?

Roger Hällhag: Yes, it has always been quite natural for both non-governmental organizations and the Nordic countries at an official level to cooperate and foreign policies in one country are often reflected in another Nordic country. Government support for the liberation movement did not only happen in Sweden but also to a greater or lesser extent in the other Nordic countries. At times other countries took the initiative and on the level of popular organizations, there was lots of exchange and cooperation. As student organizations we cooperated on the Operation Day's Work campaign in 1985. The Nordic Youth Councils and the Nordic youth organizations had joint cooperation with their counterparts in Southern Africa and these were supported with money from all the Nordic development cooperation agencies. The Nordic framework has always been quite natural to use, we have a linguistic closeness between our countries, the societies are quite similar to each other, and it is easy to relate to each other.

Madi Gray: You've mentioned you worked together with the ANC youth and with student and youth organizations in South Africa. Were there other organizations you worked together with in Namibia or Zimbabwe?

Roger Hällhag: To the same extent that we worked with the ANC, we worked very closely with SWAPO. In Namibia we also had contact with the internal organizations. SWAPO had a special status, they already had a semi-legal existence in Namibia during the South African occupation.

I was for a couple of years in contact with the student organization in Namibia, NANSO, the Namibia National Student Organization, which was formed in the late 1980s. For a while right after independence it joined and became part of SWAPO but then left SWAPO and became an independent organization once again after a couple of years. There was some contact with the SWAPO Youth League but it was never a very vibrant organization, no possibility to compare it with the ANC Youth League unfortunately. Some contact with the Namibian Trade Union Federation, which had its own basis and strengths, church organizations as well in South Africa and in Namibia.

In the framework of the Swedish Youth Council and the National Youth Council, we had contact with lots of different youth organizations in the region. In many of the Front Line States at that time the youth was organized under the umbrella of the one-party system and we had contact with most of those umbrella youth organizations, but in subsequent years those systems were broken up. There were multi-party elections in all these countries and the monolithic structures were broken up. In different ways we continued contact with some of the groups that were emerging.

From 1989 and for a couple of years I was international secretary of the Social Democratic Youth in Sweden and we had direct contact with several of the more political youth organizations in Southern Africa. A lot with the youth league of Frelimo, which was called Organização da Juventude Mozambicana, the Organization of Youth of Mozambique. It was the old one-party state or youth organization that was transformed into a Frelimo Youth League and we had cooperation with them for a couple of years and tried to provide some new references for them in their reshaping. We continued contact with the ANC Youth League, with the Juventude do Movimento Popular da Libertação de Angola, the JMPLA in Angola, and some other youth organizations.

Maybe I should add that in South Africa there was not a very clear division between youth organizations and other structures, they were very much cooperating with churches, trade unions. The whole culture of the UDF era continued for a long time, so it was very natural to meet the full range of representative organizations when one had contact.

Madi Gray: An organization that was very important for white anti-apartheid youth, which you may have had contact with, was the movement against militarization.

Roger Hällhag: Yes we had some contact with the ECC, the End Conscription Campaign during the hard years, the mid-1980s.

Madi Gray: Also with COSAWR, the Committee on War Resisters in London?

Roger Hällhag: Not personally. I didn't have contact with them directly. But they were part of the picture.

Madi Gray: You said that meeting people was very important because it gave you an impetus. Can you tell me about the more important personal relations that you managed to establish? Were there also relations that carried on?

Roger Hällhag: Yes to some extent certainly. Those I have continued to have more personal contact with from time to time were the representatives I met of the South African Youth Congress, which later became the re-established ANC Youth League.

Madi Gray: Were these the most important personal contacts? Can you tell me something more concrete?

Roger Hällhag: Let me see, first of all it was easy to become friends with the people we met, but at the same time cooperation and relations did not rest on a personal basis, that was my experience. It was on an institutional organizational basis that contacts were maintained. It was not that an organization depended on either side that there was a particular person that maintained that contact. It was the organizations that cooperated with each other and it was given real life and strength and feeling and involvement from the individuals and individuals could be extremely important to go that extra mile in the cooperation. But we related on the basis of being functioning organizations. That is important because that is what makes this kind of relationship sustainable and the fact that many organizations in South Africa and Sweden still have contact today, is because of building this kind of organizational links and not only basing it on personal relations, personal friendship.

Those I have remained in touch with are the people I met in SAYCO and the ANC Youth League in the late 1980s, early 1990s. People like Rapu Molekane who was a member of parliament for a long time and is today a South African diplomat; Phoebe Potgieter, who I got a mail from today actually telling me that she has just been appointed ambassador in Poland. Peter Mokaba, who died in 2002 had a very special political career, a quite conflict-filled one I would say, already in his youth days. Ronnie Mamoepa is today the spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Those are some of the people I worked very closely with at that time and have remained in contact with.

Madi Gray: Were there any problems in your relationship with the organizations in Southern Africa? We have looked at some highlights but we haven't looked at problem areas and we need to get to that part of the history.

Roger Hällhag: Yes there were a couple of occasions where we had political disagreements, which I remember quite clearly and in most instances it was because of the ANC relations with the Soviet Union and the communist dictatorships. It was obvious that the ANC and even more other liberation movements had close relations with the Soviet Union and received support from there. The ANC was always fairly good at balancing that and we all knew that the Soviet support for the ANC was somewhat conditioned and low-profile for good and bad reasons. Particularly the exiled youth representatives of the liberation movements were sometimes carried away by loyalty with the Soviet Union and the Soviet system, which led us to some tough discussions at points.

One instance I remember was in 1985, when there was a World Youth and Student Festival in Moscow, which were enormous events during the Soviet era. One of their main activities was to propagate the Soviet system and communism in the world to young people and youth leaders from all over the world. Western youth organizations uneasily took part in order to promote East/West detente and some understanding and with the argument of providing an alternative reference point for third world youth leaders. I was in a delegation from the West European school student organizations and also the Swedish Youth Council at the 1985 world festival in Moscow. The Nordic Youth Councils had prepared strong protests against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan at that festival and the point of confrontation was a so-called anti-imperialist tribunal where the imperialists of the world would be exposed and accused of the atrocities. We were carrying out to do that by also talking about Soviet atrocities in Afghanistan. The ANC youth section was chairing that session and they were fully loyal to the Soviet version of events, which made us very upset. I got the task of explaining this and delivering our protest to the ANC representative here in Stockholm after the festival. I remember a vivid discussion with Lindiwe Mabuza about this matter.

Then the Soviet Union started to dissolve itself so it didn't need to create too many differences in subsequent years, but afterwards there was a lingering loyalty to those who had supported the anti-apartheid struggle in communist regimes. I remember a meeting I had in 1993 with the secretary-general of the South African Communist Party Chris Hani. Just weeks before he was murdered I met him and we had a very good conversation. We could agree on almost everything apart from his insistence that it was important for the South African Communist Party to maintain close relations with what he called their brother parties in Vietnam, Cuba and North Korea.

Madi Gray: Right, by that time the Soviet Union had fallen.

Roger Hällhag: Yes, the Soviet Union and the Eastern Block had disappeared but those were the remaining communist states. I even told him that he seemed to be a good social democrat. He did not accept that, but we could easily agree on many things. The point of difference was often about this lingering international relations and that was in practice where the disagreements were, on the political level.

Madi Gray: This interview has touched on post-1990 a couple of times, when you moved on to different kinds of political work. What happened to your relations with South Africa and Namibia after 1990? Between 1990 and 1994 there was a period of working up to the democratic elections and it was a period of change. Sometimes change moved faster and sometimes it seemed to stagnate. Let us focus on that period for a moment.

Roger Hällhag: The early 1990s? At that time I was in the Swedish Social Democratic Youth and from 1991 to 1995 I was president of the International Union of Socialist Youth (IUSY), the youth wing of the Socialist International. We were having very active relations with the ANC Youth League, to some extent with the youth organizations in Front Line States, also neighbouring countries, but the ANC Youth League was a key point of contact. I attended the congress of the ANC Youth League in early 1994, they were preparing for elections, setting off for the first election campaign and that was of course a great experience. The congress was held in Soweto at the university campus there.

Madi Gray: Vista University?

Roger Hällhag: Yes, and I had quite intensive talks with them about them becoming members of the International Social Democratic Youth cooperation. It did not happen at that time but we started to prepare for it and they joined in 1997. Actually the ANC Youth League joined before the ANC became members of the Socialist International in 1998, I think it was the year after the Youth League joined.

Pre-1994 elections was a period of intense interaction and discussion with the ANC.

Everybody was focusing on preparing for the first elections and the negotiations. I cannot say that as the Social Democratic Youth we had a very strong involvement in any practical sense. We continued frequent political contact and we met very often, had exchanges. At the party level, the Social Democratic Party and the ANC, other parts of the Swedish Labour Movement including trade unions, the ABF, the Workers' Education Association, etc organized more extensive cooperation with the ANC and the mass democratic movement before the elections. For example, they channelled resources for voter education. All of that was organized through what is now the Olof Palme International Centre, but I was not operationally involved in that, even though politically very much, but I didn't have a direct role.

Madi Gray: And after 1994?

Roger Hällhag: No, for a year in 1994-95 I worked for the government, and then I didn't have any particular contact with South Africa.

Madi Gray: Weren't you also working for the government between 1998 and 2004?

Roger Hällhag: For the government in the Prime Minister's office, yes. After my involvement through the youth movement including the Isolate South Africa Committee, I went on to work

on a party political basis for the Swedish Social Democrats, both with party responsibilities and with responsibilities to the government. I see it as a natural continuation, but of a totally different character.

For a couple of years I worked in the Social Democratic Party office and there I was responsible for the party's relations with Africa. I was overseeing much of the cooperation that the Olof Palme International Centre was having with different structures in South Africa. I was also taking part in the frequent contacts with the ANC, not least in connection with the ANC's integration in the Socialist International.

Madi Gray: So you were very involved in that?

Roger Hällhag: Yes. I would say that at times there was quite normal, but also very active, political exchange between two parties. Before there was very much material financial assistance involved, and that was carrying much of the cooperation. After 1994 different kinds of democracy assistance continued being channelled to South Africa but on the more political level, on the level of the ANC and the Social Democratic Party and also on the governmental level it became more normalised political contacts. Because of mutual interests we stay in touch, not only based on different cooperation projects or something like that.

Madi Gray: How do you feel about the relations between the Social Democratic Party and the ANC and the other similar parties in Southern Africa compared to say relations between the Social Democratic Party and other parties in other countries, is there anything special, anything different?

Roger Hällhag: There is hardly any other party outside of Europe with which there is more frequent contact and cooperation with than the ANC.

Madi Gray: Still today?

Roger Hällhag: Still today, it remains pretty active, the contact and the exchanges. The ANC has a very special role for the Swedish Social Democratic Party because of the history of the struggle and because of the impact it had in Sweden. For more than a generation politically active people, not only within the social democratic and labour movements but in Swedish society in general, the anti-apartheid struggle was something that one identified with and felt involved with and many were very happy and felt that they had a share in the pride of liberation. That remains today, that is clear. The Social Democratic Party in particular is proud of having a privileged relation with the ANC. So it is giving high priority to that and many of us want to believe that the ANC has also a strong wish to keep this relationship active and so far it looks like that.

Madi Gray: Roger, what do you believe this support meant in Southern Africa?

Roger Hällhag: It is difficult and maybe not correct for us to judge, but okay we should think about it. Probably it had an impact on the liberation movement in the way that it got this strong recognition and support in the white West, which was very important to challenge the legitimacy of the apartheid regime, which was pretending to be an outpost of the civilized Western culture in Africa. In that respect it was probably important to confirm that the non-racial vision of the ANC was something that also had a resonance in the West and not only in South Africa itself.

Madi Gray: I am sure you are right there.

Roger Hällhag: And I guess that as much as it was an important personal experience for many of us who were involved, probably it was the same for our friends in the liberation movement and maybe sometimes even more for them because for us it was a way of introducing the excitement of the struggle into our lives, but in a quite comfortable life that we were living here as young people, while for them having contact with us, sometimes having an opportunity to travel, etc. was a break from a very harsh reality.

Madi Gray: What was the impact on the other work of the involvement of your organizations in the struggle against apartheid?

Roger Hällhag: I think it has served to educate a lot of people about the wider world. I believe that both people in general in Sweden and political activists in particular, trade union activists, church people, everybody who is active in voluntary organizations, are well aware about realities in the world around us. I believe that the situation is a little bit better in Sweden than in most other societies in that respect. That is not to say that all Swedes are well-informed and open-minded and show solidarity, nothing like that, but I think we have a fairly advanced position there. From the late 1970s to the early 1990s it was about Southern Africa. During the earlier part of that period it was also about the struggle in Central America starting with the revolution in Nicaragua and onwards, before that it was the Vietnam movement, solidarity with Indo-China against the American war there, and still today we see maybe more diversity of solidarity movements. In recent years we have globalization movements that have taken up different issues around globalization, third world debt, trade, etc. I think there is quite strong political involvement among people in Sweden and not least young people in what is happening in the world and that has been maintained until today.

Madi Gray: Is there anything you think that we may have forgotten that you would like to add?

Roger Hällhag: I think South Africa has become quite a special chapter for Sweden. There is a strong wish to relate to South Africa, to keep up the cooperation and there is a broad cooperation on non-governmental and governmental level, many institutions, authorities, etc. I think that is extremely positive but there are definitely challenges to it also.

One political consequence of the solidarity movement throughout the years is rather large

Swedish development assistance, which is now again going to reach one percent of the gross national product. That is the development cooperation that will happen next year, 2006. That would not have happened if it didn't have a popular base and a base particularly among politically active people who feel that it is worth investing in international development and the fight against poverty. That is great.

But a challenge in that respect is that so much of the involvement in cooperation becomes dependent on development cooperation funding. The opportunities for natural cooperation between organizations, institutions, government authorities, universities, whatever, become dependent on the flow of development cooperation money. When one day that ceases or has to go to other priorities, even poorer countries in Africa for example, then the cooperation may also cease to function. That is a risk I see.

Madi Gray: You don't think it can be converted into more of a partnership?

Roger Hällhag: I hope so. During the years I worked for the Swedish government, we were trying to push that and tried to establish that as much as possible. I think there are opportunities. Opportunities in relation to South Africa are better than maybe in any other third world country, but still it's a challenge in each and every project that it can become viable in itself and sustainable beyond a flow of development assistance. Not everything has to be commercialized, but by investing something of ourselves and giving up some of our own comfort in order to have a sustainable cooperation, that is a challenge I see.

Madi Gray: My final question we touched on, what do you think all these years of involvement with Southern Africa have meant to the people of Sweden? Swedish assistance has gone out, but has anything been replaced? It must have, otherwise you wouldn't have this long relationship.

Roger Hällhag: In a way I think it has, for a lot of people. Here it is probably necessary to come back to the personal experience. A lot of people have a personal experience or involvement and they feel that they have a part in what is still seen as a very successful transformation in South Africa that is also bringing hope for progress for Africa as a whole. That feeling, that insight, that goodwill on the part of a lot of Swedes still has a strong meaning today and I hope it will remain so for the future.

Madi Gray: Thank you very much Roger, that was very interesting and there is a lot of information here.

Roger Hällhag: Thank you.