The following is a selection from an April 17th, 2015 interview with Alan Wald, a prominent leader in the Ann Arbor anti-apartheid movement, conducted over email by Emilie Irene Neumeier:

What was your background prior to arriving at the University of Michigan? How and when did you become involved in activism? What were your primary motivations and interests in becoming an activist? How did you become involved with the anti-apartheid movement in Ann Arbor?

The first and last part of this question interlink nicely and are important. In short, I was a committed and experienced radical activist long before I came to U-M; when I arrived at U-M in 1975, there was already an anti-apartheid movement functioning that was comprised of people with backgrounds somewhat like my own, so it was kind of like a meeting of like-minded people. No doubt new and less experienced forces were drawn in, but there was a solid core of experienced activists in place at the center.

More specifically, I was alienated and restless in high school (1960-64), not really political but certainly drawn to the civil rights movement and non-conformism (the Beats, Existentialists, Jazz musicians). My first year at Antioch College (1964-69), I listened to lots of political arguments, asked questions, read a great deal, and hung around radicals—to whom I seemed naturally drawn. In my second year I joined SDS and became very active around anti-racism, the Vietnam war, student rights. I wrote for the SDS newsletter and was in some hair-raising demonstrations in southern Ohio. In late 1965-66 I was a member of an SDS community organizing project in Cleveland, ERAP (Economic Research and Action Project), which had a big impact on me—we were trying to organize the poor white and Black community to demand welfare rights, etc. In the summer of 1967 I traveled abroad with the idea of roaming around Western Europe and North Africa to gather material for creative writing; but by the fall I was attending a college for workingmen in Birmingham, England, and totally drawn into Marxist/socialist circles. I participated in the famous Grosvenor Square demonstration in October 1967 called by the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign (I was part of the "Stop It" committee—US citizens in England). I returned to Antioch in December 1967 and began attending meetings of the main socialist group, Young Socialist Alliance (YSA). I joined after several months of candidacy and was active in just about everything imaginable. This continued after I moved to Berkeley in July 1969 to work on a Ph D in English, and that fall I joined the Socialist Workers Party, running for Berkeley City Council on the SWP ticket in April 1971.

When I came to Ann Arbor I was still in the Socialist Workers Party, but mainly writing literary articles for its journal, going to Detroit to attend events, and giving classes in socialism to students in a local chapter of the Young Socialist Alliance. I actually don't recall any SWP supervision of my political activities here or any collaboration or even much interest from Detroit. It is likely that I was drifting away because the group was turning inward and going in a new

direction, which led to my separation within a few years. In any event, I and my late wife (who had returned to school to get a nursing degree at U-M) became immediately involved in Latin American solidarity activity on campus, and just about everything else that was radical. We were almost immediately in contact with the faculty member who was central to the anti-apartheid movement--Political Science Professor Joel Samoff, whom I had actually known from a distance back at Antioch. (He was an older student more or less in charge of our dorm.)

Joel was part of the main group, which was called the Washtenaw County Coalition Against Apartheid (WCAA). As you certainly know, it was the struggles in South Africa against apartheid that gave rise to the demands for boycotts and divestment, and I had been aware of these struggles from the time I entered college. At U-M, an African American graduate student named Jemadari Kamara and an undergraduate (not African American) named Heide Gottfried were the two individuals with whom I had the most contact, besides Samoff. They seemed experienced, and many of the others I encountered had been involved in Marxist study groups, FLOC (Farm Labor Organizing Committee), People's Action Coalition, Latin American solidarity, and so on. One had the feeling that these movements in the late 1970s were very much tied into the earlier movements from the 1960s—part of the same tradition with some of the same people. In addition, a South African professor at Northwestern University, Dennis Brutus, kept in touch with us and integrated us into regional activities. He, too, had a long political history.

To be active in the anti-apartheid movement wasn't a choice for me. It seemed natural and necessary, and I wanted to do it. In addition to the specific issue of racial/class oppression in S. Africa, I felt the struggle had a connection to racism in the US and the concerns of the radical movement in general. At no time did it seem like a burden, problem, or distraction. I received wonderful inspiration and education from the experience. It seemed as if the best students (graduate and undergraduate) and the most admirable faculty were involved.

When you think back to your involvement on campus during that time, what moments or events stick out to you as the most poignant or important to your cause?

It's tricky now to separate WCAA from everything else that was happening in the late 1970s and early 1980s. As indicated above, the anti-apartheid movement was part of a larger network of radical activities in which I was involved. In fact, I should say that I don't recall being as much involved in the internal affairs of WCAA as I would be in the various committees around solidarity in Latin America (Chile, Nicaragua, El Salvador, etc.), and then later groups such as Concerned Faculty and the Network for Cultural Democracy. I'm sure that there were different factions within WCAA, but I haven't a memory of taking part in the tactical debates and discussions that must have occurred. Probably this was more the purview of the students. To some extent I was a public spokesman

because I was a professor, and also because I was experienced in organizing public events, speaking, and so on. On the other hand, I had strong views about the necessity of non-violent mass action and internal democracy (for groups), so I must have felt my views were shared.

The situation of having multiple sites of activism was similar for others. Joel Samoff, for example, was very much committed to the rights and presence of African and African American students on the campus, and also active in the Ann Arbor community (I think one area was public transportation). It was a time of cross-ethnic solidarity; I myself was also committed to the Palestine Human Rights Campaign, a fine group. Joel and I were both Jewish, but it seemed to me that he wore his hair in something of an Afro style, and was frequently seen in a dashiki—which I imagined to be a reflection of his personal identification with the struggles of Black Africans and African Americans. Joel was a completely admirable guy and a good scholar, so I was horrified when he was turned down for tenure by the Political Science Department in 1980. Of course, there was no way to prove that the cause for his dismissal was his activism, but he certainly met the standard qualifications (a book with an important press in his field; excellent teaching). The fact that he was alone in his department in the political role that he played additionally gave the impression that his non-conformity was the main issue.

Although I myself was untenured, I played a big public part in fighting to overturn the decision, challenging the department openly in the *Michigan Daily*. We lost, but Joel handled the whole thing with great courage and dignity. The culture of that department was permanently damaged. I think they still owe him an apology.

As for the anti-apartheid movement itself, I mostly recall the demonstrations as exciting and moving. At one point Dennis Brutus (now deceased) came to town; he stayed with me in a guest bedroom of my house and we talked all night. We also joined in a sit-in that was being held in a conference room in Flemming—although I admit that I am a bit uncertain as to whether this action was specifically around divestment. He gave me a book of his poems which I treasure. So there is another poignant moment.

Could you describe the atmosphere of the Regents meeting you spoke at in April 1978? How did the Regents respond to you at the meeting? How did you prepare for the meeting and is there anything after the fact, that you wish you had done differently?

Well, at this point in time, I mostly have memories of memories. So others may recall things differently. I think there were just four faculty speakers—Samoff (Political Science), Tom Weisskopf (Economics), Dan Fusfeld (Economics), and me (English). Dan was significantly older; Tom had been tenured a few years earlier; Joel was a few years ahead of me; I was the youngest, thirty-one. In my perception, all the others all had more expertise in the relevant economic and

political questions due to their academic disciplines. I probably participated mainly due to my Left activist credentials and I probably gave a more ethically-argued statement. To my knowledge, there were no other faculty who came forward wanting to speak at this event, although there was a group of several dozen radicals who used to meet for lunch every Wednesday at Guild House—which functioned as kind of base for both radical faculty and WCAA with campus ministers (the Colemans, Bob Hauert) as critical allies.

I certainly didn't sense that any Regents or U-M administrators were on our side, although we may have had sympathizers of whom I was unaware. It felt like an "us" against "them" situation—"us" being the four faculty and a large of group of students, and maybe some community members. There must have been several hundred joining the protest for divestment and I believe we all marched into the meeting together. Most of the supporters were wearing gags as a kind of silent protest—and perhaps to make it clear that we weren't being disruptive and surely that we were not violent. (I'm not saying that we were philosophically pacifists, but that we didn't want accusations of misbehavior to become the subject of conversation rather than the issues of institutional responsibility we were raising.)

Since I had been involved in many public protests I probably wasn't nervous about speaking, but I always prepared a great deal (and still do). I'm sure that I had my remarks written were out on note cards and that I had timed them exactly to fit the allotted number of minutes. I think we all spoke calmly and reasonably, and I don't recall any particular reaction to anything I said—although I am sure that I was very direct and urgent-sounding (my style). But apparently Dan Fusfeld at some point said something about the Regents being "stupid," which enraged some of them. If I recall correctly the issue at hand at this particular meeting (we had raised apartheid earlier) was whether to follow the Sullivan Principles (this allowed the stock portfolio to remain unchanged but for the university to criticize racism) as opposed to our demand for divestment. I don't recall the public discussion that may have followed, but I believe that Heide was present to read a resolution for divestment but that the Regents, or maybe Robben Flemming, refused to recognize her. She can provide more details.

Were the administration and regents the only opponents of the movement? Were there other groups who opposed the divestment strategy? Were faculty members hesitant to get involved? How did concern for career affect faculty activism?

I don't recall any campus organizations explicitly in opposition to divestment, but those of us in favor of divestment were clearly a vocal minority. I don't think anyone supported Apartheid—an untenable position on a liberal campus. The alternative was the Sullivan Principles, which we saw as a liberal cop-out. Even among faculty worked up about apartheid, only a minority was willing to speak out for divestment, or anything else on the Left. The general line was "it's complicated, this won't have an effect, this will actually hurt Black South

Africans," and so on. Today, of course, probably everyone would say that they actively supported divestment.

I'm guessing that a major obstacle to involement was that faculty were focused on work and family lives, and didn't see this as their own issue. Also, in that period, as today, there was a concern that radical activism against the administration could hurt one's career. To be sure, the days of being fired simply for alleged Communist Party membership were gone, but one could always be accused of acting unprofessionally. More likely, there would be a prejudicial grudge that would play a role in evaluating tenure, promotion, consideration for awards, consideration for membership on various committees, funding proposals, and so on. None of us were martyrs who liked the idea of having our careers hurt in this manner, but we understood that these were the risks and we were all willing to take them. As you know, Samoff was fired and Dan Fusfeld was refused emeritus status (at least for a while). Anything else that happened to anyone was due to a "hidden hand," so we'll never know for sure. But the emotional, psychological, and educational benefits of this kind of activism have outweighed any downsides.