

Ruth First



Voices of Liber- ation

COMPILED BY DON PINNOCK



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CONTENTS

HER LIFE	1
Early years	3
University	7
The Congress Alliance	12
Life in exile	22
HER WRITING	31
Africans turned off the land	35
Pretoria conquered by the women!	38
Pass books for women issued in Winburg	41
Alexandra: where the pass laws breed murder	43
The new slavery	46
Tens of thousands flock to Mai Mai daily	52
Anti-pass protests shake the land	56
Potato boycott launched	59
Farm slave scheme cracks	62
In the presence of history	63
South Africa today	67
Our duty – as we see it	79
From the Freedom Charter to armed struggle	83
After Soweto: a response	91
Revolutionary propaganda at home and abroad: discussion guide note	102
The gold of migrant labour	118
Gentlemen and officers	141
The cell	152
HER LEGACY	163
Bibliography	173
Photo credits	182

‘...ideas that mattered to her most, that she made
her own, were those that were instruments in
the liberation of people...’

RONALD SEGAL (from his speech at Ruth First's memorial)

THE LIFE OF RUTH FIRST

Events in the life of Ruth First

1901	Matilda (Tilly) Leveton arrives with her parents from Lithuania, aged four.
1904	Ruth's paternal grandfather, Moses Ruben Fürst, sails to South Africa from Bauske, Courland, in Latvia.
1907	Julius First arrives in South Africa with his mother and brother.
1923	Julius elected to the Communist Party of South Africa committee.
1925	Ruth First born 4 May to Julius and Matilda First.
1936	Ruth attends Jewish Government School in Doornfontein, Johannesburg.
1938	Moves to Barnato Park School.
1939	Joins Junior Left Book Club.
1941	Matriculates from Jeppe Girls High School.
1942	Enrols at University of the Witwatersrand to read social science. Meets fellow students Ismael Meer and Nelson Mandela. Co-founds Federation of Progressive Students and joins Young Communist League and then the Communist Party.
1945	World War II ends.
1946	Ruth graduates with six first-class passes. Attends World Federation of Democratic Youth in London with Harold Wolpe, then travels to Prague for conference of the International Union of Students. Tours France, Italy, Hungary and Yugoslavia. Returns to work for the research division of the Johannesburg City Council. Assists with miners' strike, which prompts her to resign to 'do political work'. Takes a job as journalist on <i>The Guardian</i> . Meets Joe Slovo.
1949	Marries Joe Slovo.
1950	Daughter Shawn born. Suppression of Communism Act (No. 44) passed.
1951	Travels to Soviet Union. Receives first banning order. Elected to drafting committee of the Freedom Charter.
1952	ANC Defiance Campaign. Mandela calls for whites' to support it. Result is formation of South African Congress of Democrats with Ruth as organiser. On executive of South African Peace Council and in secret discussions towards the launch of the South African Communist Party. Writes for <i>Counter Attack</i> . Takes editorship of <i>Fighting Talk</i> (Springbok Legion journal). Daughter Gillian born.
1954	Daughter Robyn born. Ruth travels to China.
1955	Congress of the People held at Kliptown to ratify the Freedom Charter.
1956	One hundred and fifty-six people arrested on charge of high treason. Ruth and Joe detained. Ruth discharged after preliminary examination phase but remains a 'main co-conspirator'.
1960	Sharpeville killing of protesters by police. Sixty-nine people killed and 156 injured. Langa protesters fired on and 49 people injured. State of emergency declared. ANC and PAC banned and 1 800 people arrested.

Events in the life of Ruth First

1961	Treason Trial ends. All acquitted. Ruth researches and writes <i>South West Africa</i> . Receives banning order restricting her to Johannesburg and preventing any preparation of material for publication, or communication with banned people. Enrolls at University of the Witwatersrand for librarianship diploma. South Africa declared a republic. Umkhonto we Sizwe armed struggle behind attacks on State buildings.
1962	Sabotage Act (No. 76) passed, providing for banning orders and house arrest.
1963	<i>South West Africa</i> published. Banned in South Africa. Raid on Lilliesleaf farm in Rivonia. Arrest of most of Umkhonto we Sizwe leadership, including Mandela. Ruth arrested in August under 90 days' solitary confinement laws, then rearrested. Detained and interrogated for 117 days. General Laws Amendment Act (No. 37) passed allowing indefinite detention, retroactive criminalisation with maximum penalty being death. Torture now widespread.
1964	Leaves South Africa on 14 March with daughters, never to return.
1964–68	Travels extensively in Africa to study military coups and the failure of independence struggles. Writes <i>The Barrel of a Gun</i> .
1965	Publishes <i>117 Days</i> .
1966	Scripts and acts in the film <i>117 Days</i> . Helps former Kenyan vice-president Oginga Odinga write his autobiography. Deported from Kenya.
1967	Writes <i>South West Africa: Travesty of Trust</i> with Ronald Segal. Edits <i>No Easy Walk to Freedom</i> by Mandela, <i>The Peasants' Revolt</i> by Govan Mbeki and <i>Not Yet Uhuru</i> by Odinga. First contact battles between South African forces and Umkhonto we Sizwe in Rhodesia.
1970	<i>The Barrel of a Gun</i> published.
1971	Publishes <i>Portugal's Wars in Africa</i> .
1972	Takes up research post at Manchester University teaching sociology courses. Works for UN Commission on Human Rights. Publishes (with others) <i>The South African Connection: Western Investment in Apartheid</i> .
1973	Takes post at Durham University teaching women's studies.
1974	Publishes <i>Libya: The Elusive Revolution</i> about Colonel Gaddafi.
1977	Appointed professor and research director at the Centre for African Studies at Eduardo Mondlane University in Maputo, Mozambique. Publishes <i>The Mozambican Miner: A Study in the Export of Labour</i> .
1980	Collaborates with Ann Scott to write <i>Olive Schreiner</i> .
1982	Killed by letter bomb in her office at Eduardo Mondlane University.
1983	<i>Black Gold: The Mozambican Miner, Proletarian and Peasant</i> published posthumously.

NOTE

- 1 During apartheid, the South African population was divided into four distinct groups based on racial classification: African, coloured, Indian and white. Many different terms were used to denote these groups during the apartheid era, and in the section on her writings the nomenclature of that era, as written by Ruth First, has been retained.

Her life



Early years

ON THE TUESDAY AFTERNOON of 17 August 1982, Ruth Heloise First was in her office at Eduardo Mondlane University with her close friend Bridget O’Laughlin, the director of the Centre of African Studies, Aquino de Braganca and a South African exile, Pallo Jordan. Ruth, who was director of research at the Centre, was going through her incoming post, talking and laughing, when an explosion ripped through the office. Windows shattered, a hole was torn in the wall, the steel desk was snapped in half and the concrete ceiling cracked. O’Laughlin, Jordan and de Braganca were injured, but Ruth, who was bending over the desk, took the full force of the blast and was dead.

The parcel bomb that had killed her sent shock waves around the world. In South Africa, where her writing was banned, the news of her death was hardly mentioned in the press. But the rest of the world knew her, through her work and her dynamic role in the liberation movement. At her funeral in Llangene Cemetery near Maputo the following Monday, 3 000 mourners gathered around Ruth’s coffin, which was covered with the flag of the African National Congress. Messages of sympathy poured in from 67 countries and organisations, adding to letters and telegrams from hundreds of friends throughout the world.

At a memorial meeting her friend and publisher, Ronald Segal, described Ruth as someone who loved ideas because she was always willing to learn. ‘Those ideas that mattered to her most, that she made her own, were those that were instruments in the liberation of people,’ he said. ‘She was warm and sensitive. She was an intellectual adventure. And she was such fun.’

This book is a collection of Ruth's writings, which are remarkable for their conceptual and political consistency as much as for their diversity. Almost all share a focused, often biting sarcasm, criticism of apartheid and the institutions and ideas which held it together. That these writings found their mark can be judged from the decision by South Africa's security forces to kill her. By then she had been declared an enemy of the State and not a word she wrote could be legally read within the borders of the land of her birth.

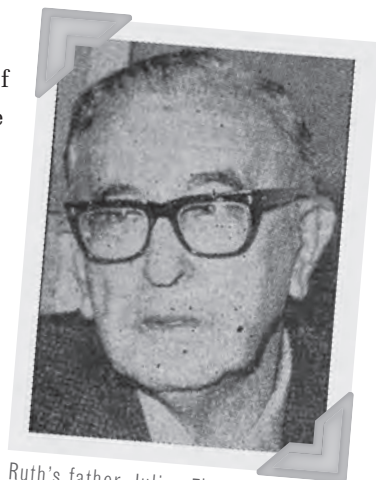
Ruth became one of South Africa's finest investigative journalists, but she arrived there by a route which wove together threads of a political subculture altogether exceptional for a white South African. She was born in Johannesburg on 4 May 1925 to a family steeped in left-wing political understandings. These traditions and commitments gave her a world view which set her apart from her peers and were the foundation of her writing and politics. However, like her grandparents and her parents, the price of this difference for Ruth was to be persecution and exile.

Her parents carried in her memories the poverty, squalor and violence of the area in Russia known as the Pale of Settlement and the pain and hope of one of the greatest migrations in human history. The movement of her grandparents from the western areas of the Tsarist Empire after 1880 was part of a general trend of emigration from almost every part of Europe, an exodus which reached its peak shortly before World War I when about one and a half million people left Europe every year to find new homes overseas. But the percentage of Jewish emigrants from Eastern Europe was much higher than that of any other group, undoubtedly because of the severe conditions which existed in the Pale of Settlement.

Ruth's grandfather sailed to South Africa in 1904. He was a tailor named Moses Ruben Fürst from Bauske, Courland, in Latvia (his name was written as 'First' by a customs official when he landed in Cape Town). His son, Julius, arrived in Johannesburg three years later at the age of ten, with his mother and brother. Ruth's mother, Matilda (Tilly) Leveton, was born in Lithuania and came to South Africa in 1901 at the age of four. Tilly remembers that her father bought a house in Fordsburg, Johannesburg. He was, she said, a tailor who had spent a year in London before bringing the family to South Africa.

For both Julius First and Tilly Leveton, politics became absolutely central to their lives. Tilly remembered that after leaving school Julius

did a bookkeeping course and joined a firm of accountants, doing trustee work. At some time during this period he started a small business 'repairing old bedsteads and iron stoves'. By then he was already politically left and was 'a socialist when I met him – he had been influenced by [Welsh socialist and trade unionist] David Ivon Jones [who was, until 1920, the general secretary of the South African Labour Party]'. He applied to join the International Socialist League but, according to Tilly, 'they refused him on the grounds that he was an employer of labour. He had one African who assisted him! It upset Julius terribly'.¹



Ruth's father, Julius First

In 1923 Julius was elected onto the committee of the Communist Party of South Africa.² The same year he and his brother Louis started a 'manufactory' called Union Mattress, with Julius as the junior partner.³ After completing school, Tilly worked in the office of Louis Goldberg, a furniture retail firm. She remembers being 'in charge of two collectors, young men, who had to go out in order to get the instalments'.⁴ According to her granddaughter Gillian, Tilly's job of repossessing furniture from miners during the 1922 strike radicalised her.⁵ Tilly's son, Ronald, says she would talk about 'the money-grabbing aspects of these people who used to repossess furniture and confiscate payments that people had made'.⁶

By 1925, with Julius in the Communist Party, the Firsts were in the forefront of revolutionary politics in South Africa and Ruth, their first child, was born into a family markedly unlike most others in the country. Nonetheless, their politics did not seem to interfere with household arrangements commonly associated with white privilege. The Firsts hired a white nursemaid from London to look after the new baby. According to Tilly, the children 'always had a white nurse...we didn't have coloured people in the house – whites were better educated'.⁷ Their house in Kensington at the time of Ruth's birth was comfortable and well furnished, with the 'servants quarters in the yard as always'.⁸

Around 1936 Ruth began attending the Jewish Government School in Doornfontein. A classmate, Adele Bernstein, clearly remembered Ruth's

arrival in the school. She was 'a skinny girl in a navy gym and white shirt who wore her fuzzy hair short. She was always neat, impeccably dressed and a bit of a class above us'⁹. According to Bernstein:

She put my nose out of joint. I was always very good at English and top of the class in that subject. Then Ruth arrived and she took over. Her parents had a very good library – they often inscribed her books in proper library fashion with the frontpiece and all. She used to lend me books. She was very articulate.¹⁰

Ruth spent two years at school in Doornfontein and then, probably because her parents moved house, she left for Barnato Park School. There she became friends with Myrtle Berman, who remembered their first meeting:

Our history teacher was talking about the Soviet Union and I was the only other person in the class who knew what the Soviet Union was. Ruth approached me afterwards and said: 'How do you know? You were the only one!' I can't remember how I did know, but I was a voracious reader, and I said: 'What does go on?' And she said to me: 'Oh, I can't really explain it at all, you should come and meet my mother. She'll explain it to you.'¹¹

The result of that meeting probably changed Berman's life and her memory of it captures something of the atmosphere in which Ruth grew up:

One day after school I went home with Ruth. I got there about three o'clock and emerged at six o'clock with my head reeling, having had a three-hour lecture from Tilly on the history of socialism, the Russian Revolution, the origins of religion...without me saying a word! And I remember wandering home and telling my mother, who nearly had a fit at this seditious stuff. But Tilly educated me. She gave me stuff to read. She was the main person who formed my early views.¹²

At home the children were never excluded from the political domain. According to Tilly:

When we used to go to the Town Hall steps [to hear communist speakers] we took the children with us. We made them conscious. We wanted them to have an understanding of what was going on. The

only people who came to our house were people interested in politics, nobody else. We didn't have ordinary friends. I didn't ever want anybody around who didn't understand what we were talking about!¹³

At the age of 14 Ruth joined the Junior Left Book Club with Berman, reading extensively and taking part in public debates. Ruth devoured books about South Africa and the Soviet Union. By the time she matriculated from Jeppe Girls High, her final school, in 1941, Ruth had all the makings of a 'blue stocking'.¹⁴ According to anti-apartheid activist and former friend Rica Hodgson:

She was brilliant...she always had it up there and she knew she had it up there. But she didn't care very much about how she looked. She didn't have a very good image of herself as a woman in those days. Her hair was very curly, she didn't use make-up. I was terrified of her. But I learned early that she had great vulnerability...she was very shy, private, she hid herself behind those dark glasses she always wore. That was a kind of hiding-behind.¹⁵

Only close friends saw Ruth's youthful self-doubt, but in finding it they also came across her warm, sensitive self. Ronald Segal was to observe that 'she was not amongst those people whose private characters are virtually the same as their public ones'.¹⁶

In 1941 Ruth passed her matric with an unexceptional second class, but she knew what she wanted to do next. At the University of the Witwatersrand she was about to discover the comradeship and politics that were to set the course for the rest of her life.

University

Ruth wrote very little about her university life. In *117 Days* she says that her university years were cluttered with student societies, debates, mock trials, general meetings and 'the hundred and one issues of war-time and post-war Johannesburg that returning ex-servicemen made so alive'.¹⁷

She wrote nothing about her academic achievements. But her university records indicate a serious and intelligent student with a wide range of interests. She decided to do a social science degree and, many years later, attempted to add a diploma in librarianship. In all, she studied no less than 25 courses, of which six were terminated by her arrest in 1963 and a further two, during

1945, were not examined. Her records show an exceptional ability in English and African history and little interest in other languages (she scored 49 per cent for Zulu and 32 per cent for French). Six of her examinations were passed with firsts.¹⁸

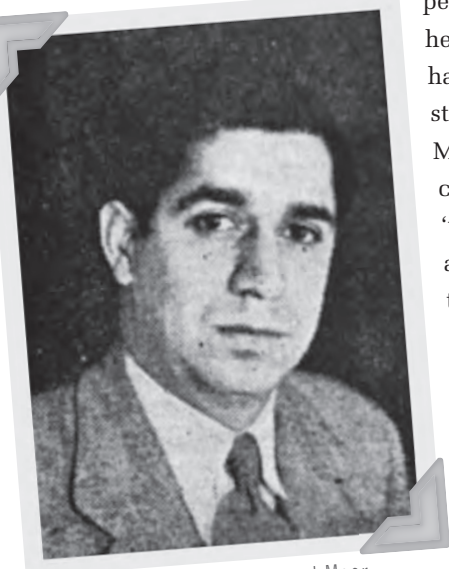
However, while Ruth applied herself to her studies in her usual focused way, the campus offered her direct emotional involvement in wider political struggles. At university she found her own measure in a way she could never have done at an all-white school and the campus put her in contact with

people of her own age who did not regard her views as outlandish. One of these was a handsome, effervescent young Indian law student called Ismael Meer. At university Meer befriended another young law student called Nelson Mandela, whom he found to be 'the best dresser in the faculty'.¹⁹ Meer rented a flat at 27 Market Street, which soon became the meeting place for radical students.

Ruth was attracted by these self-confident, politically aware students – particularly Meer. The two were soon close friends. Myrtle Berman remembers Meer as 'very charismatic, very bright, very able. He was a leader who stood out. He and Ruth were so involved with each other'²⁰. Meer and First both helped found the Federation

of Progressive Students, but their main political activities were in the broader political field. Meer was a leading figure in the Transvaal Indian Congress and Ruth soon became a central member of the Young Communist League. According to Harold Wolpe,²¹ Ruth 'wasn't a campus political person...she was more involved in, so to speak, adult politics'.²² Meer and First were both later to join the Johannesburg West branch of the Communist Party.

Meer's flat became the focus of Ruth's social world and her expanding political education. According to Berman, the flat was 'dreary...badly furnished, bloody depressing, looking back on it...just a place to be'. But it was 'awash with activity, always, it was a hive'.²³



Fellow student and friend Ismael Meer

Mary Benson²⁴ saw the social activity in the flat as a welding together of friendships among young people who were later to form the intelligentsia of the Congress Alliance:

[They were] great days – and in Meer’s flat over endless cups of tea and curry meals or at any time of the day and night, they discussed and argued and planned, they studied and they listened to the gramophone.²⁵

According to Benson, they were young, optimistic and planning for a better world:

despite the obtuseness of the Government and its continual resort to restrictive legislation, they realised they were part of the world at large, and had the assurance of knowing they were in step with what was happening in Asia and with what was likely to happen in the rest of Africa.²⁶

Ruth was becoming increasingly politically mature and involved. In 1945, the war ended and the university was caught up in the turmoil of what seemed to be new beginnings for South Africa.²⁷ She was by then a leading figure in the Young Communist League and was remembered as being ‘very quick mentally...holding her ground...and somewhat intimidating’.²⁸

The university offered the young activist more than friends and commitments: it also provided her with her first experience of life beyond the Limpopo. At the end of 1946, right after her final examinations, Ruth left with Harold Wolpe to attend the founding conference of the World Federation of Democratic Youth in London.²⁹ From there they travelled on to Prague for the conference of the International Union of Students. This was followed by a tour of France,



Albert Sachs, Ruth and Lopez Raimundo at the World Federation of Democratic Youth conference

Italy, Hungary and Yugoslavia.³⁰ In Yugoslavia, they 'travelled around and addressed meetings and met partisan leaders who gave us detailed accounts of the partisan struggles. It was just after the war and very dramatic!'³¹

In Yugoslavia, Ruth found the only country within the Communist Information Bureau which had successfully combined the war against fascism with a revolution against capitalism. As Yugoslav partisans under Josip Broz Tito began to roll back the Axis forces, liberated zones were carved out and peasants were assisted to re-establish themselves. The Popular Front in Yugoslavia, unlike the fronts in other countries, was not a coalition of parties, but had become a mass movement with a revolutionary programme created during the war of liberation. To the young communist student from South Africa, Tito must have been a great inspiration.

After leaving university, Ruth took up a job in the research division of the Johannesburg City Council, but this was not to last. She spent her days writing and editing the section headed 'Social Welfare' in a commemorative album of the city's 50th jubilee. She found herself checking the figures for the number of play supervisors for white children in white parks, the number of beggars still on the streets and the number of work centres for white disabled persons and the handicapped – work which bored and disgusted her.³² Then, in August 1946, more than 100 000 African miners went on strike and the confinement of the Council became too much for her:

When the African miners' strike of 1946 broke out and was dealt with by the Smuts government as though it was a red insurrection and not a claim by poverty-stricken migrant workers for a minimum wage of ten shillings a day, I asked for an interview with the [Council] director and told him that I wanted to leave the department. Then he asked: 'Have you another job?' ... 'A political job,' I said.³³

It was a tense and exciting time for the young graduate and it was an early indication of the direction her activism would take. The strikers were enclosed in compounds under rule by the army, the mine and State police. All officials and organisers of the African Mine Workers' Union were being hunted by the police. Ruth wrote:

A great squad of volunteers helped them set up strike headquarters in the most unlikely places, and from lodging rooms like the one I

shared with a girl-friend, the handles of duplicating machines were turned through the night, while in the early hours before dawn white volunteers drove cars to the vicinity of the mine compounds and African organisers, hiding their city suits and their bundles of strike leaflets under colourful tribal blankets, wormed their way into the compounds...When the mine strike was over I became a journalist.³⁴

Ruth's involvement with Meer had ended after university and she began a lifelong relationship with Joe Slovo, a soldier who had just returned from the war. He had been born in Lithuania and had emigrated to South Africa with his parents when he was nine. His father had worked as a van driver in Johannesburg and his mother, at times, had hawked goods from house to house. Joe was forced to leave school early in order to earn money and had worked as a shop clerk. When war broke out he joined the army and, while he was up north, he became an active member of the Springbok Legion, a radical servicemen's organisation. After demobilisation he joined the Communist Youth League. Back in Johannesburg, Joe began studying law at the University of the Witwatersrand. He and Ruth soon became political comrades, trading heated debates and sharing political platforms. They often argued – she was the intellectual, he used to say, and he was the working-class man – but the attraction grew. They shared a flat and in 1949 they married.



Ruth, Joe Slovo and two of their three daughters, 1960

By then Ruth had joined the Johannesburg office of *The Guardian*, a weekly strongly influenced by the Communist Party. Throughout the late 1940s the Party came under increasing pressure from the State. After the 1946 mine strike, members of the Party, including Joe, were accused of organising it and charged with sedition. Although they were later acquitted, the trial set the context for the banning of the Party in 1950. Both Ruth and Joe were 'named' by the State as communists, a situation which virtually guaranteed constant police harassment.³⁵

The Congress Alliance

In October 1952, in the midst of the African National Congress's Defiance Campaign against unjust laws, Nelson Mandela called on white people to support the Campaign and not to unite in opposition to it. If they did so, he said, they would be 'digging their own grave' by turning the whole movement 'into a racial front with disastrous consequences for all'.³⁶

The following month Ruth attended a meeting in Darragh Hall in Johannesburg which had been organised in response to this call. About 300 whites attended, mainly liberal and former South African Communist Party members. The meeting was addressed by Oliver Tambo and Yusuf Cachalia, who called for a progressive white grouping to cooperate with the Congress Movement.³⁷ The meeting marked the final parting of ways between liberals and former communists. Margaret Ballinger, acting as liberal spokesperson, rejected the call for a universal franchise as well as for a multiracial alliance. Liberals also refused to cooperate with former Party members who were present.³⁸ The Darragh Hall gathering was followed by three further meetings which attempted to reach a compromise that would lead to a liberal/left organisation. The failure of these meetings was followed by the formation of the Liberal Party, the South African Congress of Democrats (SACOD) and the South African Communist Party.



Ruth First and daughter Shawn

The year 1953 must have been a difficult one for Ruth to have been a mother. Her daughter Shawn was three years old, Gillian was not yet 12 months and, early in the year, she found she was pregnant. At the same time she was a full-time journalist and before the year was out would be elected onto the

national executives of SACOD and the South African Peace Council. She would also be plunged into top-secret discussions which gave rise to the South African Communist Party.

The formal acceptance of the white SACOD into the Congress Alliance

catapulted Ruth into the role of a key 'liberation publicist' for the mass movement.³⁹ She was called on to assist with and write SACOD's publications and particularly its news-sheet *Counter Attack*, which lasted for about three years.⁴⁰ She also took over editorship of *Fighting Talk*, the Springbok Legion journal which became firmly Congress-oriented under her guidance.

As a result of her work in the political movement, Ruth was offered a trip to the Soviet Union in 1951 and to China in 1954.⁴¹ In a booklet she edited called *South Africans in the Soviet Union*, she claimed she was 'not one of those who went to the Soviet Union expecting to find paradise on earth' and noted that 'footwear struck me as still below standard...washing machines, vacuum cleaners and even refrigerators are still in short supply'.⁴² The trip to the Soviet Union was hectic. In a letter home she wrote:

Have seen three ballets in the last three days, including the Swan Lake tonight...Have seen exhibitions, libraries, museums and galleries; the new Moscow Canal; the Park of Culture and Rest; a 3-dimensional film during which birds appeared to be flying through the cinema... Caviar for lunch, sturgeon for dinner, meals at crazy hours...the pace is terrific. But deeper impressions will have to wait until I see you.⁴³

Both in China and the Soviet Union she was shown the usual round of electricity projects, dams, canals and housing projects. But her sharp eye noted the effects of hard work on the faces of the people and the sadness of some of their songs – 'lingering perhaps from their history in the days of persecution'. China clearly made a great impact on Ruth and she noted that 'any achievement we have ever made in our country pales into utter insignificance in comparison with what has been done here'.⁴⁴

Back home she returned to busy planning sessions for the Congress of the People (COP), public meetings for SACOD and the Peace Council and secret gatherings of the new Communist Party. Ruth was now a high-profile activist, a working journalist, an underground revolutionary and a mother. Soon after her return from the Soviet Union she received her first banning order. However, although this may have cut back her public appearances, it still allowed her to continue work as a journalist and did not prevent her from involvement in private gatherings. So it was not long before she found herself elected onto the drafting committee of the Freedom Charter.

The idea of the Charter was raised publicly by ZK Matthews during his presidential address at the Cape Congress of the ANC in Cradock. People were asked to send in their demands for a new South Africa and an extraordinary range of demands started to pour into the COP headquarters in Johannesburg. According to *New Age*, writing just before the Congress began, ‘for months now the demands have been flooding in to COP headquarters, on sheets torn from school exercise books, on little dog-eared scraps of paper, on slips torn from COP leaflets’.⁴⁵ In order to cope with this flood and turn it into a single charter, a drafting sub-committee was appointed consisting of Ruth First, Yusuf Cachalia, Rusty Bernstein, Walter Sisulu, Duma Nokwe and Pieter Byleveld – most of whom were banned at the time. This committee, working ‘day after day, week after week, for a very long period during the whole campaign’, began sorting out the demands and attempting to draw together the threads.⁴⁶



Human Rights Day speakers, Alexandra: Yusuf Cachalia, Walter Sisulu, Ruth and Albertina Sisulu, 1952 (photographer Eli Weinberg)

According to Cachalia, the demands would arrive from the COP offices and would be given to Ruth for preliminary sorting and condensing into coherent statements. ‘She was the journalist, you see,’ he explained, ‘There were a lot of demands and she could digest them fast and present them to the committee’.⁴⁷

Under the banning order, Ruth had to suffer the frustration of being barred from attending the Congress at Kliptown which ratified the Charter. However, she was lucky she did not break her ban – on the second day of the Congress

hundreds of police surrounded the gathering, confiscated all papers and took the name of everyone present.

The challenge of the Congress Alliance and its press was clearly not going to be ignored by the State. Early warnings of the State's attempt to smash the Alliance took place during the planning stages of the Freedom Charter. As a result of a court interdict, police were expelled from a SACOD meeting about the Congress of the People at the Trades Hall in Johannesburg during July 1954. In reply to the interdict which expelled them, Major Spengler of the Security Police said it was the duty of the police to 'know what was going on at the meeting in order to protect internal security'. The police were, he claimed, 'investigating a case of high treason'.⁴⁸

The dawn raids came in December 1956. *New Age* editor Lionel Forman, one of the accused, documented the moment:

At dawn one morning in 1956, twenty days before Christmas, police knuckles and police batons hammered at the doors of one hundred and forty homes all over the Union of South Africa; the doors of luxury flats and the tin entrances of hessian shanty pondokkies, the oak of a parson's manse and the stable openings of farm labourers; doors in comfortable white suburbs, in grim African locations, in Indian ghettos, in cities, in villages and on farms far out on the veld.

One hundred and forty families were wakened that morning – Africans, Indians, Europeans, Coloureds, doctors and labourers, teachers and students, a university principal, a tribal chief...Those who asked were shown warrants of arrest. The crime charged in every single case: *high treason – hoogverraad*.⁴⁹

Eleven days after the first arrests, Ruth and Joe were detained. But by assembling leaders of all the congresses in one place and keeping them there day after day in confinement, the government was not only trying the opposition, it was creating it. People from a



Joe and Ruth after being arrested, December 1956

broad spread of political tendencies had been suddenly locked together in the embrace of the law and pressed into a single force.

In the legal battle which followed, Ruth's journalism, together with everything she believed in, went on trial for treason. She was discharged after the preparatory examination but remained an alleged 'main co-conspirator' throughout the trial and therefore continued to face a charge of high treason.⁵⁰

The trial was maddeningly slow and served to paralyse the Congress leadership right up into the 1960s.

By the time Justice Rumpff reached a verdict of 'not guilty', his findings were clearly out of step with the way in which the State now viewed the objective conditions of the time. Twelve months earlier pass protesters had been shot at Sharpeville and Langa.⁵¹ In the wake of this the State had declared a state of emergency and had arrested thousands of people. Joe was detained but Ruth fled to Swaziland with their children.

The year between Sharpeville and the treason judgment represented a critical change in the tactics of both the State and the Congress Alliance. In a sense, the logic of the trial was derived from the early years of Nationalist rule. The trial, it was hoped, would restrict the movements of the accused, intimidate others who might be similarly accused and demonstrate at home and abroad,

to a world immersed in the Cold War, that it was fighting communism by way of a highly respected judicial system. But the trial had unintended consequences. It boosted the prestige of the ANC, further cemented the alliance between nationalists and communists, and vindicated the stance of the Congress Alliance and the Freedom Charter. And the trial was of little value to the govern-



Treason trialists: J Nkamenji, F Adams, Ruth First, J Morolong
(photographer Eli Weinberg)

ment in its appeal to the white electorate, who were simply confused by the endless wrangling and who received little clarification from the mainstream press. It also failed to promote acceptance abroad, where an interest in decolonisation in Africa had overtaken fears of Soviet intervention. Quite simply,

the trial failed to install apartheid as 'common sense', and served to highlight the differences between Nationalist doctrine and non-racialism. So the State dispensed with a legal defence of apartheid and declared virtual martial law instead. The rule of law was simply suspended. Reflecting on this period of her life, Ruth said that whites who embarked on protest politics side by side with Africans, Indians and coloureds led 'a vigorously provocative life':

Our consciences were healthy in a society riddled with guilts. Yet as the years went by our small band led a more and more schizophrenic existence. There was the good living that white privilege brought, but simultaneously complete absorption in revolutionary politics and defiance of all the values of our own racial group. As the struggle grew sharper the privileges of membership in the white group were overwhelmed by the penalties of political participation.⁵²

Increasingly, whites within this political circle had become social outcasts from the white society which surrounded them. Initially this was of little consequence – their 'consciences were healthy' and, according to Joe, they were 'sort of euphoric about prospects and a bit blind as to what would eventually happen'.⁵³ But the effect of shared interests, secrecy and increasing State and social pressure was to tighten the social circle of the left. By the 1960s the fraternity of the left had become a clandestine affair – and would soon be deemed a conspiracy by the State.

For Ruth, South Africa was becoming an extremely difficult place in which to work. In September 1962, SACOD was banned and two months later *New Age* was proscribed. Then, in March 1963, in terms of the 'gagging clause' of the new Sabotage Act, both *Spark*⁵⁴ and *Fighting Talk* were forced to cease publication when all their journalists, including Ruth, were prevented from writing for any publication whatsoever. By then Ruth was deeply involved with the underground movement, which was in the



Final edition of the *Spark* newspaper, March 1963

process of changing tactics from protest to sabotage. The result of this change was the birth of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the ANC's military wing.⁵⁵

The ban on Ruth's press work did not block her from writing; it simply heightened her need to know more. Although the repression pushed her back from weekly journalism, her knowledge of migrant labour, together with her interest in the campaigns (against apartheid and poor working conditions of farm labourers) of her old friend, the Reverend Michael Scott, launched her into deeper and more reflective forms of investigative reporting. In 1960 she turned her attention to the mandated territory of South West Africa, and in so doing reached out to an audience beyond the barbed-wire borders of her increasingly isolated country.

In 1961, amid rising political tensions over rumours of a threatened United Nations 'invasion' of South West Africa and a pending court case at the International Court of Justice over the validity of South Africa's mandate to rule the territory, Ruth set off for Windhoek. Anticipating police bans and taking 'as devious [a] route as possible', she slipped into the city and checked into a hotel. Her secrecy afforded her a small breathing space:

I had four clear days unhampered by political police scrutiny in which to attempt a meeting with the African South West [black people in South West Africa]. Then suddenly the Special Branch...woke up with a jerk. There was an outsider in town, talking to Africans, asking questions, taking notes, riding around in the conspicuous salmon-pink American car of the Herero Councillors, asking for government reports in the Archives.⁵⁶

The Archives suddenly denied her access to documents written after 1946. But Africans were bursting to talk. Interviews were conducted on street corners, in motor cars, under trees, in crowded shops, though some were cancelled following police intimidation.

Government retribution for the visit came four days after her return from Windhoek. The thump on the door brought with it another banning order, which restricted her to Johannesburg and made it illegal for her to prepare or compile material for publication or to communicate with other banned people.⁵⁷ As she said later, she was in a 'state of civil death'.⁵⁸ The banning order was the final blow to her work as a journalist:

I could take part in no further exposé of forced labour like my work on Bethal; from entering African townships, so that I could no longer personally establish the contacts of African men and women who alerted our office first of all when some new vicious scheme of the police and administration came to light; from attending meetings, so that others had to take the notes and the photographs; from writing anything for publication, so that I had to sit at my desk with a legal opinion that sub-editing someone else's copy might just slip past the ban. Working in the midst of these ministerial bans and under continuous raids and scrutiny of the Special Branch was like going to work in a mine field...⁵⁹

But with regard to her work on South West Africa, Ruth simply ignored the ban and began to assemble her material. Slowly at first, then with increasing confidence, Ruth began to write her first book. The leap into longer narrative was not an easy one for her. The quality, volume and effortless flow of the later books concealed a nagging anxiety she had about her abilities as a writer. Only her closest friends saw the struggle. Ronald Segal was one:

Many remarkable journalists cannot make the leap from the article to the book. They are at home in the sentence and the paragraph, but they lost their way in the larger landscape. Ruth was all too aware of this. Some people, and I know there were some, who saw her self-assurance amounting to arrogance, never knew the turmoil of nervousness of suspected inadequacies that she brought to the writing of her books. It was a turmoil that I found difficult to understand.⁶⁰

Twenty years later one of South Africa's finest historians, Shula Marks, could still insist that 'in a field which has been notoriously neglected by scholars [*South West Africa*] remains one of the best and most readable books'.⁶¹ Ruth's manuscript was smuggled out of South Africa and published by Penguin in 1963. The risk of publication was high and Ruth's decision to go ahead with it was an act of considerable bravery. She had clearly broken her banning order and was now publicly airing the dirty laundry of a government already ill-disposed towards her. When the book appeared on news-stands in South Africa, it was banned. Any person possessing it was liable to a fine of R2 000 or five years in jail.

But Ruth was also out of work. In an attempt to train for a new profession which did not fall foul of her banning order, she enrolled for a course in librarianship at the University of the Witwatersrand and took some temporary work with an attorney. Then, on 11 July 1963, a baker's van drove slowly into the grounds of Lilliesleaf Farm in Rivonia, and its presence was to utterly alter the struggle against apartheid. As police burst from the van, others came round the back of the farmhouse and most of the leaders of Umkhonto were arrested. Also captured was voluminous evidence of plans for sabotage and revolution. By this time nearly 200 acts of sabotage had been committed.

By pure chance Ruth was not at Rivonia when the raid took place. She had been party to the decision to purchase the farm and other properties with funds from outside the country and was involved with the development of the underground movement which used the Rivonia house as its base.⁶² According to Joe Slovo, she knew 'almost everything'.⁶³ Joe, on the High Command of Umkhonto, was also a constant visitor to the farm but was not there on the day of the raid. He had been sent out of the country with the chairman of the South African Communist Party, JB Marks, on a mission two months earlier.

The Rivonia and other 'communist' trials that followed, which have been well documented elsewhere, decapitated the Congress Movement so thoroughly that it was several decades before the State again felt itself even remotely challenged by the liberation movement.⁶⁴

By the time the Rivonia raid occurred, the strain on Ruth of clandestine living must have been unbearable. The Congress leadership were well known to the Security Police and were being harassed day and night. Ruth retained her high-profile job on *New Age* and her writing skills were also constantly being called on in the drafting of propaganda pamphlets and articles. In addition, she was attending cell meetings of the Party and was involved in moves to broaden the ANC's M-plan.⁶⁵ According to Walter Sisulu, she was, during that period, 'one of the most dynamic personalities in the movement...She was moving in the circles of the ANC, the Indian Congress, the trade unions and as editor of *New Age* in Johannesburg she was central to nearly everything'.⁶⁶ Her daughter Robyn remembered that 'none of us children ever knew what was going on. It was at times very fearful – a huge amount of insecurity. It was considered better not to tell the children anything'.⁶⁷

But for Ruth time was running out. Her phone conversations were being

bugged, her mail was being tampered with and she was being followed: 'About a fortnight after the Rivonia arrests I'd seen two policemen in a car watching me...something was happening.'⁶⁸ On Friday 9 August 1963, Ruth was working in Wits University's main library. She'd been followed the day before but didn't think the Special Branch would come to the university. But she was wrong and found herself arrested under the 90 days' law.⁶⁹

Ruth spent 117 days in solitary confinement, during which time she was questioned by the Security Police and made to believe that she had given away vital information. She was released after 90 days but was rearrested on the pavement outside the police station. Overcome by a sense that an innocuous statement had betrayed her comrades, she attempted to commit suicide by swallowing sleeping tablets, but the dose was insufficient to kill her. When she was released after 117 days she did not believe the release was genuine:

We left Marshall Square eventually and by the time I got home it was lunch time, though Viktor [of the Security Police] had brought his release order early that morning. When they left me at my own house at last I was convinced that it was not the end, that they would come again.⁷⁰

When she arrived home, Tilly and the girls were horrified at her condition. With Joe overseas and unable to return for fear of arrest and the other members of the Umkhonto we Sizwe High Command on trial, there was little for Ruth to do but to leave South Africa. The decision was greeted with delight by her young daughters, who couldn't wait to leave the city which



Ruth leaving South Africa with her daughters (Gillian on the left; Robyn on the right), *Sunday Times*, March 1964

seemed to have turned against them. At Jan Smuts Airport, on 14 March 1964, she stepped off of South African soil for the last time.

Ruth Slovo and her children quit S. Africa for good

By MARGARET SMITH



MRS. RUTH SLOVO, former 90-day detainee, left South Africa last night on an exit permit.

MRS. RUTH SLOVO, former treason trialist and 90-day detainee, left Jan Smuts Airport, Johannesburg, for Europe last night on an exit permit. This means she will not be allowed to return to South Africa.

Mrs. Slovo was arrested in August last year and held for 117 days in solitary confinement at Marshall Square, Johannesburg, and in Pretoria Central Jail.

She left last night with her two younger daughters, Gillian, 12, and Robyn, 10. The third daughter, Shawn, aged 14, left South Africa earlier this week by ship.

A number of Security Branch policemen were present at the airport when she left.

Friends said the family was going to London to join Mr. Joe Slovo, the Johannesburg advocate who escaped from South Africa in June last year. They said that Mrs. Slovo had not wanted to leave South Africa permanently. But her application for a passport, was refused and an exit permit was granted a few days ago.

"The various bans and restric-

tions imposed on Mrs. Slovo made it impossible for her to continue living in South Africa," a friend said yesterday.

Ruth Slovo, a journalist and author, was forbidden to write and barred from entering premises connected with printing or publishing or to assist in any way with the dissemination of news. Nothing she said could be quoted and she could not write for overseas publications.

Mrs. Slovo was formerly Johannesburg editor of *New Age* and later, when this newspaper was banned, of *Spark*. The prohibition of its entire staff from having anything to do with newspapers forced its closure.

When she could no longer work as a journalist, Mrs. Slovo started a post-graduate course in librarianship. It was while she was working at the library of the University of the Witwatersrand in August last year that she was

arrested and detained under the 90-day law.

At the end of 80 days, she was taken from her cell and told that she was free.

Rearrested

Ruth Slovo then walked out of Marshall Square police station on to the pavement outside. She was looking in her handbag for a key to make a telephone call to her children when she was rearrested.

While she was under detention, a warrant was issued for the arrest of her father, 70-year-old Mr. Julius First—described by the police as "South Africa's most wanted political figure." Despite watches at the borders, Mr. First escaped and is now overseas.

Ruth First's brother, Ronnie, was also arrested under the 90-day law and held in solitary confinement for three weeks. At the end of this time police told him they did not believe that he was involved in suspicious political activities.

Sunday Times article about Ruth leaving South Africa, March 1964

Life in exile

After arriving in London, Ruth was burdened by a sense of two defeats – of the liberation movement and of what she perceived as her own personal defeat in detention. She set about dealing with these in the way she knew best – by writing. Her first exploration in this direction was the hardest – to write about herself. She was urged to do this by Joe, by Ronald Segal, who was now an editor at Penguin Books, and by other friends who saw her need to heal the scars of detention. So, in a remarkably short time, she sketched out and wrote *117 Days*.

The book was an immediate success, and the British Broadcasting Corporation asked if they could make a film about it with Ruth acting as herself. She wrote the script and in 1966 the film, which was called *117 Days*, was completed.⁷¹ Much of Ruth's time in London was spent at the typewriter. Her daughters remembered that they would wake up early in the morning to the sound of Ruth tapping the keys – and at night when they went to sleep it was to the same sound. Her output was considerable.

Her book *South West Africa* came out in 1963 and *117 Days* followed two years later. In 1966, between filming *117 Days*, Ruth went to Nairobi to help former vice-president Oginga Odinga write a book about his political career. Because of Odinga's politics and Ruth's reputation, she was deported from Kenya with only 24 hours' notice. During this time Ruth took part in campaigns for the Anti-Apartheid Movement and the ANC. She toured Britain, giving public speeches against apartheid and about detention in South Africa, and she soon became a well-known public speaker in London. But her writing continued. In 1967 she edited and published *South West Africa: Travesty of Trust* with Ronald Segal, *No Easy Walk to Freedom* by Nelson Mandela, *The Peasants' Revolt* by Govan Mbeki and *Not Yet Uhuru* by Odinga. She also edited the papers from a conference held in Oxford which culminated in a book called *The South African Connection*.⁷²



Ruth Addressing a rally in Trafalgar Square, London, calling on the release of Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu, 1960

Her assault on the problems of political defeat produced a book very different from *117 Days* but as powerful. Between 1964 and 1968 she travelled the new African states, studying military coups and the failure of independence struggles in Africa. The resulting book, *The Barrel of a Gun*, was essentially about the seizure of power by arms. This was not a book about South Africa, but for her comrades in that struggle it was both a lesson and a warning.

In 1972 Ruth took up a research post at Manchester University and taught on the sociology of rebellion in post-colonial Africa. During this time she did research for a book on Colonel Gaddafi in Libya. This came out in 1974 as *Libya: The Elusive Revolution*. She also did work for the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

In 1973 Ruth was offered a post at Durham University. There she became interested in feminism and introduced a course on women's studies. During

this time she met a researcher called Ann Scott and they began working on a book about Olive Schreiner. Of the biography on Schreiner she wrote: 'For once I feel something I have written is quite good.'⁷³

While attached to Durham University, Ruth spent time teaching in Dar es Salaam and Maputo. When she was offered the job as director of research at the Centre for African Studies in Maputo, she jumped at it. It would be the nearest thing to coming home.

In Maputo, Ruth soon became involved with the politicians and planners of the new government. In many ways her work at the Eduardo Mondlane University brought together all her previous skills and was directly connected to the social planning taking place in Mozambique. It was work which she needed and which mattered.

At the Centre for African Studies she saw one of her main jobs to be the training of Mozambican cadres in research and policy planning. Ruth's team was described as 'a group of very good Marxist academics driven by an excellent investigative journalist'.⁷⁴ Staff at the Centre published studies on the tea and cotton industries and then began working on one of the most difficult problems in Mozambique – migrant labour. They interviewed hundreds of mine workers, visited their farms and villages, and collected songs, history and stories. Their findings were published after Ruth's death as a book called *Black Gold: The Mozambican Miner, Proletarian and Peasant*.

Throughout her stay in Mozambique, Joe was worried about Ruth's safety and wrote: 'Take precautions. Never open the door if you don't know who is on the other side and be careful with your post...'⁷⁵ Ruth, however, was more concerned about Joe, who by then was head of Umkhonto we Sizwe and an obvious target. But when the letter bomb exploded in her hands, it was contact with the Pretoria regime that Ruth had anticipated so many years ago when she was released from prison after the Rivonia arrests. 'They' had come again.

In a police bar in Pretoria two years later, Captain Dirk Coetzee, commander of a death squad, told *Rapport* reporter Jacques Pauw that after the killing, super-spy Craig Williamson had said to Coetzee: 'We got First.' The plan had been hatched at the police-owned farm Daisy, next to Vlakplaas, the base of Section C1 counter-insurgency force. The unit assigned to do the job was Section A of the Security Police under Brigadier Piet Goosen, the man who had interrogated Steve Biko. On this farm Goosen and his colleagues manufactured

the bomb and placed it in an envelope stolen five years previously from the offices of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees in Swaziland.⁷⁶ After the bomb exploded, Coetzee said he remembered it was a joyous occasion for the police. 'The men drank beer and brandy and Coke and patted each other on the back. All agreed that had dealt the enemy a terrific blow.'⁷⁷

But what they didn't realise was that Ruth's writing would continue and her contribution to the cause of liberation would remain as strong as ever.

Her journalistic frame of reference – before she began writing books – was South Africa from the mid-1940s to the early 1960s. But it was a picture viewed from the perspective of the Communist Party and the Congress Alliance, from the position of an educated white woman who was both an observer of the life around her and a social participant in that which she observed.

The tools of her trade were the pen, notebook and typewriter. But they were also her political understandings, her values and her interpretations, and these were closely connected to her social and political context. She wrote insightfully and at times brilliantly about what she saw and knew, but she was also, in a sense, written by this context. It would, however, be entirely incorrect to say that Ruth was merely a propagandist for the political left. Hers was a probing, dissident perspective, setting ideas and events against one another, sharpening and clarifying differences and thereby intensifying commitment to certain ideologies and discourses. At times she was to develop ideas which were in advance of and even out of step with the communist, nationalist and liberal thinkers around her. And though her writing was deeply influenced by the context of apartheid and the liberation struggle, it was also essentially her own – words crafted at breakneck speed in a busy office, words agonised over late at night or before the children woke up in the morning, sometimes sarcastic, sometimes damning, nearly always clear. Her output was prodigious – up to 16 stories a week at times, in between longer articles, political reports and pamphlets.

Sorting through 15 years of her writing in South Africa, it soon becomes clear that Ruth was not an objective reporter and never intended to be. She was a passionate political reporter in the grand tradition, using her skills as a means towards the development of the class awareness of the oppressed, consciously attempting to mobilise them and to bring about tangible political results. She developed themes in her writing which were consciously

intended to galvanise public protest. This approach made her an investigative reporter of an unusual kind. She was not only reporting the advance of history through the voice of its protagonists, but through the power of her typewriter she was transforming herself into an important political actor. Historian Gavin Williams has identified three underlying ideas which ran through her work:

- That the proper focus of social explanation should be on capitalism;
- That there are times when the masses are able to seize the political agenda from the hands of their ruler and shape the political agenda; and
- Her commitment to socialism, despite the difficulties of achieving it.⁷⁸

More clearly than most other writers at the time, Ruth perceived that the struggle over apartheid was also a struggle between labour and capital. Apartheid, she concluded, was about the delivery of cheap, docile labour to the door of the capitalist.

Her attempts to discredit State legitimacy by focusing on the subterranean processes of apartheid labour organisation – on the daily indignities of passes, grimy court procedures, prison conditions, township squalor and farm conditions – struck at the heart of apartheid ideology and left State officials beside themselves with uncomprehending anger. The effect of such reporting, connecting as it did with the daily lives of ordinary people, fed into the calls by Congress politicians for an end to apartheid and to inequalities of wealth.

Ruth's involvement in the 1946 mine workers' strike, followed by her Bethal farmworker exposés, focused her writing on the struggle between capital, labour and the State in a way no other journalists of the period were doing. She was, therefore, best placed to see the implications in the plethora of legislation and regulation which followed the 1948 election and to understand the baggage of labour legislation which the new government had inherited from the old. For Ruth, it was not the individuals or the parliamentary Acts which made history, but the context which made them possible. Her writing did not follow the lead of the English mainstream press which howled in protest at the more visible manifestations of the new apartheid administration. Nor did she spend much time dealing with the 'great social forces' and broad class analyses of her contemporary Marxist writers such as Michael Harmel, Brian Bunting and Lionel Forman. Ruth was aware that these abstract forces took institutional forms, and that these social institutions and interest groups

influenced both the larger social forces and the individual. She wanted to know how institutions worked, who they were composed of, where the power lay, who benefited from them and how they impacted on individuals. She also wanted to break them open to public scrutiny and action. This interest was followed in her later studies: *The Barrel of a Gun*, *Libya*, *The South African Connection* and *Black Gold*.

These perspectives manifested stylistically in her writing. Hers was not the journalism of closure, where ideas and facts were a given and intended for the reader simply to consume. It was not predetermined. Her writing was always peppered with a string of questions, inducing the reader to take an active part in the formulation of ideas. According to Gavin Williams, who worked with Ruth on the *Review of African Political Economy*:

She always had more questions than answers and the answers anyway raised more questions. There [was] always more to be known and more to be done. The most important task [was] to ask the right questions, not to provide the correct answers. Consequently, the form of the argument is always open-ended.⁷⁹

The effect of this form of writing was to leave a gap between where the reader was and where he or she would like to be, between goals and the means of accomplishing them. For better or worse, the gaps had to be closed by action – the responsibility rested with the reader. But underlying this form of writing was an intention to discredit the legitimacy of the existing regime.⁸⁰ It was the essence of radical journalism. This book is a small sample of the considerable writings of one of South Africa's finest documenters of history as it was being made.

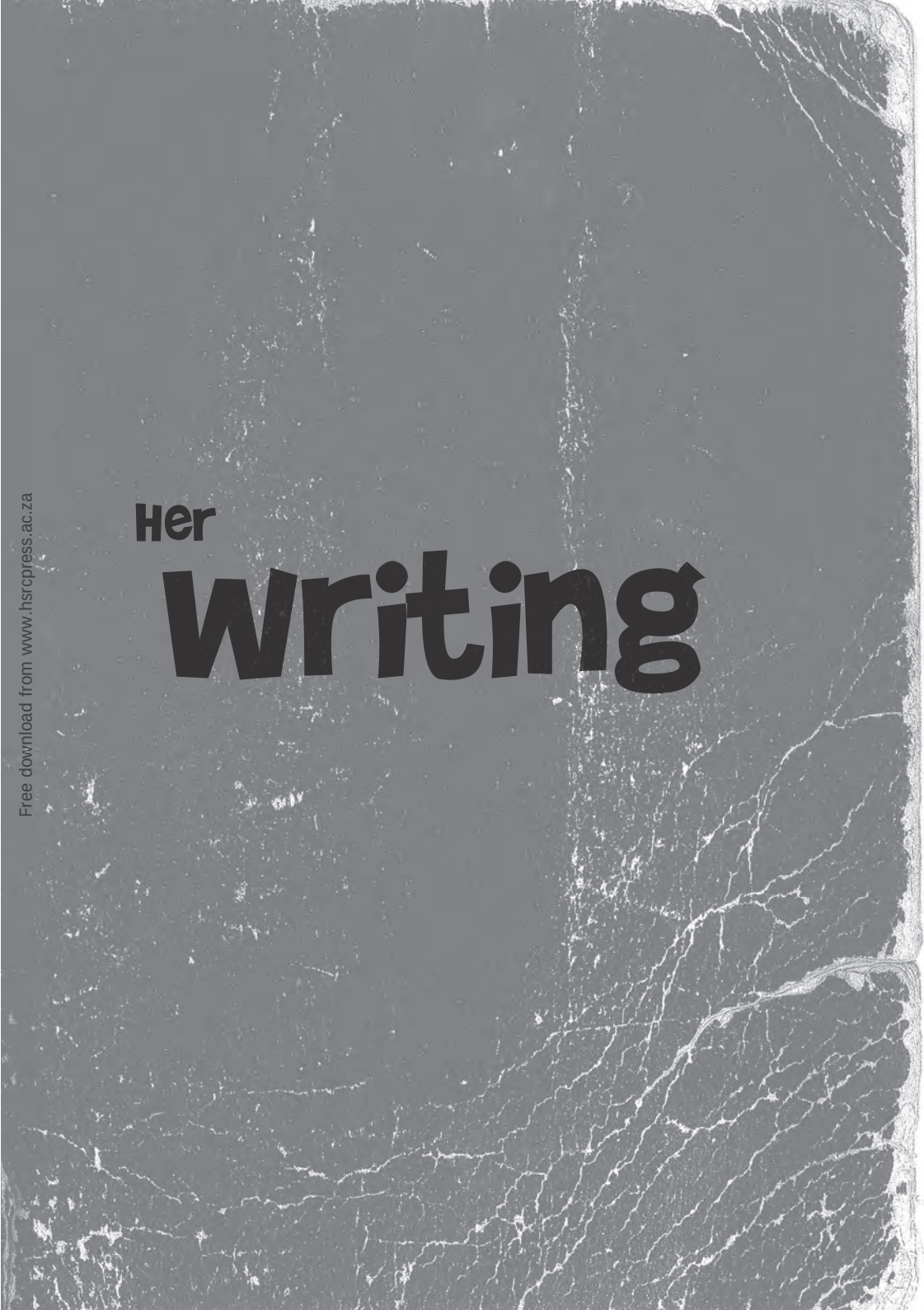
NOTES

- 1 Tilly First, interview, 1988.
- 2 Report of the Second Congress of the South African Communist Party published in *The International*, 4 May 1923.
- 3 Ronald First, interview, 1992. According to Tilly, Louis 'married a great socialite who was always looking for important people to invite onto her lawn'.
- 4 Tilly First, interview.
- 5 Gillian Slovo, private correspondence, 1992.
- 6 Ronald First, interview.

- 7 Tilly First, interview.
- 8 Tilly First, interview.
- 9 Adele Bernstein, interview, 1991.
- 10 Adele Bernstein, interview.
- 11 Myrtle Berman, interview, 1988. Myrtle joined the Communist Party and was editor of *Viewpoints and Perspectives* which documented the crucial debates by Party members in 1952/53. She later drifted away from the Party and, with her husband Monty, was a founder member of the African Resistance Movement (ARM) in the 1960s.
- 12 Myrtle Berman, interview.
- 13 Tilly First, interview.
- 14 Before going to Jeppe, Ruth was sent to an Afrikaans school for six months to improve her grasp of the language. But she never did well in Afrikaans and refused to read its literature. Myrtle Berman, interview.
- 15 Rica Hodgson, interview, 1988.
- 16 R Segal, 'Ruth First', *Index on Censorship* 11:6 (December 1982), pp. 29–30.
- 17 R First, *117 Days* (London: Bloomsbury, 1965), p. 116.
- 18 Information derived from University of the Witwatersrand student records.
- 19 Ismael Meer, telephone interview, 1988.
- 20 Myrtle Berman, interview.
- 21 Wolpe was a close friend of Ruth's and was a member of SACOD and the Communist Party. He was imprisoned in 1963 but made a dramatic escape and fled to the UK, where he became a stalwart of the Anti-Apartheid Movement. The Harold Wolpe Trust was set up by his wife, Ann-Marie, after his death, to encourage open political debate in South Africa.
- 22 Harold Wolpe, interview, 1992.
- 23 Myrtle Berman, interview.
- 24 Mary Benson was an anti-apartheid activist and member of SACOD. In exile she was a co-founder and secretary of the London-based anti-apartheid Africa Bureau and secretary of the defence fund set up for Nelson Mandela and others. She was the author of a history of the African National Congress, the authorised biography of Nelson Mandela and an autobiography, *A Far Cry*.
- 25 M Benson, *South Africa: The Struggle for a Birthright* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund, 1966), p. 96.
- 26 Benson, *The Struggle for a Birthright*, p. 96.
- 27 That year she enrolled for four university subjects but wrote only two and did not write the final examinations of two others.
- 28 Harold Wolpe, interview.
- 29 'Europe Today', *Rhodes Outlook*, 12 March 1946.
- 30 *The Guardian*, January 1947; Harold Wolpe, interview.
- 31 Harold Wolpe, interview.
- 32 R First, *117 Days*, p. 117.
- 33 First, *117 Days*, p. 116.
- 34 First, *117 Days*, pp. 117–118.

- 35 See 'Fascism at the City Hall steps', *The Democrat*, October 1947; 'Liquidator casts net wider', *The Guardian*, 28 September 1950.
- 36 See *People's World*, 2 October 1952; 'Wave of anger at pass laws', *The Guardian*, 26 May 1949, p. 5; 'Call for repeal of oppressive laws', *The Guardian* 2 August 1951; 'Thousands pledge to defy unjust laws', *The Guardian*, 10 April 1952; 'Defiance Campaign not communism', *Advance*, 4 December 1952.
- 37 D Everatt, *Politics of Nonracialism: White Opposition to Apartheid, 1945–1960*, (PhD thesis, Oxford University, 1990), p. 48.
- 38 Liberals were later to claim that white communists 'packed' the meeting and controlled the proceedings. See Everatt, *Politics of Nonracialism*, p. 48.
- 39 She was described as this by Joe Slovo in the introduction to the 1988 edition of *117 Days*.
- 40 Most of SACOD's expenses in its first few years of existence were for printing.
- 41 See R First, 'Building the future', *South Africans in the Soviet Union* (New Age booklet, 1951) and 'In China the people govern', *New Age*, 30 December 1954.
- 42 First, *South Africans in the Soviet Union*. Ruth arrived in Moscow on 14 June and visited Leningrad and Armenia. On 3 July she was in Peking.
- 43 Reprinted in *Fighting Talk*, August 1954.
- 44 *Fighting Talk*, August 1954.
- 45 *New Age*, 23 June 1955.
- 46 Yusuf Cachalia, interview, 1988.
- 47 There have been many claims about the authorship of the Charter, but none have been based on interviews with members of the drafting committee. Everatt, 'Politics of Nonracialism' is an exception.
- 48 Len Lee-Warden, unpublished autobiography, p. 88.
- 49 Forman and ES Sachs, *The South African Treason Trial* (London: John Calder, 1957), p. 11.
- 50 'Tension rises in the Drill Hall', *New Age*, 12 September 1957.
- 51 'The horror of Sharpville', *New Age*, 31 March 1960.
- 52 First, *117 Days*, p. 11.
- 53 Joe Slovo, interview, 1988.
- 54 *Spark* was the last of the series of left-wing newspapers which began as *The Guardian*, then *New Age* and several other titles created after each preceding title was banned.
- 55 Discussions about the move to armed protest began after Sharpeville in 1961 and were crystallised with the birth of Umkhonto we Sizwe in 1963. Ruth was part of these discussions.
- 56 R First, *South West Africa* (London: Penguin, 1963), p. 13.
- 57 S Marks, 'Ruth First: A Tribute', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 10:1 (October 1983), pp. 123–128.
- 58 A seminar by Ruth to the Anti-Apartheid Movement called *From the Freedom Charter to Armed Struggle*, Ruth First Collection, Institute for Commonwealth Studies, London, 1968, p. 5.
- 59 First, *117 Days*, p. 118.
- 60 R Segal, memorial speech at her funeral, Maputo, 8 September 1982.
- 61 Marks, 'Ruth First: A Tribute'.
- 62 Walter Sisulu, interview, September 1992.
- 63 Joe Slovo, interview, 1992.

- 64 See particularly T Karis and G Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge*, Volume 3 (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1977); T Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983); H Bernstein, *The World that Was Ours* (London: Heinemann, 1967); E Feit, *Urban Revolt in South Africa 1960–1964* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1971); B Mtolo, *Umkonto we Sizwe: The Road to the Left* (Durban: Drakensberg Press, 1966); G Mbeki, *The Struggle for Liberation in South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1992); M Benson, *South Africa: The Struggle for a Birthright* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund, 1966); B Bunting, *Moses Kotane, South African Revolutionary* (London: Inkululeko Publications, 1975); N Mitchison, *A Life for Africa: The Story of Bram Fischer* (London: Merlin Press, 1973).
- 65 The M-plan, attributed to Mandela but probably first advanced by ANC activist AP Mda, was an underground structure for military activity. It embraced a hierarchical structure with very clear ‘top down’ communication. Mandela said it would ‘allow the ANC to take decisions at the highest level, which could then be swiftly transmitted to the organisation as a whole without calling a meeting’ (N Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* [Boston and New York: Little, Brown, 1994], p. 134).
- 66 Walter Sisulu, interview.
- 67 Robyn Slovo, interview, August 1992.
- 68 Tape transcription of interview with Jack Gold of the BBC, n.d.
- 69 Jack Gold interview, and First, 117 Days, p. 11.
- 70 First, 117 Days, p. 143.
- 71 The South African ambassador in London unsuccessfully tried to stop its screening.
- 72 Preface to G Mbeki, *South Africa: The Peasants’ Revolt* (London: Penguin, 1964) and Foreword to N Mandela, *No Easy Walk to Freedom* (London: Heinemann, 1987 edition).
- 73 Undated note, Ruth First Collection, Institute for Commonwealth Studies, London.
- 74 Harold Wolpe, interview.
- 75 Joe Slovo, interview, 1988.
- 76 This information is from Jacques Pauw and was made public at the Ruth First Colloquium in Cape Town in 1992. It was reprinted as ‘The Future Beyond Darkness’, *Democracy in Action* 6:6 (October 1992).
- 77 ‘The Future Beyond Darkness’.
- 78 *New Age*, 14 March 1957.
- 79 *Fighting Talk*, March 1955, p. 2.
- 80 *Fighting Talk*, August 1960.



Her **Writing**



EXPOSURE:

The FARM LABOUR SCANDAL

by Ruth First

FARM LABOURER A BELSEN CASE" HE'S ONLY A

From Ruth First

JOHANNESBURG.
IS he 12 years old, or 14? He
can't tell you that because
he can't count: has never been
to school. He is a slip of a
youngster, with trusting, inno-
cent eyes. It is not that he isn't
willing to talk now—though not
so long ago he was terrified in
of his wits and spoke only in
semi-delirium. But, though he
listens carefully to the questions
through the interpreter, he
gives little infor-

1/6



SPARK

New Series, Vol. 1 No. 18

PRICE 5c

February 28, 1963

VORSTER'S NEW BAN A THREAT TO "SPARK"

Named and Banned May Not Work For Press

BY means of a notice published in a Government Gazette Extraordinary
Minister of Justice has launched the Government's most serious
CAPE TOWN

DOM, YOU HAVE UCK A ROCK"

WOMEN SAY "NO" TO PASSES

Strijdom skulked som

AND
CHILD

PORTUGUESE EAST AFRICA SUPPLIES

FORCED LABOUR FOR RAND MINES

JOHANNESBURG.

The tragedy of the deaths of the Portuguese African miners in the Waterval Boven train disaster

By Ruth First

2, 1949

about £8,000,000 this is an impor-

latter about one-third of the labour is recruited. From Portuguese East Africa all the labour is recruited; none comes volun-

JOHANNESBURG'S "SLAVE MARKET"

Arrested Men "Persuaded" To Take Farm Work

(From RUTH FIRST)

JOHANNESBURG.

D R. JANSEN, Minister of Native Affairs, talks about setting up labour bureaux. Africans call them slave markets.

been joined by Africans this year. A man arrested for a pass offence

AFRICANS TURNED OFF THE LAND

50 families living in the open

The Guardian 5 October 1950

Perhaps the deepest tragedy in the lives of the African people is the loss of the land, expressed in the words of one old chieftain who said: 'My grandfather woke one morning in his own kraal and found a white man who said: "You are living on my farm and must work for me."'

Those who think these tragedies belong to the past are wrong. They are taking place today in more than one province in the Union.

On Trust Farm [a government property] in the Rustenburg about 50 families of a formerly prosperous African farming community from the Zeerust district are living on the veld beneath the open skies, without food or shelter, crops or stocks. They have been there for almost three months, camped like animals.

'All the children are coughing,' one of their men said. An old woman has died there in the open.

These are some of the people of the Chief Moatsi. In the Marico-Zeerust district they once farmed 7 000 morgen of tip-top farming land. A visitor to the farm has described how kaffir corn [sorghum] grew for miles on the wonderfully rich soil tilled by these people.

Today this land is going for sale for about £100 000 and it will probably be purchased by the government for European settlement and split into lots.

The story is not a simple one. It goes back many years including four years of litigation in the courts.

Let a spokesman of the Mpatsi people tell part of this tale in his own way:

Very long ago in the time of Oom Paul the Roman Catholic Church came to our land. Priests stayed with us. In 1916 we were told every man living among us was to pay the church 1s. for each head of cattle, 6d. for each donkey and 3d. for each goat. A church was built.

In 1916 we first heard the Church say they had bought the land.

Through the years we paid the taxes on the animals, also 10s. each for the land.

Later the levy on cattle became 2s. 6d., and 1s. for each donkey and for

the land £1 a year. These payments were apart from the poll and other government taxes.¹

Then there was an announcement that a new church would be built and the people must pay with part of their crops. If the household had seven bags of grain, two were taken for the church. For five years we paid. Then we paid no longer.

There was a court case. The people won in the Supreme Court but lost the appeal. Then we heard we were to be put off the land.

Again last year we ploughed. Some people were prosecuted for cutting down trees on what was once their own land. After the case some of our men were called together and told to sign a paper [saying] we must pay several hundred pounds in grain. We said we knew nothing of what was in the paper and we refused to sign. If we refused to sign, they said, our corn would be confiscated.

On July 25 a Native Commissioner came to collect taxes. On the 26th the police came with guns. They were to enforce the order of the sheriff for our eviction from the land. Few men were in the village that day so next day the police returned again. By evening, they said, all the people had to leave the farm.

The police broke down the people's houses, loading them and all the other possessions on to lorries. For three days six lorries moved the village, against the people's will. Their crops were left standing in the fields, their pigs and chickens remained behind, and they found themselves on poor Trust Farm land with little water, almost penniless and without food.

The people were almost starving, but with what small amounts of money they had left they bought mealie meal from the shops. It is now the third month the people are living in the open. When it rains they have no shelter.

These are unsophisticated people, bewildered by the turn of events, confused by new laws imposed upon them, knowing little of court actions. They refused to hand over a proportion of their crop although this was in payment of costs due by them as the losers of the court action.

These homeless people will probably never understand how the rich farming land that was once theirs is now the possession of the church, which is now considering exchanging it for another area and so enabling government to use this large farm for European occupation. What do they know of the process of title registration?

Theirs are confused memories of strangers coming to their land, living there by the grace of their chief. Next their native rights are disregarded, their land treated as a location or reserve, they are tenants on what they thought was their own land, have received no compensation for it and can be turned off it at the whim of the new owner.

Mining company, trek boer, gentleman farmer, government and mission station have all played their part in reducing the Africans to a land-hungry people.

From the government, especially one committed to apartheid and dependent for its power principally on the farmers, the Africans can expect little protection.

In the Vryheid district of Natal and at Ingotshe in Zululand, Supreme Court actions are pending over ownership of land occupied by Africans. To the bitterness of losing their land and prosperity is added the disillusion of being unaided and unprotected.

NOTE

- 1 Poll tax was a personal tax imposed to force Africans into the monetary and therefore labour system.

PRETORIA CONQUERED BY THE WOMEN!

Protest delivered at Union Buildings

New Age 3 November 1955

JOHANNESBURG – In a multiracial demonstration against unjust law, nearly 2 000 women descended on Pretoria last week and made their way to the Union Buildings to present their protest to four Cabinet ministers.

Pretoria had never seen anything like it before. Overcoming every obstacle, major and petty, placed in their path, the women came from all parts of South Africa to take part in the demonstration. For hours they poured up the steps of the Union Buildings and congregated in the concourses while their leaders attempted to deliver their protest.

The Cabinet ministers ran away from them – so the women left the petition forms on their doorstep to make sure they saw them when they eventually returned to their offices.

The police resorted to every kind of stratagem to try to stop the demonstration. The women were banned from holding a meeting or walking in procession. The Transportation Board at the last minute refused permits for the buses.

The railways refused the request of the Federation of South African Women for special coaches. When the women presented themselves at ticket offices on the morning, clerks at some stations refused to sell any woman a ticket to Pretoria.

Cars were stopped on the roads leading to Pretoria, taxis were ticketed, large contingents of women were held up at police stations.

But the women were indomitable. They were determined to get to the Union Buildings. And they did!

In all, 1 600 of them converged on Pretoria; sitting for hours outside the Pretoria station while a ferry service of taxis and private cars was organised to take them to the Union Buildings. For hours on the morning of Thursday October 26 there was an endless and colourful stream of women, many of them carrying their children, winding up through the lovely government gardens and to the amphitheatre. There they filled the great granite semi-circle; triumphant that they had arrived, elated as the hours went by and their numbers swelled but calm, disciplined and quiet in their unanimous protest against passes for African women, Bantu Education, the Population Register,

the Group Areas Act, the Suppression of Communism Act, Criminal Laws Amendment Act, Public Safety Act and all oppressive laws.

From the early hours of the morning the women began to assemble at arranged meeting places in their townships. They came with their infants, carrying lunch baskets and suitcases and paper carriers; some with blankets, many with huge sunshades. Many found their way blocked at the last minute but undeterred they got round the obstacles.

The women of Natalspruit found their buses had been cancelled and drivers of hired trucks threatened with prosecution by the police if they conveyed the women. So the women of Natalspruit set out for Germiston station – a distance of eight miles – and there they bought their tickets to Pretoria.

The women of Orlando were told by the ticket clerk that no tickets would be sold to women. Some found men to buy tickets for them, others persevered and at the end of two hours the clerks resumed selling tickets to all-comers.

The women of Germiston travelled on a composite train ticket for 307 [people]. The women of Brakpan bought a composite ticket for 202 [people]. Benoni station refused to sell tickets to Pretoria to women. The people of Alexandra boarded the normal PUTC [Public Utility Transport Company] bus for Pretoria. Five miles outside Pretoria the bus was stopped, directed back to the police station and held there for two hours. Then the police had to let the bus go. The women of Alexandra arrived at the amphitheatre when the protest was already over, in time to see the last women climbing down the steps. But they got there!

A large number of women from Marabastad in Pretoria were kept in custody of the police and released only when the protest was already over.

From Bloemfontein, the Free State Congress sent a delegation of five women to take part in the protest. Women came from Klerksdorp and Rustenburg.

One Johannesburg clothing factory closed for the day; the workers were in Pretoria.

Indian women were there in their exquisite saris; coloured women from the coloured townships and the factories; a band of European women who did sterling work helping with transport arrangements.

An old African woman, half blind, brought her granddaughter to lead her. African churchwomen were there in their brilliant blue and white; women dingaka [splendid] in their beads and skins with all regalia; smartly dressed and emancipated young factory workers; housewives and mothers; domestic

servants and washerwomen; and, holding the delegations together and giving the great gathering that impressive discipline, the women Congress workers who started this protest rolling in the locations and townships some eight weeks ago when the Mothers' Congress first resolved on it.

At 10.30 a.m. the first batches of women were at the foot of the Union Buildings and the walk towards the amphitheatre started. For two or three hours there was a steady stream of women winding upwards and, as they reached the amphitheatre, each woman (and there were not many who were not puffing and panting) handed in her signed protest to four women from the four organisations stationed there to receive them.

Then, the women took their seats round the amphitheatre. Throughout they sat in hushed silence and as the morning went by the crowd grew more enormous. From the windows and balconies of the Union Buildings the civil service looked on in amazement at this impressive demonstration. The pile of protest forms grew until there were 1 600.

From the cupola Mrs Helen Joseph, Mrs Lilian Ngoyi, Miss Sophia Williams and Mrs Rahima Moosa announced that they would deliver the protests to the ministers. They moved off to a great cry of 'Africa' and the raised thumb salute. The women went on sitting quietly.

Trailed by reporters and photographers and with the Special Branch never far off, the four went first to the office of Dr Verwoerd, Minister of Native Affairs, who only a week before had told the women his policies were a subject for 'praise not protest'. The door was locked (it was the lunch-hour) so a pile of protests was left on the doormat to await the minister's return. In the office of the Minister of Justice, a *niksvermoedende meisie* (unsuspecting girl according to *Die Transvaler*) said with alacrity as the women asked her to hand the protests over to the minister: 'Certainly!'

When the four returned to the amphitheatre and reported that they had delivered the protests, the hush was broken again as the women rose to sing *Inkosi Sikelele* and the sound and harmony rang out from the tiers of women.

Then they filed out of the amphitheatre and down the gardens on their way home.

No order had been given, there was no bustle, no confusion, no panic or any hitches. The silent protest was developed by the women themselves. With their dignity, their discipline and their determination they had carried the day.

PASS BOOKS FOR WOMEN ISSUED IN WINBURG

Africans bluffed by Verwoerd's officials

New Age 22 March 1956

JOHANNESBURG – While women in Durban, Cape Town, Johannesburg and other areas were stepping up their campaign against the pass laws, Verwoerd's officials last week launched the government's new offensive against the African people by starting the issue of pass books for women at Winburg, in the Free State.

By the beginning of this week 1 429 African women in Winburg had been issued with pass books and the Native Affairs Department [NAD] teams and local authorities were patting themselves on the back that they had managed to bluff and bamboozle the women into believing that they were not really passes!

The next Free State towns marked down for the issue of passes to women are Excelsior and Westminster, both due to be visited this week by NAD teams, which will later return to Winburg again. It is rumoured Ladybrand and Verkeerdevlei will be next, but these NAD plans could easily be altered.

The reference book issued to the women is six and a half inches by three and a half inches in size and contains 48 pages within a hard black cover. The women must pay 3/6 for this book and their photograph and also a type of purse-wallet supplied with a double cord for the women to wear strung from the shoulders or round their necks.

The book provides for entries almost identical with those required in the men's pass books. Three of the sections are virtually the same: Those for Labour Bureau efflux and influx control entries, those for service contract particulars and those for details in respect of curfew and 'Native law and custom'.

The men's books have sections for Union and Bantu Authorities tax payment entries and as women are not taxpayers these sections are absent from their books. But the women's books carry an additional section 'personal particulars' and here entries are required for 'district in which ordinarily resident' and marital status, either 'married by Christian rites or Native custom or living together'! There are spaces also for the names of parent, husband or guardian and their identity numbers.

Even the Winburg women who volunteered for these books last week did not do so without anxiety, but the officials confused them. A *New Age* representative did not find any women who defended these books and now they have realised what they really are, many are very troubled.

On March 12 municipal police went round Winburg location announcing that women should report the following day to the Magistrate's Court for the issue of the books. That Tuesday morning hundreds went together to the magistrate to tell him they objected to passes and did not want to take them out.

The magistrate and NAD officials told them they were going about the matter wrongly. They should have objected via their advisory board, which should have conveyed their objections to the location superintendent. The women said they had only known of the passes the day before. The officials retorted that notices had been posted on the Town Hall and Magistrate's Court. Then they got to work to still the women's fears.

Blatantly they told them these books were not passes and since then the daily press reports have taken up this theme. The Winburg women were told they need not carry their books in Winburg but the books would help them to travel about the country. They were told the books would help them find jobs and would help to trace their lost and deserting sons and husbands in the cities.

Elderly women were among the first to queue for what they believed to be not passes but books. Many African women working on farms in the district were brought in by their employers for the pass issue.

Many women who took the books are today giving their acts second thoughts. Did the officials tell them the truth? Or have they been bluffed into accepting the hated pass?

ALEXANDRA: WHERE THE PASS LAWS BREED MURDER

New Age 12 July 1956

The youngsters stood on the street corner in an untidy, shabby huddle. They were intent on the throw of the dice and seemed to see nothing else around them. Some looked no more than 17 or 18 years old, a few even younger.

Tsotsis? Most likely, for Alexandra Township swarms with young Africans whose dead-end future has swept them into petty gangsterism. There can be few places where the pass laws and crime have such a stark cause-and-effect connection. It's really very simple to see – and quite frightening.

Alexandra is a township thrust upon its own desperate devices. Men needing to work must run the gauntlet of township control as well as Johannesburg influx control regulations. Township men find jobs in Johannesburg – good jobs – only to be refused registration and told Johannesburg jobs are for Johannesburg Africans. They are directed to find work in Alexandra Township, nine miles from Johannesburg's centre.

But the township has only a sprinkling of small factories and barely any other openings, for though the pass law regulations may say it is a separate local authority for employment purposes, everyone knows that Alexandra grew up to house Johannesburg's workers.

Each year the picture gets uglier: new batches of school leavers strike out to find their first jobs, many get them, only to have them snatched from their grasp at the pass offices.

So the township turns in on itself. Life must go on. A man must eat, dress, do something in his working hours.

Some are caught in the daily manhunt in the township for farm labour. Some take another road. The crime wave in Alexandra Township, which its residents say is the worst they have ever known, is one of the by-products of this throttled community.

There are the small-time gangs, the pickpockets, the bag-snatchers, the thieves who waylay people at night and strip them of their clothes. There are the youngsters who pounce on the Thursday and Friday visitors' bus queues;¹ rush a victim from the queue, surround him, empty his pockets.

Some of these gangs have special beats and hang out on particular corners.

Murder and assault are not, generally, in their scheme of things. A victim who resists, however, gets rough treatment.

These days, they say in the township, even the gangs have fallen on hard times. Their members are no longer such snappy dressers; some have come down to tennis shoes, others are barefoot. Decent jobs would do so much more for them – if only they would be allowed to work.

There is the case of the 12th Street Gang. Its members found jobs in a local factory and the gang's activities faded out.

But there is the story also of the school leaver who found a job with one of the largest Johannesburg record-manufacturing firms but who was refused permission to enter Johannesburg. Today he carries knuckledusters and hangs out with the local gangsters. It doesn't take very long to turn a decent youngster into a petty criminal. Unemployment and desperation at the futility of trying to wriggle through the pass law maze do the trick in a jiffy.

But the small gangs that plague the township are little in comparison with the terror sown by Alexandra's big-time gang – the Spoilers.

This gang runs like a machine. Its membership is said to be a few hundred by now and its freshest recruits are put through a training course in a house in the township known as the 'Rough House'. The Spoilers ride in cars. They 'dress like Oppenheimers', one man said. Their game is the protection racket, well-planned robberies, house- and safe-breaking, the liquor racket. (There is the time they tell of in the township when whiskey was going at 15s. a bottle after a big whiskey haul.)

The gang operates Chicago-style. The protection racket was carried not only into the taxi ranks (each taxi operating on the route was levied so much each week) but among the passengers who use the taxis.

The gang makes little attempt to work under cover. Assaults and robberies are carried out in broad daylight. The names of the leading gangsters are known by most in the township, yet the criminals go free for the most part, quite unchallenged by the law. People have become afraid to report crimes to the police: there are the cases where charges were laid and yet no prosecutions followed. There are the instances where the gang members took reprisals against those who reported them to the police.

This is the township where some years ago the people were driven to organise their own Civic Guard to protect them from the gangs. Crime figures

dropped impressively: even the police admitted that. Then the government banned the Civic Guard organisations in Alexandra and everywhere.

The people are not only the victims of persistent attempts on their lives and property, but they are paralysed, by the law, to do the thing that must best counter the work of the gangs. So the robberies become more frequent and the gangsters bolder and more brazen and the crime wave in Johannesburg's suburbs that the daily press is daily so shrill about, is slight compared to the terror of the gangs in the African areas.

NOTE

- 1 People from the countryside or elsewhere visiting families or friends in Alexandra.

THE NEW SLAVERY

Fighting Talk October 1956

The young African in the hospital bed at Coronation Hospital could not talk easily, which wasn't surprising. He had tried to slit his throat with a razor blade, and had been found, moments later, by sheer chance, as he lay bleeding on the floor of the room in Sophiatown. His pass was not in order. He'd tried again and again at the pass office to have it 'fixed', but without success. How could a man live in the town without a proper pass?

A 30-year-old Orlando man decided he could not. Convicted for a pass offence, he served a long prison term on a Bethal farm, and when he came back, 'a changed man', desperate because his pass still left him on the wrong side of the law, he hanged himself by an overall belt from a nail behind the kitchen door of his mother's house.

Horror stories? Horrible, but true. And in a South Africa that has become so conditioned to the pass laws that they are accepted as normal, necessary and our way of life, such stories must be remembered, and told. Two suicides, but for these two how many hundreds of thousands rounded up in raids, in prison, in farm jails, how many broken families, and youngsters running from the pick-up vans?

Every year more and more Africans go to prison under the pass laws. Take the steep rise in convictions over the last five years. In 1950, 217 387 Africans were convicted under the curfew, location, registration and other pass regulations. In 1955 the figure was 337 603. On every working day last year more than 1 000 Africans were sentenced in the courts under the pass laws. These are the figures for convictions, not arrests. Thousands more caught in the pass law dragnet do not appear in court. Shunted through the network of labour bureaux in the country, condemned by passes that don't meet the savage requirements of the law, they are bamboozled, cajoled, threatened or stampeded into accepting farm work rather than face prosecutions or be finally expelled from the cities.

The pass laws are a nightmare. Young men grow up gnawed by fear of the policeman or plain-clothes detective at the next corner, of the roving pick-up van; humiliated and wearied by the queuing day after day at the pass office where men are herded like cattle for dipping; afraid above all of that dreaded

purple stamp across their pass books: 'Not to be employed in the urban area of -.'

Thousands of police, thousands more civil servants, the white employing population, all play their part in keeping this gigantic pass machine ticking over. There are the travelling permits, the monthly service contract entries, passes for day labourers; permits to enter locations to visit friends, 'special' passes for use after curfew hours; the complicated tangle of the Urban Areas Act, amendments, consolidating Acts that through the years have been varied, extended, screwed tighter.

Yet, through the decades, processions of authoritative government commissions and officials have flayed the pass laws. Already in 1906 the Transvaal was trying to 'simplify' its pass system. The 1920 Inter-departmental Committee on Pass Laws wrote:

We cannot too strongly record our opinion that there should be no indiscriminate stopping of Natives by the police for the production of the registration certificate, as the harassing and constant interference with the freedom of movement of law-abiding Natives is without any doubt the most serious grievance which the Natives have against the pass laws...

All members of the South African Police examined by us are in agreement that no good purpose is served by the indiscriminate demanding of passes...The great weight of evidence from and on behalf of employers of labour and officials shows that the various pass systems operating have been of little practical value in the tracing and identification of Natives...

Through the years the chorus grew louder, more insistent: the pass laws were under fire from the 1930–32 Native Economic Commission, the Smith Commission of 1942, the Fagan Commission of 1946, to mention only a few.

In 1942 Cabinet Minister Denys Reitz made a frontal attack on the pass law system. In the three years 1939–41, he divulged, 273 790 Africans were convicted under the pass laws (compare the figure with the 1955 convictions!) and this was a 'devastating indictment...for no one can call this offence a crime...' Instructions went out to the police to relax the enforcement of the pass law in certain areas.

Not so under the Nationalists. Minister Verwoerd's Native Affairs Department empire would never hear of the abolition of the pass laws (even if the Act tightening up the system and substituting the reference book for the numerous individual pass documents is dubbed 'The Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents Act'!). The pass laws are indispensable and South Africa could not ever be the same without them.

Why? They are needed for the protection of the African people, the Nationalists tell us.

The [pass law] system was originally intended and in fact constituted a protection to numbers of illiterate and unsophisticated beings, almost all of whom could speak only a Bantu language, and who, as a result of economic circumstances, were required to leave the safety and tranquillity of their homes in the tribal reserves to seek employment in the complex foreign environment of the towns and cities of the Union. (*From the official South African memorandum published in 1953, International Labour Office Report on Forced Labour*)

Earlier this year a NAD official told African women that the possession of reference books would be 'an advantage and protection' to them.

The Nationalist government in the role of protector of the African people: that should make even Hangman Heydrich, Protector of Czechoslovakia, stir uneasily in his grave. No African has ever defended the pass laws or had a word to say in their favour. Africans abominate them and demand their total abolition. If 'protection' is to be the justification, 'Save us from such protectors' is their cry.

The pass laws prevent crime, says the government. On the contrary. Far from preventing crime, the pass laws cause it. A system that jails hundreds of thousands each year on purely technical offences turns innocents into criminals. Honest work-seekers blocked at the pass offices by influx control and labour bureau regulations become desperados. Alexandra Township, the African area being slowly strangled by the pass laws, has probably one of the highest crime incidence figures in the country. Everywhere, as the pass laws have been tightened up, the crime figures have soared.

The police tell us the daily manhunts, the mass raids, are needed to stop crime, so over some weekends 2 000 men are stopped, searched, shunted into the cells. Imagine the police of Greater London arresting 2 000 and stopping

and frisking many times that number on the chance there may be gangs of dope-peddlers, thieves and murderers among them. Wholesale round-ups that would be tolerated in no civilised community are an excuse for the absence of more effective crime detention methods, and they amount to endless reprisals against all Africans for the minority of lawbreakers in their midst.

No, crime prevention and 'protection' don't wash as reasons for pass laws. A source of revenue, yes. Yet the thousands collected for every pass book and photograph, on monthly service contracts, in court fines for contraventions of the law, are paid out many times over by the wasteful system that ties an army of civil servants to this gargantuan machine, that fritters away millions of African man-hours every year in pass queues and prison cells.

Intimidation, the grip of the police State, yes, that is a reason for the pass laws. Every man is indexed, numbered, fingerprinted, photographed and kept in his place and regimented. Keeping the system of cheap labour going, yes. Every worker in fear and trembling lest he lose his job, his pass, the approval of his employer. Cowed, controlled, docile labour without the right to bargain for the better job, to compete in any labour area other than the one in which he is pegged as a work-seeker. That is nearer the truth.

'Through its pass laws, the state is in a position to exert pressure upon the Native population similar in effect to a system of forced labour,' reported the International Labour Office Commission on Forced Labour. 'The indirect effect of the laws is to channel labour into agricultural and manual work and to create an abundant, permanent, cheap labour force.'

The State Information Office, the Native Affairs Department, will bellow the usual denials, but the facts tell the story with stark and brutal clarity.

In March 1894 a deputation from the Transvaal Chamber of Mines (whose honorary president was the State President and honorary vice-president the Minister of Mines of the day) handed over to the Volksraad in Pretoria regulations for the issue of passes which had been drafted by the Chamber. The Volksraad memorandum on 'regulations to promote the supply of Native labour on the Goldfields of the Republic and for the better controlling and regulation of the Native employed' read:

Large and constantly increasing numbers of Natives are required for the mining industry, and for service on farms, and at present excessive wages are being successfully demanded. [The wage paid by the

Chamber was 61s. a month – R.F.] Owing to the existing inadequate pass laws and regulations for the control of labour, it is impossible to secure such combination on the part of employers as it would enable Native wages to be reduced to a reasonable level. Owing to the present high wages paid by the mines, farmers and others are put to shifts to get labourers at high prices, and a reduction of the rate of the mines would therefore directly benefit farmers and all other employers. It has been found impossible to compel the due performance of contracts. The continuous expansion of the mining industry, no less than the requirements of the farmer, render it necessary that the Natives shall by all possible means be encouraged to seek work and that the large number in employment should be brought under effective Government control. (*From the annual report of the Chamber of Mines 1895*)

By October of the same year the new pass regulations drafted by the Chamber were in force in the Transvaal Republic. One section read:

Upon entering the boundaries of a proclaimed Gold field, a Native shall be bound, before engaging himself to any employer, to repair to the office of the Mining Commissioner for a district pass.

This pass was a metal badge stamped with a number to be attached to a strong leather strap or buckle and had to be worn by the African round his left arm above the elbow.

Through the years the forms of pressure on the government by the mining and farming groups have grown more subtle and sophisticated. The official reports of the Chamber of Mines at the end of the last century revealed the Chamber's hand in framing laws and putting pressure on government with crude and disarming forthrightness. These days official statistics on the functioning of the labour bureau, the numbers of Africans sent out of the towns as farm labourers, if kept, are well hidden. Since 1951 the official reports of the Department of Justice do not even give a total figure for arrests under the pass laws.

But though the true purpose of the pass laws is disguised and hidden from view, they function today as they did in 1895: this is a mechanism for cheap, forced labour on which apartheid, and segregation before it, is built. When the camouflage and fancy-dress, the bright publicity talk, are stripped from

the pass laws, they stand revealed as the master framework of South Africa's modern serfdom.

Slavery was abolished in South Africa in 1834 (though there must be many on the platteland who regret its passing to this day) but the pass laws still bind the African to his master, block his entry to the towns, keep him under constant police surveillance, control his movement, turn every employer into an arm of the police State, keep the migratory labour system going, and try to prevent the growth of stable, urban African communities in a modern industrialised society in which the old master-servant relations should be swept aside.

TENS OF THOUSANDS FLOCK TO MAI MAI DAILY

New Age 10 January 1957

'Move them away!' As soon as there's trouble, or any hint of it, that's the cry that goes up. Removal schemes, here, there and everywhere. As though moving people further away can remove the causes of trouble. The latest outcry in this city of removals and uprootings is for the pushing of the Mai Mai Beerhall out of sight and hearing, following the fighting round the beerhall late one recent Saturday afternoon which flared into a clash between whites and non-whites in the city centre.

Those in authority don't all shout with the same voice. One United Party councillor called the clash premeditated gangsterism and firms around the beerhall jumped in to sign his petition for 'positive action' and removal. Another councillor, Hymie Miller, also United Party, rapped that response firmly on the knuckles: '...these suggestions savour of...mass punishment to a section of the community as though they were a class of naughty children...Let us try to give our Natives...less irritating apartheid legislation and we shall be able to increase the number of their beerhalls without fear of disturbances...' Like all people, Africans want and like to drink. Yet beerhalls like Mai Mai were never their idea...

Tens of thousands flock to Mai Mai daily. The minute the service hour strikes, there is a hectic rush for the gates from virtually nowhere. By knock-off time for lunch and later in the afternoon the queues are uncontrollably long. The barriers are mobbed, men are pushed into and over one another, they jump fences to get out of the crush and inside the beerhall. A man will endure the pressure, the crush, and the 'push' in the queue for a tickey's worth of beer.

Inside there is more queuing to present the ticket bought at the gate for a scale of beer. Then at last the men can settle down to a drink. The whole place takes on the look of a mighty garden party. There are rows of benches but they're soon overcrowded. You can stand about, or sit on your haunches. Over all there is the loud and continual buzz of thousands of beer-drinkers. At lunch-hour there's time for the squeeze in the queue, the bolting of a beer and then the dash back to the factory gate. After work the garden party settles in a bit. Men from the same firms or factories drink in 'clubs', buying together, sitting together in their special corner in the yard closed to 'outsiders'.

All sorts go to Mai Mai. It's an easy field for the pickpocket. It's somewhere to drink for town workers for whom there are no restaurants. It's somewhere to wait – and drink – till the bus queues dwindle a little. It's a place where you can stand with a scale in your hand without any fear of a policeman, a pick-up van or a raid for liquor. That's mighty important where, anywhere but in Mai Mai and its brother beerhalls, Africans have to drink with one eye over the shoulder on the lookout for a khaki uniform.

What starts the trouble at Mai Mai? Four men, all with stab wounds, lying in a ward in the Baragwanath Hospital after the most recent flare-up, don't even know how it all started. An argument, a quarrel among those congregating outside the beerhall. Somebody trying to force his way through the queue. A fight among gangs. A pickpocketing incident. A street fight that embroils the beerhall patrons. A provocative police raid outside the hall. As the Africans are saying: 'Herd a whole white suburb together to drink in one huge pub, and only there, and see if fights don't blow up almost unseen.'

Africans, like all others, want to drink beer. They didn't plan the beerhalls. They want liquor rights, the right to home-brewing, to drink at home, in peace, after work, with friends. Perfectly normal demands and rights.

They put up with the beerhalls and patronise them because they have no choice.

But to shout for the removal of the beerhalls out of town and into the 'Black Spots' and dubbing all Africans 'gangsters' after a clash is asking for trouble, not stopping it.

It doesn't take much to start a fight in Johannesburg these days, and race clashes are frequent and inflammable because race relations have been rubbed raw. The last fight started round Mai Mai, but it could have been anywhere else too. Moving the beerhall won't help one bit, it will only inflame the wound.

'Proclamation'¹ is the word most feared among Indian communities and the *Government Gazette* is surely not the most dreaded publication, which will be the next doomed area? Which flourishing trading communities will next be faced with ruin? A few brief pages in the *Government Gazette* last August gave notice to 20 000 Non-Europeans to quit the western areas of Johannesburg, to leave their homes, businesses, their churches and mosques, abandon their properties and start anew like displaced refugees chance caught in a total war [*sic*]. For Indians there is not even that to start up again: only the prospect of

‘taking in one another’s washing’ on the barren land Lenz, as one Indian put it.

All eyes in the country are now focused on Vrededorp and Sophiatown where by August 3, 1957, the first Group Area removals are to take place.

Take Vrededorp. The fated area in this so-called ‘Village of Peace’ consists of the six streets south of 22nd Street.

Before the next 11 months are up, 5 760 people in these six streets must move. They include residents and shopkeepers, Indians and Chinese, coloureds, Malays and Africans.

There are 144 stands in the affected area, among them 23 Indian shops and nine Chinese shops. About 230 shop assistants will be out of jobs. A mosque in 23rd Street and the Springbok Hall in 22nd Street are condemned.

Indian traders in Vrededorp estimate that some shops will lose turnover of as much as £20 000 a month; that average stock holdings are in the neighbourhood of £2 000; that sums invested in goodwill and business establishments run to hundreds of thousands of pounds more.

In Vrededorp, as in all areas where the Indian people have managed to get a foothold, land and stand values have soared high. Indian and Chinese owners who paid thousands to establish businesses in these streets south of 22nd Street and elsewhere stand to lose in some cases as much as 80 to 90 per cent of their investments.

Whereas in the Non-European part of Vrededorp some stands are valued at £3 000 to £4 000 today, stands in the European section are on the market for £300. And Vrededorp has been proclaimed white!

The Group Areas Development Board has already been set up for this area and all property deals must be negotiated through the Board and can be resold only to Europeans.

The 32 doomed shops in the first six weeks of Vrededorp affected by the white group area proclamation represent only the start of the invasion of this area. The rest of Vrededorp will be affected by August 1958.

The proclamation has hit some of the smallest businesses first, for south of 22nd Street there are mostly grocery and small general dealers’ businesses, also a sprinkling of tailors, herbalists (Africans, whose removal will be carried out by the Native Resettlement Board), butchers, shoemakers and dry-cleaners.

These are businesses that were started with no great reserves of capital, but out of the savings of the poor, hard-working people. The owners themselves

serve over the counters of their shops and are an emphatic contradiction to the Nationalist propaganda that 'all Indians are rich'.

But the knocks these small shop owners will take within the next 11 months will send them reeling. Already removals of Africans from this lower part of Vrededorp have hit their trade. Since the August 3 proclamation, men who used to count their assets in thousands are wondering if they will salvage even a few hundred from the ruins.

What are they going to do? Many don't know, and say so. Others say: 'We are watching to see what the bigger men will do. We will follow them.' Others say: 'We will carry out Congress policy.' There is bewilderment, confusion, some despondency and despair; but above all deep, bitter anger.

Throughout the six doomed streets people are echoing the refrain about Lenz: 'We won't go to Lenz. How can we?' Said commercial traveller Raschid Garda: 'We're not shifting. They can pile our goods on the lorries and move them...The Indian people have no choice in the matter.'

Some are not so bold...yet. But to all of them Lenz spells disaster. One man in 23rd Street said: 'There is no graveyard yet in Lenz but there will be no need to lay one out, for it will be a living graveyard.'

NOTE

- 1 Proclamations were entries in the *Government Gazette* that pronounced an area to be for 'whites only', implying the removal of 'non-whites' living there.

ANTI-PASS PROTESTS SHAKE THE LAND

New Age 1 August 1957

JOHANNESBURG – Like those crackling veld fires that sweep over the dry Transvaal grass before the summer rains, the protest of African women against passes is spreading furiously from one area to another. In one week:

- 3 000 African women of Pietersburg refused to accept the reference books after a spirited demonstration outside the office of the Native Commissioner.
- 2 000 women of Brakpan chanted in front of the Town Hall ‘We want the mayor, we want the mayor’ in their protest against passes and permits.
- Reference books were burnt by Balfour women, a number of whom were arrested after a procession from the location to the court.
- And in Uitenhage 110 women were arrested after a clash between police and anti-pass demonstrators.

Month by month new attempts are being made to force women in towns and country places to accept passes. From Zeerust in the west to Balfour in the east and Pietersburg in the north women have routed the NAD [Native Affairs Department] pass-issuing team, and as August 9 approaches, the anniversary of the day when women from all over the Union demonstrated to Strijdom against passes, women are planning once more to go to the Native Commissioners of their district to speak out against passes.

A call for nationwide demonstrations issued by the Federation of African Women and the African National Congress Women’s League says:

Let all women, of every race, join together on this matter that affects us all. Let our voices be heard! Let us be united on August 9 as we were one year ago. Let our demonstration once again shake the land.

Strijdom did not want to meet us when we went to see him last year. His reply was to put our women leaders among the 156 that are on trial for treason. *Our* reply to him is to stand by our leaders, and to repeat until the rulers of this country understand us: *We women don’t want passes!*

Mrs Lilian Ngoyi, national president of the Federation and the ANC Women’s League, told *New Age*:

These protests are not new. They go as far back as 1913, when our mothers said 'Jail rather than passes'. The anti-pass demonstrations filling the daily and the weekly newspapers are a result of the provocation and intimidation by the Minister of Native Affairs and this insult against the mothers of South Africa. We shall not rest until the whole system of passes is repealed. Forward, Daughter of Africa. Together we shall triumph, divided we shall fall.

The Brakpan women who demonstrated carried banners 'We don't want passes' and 'Permits mean passes', and they chanted in unison for the mayor after he had refused to see them, but had referred them to the Native Commissioner.

A senior police officer told the women that as they would not go to the post office for bananas, in the same way they should not go to the mayor over the question of permits. 'The mayor is the father of our town and he should come out to see us,' retorted the women. The mayor later watched the proceedings from the Town Hall balcony.

Six of the women's spokesmen were later received by the Native Commissioner.

This mass demonstration followed police raids in Brakpan Location over the weekend.

The following day was the turn of the women of Balfour.

A meeting of the women of the location that took the decision to refuse passes was held in the open veld just before midnight. The following day at 3.30 the women assembled, and about 900 marched to the Magistrate's Court. Four spokesmen elected by the women went forward to convey the objections of the women against passes and these four were immediately arrested.

As soon as this happened, some of the passes already issued were stacked on the ground and set alight. Police made a desperate bid to save the pass books, but having been soaked in marewu [locally produced alcohol] they burnt rapidly.

The police later took the names and addresses of all the women in the location to whom reference books had been issued.

With the reference book team standing by, the Native Commissioner called on Pietersburg women to take out passes. The women shouted in chorus that they did not want them. The Native Commissioner asked who their leaders

were [so] that he could discuss the matter with them. Again the women shouted together: 'We have no leaders. We don't want reference books.'

The women then marched through the main street of the town back to the location, singing as they went.

The decision not to accept reference books was taken at a mass meeting of several thousand women from the New Pieterburg, Le Rouxville and New Look locations.

The NAD pass-issuing teams are at present hard at work in the Transkei.

POTATO BOYCOTT LAUNCHED

Congress protest against farm slavery

No potatoes from midnight on 31 May to 26 June

New Age 4 June 1959

This is the main decision of the weekend's National Anti-Pass Conference which snatched the initiative from a banning-mad government to start the first lap of the economic boycott, closely tied to a new round in the anti-pass struggle.

The Conference also announced that June 26 this year will be marked as a day of self-denial by the oppressed people and freedom fighters. On this day no buying of any kind should take place; nobody should go to any place of entertainment, from cinema to beerhall.

On June 28 mass meetings should be held throughout the country.

Fresh targets in the economic boycott are also to be announced on June 26.

The potato boycott has been launched now as a protest against the horrifying conditions of farm labourers on the big potato farms in the Transvaal.

The National Anti-Pass Planning Council puts forward the potato boycott as the first use of the economic boycott weapon in the struggle against the pass laws.

The potato boycott announcement was the climax of the weekend Conference and received a great ovation from the packed hall.

This was a spirited Conference, angry but controlled.

The ban on Chief Luthuli set the people seething. On the eve of his arrival in Johannesburg for his last visit outside of his isolated Reserve home for the next five years came the hurried ban on the anti-pass rally timed for Sunday at Sophiatown's Freedom Square. The Congress rapidly switched the rally timing to Saturday afternoon, proposing to cut short the Conference in the Gandhi Hall and let the mass rally take over. The Chief Magistrate of Johannesburg, in close conclave with the Special Branch, and with the approval of Minister Swart, promptly had notices plastered up in the city banning that rally too. That made three banning orders in a week, one on Chief Luthuli, and two within 24 hours of one another on the anti-pass rally.

The ban was dictatorial and unprovoked. The authorities made not the slightest effort even to justify the rally bans to the public. No reasons were

given. Just a blanket order. The bans were not even served on Congress leaders, but merely pasted up on public buildings.

What are the police leading up to? Is this part of their plot to bluff the country into thinking the government has good reason to take steps against the Congress, reasons they must not question but must blindly accept? Or are the police jittery because of the economic boycott campaign and acting as the State wing of Nat businessmen and firms trembling at the prospect of this boycott hitting them where it hurts most?

Bans on rallies notwithstanding, up to 1 500 and more Congress people flocked to the National Anti-Pass Conference, which went resolutely on with its work.

The report of the National Anti-Pass Planning Committee linked the struggle against passes with the economic boycott weapon. In part it said:

Some people think that the only way of fighting against the pass laws is by destroying the passes. This in the view of the Planning Council is not the only way of struggling against the pass system nor is it necessarily the most effective way.

In the history of our struggle against the passes there are instances when the resentment of the Africans against the passes has been so high that they have burnt them, but sooner or later the passes have been reimposed and disillusionment followed.

It is not the document itself towards which we must exclusively direct our attention and devise a form of struggle but the role of the document in the whole structure of our country. In order to end the pass laws which are the root of our oppression, we require *courage, endurance, and determination* and the skilful use of the power *which is available to us to defeat the government*.

Wherein does the power of the African lie?

When our local purchasing power is combined with that of sympathetic organisations overseas we wield a devastating weapon.

In the view of the Council the economic boycott weapon can be used effectively in our struggle against the pass laws. The boycott has the additional merit that it is not a defensive weapon. We are on the

offensive and we are fighting on a battlefield chosen by ourselves, based on our strength, and not by the enemy.

The Council has recommended to the ANC which has decided that the economic boycott of products of Nationalist-controlled institutions should be embarked upon as from June 26, 1959. We are in fact the greatest economic asset of our country.

What is our economic power?

It is:

- (a) The power of our *labour*. The methods we can use are industrial action in its various forms, strikes and go-slow strikes.
- (b) Our *purchasing power*.

The Africans spend approximately £400 million per annum. By withdrawing our purchasing power from certain institutions we can, as Chief Luthuli said, 'punch them in the stomach'. This is economic boycott.

The economic boycott in South Africa has unlimited potentialities.

FARM SLAVE SCHEME CRACKS

Some farmers release all their workers

New Age 11 July 1959

First signs that the exposure of the evils of the forced labour system is having effect came this week when an Eastern Transvaal farmer who had been taken to court to produce some of his labourers surrendered his farm's entire labour force and drove them back to Johannesburg.

By Tuesday his example has been followed by five other farmers, who decided to release their labour through the government scheme of contracting petty offenders.

This decision was taken although it is now harvest time, the busiest season of the year. Court actions have served to expose the rottenness of the scheme, and these six farmers at least – perhaps to be followed by more – have decided that it's not worth the trouble.

The first farmer to release his workers, Mr S Rubin, farms in the Leslie district. All his labour had come from the government farm labour bureau at Wynberg, near Alexandra Township. His lorry carrying about 30 men was driven into Johannesburg last Sunday evening and all 30 were released. All had been paid off. They reported to the offices of the Native Commissioner and then went home to join their families.

Earlier in the week, Mr Rubin had produced to court, on *habeas corpus* petition demands, Alfred Somanzi and Andrew Mamabola. Over the weekend a demand was made on him for two more labourers who were also produced.

Then he decided to release all the men contracted to him under the farm labour scheme which has come under such strong fire these last few weeks as a result of a string of court applications for the release of men allegedly forced into signing these contracts under pain of prosecution and jail sentences for pass offences.

The charge has been made repeatedly that the whole scheme operated by the police and the NAD [Native Affairs Department] to recruit labour for farmers is illegal.

The scheme has also meant a high percentage of desertions and farmers have come to expect so many runaways in each batch of labourers shanghaied on to their farms. Now they find they face the possibility also of being landed with heavy legal costs as a result of court applications by wives and relatives for the return of their men.

IN THE PRESENCE OF HISTORY

Fighting Talk June 1961

This issue of *Fighting Talk* is devoted to some chapters from South African history. The events and incidents dealt with do not, in the main, appear in any of the standard history textbooks. Almost without exception, they are chapters which are still within the range of living memory; many of our readers, like many of our writers, have taken part in them and been themselves makers of history. Perhaps few of them have even thought of themselves that way. They think of themselves rather as people who did what they had to do, what their consciences and their passions drove them to do. They lived their lives as they chose, struggling forwards as best they could without thought or consciousness that thus they were making the history of this country. But looking back on the tale revealed in the chapters in this issue, who can doubt that here South African history was in the making?

There are few heroes of gigantic stature in these episodes, few titans whose tremendous deeds are popularly associated with history. There are few dramatic moments in which the face of a country is suddenly transformed, few of those stark days when the whole fate of a nation is decided.

Instead there is the record of a multitude of indecisive and inconclusive struggles, of strikes won and lost, of campaigns completed and uncompleted; there are a multitude of nameless, faceless ordinary people, some few remembered but many forgotten. Can this be history? Have we who live today left our mark on the future?

To answer these questions, historians looking back from a future time will one day give answers. They will be able to grasp the broad sweep of our times without being involved in its daily trivialities, to pick out the decisive moments and turning points which we who are so close to them cannot distinguish from the rest.

Doubtless they will see that, between the writing of this issue in May 1961 and its publication in June 1961, a chapter of South African history has ended, the chapter of South Africa as part of Empire and Commonwealth, and a new chapter of Republic has begun.

But for most of us, living in this moment of history, there will be nothing that will set this period apart from others. The sun will go down one day and

come up the next. Life will go on. We will go forth again to our jobs and our cares. We will live, think and act much as we did before. Can this be the stuff of history?

History, so the dictionary has it, is the study 'of the growth of nations'. By this test, the chapters from our own life and times are the essence of history.

For in these chapters, we tell something of the tale of growth towards a new South African nation. The growth has not yet matured; there is no South African nation yet. But we live in the era of its beginnings. And the episodes in this issue are episodes from the birth pangs. A single silver thread runs unmistakably through all the chapters – the unconquerable spirit of ordinary men and women, who are driven by life itself to struggle ceaselessly upward towards new life. Nothing has yet been able to crush that spirit; nothing will ever be able to divert it until it has given birth to new life.

Each group has struggled, fought and been beaten back. That is the tale in these pages. But each group has kindled a spark somewhere else, or failing, handed on the flame for others to carry forward.

Gandhi's passive resisters fought and failed; but the spark was handed on, to burst into full flame forty years later in the Defiance Campaign. The white miners of 1922 fought and were defeated; but the spark lived on to be born anew, brighter and more undeviating by the African strikers of 1946. The Native National Congress fought and fell, but in failing passed on the torch to the African National Congress.

Thus each generation starts off not from the beginning of the struggle, but from the footholds built for it by others, and with the experience and the inspiration bequeathed to it by others who have gone before. Steadily and painfully, each generation fights its way upwards, higher than the last, nearer to the goal.

Each episode we record in these pages had its own special reason and its own special aim. These were not struggles started with the intention of blazing trails in history, or of building a single South African nation. The 1922 miners fought to protect their wage standard against threats of cheap, African labour; the 1946 miners for ten shillings a day. The Indian passive resisters fought to demolish the provincial barriers to free movement, the Defiance campaigners against six specific unjust laws. But every struggle developed aims and ideas far beyond its starting point. From the white miners' struggle grew the first

beginnings of understanding that white worker and African worker are equally dependent upon each other; from the Indian passive resistance grew the first appreciation that colour bars can be swept aside only by joint action of all non-white peoples.

Though this is recent history, it is hard to recall today the dim visions of those times. We have passed far beyond those early beginnings of a new, non-racial consciousness, far beyond the days when only the small outcast sect of communists and negrophiles proclaimed their non-racial visions in a hostile wilderness. Understanding of the need for race unity has been fostered by every campaign, every struggle, and even by every defeat and failure recorded in this issue.

Struggle has given birth to understanding; and understanding to action. Already, in the most recent of the episodes we record, men and women of different racial groups have acted deliberately and consciously to crash through the old divisions, to seek out the basis of interracial unity; and finally to struggle forwards together, shoulder to shoulder, towards the united, non-racial South African nation whose future shape is being traced in the actions of the present.

We stand at the highest point of this struggle towards the light. The most formidable unit of white and non-white aspirations has been achieved in the single demand for a new National Convention of all races. We are closer to the goal than any generation before, because we stand on the shoulders of the men and women of South Africa who campaigned, fought, failed and even died in the struggles of the past.

By the time this issue reaches you, the reader, May 31st will have come and gone. You will be able to judge, by that time, the legacy of those struggles of the past – the non-racial outlook which they have bred, the organisation to which they have given rise, the experience which they have handed on to us and the unity-in-action which they have produced. It will be almost June 26th, Freedom Day – the day of annual remembrance of the battles of the past and of the ordinary men and women who became heroes in the course of them, the day of annual rededication to the unending struggle for life and freedom.

This is, above all, a Freedom Day issue. It looks backward because history is a process of looking backward. But its purpose is not to dramatise the past; its purpose is to illuminate the present. It is written not as a tribute to the dead,

but as an inspiration to the living – to the men and women of all races whose lives and actions in this year 1961 are bringing a new life and a new nation into birth before our eyes. We look backwards without nostalgia for the past. Looking back along the long and trying road we have come, we are inspired with the knowledge that we are near the top of the hill, and within sight of freedom in our lifetime. We live in the presence of history.

SOUTH AFRICA TODAY

In Africa Speaks 1961

'If you faced our problems you would act as we do.' This is the tenor of the defensive arguments of white South Africans under attack for their country's policies. Conviction that their country has been made the world's whipping boy has given South Africans an injured air. Declarations of the rights of man, of equality of opportunity, preambles to the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the successive conventions of the International Labour Organisation are all very well. They might be applicable to other countries, but not to South Africa. For on the southern tip of the continent of Africa, runs the argument, is a complex, multiracial society in which Western civilisation is at stake.

South Africa regards itself as the beacon to the eternal maintenance of white supremacy on the continent. Governments have come and gone, parties have been formed and fused in the country's political life, but the policy of white domination has remained constant. The present Nationalist government is the most extreme advocate of white supremacy government but its base was laid long before 1948 when it came to power under the premiership of Malan.

Official policy which governs the relations between the dominant group of three million whites and the majority (nearly ten million) of Africans is today known as apartheid, but in different periods it has been paraded variously as segregation, trusteeship, the preservation of white civilisation, and separate development. Whether it was segregation or trusteeship in the days of Smuts as premier or the latest modifications in the apartheid policy of the Nationalist government, all deny the principle or the practice of racial equality in a common society.

That the white man is dominant there is no doubt. But this, runs the argument, is because he is civilised and superior, not because he is white. A folklore of myths and legends to justify racialism has grown up over the years and the tales vary with the narrator and the audience.

There is the assertion by the whites that they arrived in the southernmost part of the country no later than the first Bantu-speaking immigrants from Central Africa crossed the Limpopo, the northern boundary of the Union, a claim considered important enough for South Africa's representative to make

before the United Nations General Assembly. There is the claim that apartheid is the word of God and racial segregation specifically enjoined in the Bible. There is the assertion that Africans have contributed nothing to 'civilisation' and that the African, not only in the Union but further afield on the continent, has no history but one lived out in savagery. There is the conviction that Africans are different from the white man in a variety of ways difficult to define. South African obscurantism today under the Nationalists goes so far as to exclude the teaching of evolution in the school syllabus because it poses the unity of mankind; to enforce statutory regulations for apartheid in blood transfusion services so that, regardless of the blood groupings, no white person's life should ever have to be saved by blood drawn from an African donor; and to prohibit autopsies on white corpses by African medical men.

Jonathan Swift's inventiveness pales beside South African realities, and indeed it has been said that, in the Union, life improves upon satire, though not all the popular legends making up this racial folklore are equally devoid of finesse or subtlety. Yet most variations share the basic concept that the African is different and inferior, and that civilisation would be undermined by his admission to its society as an equal.

This argument has two crippling weaknesses. If Africans are inherently inferior, it should surely not be necessary to legislate to keep them so. South Africa's law books bulge with statutes reserving skilled jobs for whites; a special system of Bantu Education has been instituted to ensure that Africans find no place, in the words of the Union's Prime Minister, Dr HF Verwoerd, 'in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour'; and efforts continue to turn members of urban factory workers back into tribalists.

The second weakness in the argument that civilisation would be undermined if the African were admitted as an equal is the unsupported assumption that the African can never come any closer to civilisation – even after generations of the civilising process – as though there were some genetic, immutable quality with which whites only are equipped, and Africans never.

African experience in the Union has been that opportunity has not expanded, but shrunk. For instance, as more Africans qualified in the past for the franchise, the qualifications were altered to place the vote further and further beyond their reach until finally the African franchise was abolished entirely. It is a scathing reflection on the 'civilising mission' of the whites in

southern Africa that after 300 years Africans are still so backward that they must be totally excluded from sharing in this civilisation lest they pollute it.

Racialism has been an essential factor in the technique of domination in the Union. It has transferred the blame for any backwardness of the African to his own shoulders. The solution to the race problem has been posed primarily as one of breaking down race prejudice gradually over an extended period of time, long enough both to civilise the primitive and re-educate the civilised in tolerance, and this approach has deflected attention from the main problem. For, above all, racialism has overlaid the nature of domination and exploitation and used coloured prejudice to obscure the techniques of domination. Where privilege can be made to coincide with colour, it becomes far more entrenched and unassailable. And where white skin colour can become the badge of privilege entitling whites to sole entry to skilled trades and professions, granting them the monopoly of political representation and commercial opportunity, one quarter of the population can be prevailed upon to see the maintenance of 'white civilisation' (or dominance) as the condition for its own continued prosperity and survival.

The presence of several racial groups in the Union has enabled South Africa to plead that her situation is unique and should not be judged by international standards. In reality, though, her problems have been characteristic of those of a country rapidly developing into the industrialised phase, with the accompanying needs of a large labour force divorced from the land and directed into wage labour. Far from being unique, these problems have had their equivalent in many countries, even those with homogeneous populations. Oliver Cox in *Caste, Class and Race* argues, 'As a matter of fact, the white proletariat of early capitalism had to endure burdens of exploitation quite similar to those which many coloured peoples must bear today', and he knows that to justify this treatment it was argued that the workers were innately degraded and degenerate and consequently they merited their condition.

The Enclosure Acts which forced the peasantry into the mills and factories of newly industrialised England have their parallel in the Reserve system of the Union which restricts 70 per cent of the population to 10 per cent of the land. The consequent poverty, together with heavy taxation, impels Africans to work in the white labour areas. Vagrancy laws reminiscent of England during the industrial revolution make unemployment an offence and idleness a sin.

The aim of the education system for the poor is to teach them not learning but labour and humility so as to protect the good order of a society which views the efforts of the poor and lowly to emancipate themselves as a threat to its very nature.

South Africa entered the industrial phase only a generation ago and long after earlier developed countries, at a period when the lessons of history were known and parallel situations might have proved instructive. But racialism has served to blur the similarities and blunt the example, thus not only diverting attention from the basic structure of South Africa's economy, but also concealing the intensity of the exploitation and the excessive rate at which wealth is accumulated regardless of human welfare.

This reality applies, on the whole, as much to the Union's immediate neighbour to the north, the Central African Federation, as it does to South Africa. However, with crude racialism under strong fire from all sides in the twentieth century, both the Union and the Federation have found it necessary to modify their forms, concede here and there to public pressure of enlightened opinion, devise new disguises for the old policies and try to confuse and frustrate African and other opposition.

So, in the Federation, policies that are close cousins to the Union's form of white domination are described as 'partnership' and a new departure in race relations, and in the Union the Nationalist government, for all its intransigence and contempt for international opinion, has been compelled to try to present its race policies in a more favourable light.

South Africa's all-white governments have made many attempts, with varying degrees of success, to refurbish the old house. If the Nationalist government has been able to give the impression to some in the Union that it is moving forwards instead of backwards, and making concessions where it is really tightening the screw, this is largely because white supremacy is rooted in the basic structure of South Africa and has had many long decades to dig itself in.

Since the earliest days of contact the history of the African people has been one of steady expropriation of their lands, this process being completed and legalised in 1913 with the passing of the first Land Act which confined millions of Africans to areas too small to support them and their stock. The Union's land policy, linked with taxation, has been the lever compelling tribesmen to migrate

and work in urban areas for low wages. The rapid expansion of gold, diamond, and base-metal mining and the development of industry led to the acceleration of the process. So long as Africans could enjoy the life of subsistence peasants they could not be pressed into service. Migrant labour has ruined African agriculture by emptying the Reserves of able-bodied men for long periods at a time and simultaneously has underwritten the system of low wages. The justification advanced for the policy is that these men are peasant farmers augmenting their rural income by spells of work in mines or towns.

Another important outgrowth of white supremacy was the devolution of segregation through local municipal government. The first Urban Areas Act, introduced by the Smuts government in 1923, embodied a principle formulated by a commission which stated: 'The Native should only be allowed to enter the urban areas, which are essentially the white man's creation, when he is willing to enter and to minister to the needs of the white man, and should depart therefrom when he ceases so to minister.' Buttredding these main pillars of the segregation or apartheid policy are the scores of secondary supports: the laws enforcing residential separation and denying Africans freehold tenure in the towns; the denial of technical training to Africans and the closing of doors to the acquisition of skills; the startling disparity between skilled and unskilled wages; the laws controlling freedom of movement which are a vital device in blocking the right of the African worker to bid for work in the best labour markets. The Nationalists have taken over all these basic aspects of the policy of segregation but have enforced them more rigidly and with more brutality and thoroughness than any government in the past.

Years of enforcing race discrimination against not a minority group but the overwhelming majority of the people of the Union have given white supremacy a new rationale for maintaining itself. There is now the fear of revenge, of the Africans turning on their oppressors, of the rise of a so-called black nationalism against which the whites must defend themselves. The traditional policy of segregation, or apartheid, is the only way, it is now argued with reinforced vigour, to avoid the clashes that must necessarily arise where different races live together.

The new medicine is sweetened by the claim that in their own areas Africans will be encouraged to develop along their own lines and that, in tune with developments in most of the rest of Africa, Africans will be permitted

self-government, if not independence – eventually, the Nationalists are careful to state. The policy of ‘bantustans’, or government in their own areas, is not a genuine concession to the African’s claim for equality and participation in the running of the country; this Nationalist innovation is simply an attempt to stifle African demands, to divide the people by getting some of them, under pressure, to give the new scheme a trial, and to change the conditions which have given rise to a vocal political movement.

For, in spite of every handicap imposed on them, Africans have advanced, and impressively. The degree of literacy is higher in the Union than anywhere else in Negro Africa, because South Africa is far and away the most industrialised country with the oldest education system. The actual earnings of African workers have increased, especially over the last three decades, though in relation to the wealth produced and the contribution Africans have made to its production, and the rise of white wages over the same period, their position is worse than before. Africans have acquired skills in spite of and not because of the prevailing policy of the country. But if white supremacy, like colonisation in a country more typical of the true colonial economy than South Africa, has brought benefits, it is not out of concern for those colonised or dominated, but the inevitable by-product of technical innovations in a society geared to industrialisation.

Even this advance presents a danger to the South African establishment. The process must somehow be blocked or the traditional white preserve will be destroyed. The Africans will begin by invading the white man’s economic preserves and will end up by invading his political territory. Can the process be reversed? Can the indispensable services of African labour yet be retained? This is the government’s true problem.

The Nationalist government’s solution is almost too facile, if one can sweep aside the camouflage of words that conceals its true nature.

The traditional African Reserves are to become Bantu national homes, seven little states in all, with their own representative machinery, commissioners-general to maintain the link with the capital in Pretoria, tribal ambassadors in the towns to keep urban workers under tribal influence and control. Commissions were appointed to provide the theoretical justification of this setting up of imaginary states within the state of South Africa and to plan for the socio-economic development of the new national homes. Simultaneously the last

remnants of African representation in Parliament and Senate were abolished and the final threads linking Africans with the general political institutions cut. From now on chiefs, tribal authorities and their representatives in towns and country will administer apartheid laws as a so-called restoration of their ancient tribal rights. This is nothing more than a new attempt to modernise methods of indirect rule which have failed colonial administrations in so many parts of the continent.

Self-government in their own national homes would be very well – if it were agreed to by the inhabitants of these areas, if it were self-government, and if the economies of these national homes were viable. But rechristening a former Reserve, now overpopulated and denuded, backward and underdeveloped because its purpose for hundreds of years has been to act as a reservoir of labour for the industrial centres hundreds of miles away, does not make it an area capable of existing in independence.

The Nationalist government's commission which pondered the problem for many years proposed a minimum expenditure of \$291 000 000 to be spent on improving the Reserves over ten years, but nearly all its proposals for socio-economic reforms were rejected, and a bare \$1 400 000 is annually voted for expenditure in the bantustans, and not even all of that is spent. Turning the bantustans into self-supporting national homes will not only involve the expenditure of vast sums of money which the white taxpayers of the country will never countenance and the Nationalists will not advocate for fear of alienating them at the polls, but it would also mean reversing the whole pattern of the South African economy.

The bantustan plan is an ingenious pretext for dealing with Africans as foreigners in their own country, except for the small Reserves to be known as their 'states'. Those African rights which still survive in the towns will be erased and Africans permitted only as temporary workers, on the grounds that they will enjoy full rights in their own areas. But in their own areas, Africans under their chiefs, who hold office only so long as they agree to carry out the line of the government, will be administered under the laws passed by the Union Parliament and supervised and implemented by the octopus-like Bantu Administration Department which controls African life in every detail.

Inaugurating one of these tribal authorities, the Prime Minister of the Union told Africans:

The white man also has had his tree of separate development planted a long time ago. Already it has grown big and bears fruit...For progress the Bantu must also have that tree. They must not be jealous when they look into another man's garden...Tend your own little tree and it will become big.

The hypocrisy of the parable lies in the fact that it was the Africans as much as anyone else who tended and continue to tend the white man's tree. And like the Union squatter or sharecropper who farms his own inadequate plot only when he has spent the greater part of the year working on his master's land, he must tend his tree only when he has done with the white man's, and then be told it has not flourished like the white man's because he is lazy and his farming methods are backward and outmoded.

The Nationalist government's hopes for blocking African advancement are staked on the bantustan policy, but tribalism is not compatible with the country's economy and must in time hinder national development plans. This realisation has ranged important sectors of industry against the Nationalist policy, and with each passing month opposition from this quarter has increased.

Political opposition in a country which produces parties and political groupings in fair abundance can broadly be judged by the degree to which they associate themselves with the basic South African concept that the whites must remain dominant. Arguments range on whether this dominance is a temporary or permanent phenomenon, on the rate at which African advancement must be permitted, or the size of the share Africans will be handed. Election programmes of the white parties have been a long tale of manipulations and jugglings with the electoral roll, of elaborate formulae for giving the Africans more rights, but not too many, for relaxing the pass laws which prevent freedom of movement, but only somewhat.

What has been the African response? African political movements have become bored and not a little impatient with the tricky formulations, none of which will be allowed to alter the basic pattern to any significant extent. Where concessions have been made to African claims, they have always been too little or too late; and in recent years, of course, no real concessions have been made.

The notion has long died among even white political groupings close to the Nationalist party that non-whites accept the idea of their own inferiority, and are waiting passively and patiently for a change of heart by the white man. Indeed, the tempo of political controversy in the Union has been sharply accelerated by the growth of the Non-European political movements. Discussion on the future of the African people is no longer going on in the white man's club, but is in the arena of African political struggle.

The most detailed and far-reaching programme of non-white demands is that of the leading political organisation of the Africans, the African National Congress, joined by allied congresses of the Indian people (the South African Indian Congress), the coloured people (the South African Coloured People's Organisation), and the only non-racial trade union federation in the country (the South African Congress of Trade Unions).

The product of these efforts was reflected concisely in the Freedom Charter which was adopted at an assembly of delegates of all races in June 1955 after a nationwide effort to ascertain grievances and needs of the common people in all walks of life. This Charter is the most radical of the political programmes current in the country and, significantly, forms the central theme of the evidence for the prosecution in the Treason Trial.

The policy of the Congress Movement – the chief drafters of the Charter – is based on two essential presumptions, closely related to each other. The first is the recognition that with the complete monopoly of government in white hands and an opposition party in decline and handicapped by rigged delimitations and other electoral and constitutional hindrances, it would be little short of a miracle for far-reaching changes in national policy to be achieved through Parliament. The second is the recognition, set out in the preamble to the Charter, that 'South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people'.

The Charter is both a recital of grievance and a declaration of the basic tenets of the Congress Movement. The greater part is a claim to the rights which have come to be recognised as part of the heritage of every person in the modern age. These include the demand that the rights of the people shall be the same, regardless of race, colour or sex; no one shall be imprisoned without fair trial; the law shall guarantee to all their right to speak, worship, meet

together; all who work shall be free to form trade unions; education should be compulsory, free and equal for all children; adult illiteracy shall be ended by a mass State education plan; the aged, the orphans, the disabled and the sick shall be cared for by the State; fenced locations and ghettos shall be abolished and laws which break up families repealed; the colour bar in sport and cultural life shall be ended; a preventive health scheme shall be run by the State, and so on through the ten main sections and 56 clauses of the Charter.

Here there is no concession to the theory that education must be a qualification for the vote, that more 'backward' members of the community must be groomed for civic responsibility before they can be entrusted with it. Here there is no proposal that instead of concerning themselves with the vote, non-whites would concentrate on attaining the more 'urgent' needs of better housing, adequate wages, and social services. Congress policy is emphatic that only political rights are a guarantee against the legislature's continuing to ride roughshod over the interests of the majority of the population. Quite absent from the Charter is any suggestion that piecemeal reforms and the repeal of this discriminatory law or that will be adequate to produce any substantial change in the total situation of discrimination.

How to invert a pattern of 300 years of white domination? The Charter asserts in one of its economic clauses, 'All people shall have the right to trade where they choose, to manufacture and enter all trades, crafts and professions.' But a mere proclamation of rights without any corresponding change in the order of things which makes all these fields preserves of whites, gives them little meaning.

Congress is committed to a policy of conquering rural poverty, banishing famine and land shortage, demolishing slums, guaranteeing equal pay for equal work, ending migrant labour, child labour and contract labour. All these are dependent on breaking the dominant socio-economic pattern in the country. Giant monopolies in the gold mining industry, linked with financial and industrial interest and entrenched farming groups, own and control the national wealth of the country and shape the basic pattern. The Charter advocates that 'the national wealth of the country shall be restored to the people, the mineral wealth beneath the soil, the banks, and monopoly industry shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole'.

Nationalisation of the basic gold mining industry and monopoly industry,

and land distribution, which are fundamental to the major problem of raising the economic status of non-white people, are not exactly synonymous with socialism, and the Congress makes no claim at all to have a socialist programme. It aimed in its Charter to reflect the aspirations of all classes and groups in South Africa striving for democratic change. The test for the clauses in the Charter was simply: can the programme as a whole be implemented without these, taking into account the nature of the present order?

South Africa's situation is complex, because, although the great majority of her people occupy colonial and semi-colonial status, they are not administered by a dominant power from across the seas but by a settled white population in a secure home base within the colonial population and allied with British, American, and other investors beyond her borders. As full and untrammelled independence for any of the newly emerging states of Africa means breaking the ties not only of political but also of financial dependence, so too, freedom for the great majority of the people of the Union means a sharp break with the old subjection in all its forms.

The Congress Movement in South Africa is not a completely black nationalist movement. The freedoms guaranteed in the Charter are for all who live in South Africa, whatever their race or colour. One of the surprises in the tense South African situation is that the major political expression of the non-white people is broadly humanist and does not advocate an inverted racialism as an alternative to the present ugly system.

The Congress Movement cannot confine itself within the straitjacket of politics within the parliamentary arena, because it is not admitted to this arena, and over the years it has built its strength in popular campaigns, using such tactics as passive resistance, boycotts, strikes, and mass demonstrations. These methods of campaigning do not mean that the Congress Movement is not concerned that white political thinking be weaned to new notions. While changes of the nature essential to non-white advancement are highly unlikely to be initiated by white political action, white resistance to change can be considerably weakened. And Nationalist repression is having not a little to do with that. For whites have found that many laws passed to shackle non-whites and their political action have infringed the liberties of whites no less, and opposition to the policies of the Nationalist government in these days is stamped 'un-South African' and unpatriotic. A forward movement of

white opinion has been noticeable in the years since the formation of such groups as the Liberal Party, the Black Sash, and the Congress of Democrats, the Progressive Party breakaway from the United Party, and such numerous multiracial campaigns and activities as have been a feature of the growing multiracial front of opposition to the Nationalist government.

For some whites in South Africa have come to realise that even if apartheid benefits them materially for the moment, it has serious drawbacks. South Africa, a country with tremendous prospects for economic expansion, is being fettered by feudal and outmoded labour relations and controls. And apartheid and repression are having a corrosive effect on white society which administers the laws to dehumanise the African and 'keep him in his place'. South African whites, bolted and barred behind burglar-proofed doors and windows, devoured by colour neurosis, fearful of the day the tide might turn, stung by the condemnation of most of the outside world, begin to realise the growing untenability of their position. The white man in Africa carries a new burden; can he escape the consequences of his career in colonialism in a world where these theories and practices are being so steadily discarded?

In the Union, he may for some time to come be able to maintain himself as before. But who knows for how long? A change in the Union will be compounded of three factors at least: the growing strength and maturity of the non-white political movement; stresses and strains in the South African system resulting in a weakening of its resistance; and the climate of opinion in the rest of Africa and the changing world beyond the continent.

OUR DUTY – AS WE SEE IT

Fighting Talk June 1962

This journal was born out of a war against Nazism. It was called *Fighting Talk*. It was, then, the voice of the democratically inspired soldiery of this country's army against Nazism. It dedicated its columns to the fight against Nazism, racial reaction and dictatorship. From that it has never wavered, though times have changed since the war ended and the army dispersed. First as the voice of full-time soldiers, later as the voice of civilians, *Fighting Talk* has always been the journal of the advance guard of this country's anti-Nazis, the voice of the fighters with weapons or with words against the Hitler doctrines of supermen and master races.

This journal is today under sentence of death. At any moment after the Sabotage Bill becomes law, it may be closed down, without reason and without hearing, by order of a man whose political career started with support for Hitler and National Socialism, and ends, appropriately, in the Verwoerd Cabinet. Until the executioner's axe falls, our editor, our contributors and staff face punishment – imprisonment and fines – for almost every word they dared to write. A new crime has been created in this country – the crime of writing and publishing what the gauleiters of South African Nazism describe as 'undesirable'.

Thus, after twenty years of unbroken publication, we face the severest test of our history. The South African Nazis dominate the government and have taken to themselves the powers to terrorise us, or – if that fails – to close us down by decree. What course are we to follow now? The question does not confront only us. It confronts every journal, every organisation, finally every individual who does not bend the knee before the juggernaut of Verwoerd apartheid. What course are we to follow?

This problem faces the whole South African press; they are all finding differing answers for themselves. Patrick Duncan of *Contact* has emigrated to Basutoland before the Censorship Bill becomes law, seeking refuge in advance from restrictions on his personal freedom which are far lighter than those imposed on many of our writers and staff. Lawrence Gandar of the *Rand Daily Mail*, by way of contrast, has forcibly climbed off the fence on which he has sat for a long time, and uses his pen with all the passion and force he can muster

in the battle to stop the Bill and bar the pass to its foul twin, the Sabotage Bill. Is Duncan's way the way of caution? Or of cowardice? Is Gandar's that of heroism? Or of recklessness?

The problem goes far beyond the ranks only of editors. Consider, for instance, the Johannesburg Liberal Party, which had advertised a meeting at the City Hall steps before the storm-troopers and bully-boys of the new dictatorship had got into their full stride. By the day before the meeting, the hooligan gangs had been given the freedom of Johannesburg's streets by the South African Police; from behind the police cordons they had gathered freely to abuse, assault and spit upon anti-government demonstrators. In this atmosphere, the meeting would certainly have been rough; it would have required much determination and courage to go through with it. Unfortunately, the organisers could not muster enough of either, and cancelled their meeting. Party chairman Alan Paton, who had fought courageously and well throughout the week in Durban, summed up the deed: 'Freedom of speech has lost a critical battle.' True. But it was a battle in which the defence had failed to bring its weapons and ammunition into action. This was not caution; it was cowardice in the face of the enemy.

Nothing contrasts more strongly with this than the magnificent courage of the women of Johannesburg's Black Sash, who faced up to all the gutter abuse and the sewer-rat behaviour of the hooligan gangs, in order to maintain their vigil over their 'Flame of Liberty' on the very same steps of the City Hall. Here were courage and determination of the highest order. And yet clearly courage alone is not enough. The Black Sash vigil has been forced off those central steps, into the side streets and byways, where the demonstration is less significant and less inspiring. They have not been driven off by superior force; for any who knows Johannesburg, anyone who saw its common citizens in their fine silent march of protest against the Sabotage Bill, will know that Johannesburg can still – even in the fourteenth year of Nationalist rule – muster an overwhelming majority of anti-fascists against the bully gangs and the government which inspires them. But the women of the Black Sash discouraged every offer of protection, rejected every suggestion that the answer to gang force is counterforce. They decided to face force and violence with a demonstration of moral superiority only. Their tactics failed. Certainly they were heroic; but were they not also, in this, mistaken?

Thus far we have spoken of courage and of cowardice. But it is necessary

also to speak of treachery and betrayal. Consider first the case of the Trade Union Council [TUC], which is content to let the Censorship and Sabotage Bills pass in silence, because they themselves have the assurance of the minister that their trade unions will not be suppressed. Let us not ask what value such an assurance has; the National Party has never felt obliged to honour promises, or respect restraints imposed by 'the dead hand of the past'. Nor let us bother with the fact that while trade unions may be given immunity, their members, their leaders and their spokesmen fall just as surely within the shadow of the Gestapo as anyone else in the country. Let the TUC look after itself in these matters. But we cannot ignore the fact that the assurance asked for by the TUC and given by the minister, affects only their unions, only the unions of white workers. They have given their silence and their acquiescence to the Bills, in exchange for their own immunity. In doing so, they have shown themselves ready to sacrifice all other trade unions, especially the unions of non-white workers, without a murmur. This is not cowardice; it is treachery.

So too the behaviour of the press magnates, united in the press barons' association – the Newspaper Press Union [NPU]. We speak here of the proprietors of the English-language dailies; for the Afrikaans dailies are so completely part and parcel of the Nationalist Party that nothing they say and do – neither incitement to public violence nor gross racial incitement to public violence nor gross racial incitement nor straightforward lying nor outspoken Hitlerism – nothing they do will be classed as 'undesirable' in Nationalist South Africa. The proprietors of the English dailies have also fastened the gag upon themselves in exchange for their own immunity from censorship. They have traded their freedom to write as they please and as they think for the right to be excluded from the Censorship Bill; they have retired from the battle before it is half fought, and in doing so they have thrown all other publications to the Nazi wolves – *Fighting Talk*, *New Age*, *Contact* and many more. This is not surrender; it is treachery.

We are concerned at this moment to pass judgement on treachery. In military circles, treachery is punishable with death. History will pass judgement on the TUC and NPU soon enough. We are concerned, from all this, to chart our own course and determine our own future. If we put accusing fingers on the deeds of others it is only in order to underline our intention not to follow the fatal paths which they take.

We have tried, for twenty years, to live up to our name, *Fighting Talk*. Surrender without a fight, cowardice in the face of the enemy, treachery to our friends, our allies and our people is foreign to our whole tradition. They are the antithesis of everything we have worked for and campaigned for through our whole history. We do not intend to change our colours now, nor to haul them from the masthead.

We have dedicated ourselves to campaign against South African Nazism. We will continue to do so for as long as we are able. We have campaigned against Nazism's local representative, the Nationalist Party. We will continue to do so. We have fought for the new South Africa whose outline is drawn in the Freedom Charter. We will continue to do so. We have worked for the unity of all South African democrats and lovers of liberty, for the common cause of removing the present government and opening the road to democracy for everyone. We shall continue to do so.

For as long as we are able, we neither retreat, nor surrender. We do not believe that a soft answer from us will turn away the Nazi's wrath. We will carry on the fight for as long as we are able. And if, in the future, they bring such force against us that we can no longer continue, then we shall go down. But at least we will go down as we have lived, fighting. We know that in this approach we are not alone. This will be the path trodden by the majority of our people now and in the critical days ahead. Our special field has been 'talk'. But there comes a time when talk is not enough; when what is wanted is not just talk, but also deeds; not just ideas but also action.

We will try to match our actions in the face of Nazism to our talk over these many years. We are confident that this way lies victory for our ideas, and defeat for Nazism. Perhaps not now. Perhaps not for some time to come. But in the end it must be so, because governments can silence their opponents, but they can never destroy them while human courage and determination are kept alive. In the end of ends, it is not the government of this country which will crush the people; but the people who will crush the government. Whatever little we can contribute to that end, we will do, willingly.

FROM THE FREEDOM CHARTER TO ARMED STRUGGLE

Speech to Anti-Apartheid Movement Conference, London, 1968

The launching of armed struggle against the South African regime must be seen against the total background: the history of South Africa is one of organised violence applied against the majority of the people, first the violence of military conquest over three centuries (the last act of armed resistance was the Bambata Rebellion at the beginning of this century in Natal), and then the institutionalised violence of a political system which entrenches a minority in power against the will and the interests of a majority that outnumbers them four to one. The history of South Africa is also one not of a steady or even gradual devolution towards greater rights for the majority, but of a progressive loss of rights, the abolition of what limited franchise existed as a hangover from Cape liberalism of the 19th century, and a consistent undermining and finally abolition of the right of the individual to advance his civil liberties and living standards through the courts and the use of the rule of law, or by political or trade union organisation.

Non-violent protest was a tenet of the Congress Movement for by far the greater part of its history, from the foundation of the African National Congress in 1912. The late Chief Luthuli put the seal on this early period.

‘Who will deny,’ he asked in October 1952, ‘that 30 years of my life have been spent knocking in vain, patiently, moderately and modestly on a closed and barred door? What have been the fruits of moderation? The past 30 years have seen the greatest number of laws restricting our rights and progress until today we have reached the stage where we have almost no rights at all.’

The immediate post-World War II period was a time of great economic hardship for the African people, and also of a great spurt of organisation, in trade unions and mass political movements. But the policy of the government was to ‘bleed the unions to death’ (the words of a South African Minister of Labour), and to repress the political upsurge. The first years of the Nationalist government in power were a taste of things to come: there was a great spurt of repressive legislation from the all-white Parliament and one after another the few remaining rights of the non-white people came under attack. The legislative record of the Nationalist government has been well documented elsewhere. So, too, has the growth in strength and influence of the resistance movement,

that mustered great nationalist protest strikes and an impressively disciplined Defiance Campaign against unjust laws during which 8 500 volunteers courted imprisonment in order to draw attention to the seething bitterness of the non-white people and the urgency of their claim.

The campaigns of the fifties were the years of mass mobilisation of the Africans, the Indian people and the coloureds, with the support of a small sprinkling of anti-racial whites, and also of the hammering out of a programme of aims and demands for the liberation movement of South Africa. This latter objective culminated in the Congress of the People, held at Kliptown, outside Johannesburg, on 26 June 1955. The Congress was the climax of months of organising in village, factory, mine and township to get ordinary people to speak out their demands for freedom. They wrote their grievances and their demands in resolutions taken at unknown hundreds of meetings, then elected delegates to come in person to the mass conference that adopted the Freedom Charter. Its demands are well known, in general:

South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white.

No government can justly claim authority until it is based on the will of the people.

The people shall govern.

All national groups shall have equal rights.

The land shall be shared among those who work it.

All shall be equal before the law.

There shall be work and security.

The doors of learning shall be opened,
and so on.

The Freedom Charter was the first policy document of the mass movement of oppressed people to set out objectives for a non-racial democratic South Africa.

The government retaliated with the mass arrest of political leaders of all races. Twenty days before Christmas 1956 the Treason Trial opened. One hundred and fifty-six political leaders of all races were in the dock. The State charged them with a treasonable conspiracy to overthrow the South African government by violence. The focus of the case was African National Congress policy from 1952 to 1956, and every document written by or in the possession of every one of the 156 was studied minutely and presented as part of the case

for the prosecution. The trial went on for four years and eventually collapsed. All 156 were found not guilty and discharged. The State evidence alleging violence had been manufactured. This was the most ignominious defeat of the government in the courts and before the eyes of the world. From then on the South African government began steadily to circumscribe the powers of the judiciary, to break what independence it had left, and acted beyond the law, by edict and ministerial decree.

While the Treason Trial was still in progress, the country was shaken by the events in Sharpeville, 1960. In March of that year the police opened fire on mass anti-pass protests in two centres, at Sharpeville in the Transvaal, where 69 were killed and 180 wounded, and at Langa in the Cape, where two died and 49 were wounded. The African National Congress called for a national strike as a day of mourning. The government wavered for a moment with its announcement that the pass laws would be suspended, and Chief Luthuli burnt his pass, followed by thousands of others. The government declared a state of national emergency, the African National Congress and the Pan-Africanist Congress were banned. Eighteen hundred political leaders were imprisoned for the duration of the state of emergency.

The following year, 1961, was the year when white South Africa was preparing to hold a referendum to declare itself a (white) Nationalist Republic. An ad hoc committee of African leaders (that took the initiative because the organisations of the African people were banned) summoned an all-in conference in Pietermaritzburg for March 1961 to draft a non-racial Constitution for South Africa and to reinforce its demand that the vote be extended to all without discrimination. The demand was backed by the calling of a national protest strike. The government answered the strike with the country's biggest mobilisation since World War II as army and police staged an unprecedented display of armed force to strangle the strike at birth. But for all that, the stay-at-home received solid and massive support throughout the country. It was at this point that Nelson Mandela, who had led the strike from underground, posed the question:

Is it correct to continue preaching peace and non-violence when dealing with a government whose barbaric practices have brought so much suffering and misery to Africans...?...Have we not closed a chapter?

The smashing of the strike – with Saracens [armoured cars] made in Britain – was the turning point in the political struggle. Africans had decided that the violence of the State made peaceful protest futile.

For the fifties had seen, side by side with the sharpening of African claims and the maturing of their political organisation, a steady attack on their rights to organise. This had started with the Suppression of Communism Act in 1950 which gave the Minister of Justice autocratic power to ban any organisation, newspaper, individual or policy. Bans on trade unionists and political leaders which were at first for two years were extended to five. Men and women were restricted to certain magisterial districts, townships and, ultimately, under the Sabotage Act of 1962, to their own homes. They were forbidden to enter factories or harbour areas, to attend meetings, to write for publication, to enter newspaper offices, to belong to any organisation which discussed the affairs of State, to communicate with other banned individuals or be seen in the company of more than one person, for this was construed as an illegal gathering. Opposition members who had outspokenly expressed their views were sentenced to a state of civil death; and the political movement was drained of its activists for one transgression or another of a myriad of legal restrictions.

From 1953 onwards the government had empowered itself to suspend all law and rule by decree in a state of emergency. These emergency powers were used not only to crack down after Sharpeville, but also against the peasant revolt in Pondoland, and to this day Proclamation 400 in the so-called independent Transkei enables the government to detain anybody for any length of time.

The cumulative effect of these draconian laws was to turn South Africa into a full-blooded police State. To organise for political rights, to express political demands, became an act of subversion. Political expression was driven underground and political organisation was pursued at peril of victimisation, arrest and imprisonment. It was apparent that for the African people to restrict their opposition to conventional and peaceful methods alone would be to surrender. The more the political organisations proved their ability to rally the African people behind them, the more savage was the repression unleashed against them. A dead-end of continuing oppression and discrimination seemed to stretch before the country.

On 16 December 1961 Umkonto we Sizwe (The Spear of the Nation)

emerged with a series of attacks with explosives against government buildings, particularly those connected with the implementation of apartheid, and a manifesto that overnight was pasted on the walls of city buildings:

The people prefer peaceful methods of change to achieve their aspirations without the bitterness and suffering of civil war. But the people's patience is not endless. The government has interpreted the peacefulness of the movement as weakness; the people's non-violent policy has been taken as the green light for government violence – without any fear of reprisals. Umkonto we Sizwe marks a break with the past. We are striking out along a new road for the liberation of the people. The government policy of force, repression and violence will no longer be met with non-violent resistance only. Umkonto we Sizwe will be at the front line of the people's defence. It will be the fighting arm of the people against the government.

Umkonto we Sizwe was to complement the actions of the established national liberation movement. The new movement, despite its military character, announced that it did not abandon the hope and prospect of change without violence in South Africa.

We of Umkonto we Sizwe have always sought, as the liberation movement has sought, to achieve liberation without bloodshed and civil clash. We hope – even at this late hour – that our first actions will awaken everyone to a realisation of the disastrous political situation to which Nationalist policy is heading. We hope that we will bring the government and its supporters to their senses before it is too late, so that both the government and its policies can be changed before matters reach the desperate stage of civil war. We believe our actions to be a blow against the Nationalist preparations for civil war and military rule.

So long as there remained the slightest possibility of forcing a reconsideration of intransigent official policies, Umkonto we Sizwe stressed, the armed struggle would remain the supplementary, not the main form of struggle, and the people would, side by side with Umkonto actions, strive as before to find every means at their disposal to win democratic change by the methods of mass action.

The government answered the formation of Umkonto we Sizwe with the 'Sabotage Act', the General Laws Amendment Act of 1963. It created retrospective offences for which people could receive the death penalty, it provided for the indefinite detention of political prisoners – the 90-day Law, which was suspended in January 1965 but replaced some months later by the 180-day detention powers – and defined sabotage as almost any illegal action taken to further economic or political changes, and since practically every sort of political activity was by now illegal, a trade unionist trespassing on factory premises or an African taking part in a strike could find himself accused of sabotage.

The International Commission of Jurists condemned the law as 'reducing the liberty of the citizen to a degree not surpassed by the most extreme dictatorship'.

Ninety-day detention inaugurated the official use of torture by the State. Where solitary confinement did not have the desired effect in manufacturing confessions out of prisoners, or forcing them into becoming State witnesses, the Security Police resorted to torture – statue torture [forcing people to stand, often on a brick, for hours or days], use of electric shock treatment, and other forms.

The effect of this and other laws was to cram the jails with political prisoners. The wave of repression was nowhere more cruelly administered than in the Eastern Cape, a stronghold of African National Congress militancy, where, in the space of two years, the Security Police arrested over 1 000 people. Mass arrests, mass trials and the mass dispensation of 'justice' became the order of the day. The State relied for its evidence increasingly on police traps, informers, and the brute extraction of confessions. According to the figures of the Minister of Justice, 3 335 South Africans were detained under various security laws in 1963; according to calculations by a South African newspaper there were, in the period between March 1963 and August 1964, a total of 111 mass political trials in which 1 353 persons were charged. Of these, 44 were sentenced to death and 12 to life imprisonment and 894 to a total of 5 713 years of imprisonment. Among the first casualties of the death penalty for sabotage were Vuyisile Mini, the dockers' leader, and [Wilson] Khayinga and [Zinakhele] Mkaba, who were hanged during 1964.

On 11 June 1963 the police raided the [African National Congress]

underground headquarters in Rivonia, a suburb in Johannesburg, and arrested Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Ahmed Kathrada and others. The prolonged Rivonia Trial of the nine leaders of the African National Congress ended in the conviction of life imprisonment of these men, all now on Robben Island. From the dock Nelson Mandela said:

I admit I was one of the persons who helped to form Umkonto we Sizwe. I do not deny that I planned sabotage. I did not plan it in a spirit of recklessness or because I have any love of violence. I planned it as a result of a calm and sober assessment of the political situation that had arisen after many years of tyranny, exploitation and oppression of my people by the whites.

The events of the early sixties had convinced the African political movement that no possible prospect remained of effecting change in South Africa by peaceful means. Constitutional, parliamentary action has never been open to the African majority. Demonstrations, petitions, massive organisation to prove the representativeness and popular support of the organisations, passive resistance campaigns influenced by Gandhism, uniquely South African-evolved non-violent campaigns, and even the warning shots fired by Umkonto we Sizwe in its selected sabotage action had left the granite wall policy of apartheid and white supremacy rule unyielding and impregnable.

From the time of the first sabotage attacks by Umkonto we Sizwe, young men had been making their way out of the country to enlist for military training with the African National Congress, and to live in military camps beyond the border until the time came for action.

On August 13, 1967, advance units of Umkonto we Sizwe, together with fighters of the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU), opened a new chapter of resistance in southern Africa. Advance units engaged the Rhodesian security forces in fierce fighting at Wankie and in other areas. Three pitched battles that month were followed by sporadic engagement, a steady penetration of guerrilla forces into Rhodesia and towards South Africa, and the opening of a second major assault phase from March 15 this year. The South African *Sunday Times* has admitted that 'the guerrilla campaign is now a full-scale war of attrition'.

The Lusaka communiqué that announced the start of the fighting broadcast

officially the existence of a military alliance between the African National Congress and ZAPU. This sets a precedent in African resistance for there is no other instance of freedom fighters drawn from different territories uniting in a common force. This development was inevitable in southern Africa. South African apartheid is making the border not the Limpopo but the Zambezi (and has aggressive intentions even further afield in a new flowering of South African economic imperialism). As Rhodesia is seen as the front line for South Africa as well as for Rhodesia, South Africa has blatantly intervened in Rhodesia to prop up the Smith regime. It will undoubtedly not think twice about rushing to the aid of Portugal as FRELIMO guerrilla pressure on Mozambique increases. Oliver Tambo, ANC Acting President-General, has said that the joint ANC-ZAPU action was to meet the unified strategy of the unholy alliance of Vorster-Smith-Salazar.

‘We are fighting the same enemy ultimately. Our military cooperation flowed from the political cooperation with which we answered the common repression of white minority governments in the South.’

Mr Tambo has said that a different British policy towards Rhodesia might even have made armed struggle in Rhodesia unnecessary. But in the light of the miserable failure of the sanctions policy and with Rhodesia a South African sphere of influence, the need for armed struggle in Rhodesia has inevitably joined the two fronts of African resistance. The African people of the beleaguered South had had no option but to meet armed repression with armed revolt. Battle in a long and protracted struggle has been joined, with full knowledge that it will cause grim and prolonged suffering, but in the equal knowledge that if apartheid is to be defeated, it will have to be by armed struggle.

AFTER SOWETO: A RESPONSE

Written in response to an article by Archie Mafeje

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Archie Mafeje's 'Soweto and its Aftermath' deals not only with the student struggles in South Africa of the last few years but also with some of the questions which are critical for an evaluation of the tasks of revolutionaries in that country. Whether directly or by implication these questions include:

- the analysis of the character of the student movement and struggle, and the relationship of the student movement to the national and working-class organisation, and by extension, the role of classes, and the class leadership of the revolution;
- the relationship of internal to external forms of organisation;
- the relationship of the armed struggle to political struggles;
- the national revolution and the socialist revolution, that is, notions of two-stage revolution.

An important set of questions. However, although these issues are posed, they are barely confronted and such treatment as they get, where it is not merely superficial, is highly contradictory. The argument also distorts the evidence in some cases, or, alternatively, does not substantiate its assertions. The distortions and omissions are serious precisely because Mafeje is, quite rightly, not content to reflect on the issues of Soweto as part of the struggle's recent history, but he advances propositions for future revolutionary action which he would like all sectors of the movement in South Africa to take seriously.

In this response to his article I do not propose to encompass the issues he raises; these could be the subject of debate in future issues. What I do propose to do is to argue that in the Mafeje article the problems are badly formulated, to the point that they cannot confront the questions they purport to deal with. The article may be examined on two related levels: first, such analysis of social forces as it contains; and secondly, the assessment of the capacity of organised movements to analyse and lead these social forces.

First, what elements of social analysis are present? Correct revolutionary practice, Mafeje argues, is impossible without a guiding theory, a coherent programme and a clear strategy. The South African struggle is a class struggle,

not merely an anti-racist struggle, and it must have a perspective of social transformation. Fine. Mafeje then proceeds to draw certain conclusions about the importance of the working class as the leading class of the revolution, and the limits of student struggle.

Understandably, the importance of the working class is drawn out of the limits of student struggles as demonstrated by the Soweto events: Mafeje argues that the students did not consult the workers in advance; that their tactics were initially to stop the workers physically from going to work rather than to enrol them as conscious partners in the struggle; that not until the beginning of August (some two months after the start of the student upsurge) did the students begin to approach the workers as such. Only very late in the day, then, did the students 'start a dialogue with their worker-brothers in the streets'. This, Mafeje rightly says, opened a new phase in the student struggle. He argues that, based on the account of student spokesmen in Botswana after two months of struggle, the students knew 'where real power lies...but for the problem of organisational methods and tactics'. (An important reserve, but let it rest for the moment.)

I am at one with those, including Mafeje, who argue that this was the most important outcome of the Soweto struggles: the experience in practice, of a generation of young student militants, of the need to forge links between students and workers – and, it should be added, with other forces in struggle. Mafeje contrasts the limits of the student movement to the importance which socialists give to working-class ideology, organisation and action. Students, he says, lack class consciousness. Black Consciousness is a diffuse nationalist ideology. Accordingly, its adherents are 'handicapped ideologically and organisationally'.

Given this evaluation of the relative revolutionary capacity of workers and students, where does Mafeje take his conclusions? Many of the student militants of the Soweto struggle – though a minority, of course – left the country, some to take up scholarships but others to join political movements, especially the ANC, and Mafeje's position is to argue against the current 'co-optation of the rebellious youth' by what he calls variously the older, expatriate or traditional organisations. He criticises both the students who have entered political movements, and also the attempts of these movements to enrol student militants within their ranks and, since he concedes elsewhere in his article that they have an important worker presence, to join them with worker and other organised militants. Suddenly Mafeje's insistence upon

working-class leadership is abandoned; the leading role of the class, and the principal thesis of this argument, vanishes without a trace. Are we then left with these 'ideologically vacuous students', moved by a diffuse nationalism? The militant youth inside South Africa, he says, 'should take seriously the question of ideology, theory and organisation'. But how? In the meantime, if 'the co-optation of peoples' organisations [apparently more than student movements, though the others are not specified] should be condemned', what should these activists do? They should, it seems, wait on the outcome of some rather unspecified and indefinite shifts within and between organisations.

Mafeje pins his thesis to the possible emergence of a 'new left' within existing organisations, though he conceded that much depends on if it emerges, for then there would be 'reason to believe' that there would be changes. Is there a new organisation in the offing? A new alliance? A new grouping within existing movements? On what programme? Mafeje considers in his final paragraph that this is something for 'the critical cadres within the movement rather than for inter-party exchanges'. The reference is so elliptical and vague that it is impossible to evaluate. This means that we are left with little or nothing to go on; and so, unfortunately, are the students. It is one thing to tutor them for their political limitationism, but another thing to virtually freeze their potential for the struggle; is this not a dereliction of revolutionary guidance if ever there were one?

Of course, this strategy of *attentisme* is calculated. It hangs on the necessity, in Mafeje's case, for a break from the established political organisations. For if the first leg of his argument stands on his judgement of workers and students for revolutionary action, the second stands on his evaluation of how the various organisations score by his criteria of judgement.

The trouble is that Mafeje offers only class labels but does not analyse class relations or class struggle. The situation is that the working class, apart from migrants, is not analysed at all despite the assertion that the working class is the leading class of the revolution. This assertion is based on some ever-present revolutionary readiness which merely needs to be set in motion by the 'proper' approach. Hence, as Mafeje argues, in the first phase of Soweto the students, acting as detonators (not his word, but his notion), failed to activate the working class because they had an incorrect approach; but later they opened a dialogue and the workers responded. For all the insistence on

worker leadership of the struggle and on proletarian consciousness, students (or some new left, or militant youth) given the 'correct' policy will activate this class. It is a thoroughly idealist conception.

It is also thoroughly mechanical. Classes are reduced to carriers of preconceived roles. Mafeje has nothing at all to say about the experience of the working class in South Africa in class struggle. And here it is necessary to analyse the condition of the working class as a result of the structural divisions imposed on the class by the ruling class and the State; to analyse the effects of the present-day crisis in South African capital accumulation on the African working class, including the massive increase in unemployment, declining real wages, the increased use of force against the black working class at the same time as the installation of collaborationist machinery in the factories, in an attempt to cultivate reformist options within the class.

Migrant workers get longer treatment because they were enrolled as strike-breakers in Soweto, but the reasons adduced for their role are similarly derived from a thoroughly non-materialist analysis. What is said about the migrants?

- They are Zulu.
- Their families have been left in the Reserves, therefore strike action does not come easily to them.
- Unlike the precipitate urban youth, the migrants' traditions dictate long deliberation before decisions can be taken (shades of romantic anthropology!).
- They are despised in the cities for their lack of sophistication.
- They still have a vested interest in the land.

These are mostly subjectivist explanations for the structural divisions induced within the African working class by State and capital.

They are, of course, part of the argument that migrants should be classed as peasants, not proletarians, and part of Mafeje's advocacy of the Non-European Unity Movement. I must confess I am unsure about who has theorised the migrants simply as workers as Mafeje claims. If the test is the actual organisation of migrants at their peasant base, the evidence points several ways: if the work of the Unity Movement in the Transkei and Northern Natal points to their theoretical grasp, does the African National Congress not likewise qualify by virtue of its part in the struggles of Pondoland, Sekhukhuneland and, even

earlier, the Communist Party in the Zoutpansberg? And what does the 1946 African mine strike, perhaps the greatest proletarian action ever in South Africa, tell about the class action of migrants?

But this is to fall into Mafeje's method of dealing with the question of migrants, and what is missing altogether is any attempt to come to terms with an extremely complex issue of a peasantry which has been semi-proletarianised over an extremely long historical period, so that it spends part of its life cycle in industrial production, and the other in peasant production, though I wonder at the notion of a vested interest in land for this group as a whole. There is no question that the driving historical process is one of proletarianisation, which has produced a workforce confined to the rural areas, and with differing access to means of rural production. The point is that the migrant's consciousness has been shaped by his peasant but also by his proletarian experience, and he has an ideological outlook which necessarily borrows from both. It is not a matter of deciding how peasant or proletarian the migrant is, but of grasping the essence of the condition of the group as it appears, necessarily differently, even for a single migrant, when at the point of industrial production; in segregated bachelor barracks in the urban townships; at home between work spells in the stricken countryside where 'traditional' forms of consultation have been incorporated into the bantustan authority structure; or as a reserve army of labour semi-permanently excluded from both industrial work and access to land. No glib classification, whether as peasant or proletarian, will do.

Here Mafeje is absolutely right: abstract theory apart, it is at the level of strategy that any alliance between workers and peasants must be forged. But deterministic theory necessarily forecloses appropriate strategy. And if the article's first problem is the mechanistic, reductionist use of class categories, a second problem and one intimately connected with the first, moving from an analysis of social forces to political strategy and practice, is the absence of any conception of forms of political struggle for immediate and for longer-term demands, and the relation between these.

Soweto, after all, although it reached unprecedented heights, is in the long tradition of mass struggles in South Africa which began by asserting often fairly minimalist, immediate demands – and precipitately found themselves in full-scale confrontation with the power of the State. It happened in the 1946 mine strike (for ten shillings a day and union recognition); with the

Defiance Campaign of the 1950s (for the repeal of some of the more blatant discriminatory laws); it goes further back still to struggles in the immediate aftermath of World War I; there is no space to enumerate. As Mafeje says, in the course of such struggles, bitter lessons are learnt at the expense of their defeat by State power. (Even so, as in the case of Soweto, it is possible to win victories, and the students' triumphs must not be minimised: their struggles have continued into 1977 and 1978; they have caused the virtual collapse of secondary Bantu education, with almost 200 000 students still boycotting classes in October 1977, 375 schools shut down in the Venda homeland alone, and 475 teachers resigning in response to student demands; and Soweto at the time of writing remains virtually ungovernable.)

But while Mafeje salutes Soweto as a historical event of great significance, his overall handling of the student struggles is nonetheless condescending. This is not, I believe, because what he argues about the limitations of student struggles is incorrect, but rather because this is part of the larger problem of how to assess mass struggles this side of the revolution, and thus the leadership of the masses in the course of actual political practice. Mafeje criticises campaigns of the masses which are 'ideologically and organisationally handicapped', and in this instance he sees the student movement as generally so, in the nature of students, and without 'real revolutionary commitment', lacking a 'guiding ideology, a coherent programme of demands and a clear policy'. The question is: in his view, has any significant mass struggle ever come up to scratch?

For the approach is redolent of the purist, theoreticist reservations which made the 10 Point Programme of the Unity Movement¹ abstractly immaculate, perhaps, but irrelevant to mass struggles, from the Defiance Campaign and before, and onwards to Soweto. And if one is to isolate the theoretical differences between South Africa's various political organisations, it is crucial to identify the revolutionary puritanism which is fluent on important notions of revolution, but which fails to make connections in political practice between immediate demands which mobilise, or more spontaneously ignite mass struggles, and the longer-term programmatic conception of the revolutionary alternative society. The assertion of only maximalist perspectives at the cost of tactics for immediate struggle produces an outlook that is adventurist and quietest at the same time. This revolutionary abstinence from struggles which are not revolutionary enough is no transitory or occasional phenomenon.

It was argued at the time that the Defiance Campaign was ill-conceived for the State was bound to smash it. It was also argued that its programme was for democratic demands which could easily fit into the framework of any capitalist state. The point is, firstly, that they do not fit into the South African framework, and it is from this that the masses grasp revolutionary theory, not merely by reading *The State and Revolution*,² but from their experience of political action, that demands which would be consistent with capitalism elsewhere cannot be met without far-reaching revolutionary societal change. This is part of the essence of the South African case, that it is a capitalist social formation but one without the features of a bourgeois-democratic state precisely because forms of labour coercion, buttressed by race and national oppression, are essential to the processes of accumulation, and the politics of race rule. And secondly, the point about the practice of mass struggles is that revolutionary programmes have to be won not only in the head, but in the streets, townships, factories and countryside, and by engaging in struggle, not abstaining from it because it does not start with a perfected long-term programme.

Which brings us back to the tradition of revolutionary puritanism with its abstract theoreticist reservations and its record of abstinence rather than engagement. And here it must be said that while Mafeje is absolutely right that the Unity Movement does not and cannot claim responsibility for the boycott actions of coloured students in Cape Town, more than this needs to be said: that in these schools, notably Trafalgar, which have been the stronghold of SOYA (Sons of Young Africa), the Anti-CAD [Coloured Affairs Department] and Teachers' League of South Africa (all Unity Movement affiliates), its teacher ideologues argued the limits of Black Consciousness and the student use of the boycott tactic to the point of disassociating from the student struggles. Yet for all the shortcomings of Black Consciousness as an ideology it should be said that it defines coloured as part of the oppressed blacks and offers unprecedented scope for African-coloured-Indian unity in struggle.

To sum up at this point: it seems to me that an approach which uses class categories in mechanistic fashion, and forms of struggle without regard to their structural context, which judges struggles to be reformist because they do not carry complete long-term programmes on their banners, this regardless of any analysis of the content of their actual demands or of the class leadership of such struggles, must invalid itself out of political practice. And while I think that

Mafeje is justifiably critical of the notion of any two-stage revolution (a notion long overdue for rejection, in my view), he is really incapable of countering it. This is because his own misgivings about ongoing mass struggles and their demands 'informed by simple slogans' in fact convey a similar conceptual break. I see Mafeje's approach to so-called reformist and revolutionary struggles as being situated in a very similar category as the two-stage revolution approach. All struggles this side of the revolution are not necessarily reformist; they have to be analysed for their programmatic content, and their class base and leadership, and their significance for mass mobilisation. In the same way, on the two-stage revolution approach, I agree with those who argue against the conception of a revolution having to pass through a national-democratic before a socialist stage. This is because I do not see any such thing as 'pure' national or 'pure' class oppression/exploitation. The national and the class struggle are not part of some natural order of succession, but take place conterminously. This is because workers are exploited as workers and also as members of a nationally oppressed group, and not even their national demands can be met without the destruction of the capitalist order. It is because national demands cannot be met under capitalism that the proletariat is the essential leader of the South African revolution, and the struggle for national liberation, given this political leadership – which has, I agree, to be asserted – will at the same time be part of the struggle for socialism.

Reading and re-reading Mafeje I have been puzzling over the problem of why an article that poses relevant and important things about the South African struggle is at the same time so elusive, confused and inconclusive, especially on the principal issues it appears to want to tackle. Is it not because what purports to be an analytic, programmatic assessment in fact declines into partisan organisational competition? Mafeje opens with a sarcastic sally at those who stake proprietary claims to the Soweto struggles. Like Mafeje I feel strongly about the importance of organisational commitment but I also have a strong distaste for the levels of sectarian rivalry which appropriate mass action merely to confirm a movement's assertion of its own primacy. But it seems to me that Mafeje's method is to reinforce such political proprietorship by lodging competing claims. The result is that an effort to examine the social identity of movements and their organisational form and programmes and strategy is undermined by a partial and incomplete assessment of the available evidence.

One example is the already mentioned selective record we are given on the organisation of migrants and peasant struggles. Another is the notion that only the leaflet issued by the coloured students carried a political line; I found a political line in the ANC 16 July 1976 leaflet; the specifics are not detailed and are clearly a matter for discussion and not foregone conclusion. The selective and incomplete presentation of programmatic material is even more serious. One can no longer evaluate ANC policy merely by the Freedom Charter, which was drawn up in response to the conditions of legal struggle two decades ago. And if one looks at the ANC's Strategy and Tactics document of 1969 important issues are handled: the leading role of the working class, and the relationship between armed and political struggle. Under a section on 'The Working Class', this document speaks of a speedy progression from formal liberation to genuine and lasting emancipation as a result of the actions of the working class and its class consciousness, in its struggle for liberation and socialism.

On armed and political struggle Mafeje is, of course, right on the dangers of militarism, and in the swing from the tactics of the pre- to the post-1961 periods, armed struggle has sometimes been stressed by some propagandists without an elaboration of its continual reliance on all-round political mobilisation. The ANC policy document stresses the dangers: it goes on and on about its explicit rejection of militarist manifestations and says 'when we talk of revolutionary armed struggle we are talking of political struggle by means which include the use of military force. Our movement rejects all manifestations of militarism which separate armed people's struggle from its political context.' The relationship between the two is a difficult and complex matter, requiring not only a recognition of the ever-present need for political struggle but also a movement's capacity to respond to struggles, even those it does not initiate. Mafeje argues a logic of precedence: that sustained political warfare should precede guerrilla warfare; that the best time for insurrection would be 'when the economy is in chaos and the workers are in a high state of preparedness'. It is a view of economic crisis prompting labour action as a necessary precondition for guerrilla action. Again the approach runs the risk of *attentisme*. Must the struggle wait for some deep crisis in the enemy camp which opens the role to immediate all-round insurrection? (Some socialists in many countries have long been waiting for the capitalist crisis to make the revolution for them.) It is a deterministic theory of economic crisis creating

spontaneous revolution. The lessons of the mass struggles of the 1950s were that in the conditions of South Africa, mass political mobilisation, including the organisation of the working class, and principally the latter, cannot advance beyond a certain point without the reinforcement of forms of armed struggle; that movements with a strategy of mass mobilisation have the responsibility to devise accompanying preparations to enable armed militants to defend the struggle from the attacks of the State, and thus to carry it to greater heights. So it is not a matter of sustained political strikes rather than military action; or of the postponement of the guerrilla war until the insurrection, but of their complementarity. The problem of the relation of armed to political struggle is, of course, exceedingly difficult in practice, and is not yet necessarily solved.

The ANC itself has been engaged in the difficult phase of the installation of armed groups and the reconstruction of the underground in the cities as well as in the countryside, and has asserted these two tasks as the pressing imperative to which militants thrown up by all struggles should devote themselves. This is not to say that these are the only tasks of the present stage of the revolution, nor that any single organisational form is adequate to embrace the diverse forms of struggle necessary in South African conditions. I would agree with those who argue that there has been too little creative thinking about the forms of above-ground organisation which are still possible, however precariously so, and the brilliant organisational achievements of the students should prompt a careful study and assimilation of their example.

It is always necessary to rethink the politics and the strategy of the South African struggle. I have responded rather sharply to some of the points in the Mafeje article not out of any appetite for acrimonious exchange, but in order to sharpen issues, and to argue that a heavy responsibility attaches to any proposal for an 'independent Marxist-Leninist party formed within the black liberation movement'. (Why 'black' if class and ideology are the criteria?) Movements under criticism can defend themselves, preferably by the assertion of revolutionary leadership in the struggle. Admittedly there are difficult problems, notably the questions of class and national struggle. I agree that national liberation is not self-defining; African nationalist ideology devoid of class analysis could become the instrument of different classes among the African population. At the same time the assertion of working-class leadership of the liberation struggle is too often reduced to worker-boss struggle, and

such a workerist approach fails to confront the fact that the State carries out the purposes of capital. In this sense the great political strikes of the 1950s, 1960s and again, 1976 – the stay-at-home – were the use of the working-class strike weapon for political demands that challenged the hegemony of State and capital both. Though the urban townships remain the strongholds of this working class, factory industrial organisation of the class has lagged behind: what are the conditions under which this front of the struggle can be conducted?

I also agree that it is important to analyse and identify the class tendencies without a national liberation movement in order to be alert to the influence of a petit-bourgeoisie and its interests. But Mafeje's castigation of petit-bourgeois influence is far too unspecified to deal with at the level at which the accusation is made. Is it that the social origin of leaders and cadres is petit-bourgeois and how far can this pedigree classification be taken? Is it that political demands assert the interests of this stratum; if so, which and in what context? And a similar query: what does it mean that the South African Communist Party is 'historically a white party'? That it was formed on the initiative of white socialists from Europe? Right. That it has consistently been composed of a majority of white members? Wrong. It is true that the Communist Party early had to face the fact of white workers who were co-opted by the ruling class into superintending black labour; after some nasty errors that date from the early 1920s, from the 1930s onwards it turned to organising black workers. What does Mafeje mean when he suggests that it cannot hope to recruit 'black workers who are not short of black leaders'? Are we back with blacks organising blacks; and where are class and ideology now?

Despite my many disagreements, and my regret that in the end some important questions are put but then abandoned by Mafeje, many of the issues he raises need debate, but above all in the course of the struggle. I can't say that I'm surprised at his statement in his penultimate paragraph that the moves towards something new are deadlocked; perhaps the ways in which the issues have been posed are a large part of the problem?

NOTES

- 1 The Unity Movement was a Trotskyist organisation with most members in the Western Cape.
- 2 Lenin wrote the notes for *The State and Revolution* while still in hiding and finished it in August 1917, when the Russian Revolution was, in his words, 'completing the first stage of its development'. He had planned to finish it with an analysis of the Russian Revolution, but in a postscript he says, 'It is more pleasant and useful to go through the experience of revolution than to write about it.'

REVOLUTIONARY PROPAGANDA AT HOME AND ABROAD: DISCUSSION GUIDE NOTE

Two fields for operational purposes

Probably written for the ANC in the late 1970s

Revolutionary propaganda at home and abroad constitutes two distinct fields of operation for practical propaganda purposes, demanding two sets of political analysis, or a single analysis from two vantage points.

We do not conceive of propaganda as a mechanical, technical exercise – though, intrinsically, in these days of advanced communications techniques and mass media, our propaganda, too, must be technically adapted for the purposes it has to serve, of which more later – and plans for propaganda that draw too uncritically on methods used in the past, when different conditions of work obtained, or that are not grounded in sufficiently searching political perspectives, will lead to errors and inadequacy.

The first, and priority, field of work, revolutionary propaganda at home, cannot be planned, let alone executed, without an elaboration of the tasks of reconstructing the movement at home. What are our present, and projected, possibilities of underground political work? What forces are available on the ground at home, and what plans exist, immediate and long term, for augmenting these forces? These organisational details of the cadres working in clandestine, and also in semi-legal, conditions will determine the scope, frequency and nature of the propaganda issued under illegal conditions. Without a knowledge of them, it is difficult to lay detailed plans for propaganda activity. Then, there are the political questions to be answered. Based on our study of (1) the situation at home in the political, economic and social spheres; (2) the work to consolidate the national groups and progressive organisations in the revolution; and (3) the strategy and tactics of the revolutions – all these are papers being prepared for the [forthcoming ANC] conference. We must deal with the following:

- Which are our priority areas for political engagement?
- Which issues, which demands, will mobilise the widest, and particular, sectors of the people?
- Which sectors are we to single out for concentrated political attack: urban

townships (which, specially?); the countryside (which regions, bearing in mind other needs?); industrial workers? secondary school pupils? the subjects of the bantustans, etc., etc. It is crucial not to plan propaganda 'in general' but direct it towards clearly delineated political ends and targets.

- Apart from the task of reconstructing the ANC, what is our policy towards (1) other clandestine activity under other auspices? (2) legal political activity? In what forms?

Revolutionary propaganda abroad, on the other hand, is dependent on a different set of perspectives and tasks within the international solidarity movement. To draft our propaganda, chart our propaganda needs, and devise adequate structures, we must ask ourselves the following questions, among others:

- Does the ANC in its own propaganda convey adequately the new, armed, phase of the struggle?
- Are the existing structures for initiating and coordinating and publicising solidarity activities adequate? How do we see the ANC fitting into these solidarity structures; to what extent should the ANC be active on the solidarity front in its own name, through its own personnel, and through its own propaganda, and to what extent should it work with and through the solidarity movement?
- Should our propaganda be adapted to meet the new phase of the struggle which introduces some element of conflict in our solidarity between those elements in the West that have been anti-apartheid for humanitarian reasons and on moral grounds, and the new upsurge of forces, largely of the youth and students, who have a more radical commitment, whose opposition to apartheid is based on a rejection of imperialism and the capitalist system, and an espousal of popular, and armed, struggle? This conflict between two levels of opposition to apartheid is not necessarily insoluble, but it has as yet been only faintly elaborated, if at all, in our internal discussions. The issue affects the nature of the propaganda of the ANC, and of the solidarity movement generally.
- What of propaganda prepared for the socialist countries?
- What of the African continent, the site of the OAU [Organisation of African Unity], and of strategic areas for the conduct of the armed struggle itself?

These questions may appear to be too broad to be directly relevant to ANC propaganda, but it is impossible to decide even questions of the type of ANC publications and their content without a clear perspective on the above points. So, the two fields will be dealt with separately.

Perspectives and tasks at home

The heights of ANC and Congress Movement propaganda, as expressed in the cluster of Congress-controlled and Congress-supporting newspapers and journals the Movement ran, as well as in the waves of campaign propaganda which characterised the mass struggles of the fifties, were reached in the days of the legality of the ANC, and for a very few years after Sharpeville. Among our heavy casualties in the transition from legal to illegal existence, and from outlawing by the government to unrelenting persecution, was our press. There was a double attack on our press. The one aimed directly at us persecuted our papers and our publications workers, and led to the withdrawal of commercial publishing facilities. Side by side with rapid-fire attacks on our publishing apparatus and personnel, the government introduced rigid censorship-and-registration control, so that it became virtually impossible for any but a financially established and politically acceptable venture to get permission, via official registration, for regular publication. In the period 1962/63 and onwards the only public expression left to the ANC and its allies has been in the heroic counter-accusations of the government made from the dock by our political prisoners, which the established press has been unable to totally ignore, and, in slanted and reduced form, what news has filtered into the South African press of activities and opposition to apartheid abroad.

The transition from legality to illegality has been total in so far as the Congress press is concerned. We retained nothing from the highly productive early period. We were unable to recoup any of our legal publishing apparatus because, at the time, we had a foothold in the official press-registration machinery by virtue of the sustained appearance of our existing publications (*New Age* and *Fighting Talk* were never actually banned, but they lost their registration rights by default of sustained publication), our press personnel were under the same severe attack as other cadres in the Movement, and though secondary levels of direction had been prepared, they, too, came under assault, and no tertiary levels or alternate forms of use of the registration facilities had

been prepared, or came forward. During the same period of repression we were also unable to save the underground printing apparatus that had been established. The levels of clandestine publishing were lost, the one, ranging from a large, technically-sophisticated press to mimeograph machines in the townships owned and operated directly by the Movement, and another indirectly.

Since 1963, then, the publishing scene in South Africa has never been – since the decades of the last century – so dominated by the monolithic big business or government political press and so bare of expression of majority opposition. During the fallow period of the repression one or two small cyclostyled publications made emphatic but brief appearances, as in Cape Town, but publication was not maintained.

There has been a worrying dearth of local attempts, however modest, to give expression to popular opposition. This might be interpreted as a long-continuing confidence that the Movement leadership will organise initiatives when and how it thinks fit. But one of our tasks in the coming period is to break this loyal dependence on and expectation of our central Movement direction and to encourage local initiatives of a widely varying scope and nature.

The ANC, the South African Communist Party, and, to a more limited extent, the SAIC [South African Indian Council] and SACPO [South African Coloured People's Organisation], made a re-entry into the propaganda field at home in the shape of the illegal leaflet distributions of 1967 and 1968. There have been about ten leaflet distributions in all. If each leaflet reached its destination perhaps a few hundred thousand of our people have heard from us directly in the last two years. It is impossible, at this distance, to estimate the quantitative results of the distributions.

The most ambitious of the publications was illustrated cartoon booklets conveying the momentous decision to embark on armed struggle. It was captioned in five languages. The publications were technically advanced and ingeniously designed, and [showed] evidence of sophisticated printing techniques.

After the years of persecution in illegality, the reappearance of the ANC in the shape of these leaflets was of inestimable importance! They were not so much propaganda achievements as organisational coups. 'Here we are,' they proclaimed. 'No persecution can kill the ANC. We are alive and ready

to lead you.’ The leaflets were more than leaflets; they were the symbol of the Movement, not only undefeated, but on the offensive. For each leader in prison, there is another armed with a gun. The impact of these leaflets was not so much in the breadth of circulation but in the fact of their appearance as such.

It is, however, now necessary to advance to further stages. The declaration of war has been made. It is now necessary to adapt our propaganda to its unrelenting persecution on the political front. Our resistance and our liberation are to be achieved through armed struggle. This will be conducted by a people’s fighting force, political militants with guns, who aim to entrench themselves at the heart of resistance struggles within our country. Our people’s fighters will not survive, let alone win, we know full well, without the support of the mass of the people. Our propaganda has therefore to measure up to this awesome task of keeping the fires of resistance burning in times of unprecedented government counter-terror and reprisals. The presence of fighters in the field is the propaganda of the Movement beyond equal. The more action, the more frequent the engagements with the enemy, the more intuitively the propaganda of the South African revolution will do its work.

What of the lean and fallow periods – the times, preparatory to action, as the armed struggle moves homewards and we have the task of preparing the field for our fighters? What type of propaganda constitutes this preparation?

It is important to propagandise the armed struggle in general ‘call to arms’ terms to ready the people. Leaflets distributed by underground methods can do this, but to an extent limited by the size and range of the clandestine base we can build within the country. For operational purposes linked with the effectiveness and the survival of our underground cadres, we should perhaps grade our propaganda in terms of its revolutionary content and, commensurately, the security risks it will invoke. Call-to-arms material, issued in the name of the ANC or its allies, directly advocating armed struggle for the overthrow of the State could, for purposes of this discussion, be called Propaganda Grade A1. It carries an explosive security risk. Its organisers will be security-proof only if this type of propaganda action is carried out in totally ‘sterile’ security conditions, with technical apparatus and personnel isolated from all other levels of political activity and contacts.

This type of propaganda calls for the maximum organisational and security

effort, places the greatest strain on its operators, will reach hardly more than an unselective and symbolic set of targets, but will also score maximum revolutionary impact. It will be the most demanding of our underground reconstruction resources.

This is not the only type of propaganda that can make a revolutionary impact. Our analysis of the South African situation sees oppression, and with it, the demand for revolutionary social change, as endemic in the peculiar system of apartheid exploitation. The condition of the people cries out for change; the nature of the oppressive system makes change impossible except by social revolution. The experience of the people in local and immediate, as well as national and longer-term, struggles daily endorses this. Seemingly localised and even petty grievances of the people demand solutions that must lead to revolutionary change, for issues such as curfew, poll tax, Bantu education, endorsements-out,¹ 'black spot' removals, cut-throat wages, all go to the heart of the system and reform and relief have been proved to be impossible without radical change in the system as a whole. The strength of the ANC lay always in its leadership of local communities on local issues. Side by side with the task of reconstructing the underground apparatus of the Movement, we must devote a large share of our energy and attention to ways and means of reviving forms of political expression and organisation on local, popular grievances. A new generation of cadres must be nurtured, not necessarily, and preferably, for security reasons, not under the direct organisational command and control of the ANC apparatus, but playing a role that our own activists would under existing political conditions.

It might be argued that in these days of armed struggle it is wasteful, even reformist, to expend energies on slow and painstaking campaigns on local issues, and that all available cadres should be directed to propaganda of the Grade A1 priority. This approach will isolate us, build no reserves, and will, ultimately, undermine our chances of victory in the armed struggle.

We must, after all, reckon with a political situation far removed from that reached at the peak of our leadership of mass action. For close on a decade, except to the few and initiated, the ANC has had no visible presence in the country. Nor has there been any national, African political organisation confronting the government on the major issues of the day. There is that ever-burning sense of grievance, but no coherent political expression of it. The age group 16 to 25 in the townships, in the secondary schools, has grown

up without any direct experience of the ANC and its militant leadership and revolutionary alternative. Our heroic reputation is undying, but revolutionary memory is insufficient; an organised presence is needed to devise ways of organisation, means of struggle, and reserves of support in strategic sectors of the society that can survive the severe repression of the present time.

In this phase in which government terror knows no bounds, there is fearful Security Police penetration at all levels of organisation, and popular organisation has been reduced to its most skeletal forms, no type of political organisation is too primitive, no issue too humble for the work of reviving political mobilisation and, through it, political propaganda (not necessarily always in written form).

The exact forms of work must be thrashed out in political discussion by the Movement which will be required to take policy decisions on the revival of forms of legal, or semi-legal, work. Here, tentatively, are some themes for discussion, to open the issue:

- The cadres entrusted with this work and those engaged in reconstructing the underground apparatus must be sealed off, one from the other, in different layers of activity and leadership.
- We should select some areas for pilot preparation and activity, and from experiences carefully gauged and studied, should re-elaborate tasks and methods. Pilot schemes might be an industrial pocket, a rural community, a few secondary schools. In general, key sectors for political attack include some or all of the following:
 - college and university students, the secondary schools;
 - lower levels of the civil service, including teachers, clerks;
 - industrial workers, especially in industries that have traditions of trade union organisation and where white–African wage disparities are particularly glaring;
 - local communities in the bantustans excluded from benefits and from favours by virtue of their adherence to opposition elements within the structure;
 - key ‘operators’ in the townships, like taxi drivers, those who, by virtue of government pass-law terror, live in the ‘shadows’;
 - the endorsed-out, at the lower levels of the employment market, shifted from pillar to post, from urban to rural areas;

- local communities with raging grievances and previous struggle experiences, and commitments to leaders martyred in the struggle;
- Indian and coloured communities being grievously victimised by apartheid.
- At the outset organisational and propaganda steps should be tentative in the extreme. There should be no attempt to set up any national apparatus, or to coordinate activities along clearly recognisable lines from area to area.
- Organising and political mobilisation guidelines should be simple:
 - We must revive the spirit of collective discussion and organisation, not necessarily immediately on directly political issues, but on community issues related, ultimately, to politics.
 - Preliminary work should help clear the field of spies and informers and bring new leadership material to the fore. It must be a testing-time of genuine commitment and must guard the people's sense of security, their need to protect themselves against undue and premature risk and exposure.
 - The first groups might be organised around no more than self-help activities, or on residents' and vigilance committees. The issue is not crucial; the painstaking search for cadres and new styles of work is.
 - The spirit must be one of no collaboration or knuckling under to government oppression and, if we cannot fight today, preparation to fight tomorrow. Meanwhile, if there is need to work government machinery from within, it should be so as to ultimately use it against the government itself. This latter point involves a re-opening of the issue of boycott. Do we confirm or reconsider the policy of boycott of all government machinery like advisory boards and bantustan administrative machinery? (If the decision is to confirm this policy, should we not consider building yet another layer of clandestine cadres within the administration, as a fifth-column?) Are there possibilities for using the labour-machinery of the government as the Spanish underground did to subvert their government's industrial and political establishment?
- In the development of these levels of organisation, our watchwords must be flexibility in methods of work. Except among groups with a convention of written material, like students, school pupils and teachers, there should

be the minimum of written propaganda at the outset. Propaganda does not need to be written, after all. It need also not be overtly agitational. We must use idiom, verbal dexterity, oral tradition, allusions to history and past traditions that the people will understand and will refer to their present condition. Propaganda can be crafty and cunning and can draw on local initiative and tradition. In the period of the worst Chinese repression, in the thirties, China's leading socialist writer used allegory and classical allusion to inspire resistance to the oppressor. We must advise slogans to be passed by word of mouth, that have local meaning, that refer to local issues and experience, and yet are interpreted within a total resistance context.

- This work is semi-legal. All political work in South Africa carries some measure of risk. These cadres will be like icebergs. They will be visible in part, as they go about their daily jobs within the community, but a great part of what they do, and plan, will be beneath water. They will conserve their greater strength and force. Local issues, especially if we select the burning ones, cannot indefinitely be kept on ice, of course, and casualties there will be. Local actions should not be discouraged where this would undermine people's fighting determination. But side by side with the building of nuclei of cadres must go long-term education of the people, conducted in informal, integrated style in the local community, on perspectives for struggle and styles of work.

We could also develop even more legal forms of work, especially in the propaganda field. Once we concentrated on legal propaganda activities and conserved too little for the time of illegality; we must not make the opposite mistake of neglecting legal fields still open, or possible of creation. We could help initiate a magazine for African students and school pupils that would link the country's educational institutions. There would have to be a deliberate attempt to keep down the level of incitement, initially, until it is established, but, once again, survival and political commitment together could afford a valuable exercise in styles of political resistance. A women's magazine could play a similar role. It could, obliquely, under cover of women's and township issues, provide a forum and training ground for new cadres. So could a journal aimed at white students, intellectuals, and professionals, aimed at exploiting the differences within the white camp.

A fault in our propaganda in this period of illegality, and which we must strike away from at all levels, illegal, semi-legal and above board, is its generality and remoteness from contemporary conditions and local peculiarities. We continue to issue material that is impeccable in its general militancy of slogan, but which shows only a very glancing acquaintance with the nuances of special situations. We continue to address the people at large, ignoring great varieties of experience and interest, and commitment. As our work on the ground develops, the general leaflet should more and more give way to the particular appeal, showing intimate knowledge of local conditions and developments, and thus revealing to the people the role they can play in their own situation.

In this period of the revival of political organisation, we must build from the bottom upwards, from the particular to the more general, from the smaller issue to the larger. This should emerge from the points outlined above.

There is also the level of propaganda work directed inside the country from outside which I shall categorise as Grade B methods, and which at present revolve principally around the radio broadcasts beamed home. This is a propaganda resource of inestimable value, but seems to rate far too low a priority in our attention at present. We must develop two aspects.

- We must fire people's imaginations and help them develop their resources for this medium of propaganda. Indian traders, especially in the countryside, could be enrolled in the drive to import short wave models if these are not already in profuse supply. The time and wavelengths of the broadcasts must be spread by word of mouth, or publicly. We must do careful listener-research.
- We must develop our programmes so that they become our most powerful single sustained propaganda voice – and a very economic one too, considering the costs, not to speak of security risks, of reaching similar-sized audiences any other way. In general, the broadcasts seem to suffer from two, related faults:
 - They are too general, too unvaried, too didactic.
 - There is insufficient feedback from home. Somehow a system of news-gathering of home-contact must be developed so that, spasmodically at first and then more regularly, we show through our programme contents that we have intimate touch with what is going on among the people of our country.

Extra personnel have probably to be drafted to this propaganda field. Until they are, it will be difficult to strike away from the repetitious 'lecture-style' programmes, to introduce live, even hot reporting (based not only on material filtered out of our country, but also material processed outside, to show the spirit and the substance of related struggles and political events central to ours). The broadcasts could fire the youth as few other media [can]. A resistance network could grow of illicit listeners-in. Our voice on the air could not only break into the imposed political vacuum with directly political calls to action, but educational-political-cultural material could convey the perspectives and content of struggle of popular forces all over the world which South African censorship and education systems are calculated to black out.

In this grade of propaganda directed from outside within, a wide range of other methods and auspices for indirectly political education could be considered. For the most part they would be dependent on auspices and finance. They would be particularly important for the generations of school age.

Propaganda for international solidarity action

It is impossible to discuss and make proposals for revolutionary propaganda abroad without a scrutiny of our solidarity objectives, work and apparatus. ANC propaganda has been far too generally conceived, without considering what its special tasks are, in relation to other efforts in the international field. The ANC structure has been overstretched in the solidarity field with consequent strain on resources in other fields, just because of the vagueness of our general political perceptions of solidarity work.

There is no doubt that in the course of the last few years there has been a loss of priority in our allocation of resources between the needs of home and abroad. The balance must, and will, no doubt, be corrected. The danger is that in the correction of the imbalance, the axis will swing too far from the other pole, namely the strengthening of the solidarity fronts and the impact the ANC makes in the outside world. Strengthening does not mean enlarging, or allocating extra personnel. It does mean more effective structuring and clearer political purpose.

While it is true that disproportionate efforts have been devoted to solidarity work, it must also be pointed out that resources have in large measure been wasted. Compared with the numbers of persons on solidarity work, and even

propaganda work, the results have been minimal, sometimes even counter-productive. One of the effects of an over-allocation of personnel to the solidarity front has been a profusion of committees and effort, a tangle of organisational machinery in which discussion, decision-making and consultation have been duplicated to the point of waste. This refers mostly to propaganda work within the ANC, and to solidarity work in Britain with the result that:

- such ANC propaganda is duplicated;
- attention is badly underpaid to key areas in Europe, the United States and Africa.

Special solidarity machinery has been built – as must be done for effective solidarity work in a national situation and yet at the same time the Congress organisational machine has been drawn at all levels into participation in this solidarity work. Yet when a close look is taken of the state of solidarity work, a criticism that emerges inevitably is that the Congress itself has too vague and amorphous a presence, and for all the personnel sitting here, there and everywhere on committees, it does not itself make a direct enough impact on solidarity work. This is largely because:

- the machinery for integrating solidarity activities in the Congress is inadequate;
- there is a vague and muzzy notion about the role of the ANC office and organisation in a national situation, say Britain; and
- a great deal of our effort, especially in the field of propaganda, is ‘incestuous’, direct to our members, our immediate supporters, the already-persuaded and the needs of our membership and the general public are not clearly delineated in the planning of ANC propaganda.

In Britain, especially, where, outside of Africa, most are Congress personnel [and where] most solidarity work is done, the Congress must decide explicitly what its functions are, by category and importance, for the allocation of personnel and the preparation of its propaganda. Several categories of work come to mind:

- domestic organisation and consolidation of membership (general members’ activity, women’s and youth sections, etc., etc.);
- solidarity work and how best the work of ANC members can be integrated with the other activities in that field;

- fund-raising from internal and solidarity support;
- diplomatic and government contacts.

The big question is: how, on a coordinating and an individual membership level, should the ANC organise its solidarity work so as to preserve its own independence of action, inspire solidarity work at the same time, and yet not duplicate the tasks for which special solidarity apparatus has been built?

This is general background, not strictly related to propaganda as such, but contributes to the general weaknesses of our work in propaganda and other spheres. Some of the vagueness, and stumbling-over-our-own feet, is best illustrated in the field of propaganda.

Most of the publishing and propaganda done directly by the ANC, directed to its own membership or to a wider audience, is of the 'old' type of propaganda. This means it is devoted to exposing the evils of apartheid, and is not linked with and does not always directly project, certainly not in sufficient strength, the armed phase of the struggle. (Though *Sechaba* has, of late, begun to remedy this deficiency.)

There does not appear to be a clear enough definition of the different editorial purposes of *Mayibuye*, *Spotlight* and *Sechaba*. *Spotlight* seems to be largely a publication for keeping members who have not, presumably, other sources, in touch with South African news developments, and also carries some ANC editorial comment, generally of a rhetorical nature; *Mayibuye* is less second-hand in terms of sources, but even more aimed at the initiated members of the inner, committed circle.

Sechaba started by preaching the old moral case against apartheid and being, very often, indistinguishable from the publications of non-ANC and solidarity-type movements, but of late has begun to carry good material relating directly to the armed struggle and our allies in southern Africa.

Can we talk to ourselves (membership) and the wider audience in the same material? What should ANC propaganda concentrate on and which are its most important audiences? Clearly, no one else can speak to its membership. But is it necessary, in keeping members in touch with events, for the ANC itself to duplicate the general propaganda which is produced by the solidarity movement? The latter has been built to:

- project the general picture of apartheid repression and news of the struggle;
- appeal for solidarity action in specific national situations.

Why should the ANC have to repeat the [general] picture? There might be variations in the treatment of the nature of apartheid evils in, say, *Anti-Apartheid News*, and *Spotlight*, *Mayibuye* and *Sechaba*, but the variations are not all that great, and we could put up with the minor failings in the interests of saving our resources for the propaganda work that no one but the ANC can do.

What should the ANC be saying that nobody else can? It must project the strategy and the dynamic of its struggle, elaborate its policy as the revolutionary alternative in South Africa. It must publish in full documents issued by the ANC itself (i.e. to international conferences, etc.) which will not get such coverage elsewhere. Ditto policy statements and press releases. Ditto, above all, battle communiqués. We need more analytical material discussing our struggle and our policy elaborations. Above all the ANC must publicise the present phase of the struggle in a way that has been done far from adequately. We have produced as yet no single booklet on the armed phase which can catch the spirit of revolution in the Third World, or of the generation growing in the capitalist West that looks for a revolutionary break with the capitalist and imperialist systems. We have taken it for granted that this, in the nature of our struggle, is what we advocate. It is not transparently clear to outsiders. This does not mean a great welter of publications, but it means one or two specially devised for situations where solidarity action for the struggle is crucial, and where a distorted image of the ANC lingers on and is fostered by our enemies.

Some conclusions emerge

- The ANC should not in its publications duplicate the material that the solidarity movement can itself issue. It has to concentrate on two functions:
 - to keep in touch with members – outside the country, mainly, for these purposes; and
 - to project its struggle to the outside world and demand maximum solidarity actions.
- Duplication should be eliminated. It is costly, and confusing. *Sechaba* should be developed as the ANC's official publication and it should develop the more analytical type of argument as well as the reportage-discussion on the armed struggle. It should eliminate, gradually if not immediately, the general apartheid description.

- If a members' newsletter is needed, *Mayibuye* and *Spotlight* should be combined for this purpose. It would serve students studying abroad and general contacts lists. If changing or closing down one or other of the above ANC publications means members and certain circles of contacts in certain countries will fall out of touch, then an organisational arrangement could be made for them to receive the most suitable of the solidarity publications.
- When it comes to its material, the ANC must process less and less of this itself, and must siphon more outwards, rapidly and in professional-type form, for use in the solidarity movement, and directly to the mass media. Ten minutes on television or four inches in a national daily makes more impact than several costly editions of a journal published by ourselves. One skilled ANC publications press officer will achieve more than does massive amounts of money and personnel producing general publicity material. So, the ANC must conserve its publishing efforts: disseminate more, but leave the handling of production lines to others.
- The ANC must also rationalise its processing methods. Lusaka should be not so much a production centre and printing press as a release centre. It is postally remote and therefore costly as a supply centre. Other centres also have better developed processing and printing techniques.
- When it comes to types of solidarity action, the ANC will have projected its own policy, course and methods, and solidarity action must be hammered out within solidarity movements within national situations. (With provision, of course, for top-level consultation and coordinating machinery, which is dealt with in the Discussion Document of the Congress group.) This will in some measure reconcile the conflict referred to earlier between different levels of support roused by our condition and our struggle.
- Only in these ways will the ANC find it possible to conserve personnel for more urgent tasks of internal reconstruction. Clearer sets of priorities will also produce better results within the ANC capacity for propaganda, which will in turn be projected into improved solidarity propaganda.

On the African continent, there is need for sharpening the ANC's propaganda presence. South Africa's economic penetration northwards into independent African countries is clearly related to a long-term strategy of defusing the opposition to apartheid in the rest of Africa. We must discover how South

African economic, financial, trade and investment policies fit into this strategy and devise a campaign on this issue among African states with a view to:

- strengthening overall OAU policy;
- building reserves of support for our struggle in the more committed states, and among forces within less committed states that could help change their own national policies.

Some of these matters require further elaboration, but they are submitted as guidelines for discussion on this topic.

NOTE

- 1 Under Group Areas and bantustan removals, people of the 'wrong' colour were endorsed out of the cities or areas in which they lived.

THE GOLD OF MIGRANT LABOUR

The Gold of Migrant Labour, *Spearhead* (May–June 1962)

The days when each country in Africa was an island are over and few know this better than South Africa's vast and wealthy gold mining industry.

Migrant labour for the Union's mines – long the flywheel of Union 'Native policy' – is today being drawn not only from the Union, but from nine countries in southern and Central Africa, reaching as far north as Tanganyika.

The Witwatersrand has become the capital of an economic empire which is influenced by events and policy not only in Cape Town, Pretoria and Windhoek, but also in Maseru and Lobatsi, Luanda and Lisbon, Salisbury, Blantyre and Lusaka.

Of a labour force of 432 234 African workers *recruited* in 1959 by the Chamber of Mines, only 182 561 came from the Union; 58 per cent (a total of 249 673 men) came from territories over which the Union has no direct political control.

Of the Africans *employed* during 1959, only 35.2 per cent, or roughly one in three, came from the Union; and 64.8 per cent of the African labour force came from other countries in Africa.

In 1958, 19 per cent, or *one man in five* working on the gold mines, came from Africa's tropical areas (Angola, Northern Bechuanaland, Nyasaland, Tanganyika); and it is of key significance that the proportion of miners drawn from the heart of Central Africa has risen sharply year by year.

In 1941, the first year that the annual reports of the Chamber of Mines list 'tropical areas' as a separate source of labour, only 26 067 workers came from these areas. By 1959 the figure was near 70 000 and it probably rose another 10 000 in 1960. By agreement between the Chamber of Mines and the Nyasaland government, from Nyasaland alone there was a target of 20 000 to be recruited for the mines last year.

The preoccupation of South African politicians with the white man's 'civilising mission' in Africa is thus really the need for a common 'Native policy' as far north as possible, and arises from the ever closer identity of interest in matters of labour supply and control between the Union, Portuguese colonies in Africa, and the Central African Federation. The future of Federation; an African majority in the Nyasaland Legislative Council; Nyerere leadership of

a Tanganyika approaching self-rule: these are all matters of vital interest to the mining houses dominating Hollard Street and the lower ends of Commissioner and Main streets in Johannesburg.

Ominous indeed to the mining empire are the giant strides towards independence and African self-rule being taken by East Pan-African unity and solidarity with the non-white people of South Africa. For the mines are about to see gains, earnestly striven for since the end of World War II, snatched from their grasp by events in Africa during the next handful of years.

Even before the Boer War [South African War] at the turn of the century, the mines tried to extend their labour recruiting areas to West Africa, to India, Italy and Armenia, even to the West Indies, and the chronic labour shortage of this period resulted in the ill-fated scheme for the importation of Chinese labour.

Successive governments and commissions grappled with the ever-present shortage of cheap labour. A 1929 user departmental report said there was 'insufficient native labour in the Union', and the 1931 Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA) report hoped that the government would 'move in permitting native labour for the mines to be drawn from fields further afield than the present limit'.

In 1951 the mines estimated they were short of 70 000 workers, and in 1953 were 15 per cent below their labour capacity. The shortage began almost immediately after the Second World War, but was aggravated by the development of the new Free State mines, the fillip given to existing mines by uranium development and the expansion of secondary industry in the Union.

As recently as 1953 the Chairman of Anglo-American, the late Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, issued a warning for the future of the producing mines if the African labour shortage was not overcome.

Only during the middle fifties has the labour supply at last been found to be adequate. In 1955 the Colonial Secretary of Mauritius enquired whether WNLA was still interested in a supply of Native labour from the island. The official was advised that 'as the Native labour position of the mines had changed, no further action was intended by the Association for the time being'.

It was with the establishment – its headquarters in Salisbury – of the Tropical Areas Administration of the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association, the labour organisation of the Chamber of Mines, that the picture started to change.

Over the last 21 years the mines have been on an extensive, and, on the whole, unpublicised, venture into the interior of southern and Central Africa. Africa has been opened up anew by 200 labour engagement stations. Top security labour treaties with other states have been concluded. International Labour Organisation Covenants on migratory and forced labour have been carefully studied and recruiting practices adapted to skirt round international labour control provision.

By 1952 the General Manager of the WNLA Tropical Areas Administration could write that there was an ever-growing reservoir of African labour for the mines and that:

the total population of the countries north of latitude 22 degrees south, excluding territories north of Angola and Tanganyika, is now more than 20 million, of whom about one-fifth are male adults physically fit for work.¹

An inviting picture – for the labour recruiter – of the new Africa; but even in this article on the triumphant outcome of the scramble for labour in Africa, the note of panic sounds:

As the Natives become more conscious of the advantages of wage-earnings there must be far more than enough surplus labour to supply the needs of the gold mines, provided – and *this is an essential provision* [my italics] – that no government or administrative restrictions are placed on the free choice by the Native of the employment he desires, in other words, provided he be allowed the elementary right of selling his labour in the best market available to him.

For, even as the labour appetite of the mines at last seems sated, three continent-wide pressures are starting to undo the years of careful negotiation and planning by the labour recruiting organisations of the Chamber of Mines. Colonial governments are giving place to African governments by no means willing to inherit the labour agreements concluded with other countries and agencies under the old order. African independence must at least get to grips with the problem of poverty and economic underdevelopment; and, inevitably, the system of migrant labour must come under fire. Thirdly, the continent-wide antagonism to South Africa's apartheid rule is speeding up the boycott movement against the Union, and already items on the boycott list in East and

Central Africa will include not only canned goods and mining equipment, hoes, sherries and shark fins, but African labour.

Johannesburg's Hollard Street Stock Exchange could not have liked the sound of the first All-African Peoples Conference resolution which, in December 1958, called on the Rhodesias and Nyasaland to withhold their labour from the South African mines and to divert such labour to the development of their own countries, both as part of the economic boycott of South Africa and as an essential measure to put a stop to the disruption of family life in Central Africa. If the mines hoped that the resolution would remain pious, they must have reacted sharply to the Tanganyika government announcement in October 1960 that it would end the agreement signed in 1959 by the British colonial government and WNLA under which government facilities are used for the recruitment of African labour for the South African mines. The agreement ended this March, just when the Tanganyika labour quota was due to reach the record figure of 12 000.

For too long in South Africa, 'Native policy' has been based on the maxim that what is good for the gold mines must be good for South Africa. The Chamber of Mines will have a great deal more difficulty in trying to persuade the continent of the 1960s that what is good for the Union's thriving gold mines must be good for Africa as a whole.

The glossy publications that specialise in idyllic pictures of the mining industry boast that employment on the Witwatersrand gold mines is 'one of the greatest civilising factors' in the whole field of African labour. The gold mines 'have established themselves as a magnet that attracts for employment Africans from Central Africa because the system of migratory labour is particularly suitable for them'. Here they learn the habits of regular work, of cleanliness, first aid and hygiene – to glean a few phrases from the Chamber of Mines glossies. Here 'mining employment cushions the impact of Western industrial society upon the tribesmen brought into contact with the white man's way of life'.²

The mines have always possessed the marvellous facility for believing that their own self-interest coincides with the general good. For 24 years they have posed as South Africa's fairy godmothers. Men were to be recruited for the mines so that the 'civilising habit of labour' could be inculcated into them. (Profits were a factor too, of course, but not advertised as such in public.)

It has been said that the wealth of the Reef gold mines lies not in the richness of the strike but in the low costs of production, kept down by the abundance of cheap labour. The Transvaal mines have been the world's richest source of gold (61.9 per cent of the world's supply); but to make the mines pay, enormous quantities of ore have had to be processed. There have been few limits to the amount of gold mined from even low-grade ore, as long as a continuous stream of cheap labour could be kept flowing. So, from the start, the mines have had to find not only abundant supplies of labour, but labour that was cheap. These two rather incompatible aims were achieved in two main ways. The first was to use only contracted migrant labour at cut-throat wages on the assumption that African mineworkers – brought from their rural homes to the Reef for stipulated contract periods – were really peasants, able to subsidise mine wages from the land. The second was to achieve a labour recruiting monopoly and to reduce costs of wages, food and quarters by setting up a highly centralised system for controlling wages. These methods have been preserved intact to this day.

In 1889, only three years after the discovery of uniform banked deposits with cheap coal nearby, the Witwatersrand – later the Transvaal – Chamber of Mines was formed. By 1896 the Chamber had got the mines to conclude an agreement on minimum and maximum pay, hours and rations, and to secure labour recruiting privileges in Portuguese East Africa. A Native Labour Supply Association was early at work trying to recruit and propagandise the mines among the chiefs. The labour supply rose from 14 000 in 1866 to 97 800 in 1899, workers coming from the Union, but large numbers also from Portuguese East Africa. Yet the demand for labour was never satisfied, due chiefly to the bad conditions, wage reductions (from 1890 to 1898), and recruiting abuses. The 1890s saw attempts to induce Transvaal Africans to work for wages; increased taxes, among them a special labour tax; laws against squatting; and persistent approaches by the Chamber of Mines to the Transvaal Volksraad for the tightening up of the pass laws.

The Boer War in 1899 brought a stop to most Reef mining, and 96 000 Africans on the mines dispersed to their homes. From 1901 mining slowly restarted; but labour returned very slowly, and by 1904 only some 70 000 men were back at work. The Transvaal Labour Commission estimated the labour shortage at over 300 000 and concluded that not only South Africa but even Africa did not contain enough labour!

Except for those from the Transvaal, Union Africans were comparative latecomers to the mines, and only after Union in 1910 was an African labour force on an appreciable scale recruited from the Cape, the Free State and Natal. Year by year, as land congestion in the Reserves got worse and soil deteriorated, Africans were forced to go into 'white' labour areas to make up the deficit between their needs and crop production.

Throughout the years of the greatest labour shortage the mines continued to take steps to get labour as quickly and cheaply as possible, but without altering their system. Past dividends were being paid in those early years, in some cases at 100 per cent; but though the WNLA came under fire from some quarters for its recruiting abuses, its labour monopoly, its wage policy and compound conditions, rather than put its own house in order and raise wages to attract a more established force, it started even then to cast its eyes beyond the Union's borders, convinced – like Rhodes – that its labour hinterland lay northwards.

Despite Lord Milner's efforts, the British government refused the WNLA permission to recruit in Kenya and Uganda. An experiment in 1903 – to bring 1 000 Nyasas to the Reef after a drought – failed. Some Damara labour was brought in from German South West Africa. It was even suggested that American or West Indian labour be imported; but when it was pointed out that the former would demand better conditions and might 'play some political part in holding that the Blacks are the equal of the White',³ this plan was hastily dropped. Feelers were thrown out to Madagascar, Somaliland and the Congo, but no labour was forthcoming. The years 1904 to 1910 were those of the Chinese experiment that misfired.

Only Portuguese East Africa saved these early years for the mines. The earliest WNLA records show that in January 1903, 88.9 per cent of the African miners were East Coasters. By 1922 the East Coasters had dropped to 40 per cent, and by 1958 to 26 per cent of the labour force. But – though the percentage of East Coasters has dropped as the mines have found other steady sources of labour – year after year since the last century the Portuguese recruits have flowed underground to reap the gold of the Reef.

A close brotherhood between the Union and Mozambique governments has been sealed by generations of migrant labour, who have supplied the backbone of the mining industry. Early Chamber attempts to centralise

recruiting of workers and obtain a labour monopoly were not as successful in the Union as over the border in Mozambique where – Professor Duffy records in his *Portuguese Africa* – ‘according to the report of the Rand Native Labour Association, the services of every Labour Agent in Portuguese territory whose opposition was of any moment was secured at a cost which did not materially affect the price of natives landed in these fields’. From 1904 the mines drew anything from 60 000 to 115 000 Africans from Mozambique annually, with the peak being reached in 1928/29.

1928 was the year of the Mozambique Convention which followed on the pre- and post-Boer War labour arrangements and the 1909 Convention between the Transvaal Republican and Portuguese East African governments. The 1928 Convention was revised and ratified in 1934, 1936, 1940 and 1952. It records the sordid deal between the two governments of the Union and Mozambique by which – in exchange for the sole right of the Chamber of Mines to recruit an annual contingent of contract workers – the South African government guarantees that 47.5 per cent of seaborne import traffic to the Reef will go through Lorenzo Marques harbour.

Part One of the Convention fixes the maximum number of Mozambique Africans to be recruited, and the guaranteed minimum. It lays down recruiting and working conditions, provides for the payment to the Portuguese government of registration, engagement and monthly fees for each recruit, and regularises the deferred pay system and the compulsory repatriation of recruits at the end of their contract periods.

Part Two of the Convention deals with railway traffic and rates, and Part Three with customs matters.

In 1940, in an extension of this barter of humans for port traffic, the South African government agreed to export 340 000 cases of citrus each year through Lorenzo Marques, while the maximum number of recruits was raised from 90 000 to 100 000. The present maximum quota is still 100 000 recruits.

From Portuguese East Africa the mines get a contingent of labour that could not be bettered for regularity, that can be shunted to the worst and most unpopular mines, that remains on the mines for longer contract periods than any other group of workers. In return, Lorenzo Marques has found a place on the map as an important port. Mozambique itself gets steady revenue from contract, passport and recruiting fees (44s. p.a. for each African recruited);

operates tax collecting posts on the mines; and has benefited from wages earned on the mines but spent as deferred pay in the territory.

The East Coaster signs on for a minimum work period of 12 months or 313 shifts. At the end of this contract, he may renew it for a further six months. After that he must be repatriated, but may sign on again as a recruit after six months have elapsed. On the average the East Coaster signs on for five to six contracts. After 10 to 12 years his working life as a miner is over.

The Chamber of Mines and the Union government deny with horror any suggestion that there is compulsion in labour recruiting for the mines. Workers are not recruits, but volunteers, they insist.

Marvin Harris⁴ describes how, caught in the vice of the Mozambique labour code which permits no African to be 'idle', the African escapes to the mine recruiter in order to evade conscription as a *shibalo* or forced worker. When the hunt for *shibalos* is on in a particular district, the WNLA recruiting post is deluged by Africans anxious to sign on for the mines.

It is said that the days are now over when labour agents beat the bush for recruits, and chiefs were coerced or bribed to deliver a quota of young men to the mines. Lord Hailey, however, quoted by the 1953 International Labour Organisation Report on Forced Labour, says cautiously:

Though of course the Union cannot be held directly responsible for the fact, it is generally believed that recruitment in Portuguese areas has involved some element of compulsion, though its exact degree is not easy to determine.

Apart from the annual labour quota from southern Mozambique, more and more Africans from the north of the territory, or Portuguese Niassa, have been coming to work on the mines since the opening of the rich Free State goldfields. Mozambique between latitude 22° south and the Zambezi River is outside the recruiting sphere of the WNLA, and officially the Portuguese authorities do not encourage a labour exodus from this area. Yet it is estimated that 12 000 men make their way to the mines from Portuguese Niassa each year. If the WNLA has no offices in this territory, other recruiting organisations manifestly have. Or the recruit crosses over the border into Nyasaland and signs on at an engagement station there.

A Portuguese worker not signed on by the WNLA under the Mozambique

Convention is a prohibited immigrant in the Union and liable to criminal prosecution and deportation. But once he travels south – whether he makes his own way or his transport is arranged by a labour recruiting organisation – he will be issued with a Portuguese passport at the Ressano Garcia depot of the WNLA, and will fall under the authority of the Portuguese Labour Curator stationed in the Union.

The Protectorates

Whatever their formal constitutional status – and in recent years Basutoland in particular has been striding towards independence – the three British Protectorates in southern Africa, by virtue of their heavy labour exports each year, remain in large measure economic dependencies of the Union.

The 1953 Report on Basutoland, issued by the Commonwealth Relations Office, confesses that:

apart from employment in the government service, or at trading stores, printing works of the Paris Evangelic Mission and Roman Catholic church, there is little work to be found in the territory. It is therefore necessary for the Basuto to leave the territory to work in the Union of South Africa.

It is estimated that about 43 per cent of the adult male population is temporarily absent from Basutoland at any one time. This is labour not only on the gold mines, but recruited for work on coal, diamond and manganese mines and on farms. Recruited Basuto mine labour has jumped from the figure of 55 066 in 1957 to 65 249 in 1958 and 71 694 in 1959. (The Native Recruiting Corporation [NRC] of the Chamber of Mines has head offices in Maseru and branch offices throughout the territory which have labour contracts attested by government officials. The Agent of the High Commission Territories who deals with Protectorate Labour now has offices in the new Free State goldfields.)

In deferred pay and remittances, the labour agencies paid out £655 000 in Basutoland during 1958. In the same year the recruiting agencies paid £60 000 to the government for tax due by recruits and recoverable from them in instalments, as well as some £20 000 in attestation fees.

From Bechuanaland the Native Recruiting Corporation and the WNLA recruited 19 306 men to work on the mines in 1959. In 1948 the figure was

only 9 821. On departure from Bechuanaland, the labourer is debited by the recruiting agency with a sum of £2 for Native Tax and £1 a year for Graded Tax. The total of £3 is paid to the government forthwith and recovered later in instalments from the labourer's earnings. In this way the government is assured of an annual tax revenue from mine labour of some £55 000.

Swaziland is the smallest but also the wealthiest of the three Protectorates. This country's peak figure for mine labour was 9 175 in 1959.

Like the recruits from Mozambique, Protectorate labour has been flowing steadily into the mines for most of the century. Together these three Protectorates, on which successive South African governments have cast such greedy eyes, provide one in five of the men who dig out South Africa's gold.

South West Africa

In 1943 the WNLA had discussions with the South West African authorities 'for the engagement of surplus natives in SWA'. Two years later an agreement had been signed for the recruitment of men, labour rest camps had been built and a new road cut from Grootfontein to the Bechuanaland border. By 1947 the annual SWA recruiting quota had been fixed at 3 000, and no more recent figures are available. The WNLA does not publish separate figures for SWA labour recruited (here following in the footsteps of the Union government, which has illegally annexed South West [Africa] into the Union, treating it as a fifth province). Today's figure is no doubt higher than the 1947 quota; while, in addition, Africans from the north are making their way through the Okavango Native Territory and are being recruited at Mohembo in Bechuanaland.

During the 1960 South African parliamentary session, the Minister of Mines was asked how many Africans from SWA were employed on the gold mines. He blandly replied: 'No organised recruiting is being undertaken in South West Africa, and the information is therefore not available.' Even the reports of the WNLA, scary and secretive as they are, do not bear out this statement.

Tropical Africa

The careful statistics of the gold mining industry conceal as much as they tell. The WNLA's 1959 territorial analysis of Africans employed at the mines shows that 19.76 per cent were drawn from the tropical areas of Central Africa, and the figure probably reached the all-time record of 80 000 during 1960.

Nowhere, however, do the WNLA reports stipulate which these tropical areas are. Even when asked, the Chamber of Mines was not prepared to supply a breakdown of the figures.

The number of Tropical Africans is regulated by the WNLA and the governments concerned; but again, the WNLA will not release details of the labour agreements or the quotas fixed for Nyasaland, Tanganyika, Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Northern Bechuanaland. The agreements are confidential, a Chamber official told the writer, 'because they involve foreign governments'.

It does emerge, however, that it was after a 1938 conference with the governors of Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland that the WNLA was given recruiting facilities in these territories. In that year the number of Tropical Africans brought to the gold mines was only 15 405.

Once the WNLA could promote its own recruiting bodies within these countries there was no limit to its scale of expansion.

Thirteen hundred miles of special WNLA roads have been cut into Bechuanaland; motor barges ply the Zambezi and the rivers of Barotseland. The Eastern Caprivi strip – running from South West Africa to Northern Rhodesia and dividing Bechuanaland from Angola – is preserved as a game reserve, but the WNLA obtained permission from the Union government to cut a private WNLA road through the strip, on which no transport is allowed other than WNLA vehicles on WNLA permits.

In Nyasaland a network of labour recruiting stations and sub-stations has been established at Dowa, Mlangeni, Dedza, Salima, Fort Manning and Mzimba. Extensive airlifting of recruits is now undertaken, and WNLA operates its own fleet of planes.

Nyasaland has for many years contributed substantially to the labour force of the Union and the Rhodesias, but the WNLA is the only Union agency permitted to recruit men for work in South Africa. Unless they are contract workers on the mines – or the farms to which 'illegal' immigrants are sent – Nyasa and, indeed, all non-Union Africans are prohibited entrance to the Union and, if arrested, are liable to imprisonment and deportation.

During 1957 WNLA was allowed a quota of 16 000 Nyasa recruits (more than double the quota of three years earlier); by 1959, it had recruited 19 985 men and had had the 1960 quota fixed at 20 000.

In Northern Rhodesia, Barotseland is the most fertile labour recruiting region for the mines. During 1958 the WNLA recruited 5 125 Africans from Northern Rhodesia.

Some labour also comes from Angola, but no figures are available.

Whereas the earliest Rand experiments with Tropical workers had to be discontinued because of the disastrously high mortality rate, WNLA was able by July 1953 – a year of happy coincidence, for from this time the Free State developed rapidly and needed to suck in great quantities of labour – to reduce the acclimatisation period for Tropical new recruits from 26 days to eight.

An analysis of labour supply trends over several decades shows that from 1930 to the present day the Transvaal recruiting figures have remained remarkably constant in the 20 000 to 30 000 region; the Cape Reserves – at 133 359 men recruited in 1959 – is back to the good years of 1936 and 1939, but not yet at the peak years of 1940 and 1941; the Mozambique quota, controlled by Convention, is the most constant of all; and the increased flow of labour needed since the opening of the Reef State Mines has come from the Protectorates and the tropical areas.

The opening up of Africa by the Chamber of Mines has not been without its problems. Evidence by the Gold Producers' Committee to the 1947 Native Laws Commission of Enquiry recorded the plant of the Chamber of Mines [as saying] that: 'In the four most important areas – Angola, Tanganyika, Southern Rhodesia and Portuguese East Africa north of latitude 22° south – the WNLA is not permitted to open stations or do anything to encourage the Natives to come out for engagement.'

Somehow or another, between 1947 and 1957, the WNLA managed to circumvent these difficulties. Some labour, like that from Portuguese Niassa mentioned earlier, filters south to be signed on at recognised engagement stations; Angola is a closed book – unless one has access to the Chamber's working records.

Even in Tanganyika, where labour legislation is based on International Labour Organisation Conventions and Recommendations, and not only recruitment but even defined wages are illegal, the Chamber managed to conclude an agreement with the Tanganyika government for the opening of the Tukuyu depot on April 1, 1959. The labour quota for this country was fixed at 11 000 for 1960 and raised to 12 000 for 1961, but the flow is to be abruptly cut

off by Nyerere's Tanganyika African National Union, in response to the Accra Conference call to stop the supply of labour to South Africa.

Explaining the opening of the Tukuyu depot, the WNLA claimed that here 'Africans offer themselves for work and are not recruited'. In Tanganyika particularly, but also in general, the WNLA is these days making great play of this distinction between 'recruiting' and 'engagement'. This is because the mines – and the South African government – are acutely aware of the international conventions on recruiting migrant labour. Though South Africa has for years flouted international labour standards with no discernible conscience, it is important to make a pretence of falling in line.

South Africa's labour record is in reality one of the worst in the world.

Of 111 international labour conventions passed since 1917 (and South Africa is one of the oldest members of the International Labour Organisation), South Africa has ratified only 11. These relate principally to night work and underground work by women, accident compensation and wage fixing machinery. South Africa has *not* ratified Convention 29 of 1930 on forced labour; its successor, Convention 50 of 1936; the Convention (No. 97) of 1949; and the Recommendations of 1949 and 1955 for the Protection of Migrant Workers.

Ironically, even South Africa's partner in labour crimes in Africa, Portugal, no longer finds it politic to fly in the face of the labour conventions. In 1959 Luanda, chief town of Angola, played host to a meeting of the International Labour Organisation Advisory Committee which was attended by nine African states, and Portugal chose this conference publicly to ratify the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention – though this formal recognition of its principles has made little difference to Angola's ugly labour practices. South Africa boycotted the conference altogether.

The Conventions and Recommendations on forced and migrant labour should be read together. The first attempt to stop forced labour was in 1930. South Africa can clearly not go on record against the use of forced and compulsory labour because – migrant labour apart – both the pass law system and the use of convict labour by railways, mines, farms and other private employers are blatant contraventions of the Forced Labour Convention, and condemned as such by the 1955 International Labour Organisation Report on Forced Labour.

The definition of recruiting in Convention 50 of 1936 covers 'all operations undertaken with the object of obtaining or supplying the labour of persons who do not spontaneously offer their services at the place of employment, or at a police emigration or employment office, or at an office conducted by the employers' organisation...' Article 10 specifically prohibits chiefs from acting as recruiting agents. Labour from Portuguese East Africa clearly flouts this provision as, in all probability, does labour from areas like South West Africa.

It must remain a fine point whether men 'spontaneously offer' their services or are recruited in many areas traditionally reserved for mine labour.

Bush-beating by labour recruiters is the most compulsive form of recruiting; but what of the more negative pressures on Africans to stimulate recruiting?

The migrant worker unable to make a minimum living from the land is not a free agent in the sense that he can move into an industrial labour market and offer his labour to the highest bidder. He may not leave a Union Reserve unless he gets a pass from the government authorities; and, with exceptions, he gets no pass unless he signs a contract to work on a mine – or farm.

Other employment avenues are simply not open to him. Further, only by signing a contract with a labour recruiting agency will the African get a cash advance to pay his fare to the labour market. Incidentally, the mine pays the inward journey of the recruit only if he completes a minimum number of shifts underground.

Once the recruit has signed the contract, he is prosecuted as a deserter if he leaves the mine before completing the contract term. Criminal penalties for leaving work have their counterpart in no civilised labour code.

The Conventions and Recommendations of the International Labour Organisation following the Second World War begin to get to grips with the peculiar labour problems of Africa. Convention 97 on migration for employment and Recommendation 100 for the protection of migrant workers in underdeveloped countries and territories compose a detailed 'magna carta' for migrant workers like those on whom South Africa's gold mining industry is based.

The general approach of the International Labour Organisation is that as far as possible the economics and social organisation of the population should not be endangered by demands for the withdrawal of adult male labour. This consideration must be borne in mind by governments before they approve any

labour recruiting scheme. An expert investigation done some years ago in the Congo reported that a maximum of 10 per cent of the adult males could be absent without detriment to village life and agriculture.

Investigations over the years in Basutoland, Bechuanaland and the Union tell of the havoc wrought by the migrant labour system. In some areas 50 per cent of the men are absent at any one time. This throws the burden of agriculture on to the young, the women and the aged, and – apart from stultifying progress in the Reserves even further and making them even more dependent upon the migrant labour system for cash with which to pay taxes and supplement the grain harvest – has disastrous social effects, shattering homes and depriving children of adequate parental control, among much else.

Article 6 of the Migrant Labour Convention (97) lays down that migrants should receive treatment no less favourable than that given the country's own nationals, including the right to belong to trade unions, social security provisions, and overtime arrangements. Recommendation 100 says firmly that 'any discrimination against migrant workers should be eliminated'.

Migrant labour should receive wages enabling workers to meet minimum requirements and take into account normal family needs. Minimum wage rates should be fixed by collective agreements freely negotiated between the trade union and employers' organisation.

Clause 37 lays down the principle of equal opportunity for all sections of the population, including migrant workers. Clause 41 states: 'The right of association and freedom for all lawful trade union activities should be granted to migrant workers.'

The employer should pay the journey of the migrant to his place of work and also the costs of his repatriation when his period of service has expired. The Chamber of Mines does not even do this. Every contract sheet has printed in it the repatriation fee of the worker, which is subtracted from his wages, together with other deductions. Clause 13 even says that migrant workers should be free to waive their right to repatriation, or to postpone their repatriation.

International standards and practice in South Africa are poles apart.

The International Labour Organisation clearly discourages the whole system of migrant labour, maintaining: 'The governments of the countries of origin and destination of migrant workers should endeavour to bring about a progressive reduction of migrant movements.'

South Africa took part in the discussions leading up to the drafting of the Recommendations on Migrant Labour, though it did not endorse these Recommendations any more than their earlier cousins. Its written comment on the migrant labour control proposals smoothly claims that it supports provisions for migrant workers, but that such protection cannot be given by 'measures designed for universal application'.

'The problems associated with migrant workers vary greatly, and their solution is essentially a matter to be determined between the governments concerned or, in the case of internal migration, in accordance with national laws.' The Union government 'considers it should be left to national authorities to determine the extent to which any recommendation can be applied to various categories of migrant workers'. Union policy, it was claimed, is against social upgrading:

The movement of workers within the Union is between country and town rather than between territories, and it is considered inadvisable to settle them and their families near their places of employment as they would suffer from the change to crowded urban living conditions. Mining industries are 'vanishing industries', albeit long term [*sic!*], and it is therefore undesirable to create a large working population entirely dependent on these industries.

It is also advisable from the social and health point of view that Natives employed on mines should return to their rural homes at more or less regular intervals. Natives on the mines are almost unanimously in favour of maintaining the present system of migrant labour.

The only time African miners have ever been able to say what they do or do not want was during the forties – in the African Mineworkers' Union [AMU], which the Chamber of Mines stamped out after the epic African miners' strike of 1946. The AMU offered in 1941 to engage a group of architects to design township schemes on mining property if the mining companies would make available information on the space available. It wanted the total abolition of the compound system, and the establishment of townships on mining property as in Northern Rhodesia.

The clauses relating to trade union rights must have been particularly hard for the South African government to examine, let alone consider endorsing.

It neatly hurdled over them by commenting: 'The (trade union) matters affect all workers and cannot appropriately be included in a measure dealing only with migrant workers.'

Governments and the Chamber of Mines have from time immemorial based wage policy on the assumption that the African mineworker is a peasant, able to subsidise his mine wages from the land. This is a fundamental assumption, but a faulty one. Land shortage in the Reserves and the shattering of the African subsistence economy have turned the peasant into a labourer, and wages from the mines are the sole support of increasing numbers of African families in the Reserves, where the majority live perpetually below the mealie-line.

The 1943 Landowner Commission into African mine wages examined the assumptions upon which the wage policy of the Chamber of Mines is based. One witness compared the African migrant miner with a white worker who had a private income in addition to his earnings. Would his wages, asked the witness, not be assessed by the rate for the job, without reference to his private income? The Chamber of Mines spokesman replied:

this ignores the fact that the ability of the Native to earn a Reserve income is largely due to the fact that he is granted by the Union government land to cultivate, and pasturage, with practically free occupation of both. In effect he receives a substantial subsidy from the government which enables him to come out to work in the intermittent fashion which suits him.

Two chief devices keep African mine wages low. The first is the recruiting monopoly of the WNLA and the Native Recruiting Corporation of the Chamber of Mines, which eliminates competition between mines in the purchase of labour and keeps wages and working conditions static. The Chamber lays down a maximum average daily wage for African miners which no mine may exceed. This system limits the number of men any mine may employ at a higher rate of pay, and so prevents any mine competing for labour with another. Even the most unpopular mine is ensured a regular labour supply under the centralised system of recruiting and wage control. Contracted migrant labour keeps the African worker in a permanently weak bargaining position. He has no option but to accept the terms of the prescribed contract form; and there is no way in which the African worker can use a period of labour shortage to ask for higher wages.

The second device is the recruiting of labour from outside the Union, and this tactic is used increasingly to keep Union wage standards depressed.

When South African labour for the mines is scarce, the policy of the WNLA is to cast about in other African countries for labour that can be bought at the current low wage rates. The Union shortage of labour at a particular wage rate might not exist at a higher wage rate, but the mines have taken good care not to test this.

The mines get the best of both worlds. When there is a shortage of labour in the Union, the mines do not raise wages to compete for labour with other fields of employment but recruit further and further afield. When any shrinking of the economy in the Union forces more African workers into low-paid jobs on the mines, less labour is drawn from the extra-Union pool.

More than this, the gold mines and their labour system have over the years set standards for prevailing wages in other industries. There is the notorious reply of the Victoria Falls Tower Company to the African Gas and Power Workers' Union about to go on strike – no increased wages since these would create disorganisation in the mining industry.⁵

The Lansdowne Commission [discussed later] noted that there had been a conscious effort by certain collieries to assimilate the rates of pay and service conditions for African workers to those on the gold mines. If gold mine wages went up, the Commission found, this would have a deterrent effect on recruited labour for the coal mines, so that ultimately the minimum rates of pay would have to be increased.

Every poor farming season in the Union Reserves triggers off an accelerated flow of labour to the mines, because signing a mine contract is the only open door to the Reef labour market. The Chamber of Mines watches the tide of economic and industrial development closely, ready at any time there are signs of economic recession to place an embargo on the outside labour supply from certain territories, or to negotiate for a reduction of the labour quota for the mines from countries to the north.

During 1959 and 1960 the mines anticipated an 'oversupply of labour' due to recession conditions in some industries and the fact that more and more Africans were abandoning their lands for longer and more frequent periods of their working lives. Hard times in the Union are boom times for the mines' labour supplies and help to keep wage rates static.

There is no industry of the size and prosperity of this that has managed its cheap labour policy so successfully. Migrant labour is wasteful, inefficient and far less productive than stable labour; but as long as it is abundant, it can be kept dirt cheap. The gold mining industry of South Africa has prospered as no other, thanks not only to the opening of the new Free State mines but also to uranium production; profits have reached new heights (a record figure for gold and uranium of £114 908.58 in 1959). African labour productivity has increased, yet African miners' wages, in terms of real wages, are lower than they were a half-century ago.

Chasing down figures of African mine wages is like pursuing dandelions through thick mist. The Chamber of Mines prefers to shelter behind generalities and averages, and treats detailed queries about wages with barely concealed suspicion. The figures of average wages paid are low enough, but they nonetheless manage with great success to conceal the plight of the great majority of African miners working for the scandalously low starting basic wage.

Early records show that in 1890 the average pay of African miners was £3 3s. a month exclusive of keep.⁶ From that year onwards the various mining companies attempted to arrive at a concerted policy to reduce wages; and in 1897, in the first effective wage agreement drafted by the miner, African miners took a wage reduction, to a minimum of 1s. a day and a maximum of 2s. 6d. By 1900 the wage cuts resulted in an average monthly wage of £1 17s. In 1903, when the mines had to reassemble a labour force dispersed by the Boer War, they reverted to an earlier schedule – an average monthly wage of £2 7s. and a maximum of £3. By 1903 the average wage was £2 14s. a month.

The price of gold rose by 97 per cent between 1931 and 1940. According to the Gold Producers' Committee of the Chamber of Mines, African wages increased by 8 per cent during this period.

The most searching investigation into African wages and conditions was in 1943, when the government-appointed Lansdowne Commission sat to investigate the wages and other conditions of employment of Witwatersrand African miners.

Evidence submitted on wages showed that African pay rates had not risen over a period of 20 years. At the time of the Commission, the cash wage of the African miner was 2s. per underground shift (£2 19s. 6d a month) and

1s. 9d. (£2 14s. 2d. a month) for the surface worker. The value of food and accommodation provided by the mines was reckoned to be £2 16s. 4d. a month.

The Commission recommended an increase of 5d. a shift to bring the underground minimum rate to 2s. 5d., and the surface rate to 2s. 2d. It recommended also a cost-of-living allowance for all African miners of 3d. per shift. These increases, small as they were, were not given in full. Underground workers got the additional 5d. recommended, but surface workers only an extra 4d., while the 3d. cost-of-living allowance recommendation was ignored. To help the mines meet the extra labour cost, the government for one year refunded the gold realisation charges of £2 054 000. Subsequently the price paid for gold by the South African Reserve Bank was raised to include the amount previously deducted as a 'realisation charge'. In effect the government remitted this particular form of taxation to assist the mines meet the increased cost of African labour.

After the Lansdowne Commission, the average pay for underground miners was £3 8s. a month (in addition, payments in kind amounted to £1 10s.). This should be compared with the figure of £3 3s. a month paid in 1890, before the mines combined to slash African wages.

Between 1943 and 1952 the minimum underground wage rate rose by 3d. a shift, and in 1953 by a further 4d. Now, seven years later, 3s. remains the basic wage for the underground miner, and the surface worker earns 2s. 3d. a shift. While there has been an increase of 16 per cent on the average wage of the African miner, made up by small bonuses and long-service increases and some improvements in the wages of the minority of higher paid 'boss boys' and clerks, the basic wages have remained static.

When mine wages are criticised as being too low, the mines resort to the well-worn argument that the miner is really supplementing his agricultural income by his stints at the mines, and also trot out the figure of services given the miner in addition to his cash wage. In 1957, for example, it cost the mines 3s. 1d. per African labourer per shift to feed, house and keep him in health. This calculation turns out to be a most revealing one. In 1943 the mines estimated the cost of food and services as 1s. 1d., but the figure had risen to 3s. 1d. by 1957. This represents an increase of 18.5 per cent, over the 14 years 1943–57. Over the same period, however, African underground wages increased by only 24 per cent.

Even more revealing is the Chamber of Mines' method of calculating costs of services per African miner per shift. Figures produced for the Lansdowne Commission show that remuneration in kind was made up of costs of rations, quarters and medical treatment. The total cost of services was 13s. 4d. [*sic*] in 1943. Food per shift amounted to 5s. 28d. and hospital costs to 1s. 5d.; the remaining amount of 6s. 97d. [*sic*] (more than half the costs) was made up by expenditure on the following items: salaries of compound staff; preparation of food, including wages; fees owed to the NRC and WNLA, the Chamber's labour recruiting organisations; passport and registration fees paid to governments; fees to local authorities for sanitation; assessment rates; maintenance of hospital and compound buildings; Miners' Phtisis Compensation and accident premiums; fuel, water and lights; fire insurance; clothing and boots; entertainment, education and religion.

The most costly items are fees paid to the Union and Portuguese governments and the various governments of Tropical Africa, and recruiting fees paid to the NRC and WNLA. The Chamber of Mines thus charges its labour recruiting costs against the figure of services in kind spent on the African miner. The Chamber's statistician admitted, when questioned by the Lansdowne Commission, that 'while all these items represent costs to the mines of native labour, they are not all chargeable as benefits to the natives'. There is no evidence that the Chamber has altered its methods of accounting for services in kind; and the figure has made a spectacular rise to an average of £3 a month for each African.

African miners get no overtime rates of pay for Sunday, holiday or night work; they receive no sick pay and, even while convalescing, can be put to work to earn their keep at surface work at surface rates of pay; and they have only two paid holidays a year (Christmas Day and Good Friday). To this day the mines are exempt from paying cost-of-living allowances to African miners.

The meagre cash wage paid the African miner is even lower than the figures produced on paper, for every migrant worker must pay not only the costs of his repatriation, but also has deducted from his pay the cost to the mine of equipping him with two blankets, a singlet and pair of trousers, and a protective tunic. The standard contract form of the WNLA for a Nyasa recruit, for instance, deducts a repatriation fee of £4 10s. and £2 5s. towards the cost of the protective tunic and other clothing. The repatriation fee covers the cost

of the return journey and food provided on that journey to the recruiting depot nearest the recruit's home. If this is some distance from his village, he must pay further travelling costs himself.

Also deducted from the miner's earnings during the period of contract is the annual tax, which is collected by the mines through arrangement with the government concerned, as well as the initial outlay of £2 or £3 remitted to the recruit when he signed on at the engagement station. A Nyasa recruit on the mines for his first work contract will earn a maximum of £46 in twelve months, one tenth of which will be deducted as a repatriation fee. After all costs have been deducted, the recruit will be left with something like £39 9s. 6d. for one year's work underground. A second-term worker who receives a slightly higher basic wage will earn about £45 in a year of 312 work shifts.

The gold mines ignore the cold facts of exploitation which such figures lay bare and advertise only the 'benefits' which the men of 55 tribes from seven countries get in deferred pay to miners and their families (carefully omitting any figures of wages and profits). The mines claim that they generate economic growth; that 'the economic distress of the (Union) Reserves is in part relieved by the gold mining industry', that 'they stimulate and stabilise the economy of tribal territories'. But then the mining industry always has been a past master at turning economic arguments on their head.

The truth is that migrant labour, the basis for the prosperity of the gold mining industry, has ruined the Reserves and African agriculture and has been responsible for the most blatant exploitation of the largest single labour force in South Africa. Migrant labour impedes agricultural development, keeps wages at rock-bottom levels, and is an excuse for not training a stable force of skilled labour. The evils the migrant labour [system] has brought to the Union's Africans and its economy, it will bring to the African countries whose labour reserves are being milked dry by this system.

Even the mines have had to face [the fact] that the increasing flow of labour from countries adjacent to South Africa and to its north will depend on the tempo of industrial development in those areas.

Tsopano, a monthly publication which supports the Nyasaland Malawi Congress Party, maintains the recruitment of 20 000 Nyasas for the Rand gold mines each year is stripping the country of its most valuable asset – labour.

The reason why the WNLA is able so easily to fill the quota each year is that there are thousands of Nyasas who are unable to find jobs in their own country. Until Nyasaland has built its economy to the point where there is full employment for all, there will continue to be a section of the population prepared to suffer the indignity and hardship of working in South Africa...The first task of the new Malawi government must be to set in movement economic planning...Until that time measures will have to be taken by the government to protect the interests of those who work abroad...This can best be done by organising a labour exchange and by bargaining with the employers abroad who wish to employ men from Nyasaland.

The prosperity of the gold mining industry has been based on the poverty of Africa and her people but Africa is changing fast and can help to make the mines change their labour policy too. While two in every three African miners on the Witwatersrand come from countries other than the Union, and one in five from a Central and East Africa rapidly advancing towards independence, low wages, debased compound life, the suppression of all trade union activity, contraventions of international labour conventions – all these are the concern not only of South Africa, but of the peoples of half a dozen African countries, indeed, of all the continent.

NOTES

- 1 W Gemmill, 'The Growing Reservoir of Native Labour for the Mines', *OPTIMS* (publication of Anglo-American Corporation).
- 2 GOLD – Chamber of Mines P.R.D. Services No. 56.
- 3 JA Reeves, 'Chinese Labour in South Africa 1903–1910' (MA thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1954).
- 4 M Harris, *Portugal's African Wards: A First-Hand Report on Labor and Education in Mozambique* (American Committee on Africa, 1958).
- 5 Johannesburg Star 9 June 1943.
- 6 RH Hatch and JA Chalmers, *The Gold Mines of the Rand* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1895).

GENTLEMEN AND OFFICERS

Extract from *The Barrel of a Gun: Political Power in Africa and the Coup d'État* (1970)

'Army coups in Africa?' friends said caustically. 'You had best suggest to the publisher a loose-leaf book, or a wad of blank pages at the back.' Army men have by now unmade and remade governments in one out of every four of the continent's independent states. Since I started planning this book, nine states have been taken over by their armies. As I prepared to visit Nigeria, a West Indian friend, who had gone to teach in West Africa, a devotee of African power on the newly free continent, was leaving. He had found himself in the thick of two military takeovers, at intervals of six months from one another, and had narrowly escaped being taken for an Ibo during the massacres in the North. He wanted still to stay in Africa, to teach and to write, but in a quiet spot this time. 'No more coups, I think it'll have to be Sierra Leone.' Nine weeks after he arrived in Freetown, there was an army coup. A year later, on my way back from Nigeria and Ghana, I dropped in to see him in Freetown. The very night I arrived we were stopped by armed soldiers at a roadblock. A coup to end the regime installed by the coup of a year earlier was in full swing. From his house veranda, we watched soldiers searching the neighbourhood. They were rounding up the officer corps.

Sandhurst and St Cyr [military academies], the journalists were saying, had succeeded the London School of Economics and Ecole Normale William Ponty in Dakar as the training ground of Africa's leaders. (The Sandhurst and St Cyr curricula were probably overdue for change.) Africa was becoming another Latin America, where political instability has long been chronic. There, modern political history is a chaotic account of coups and counter-coups, of precipitate but meaningless changes of president, minister, Cabinet, government and army chief. One professional soldier replaces another at the head of government. Sometimes the military unmade the very power formation they had themselves installed. A coup every eight months, or twelve, in some states; elsewhere, a breathing space, before another spurt of *golpe cuartelazo* (barracks-room revolt), or *golpe de estado* (coup d'état), or some combination of the two. The very language of coups has attained a peculiar finesse in Latin America. Violence has nearly always been present; fundamental change, virtually always absent.

By the time the coup d'état reached Africa, men of more blasé societies – whose own nation states had evolved through revolution and civil war, but in an earlier era – were already adapted. The Sierra Leone coup, said a United States Embassy official in Freetown, was just 'a Mickey Mouse show'. African countries, said the sceptics, were like television stars: in the news with a coup today, forgotten tomorrow, or confused with each other in a succeeding coup.

It has proved infectious, this seizure of government by armed men, and so effortless. Get the keys of the armoury; turn out the barracks; take the radio station, the post office and the airport; arrest the person of the president, and you arrest the State. In the Congo, where the new State disintegrated so disastrously so soon after independence, Colonel Mobutu, army chief-of-staff, 'clarified' the situation by taking the capital with 200 men. At the time it was a larger force than any other single person controlled in Leopoldville. In Dahomey, General Soglo, who had come to power by a coup d'état, was overthrown by 60 paratroopers in December 1967. In Ghana 500 troops, from an army of 10 000, toppled supposedly one of the most formidable systems of political mobilisation on the continent. In the Sudan two bridges over the Nile command Khartoum; and the unit that gets its guns into position first, commands the capital. In Dahomey a Minister of Foreign Affairs was heard to boast about one of that country's three coups d'état, that not a shot had been fired, not even a blank; not a tear-gas grenade had been thrown; and not a single arrest had been made. Dahomey's army men staged three coups in five years and thus far hold the record for Africa.

It seems to be done with little more than a few jerks of the trigger-finger; and there are, often, no casualties; Nigeria and Ghana were exceptions.

The facility of coup logistics and the audacity and arrogance of the coup-makers are equalled by the inanity of their aims, at least as many choose to state them. At its face value, the army ethos embodies a general allergy to politicians; a search for unity and uprightness; and service to the nation. Nigeria's First Republic collapsed, said General Gowon, because it lacked high moral standards. Nzeogwu, the young major who made that particular coup, talked in more fevered but comparable terms of a strong, united and prosperous Nigeria, free from corruption and internal strife. In the Central African Republic Colonel Jean Bédel Bokassa's Revolutionary Council announced a campaign to clean up morals, that would forbid drum-playing and lying about

in the sun except on Saturdays and holidays. Colonel Lamizana of Upper Volta said, 'The people asked us to assume responsibility. The army accepts.' It is the simple soldier's view of politics, a search for a puritan ethic and a restoration of democracy unsullied by corrupt politicians. It is as though, in the army books and regulations by which the soldiers were drilled, there is an entry: Coups, justification for; and beside it, the felicitous phrases that the coup-makers repeat by rote.

The coup is becoming conventional wisdom not only among Africa's army men, but among her young intellectuals. In the exile cafés of Paris and the bedsitters of London, and on the university campuses of the United States, young aspirants for power, or social change, consider the making or unmaking of African governments in terms of their contacts within the army. Power changes hands so easily at the top, and the political infrastructure is so rapidly rendered tractable. Government shifts in a single night from State House to barracks. There are fresh names, ranks and titles to be learned. The photographers ready their cameras for the new official pictures: uniforms instead of double-breasted suits; the open army look instead of the politician's knowing glance. In place of laws lengthily disputed in debating chambers, come swift decrees in civil service jargon. There is more punctuality, less pomp, total pragmatism. 'Efficiency' becomes the outstanding political principle. Political argument, once exuberantly fatuous in the mouths of career politicians, is stilled. In the political vacuum where the soldiers rule, the role and purpose of armed men go unquestioned. At the outset, it is enough for them to announce that they rule for the nation. Power lies in the hands of those who control the means of violence. It lies in the barrel of a gun, fired or silent.

What is Africa that soldiers are taking over? The Third World consists of three vast continents, and Africa is one of them. She is united with Latin America less by any close resemblance between, say, Brazil, Venezuela or Peru, and Algeria, Uganda or Ghana, than by their mutual relationship to forces outside the three continents, which aggravate their poverty, their dependence and their dilemmas. Latin America has had its spate of military coups; Africa seems to be in hot pursuit. Neither continent has found countervailing forces against the firepower of the clique in uniform. In Latin America, though, there is Cuba, capital of social revolution for the continent, where a popular guerrilla army and popular rising displaced the putsch and achieved a seizure

of power different in character. Africa, for her part, has Guiné-Bissau, where Amílcar Cabral and his party propose to lead a social revolution through armed struggle by an army of political volunteers. Both continents grapple with the threat and the reality of outside intervention, with the visible and concealed roots of dependence, with mounting national indebtedness and the prospect of stability in massive want and conspicuous corruption.

Not that the continents of the Third World are the same, or their political crises and uniformed presidents are interchangeable. In Latin America the military emerged in alliance with the traditional power of land-owners; and later, when new social and economic forces developed, intervened in contests between the forces of the countryside and those of the city, between indigenous vested interests in industry and organised labour. In some countries there is a long history of student protest with an explosive revolutionary content. There has been a long-standing United States defence and security policy of keeping the continent 'stable' by coddling dictators, especially those in uniform. In Africa the economy is less developed by far; social forces are still largely inchoate; and the continent, except for some key areas like the Congo, and Ethiopia on the Red Sea and near the Middle East, is lower on the foreign-policy lists of the big powers.

What Latin America endured yesterday, Africa may encounter, with due variation, today. Yet the identity of plight and purpose between the continents of the Third World is obscure or irrelevant to the vast majority of the men who rule over most of Africa. I rarely hear them talk about Vietnam, or China, or Cuba, or even Guiné-Bissau. The revolutionary turmoil of the Third World in our century is passing them by. Africa is one, of course, but it is a skin-deep connection. About the vast and vital areas of the unliberated south there is concern, but only ricocheting knowledge. Ghanaians, supporters of both Nkrumah and Ankrah regimes, have said to me that the southern African liberation movement should 'struggle' for independence as Ghana did. 'We had twenty-nine shot dead before we gained our independence,' they admonish. There seems so little awareness of the structure of white power in the south; no insight into the strategies of struggle there, of how far back it goes and how many hundreds have lost their lives. What independent Africa has not herself experienced, she does not easily recognise. She can be only too careless in her ignorance, and smug in her superiority. Men who still struggle for independence are considered unrealistic,

for all the advice that they should struggle onwards. They should know better than to espouse hopeless causes or to fight for goals beyond the reach of the manipulating politician or the coup-making officer. I cannot forget the remark of a young Nigerian politician, who not long before had enjoyed a reputation for radicalism and even been imprisoned for his politics. He and a friend were discussing the then recently reported death of Che Guevara at the hands of the Bolivian army and the CIA. 'What could he expect if he went messing about in other people's countries?' he exclaimed. In Britain, the United States and Cuba, Black Power advocates declare, 'We will hook up with the Third World. We will go for the eye of the octopus, while our brothers sever its tentacles.' Many in Africa have not yet recognised eye or tentacle.

Africa is the last continent of the Third World to come to political independence. She is the deepest sunk in economic backwardness. She has the most appalling problems. And she revels in the most effusive optimism. In the offices of the world organisations, the international diagnosticians, planners, technocrats – experts all, if not partisans – retreat steadily from hope. Their figures and graphs show that the continent is more likely to slide backwards than to stride forwards. The assets of three United States corporations, General Motors, Du Pont and the Bank of America, exceed the gross domestic product of all Africa, South Africa included. What Africa produces, with a few exceptions like copper and oil in fortunate places, is less and less wanted by the international market. Prices are dropping; Africa's share in the total of world trade is declining. Schemes for commodity price stabilisation, if they can be agreed, may help for a while. But even as the parties bargain, the chemical laboratories are making synthetically what Africa strains to grow.

Africa is a continent of mass poverty, but the obsession of the ruling groups is with luxuries. The same could be said in indictment of countless societies. But those who came to power mouthing the rhetoric of change face the critical poverty of their countries with frivolity and recklessness. Their successors, the soldiers, have an ingenuous faith in 'efficiency', and the simple army ethos of honesty. They detect the problems no more acutely than did the men they overthrew, probably, indeed, not as much. They discuss the problems less often, for such are 'politics'.

There has been eloquent, inexhaustible talk in Africa about politics, side by side with the gaping poverty of political thought. Down there on the ground

in Africa, you can smother in the small talk of politics. Mostly it is about politicking, rarely about policies. Politicians are men who compete with one another for power, not men who use power to confront their country's problems. The military formations, the uniforms, the starch, the saluting aide-de-camp, the parade-ground precision might look, at last, like the decisiveness of purpose that Africa needs in its leadership. They camouflage a regimented sterility of ideas and social policy...

Everywhere, under the mobilisation systems inaugurated by Nkrumah, Modibo Keita and Sékou Touré, Julius Nyerere and Kenneth Kaunda, as well as under the free enterprise of the Margais, Okoti-Ebohs and Mobutus, African development has been held to ransom by the emergence of a new, privileged, African class. It grows through politics, under party systems, under military governments, from the ranks of business, and from the corporate elites that run the State, the army and the civil service. In some countries, its growth is virtually free, in the sense that, though resources themselves may be fast exhausted, there is no social or economic policy to limit the size or dominance of this class. In other countries, policy is opposed to its very existence, but it persists all the same. National styles, territorial distinctions, and even divergent policy commitments blur into the continent-wide style of the newly rich. They are obsessed with property and personal performance in countries where all but a tiny fringe own hardly more than a hoe, a plastic bucket, an ironware cooking pot or two, and perhaps a bicycle. On the plane from Rome to Lagos there was a young man who had spent a year in Milan training to operate a computer. On his little airline trolley he carried as much haul as a peasant family in Africa or even Italy might work a decade to earn. Milan, he said, had been all right, but the Italians, though they worked so hard, 'don't seem to be getting anywhere'. Africa's elite is working hard at getting somewhere. Few of them read Franz Fanon, yet they are living out his description of them: 'Spoilt children of yesterday's colonialism and of today's governments, they organise to loot whatever national resources exist.'

There are, of course, those who have always been convinced that Africans are unfit to rule themselves, that Empire opted out of Africa too quickly, and that the continent was bound to go into decline after the premature granting of independence. But the crises of Africa have nothing to do with any such supposed incapacity of Africans to govern themselves. Independence delayed

longer would have made the continent less, not better, able to meet the political and economic challenges of independence. Those who seek comfort in the tumult because they can ascribe it to black inferiority close their eyes to the depredations of the slave trade; the colonial role in Africa; and the political horrors perpetrated in Europe and elsewhere by whites and European political systems on a far more shuddering scale. It is the old paternalism of seeing London, Washington or Paris as the norm, which the rest of the world must follow, at peril of Western censure. It is time to judge Africa by what Africans need and want, and not by what the West finds congenial.

On the other hand, Africa needs a pitiless look at herself. It must be a long look, without the sentimentality which is the other side of colonial patronage. It is no answer to an indictment of the way Africans have handled their independence to ask, 'Could others have done better?' If they had not managed, they should have been subject to the same sharp criticism. Yet it is, after all, less than ten years since Africa became independent. That is no time at all to advance a continent as ravaged as any other, and that started with fewer advantages than most. Africa rightly rejects a time-scale that measures her need by the time taken by others to assuage theirs. 'We took a hundred years, after all; have patience', is chilling comfort. There is no patience. Too much time has been lost or squandered.

Much that needs to be said on the continent is not said, or not so that others can hear. James Nguni, the Kenyan novelist, has warned of the 'silent clamour for change that is now rocking' Africa. Yet, sounding close to despair, Wole Soyinka has anticipated that the African writer will before long envy the South African the bleak immensity of his problems. 'For the South African still has the right to hope; and this prospect of a future yet uncompromised by failure on his own part, in his own right, is something which has lately ceased to exist for other African writers.' Soyinka was considering the failure of writers; but of others, too, more directly culpable. The velvet-cushion commandos, he once called them in his own country, the men who rode to office and prosperity on the wave of independence, while the great majority saw no change from colonialism to independence.

Is there a group compromised by failure? Perhaps for some the anti-elite invective in this book will be too strong. Criticism made of persons or their roles is only incidental to a criticism, substantially, of systems and of policies. The targets are not individuals, but their place in an interest group.

Civil servants come under fire not because Africa cannot produce some of the best, but because the very virtues avowedly possessed by a bureaucracy are inimical to the growth of self-government. Politicians condemn themselves out of their own mouths by their professed purposes and their subsequent performance. The army, whatever its declarations of noble intent, generally acts for army reasons. Where it does not, it has, in the nature of army structures and ethos, the greatest difficulty in initiating more than a temporary holding action. Above all, traditional armies believe that it is possible to create a policy without politics. This opens not new avenues but new culs-de-sac.

For many, the indictment should not be of Africans, whatever their record, but of the outside forces responsible, ultimately, for the plight of the continent. That indictment stands. It cannot be framed too often. But that approach, too, on its own, is a form of patronage; for it makes the African ever victim, never perpetrator. If independent Africa is far from the political promise of independence, let alone from social change, this is not because she does not need it. She needs change no less, at least, than Latin America; but the Americans seem closer to change and their needs therefore nearer assuagement. She is far from change because there are formidable world forces against it, and because her colonial experience hangs a dread weight upon her; but also because she has produced few leaderships, these independent years, that want it. The old generation of independence politicians is largely played out, exhausted. There are too few exceptions – until new forces stir – to stop the débâcle in all but a few enclaves. The generation, whether politician, administrator or soldier, that comes forward to replace *les anciens* from the euphoric days of independence, is greedy for its prizes; and, for the most part, even less concerned with the polity, let alone the people. A different force is stirring, among the secondary-school students, the urban unemployed, the surplus graduates of the indulged coastlines, the neglected and impoverished of the northern interiors. As yet the pockets of discontent are scattered, hesitant and unassertive, or easily obliterated. The disaffected are bewildered by the confusions and lost causes in the litter of the generation that wrested independence, and are fumbling for a coherent resolve. They are not rebels without a cause, but, stirring to rebellion, are still unsure of their cause, and the means to advance it. Will the search for change be pre-empted or pursued by the entry of the army into government?...

Think-tank theories

Armies, it was said, would not move into politics in Africa because they were so small. The strength of the army has turned out to be the weakness of other forces in the society. This can be illuminated only by looking at both army and politics, and their mutual interaction. Many questions have to be asked. Who rules Africa under independence? What are the main elements in the chronic instability of these states? How is political power concentrated or dispensed, and why can the action of a small armed group so effortlessly capture it? Why, thus, when there has been a blow at the top of the power structure, does it seem so irrelevant to the polity as a whole? What of the institutions of State, and in particular the management of the economy? What of the people, down below? Who is dispossessed by a coup; who raised to power? Was the conflict over who exercised power, or how it was exercised? Why does the army, and not some other group, play the pivotal role in new states? Who are the military men under their uniforms; whose sons and brothers? Do they represent distinctive social forces? The dispossessed? Themselves alone? Do captains of the army hope to become captains of industry, or of commerce? What triggers the coup? Does the army act for inner army reasons, or for reasons that flow from the wider polity, or both? Coups clearly decide who will rule for the moment; but do they, could they, change the character of the society or its political system? Do they promote change, or conformity? Where coups have failed, what have been the sources of their defeat? Are all army coups equivalent, all military governments comparable? What can the barracks produce that the politicians, or the economic planners, have not? Does the army file back to barracks on its own?

These questions apart, there is the issue of foreign intervention. A theory of conspiracy sees all the ills of the Third World as visited on her by outside forces. Very many of them are. No doubt, in time, more information will come to light about exact connections between foreign states, military attachés and coup-making army officers. Until the evidence does become available – and that, in the nature of things, will take time – this account of coups d'état calculates on intervention playing an insidious and sophisticated role, but not the only role, and often not even a decisive one. For there are two sets of causes for a coup. The one is deep-seated, in the profound dependence of Africa on external forces. The economic levers that move or brake Africa are not within her boundaries, but beyond them.

The second set of reasons lies in the tensions and fragility of the African State. It is the groundswell of African politics which makes army coups possible, and while giving armies internal reasons for striking, gives other forces little or no defence. Not all army, or armed, interventions in politics are equivalent, nor do they all take the shapes of coups d'état.

The army coup d'état, though, is not equivalent to any political use of the army by government. Nor is it equivalent to any use of violence to effect change; or even to any sudden, forceful substitution of one ruling element for another. These could be rebellion or revolution, where groups, small and conspiratorial, or representing great masses of people, act to seize the State: either to press for changes within the accepted framework, or to substitute new forms of government and political system. The coup can only be undertaken by a group that is already a participant in the existing political system and that possesses institutional bases of power within the system. In particular the instigating group needs the support of some elements of the armed forces.

The coup d'état can pre-empt revolution, or lead to it. It can install a military, or an alternative civilian, government. It can maintain or change social policy. In its essence, the coup is a lightning action at the top, in which violence is the ultimate determinant, even if it is not used. The conspiratorial strike is the secret of its success, not the mobilisation of popular masses or their mandate. Any armed group can, theoretically, effect a coup; but it would have to immobilise or confront the army, police and other security apparatus of the State. Army coups d'état involve the army as principal protagonist and conspirator, even if it withdraws to the barracks once the action is over.

The army does not always move monolithically. A successful coup may be staged by the army command itself, by a section of the officer corps, by non-commissioned officers, or even by privates, if each such group can take the necessary steps to immobilise counter-action from the levels of command above it. Senior military commanders have tended to identify with the government in power and to have substantial stakes in preserving the status quo. Younger officers have tended to identify with their generation in politics or the civil service; if that generation is critical of the political order, its representatives in uniform may employ arms to rearrange the order itself. The critical coup-making rank was generally considered to be the colonels and other middle-grade officers, who have command of men and also access to

army communications and arsenals. But most ranks have been protagonists in one or other African coup d'état.

Whatever the political background to a coup d'état, when the army acts it generally acts for army reasons, in addition to any other it may espouse. Corporate army interests may be predominant, or they may be secondary to other more generalised political grievances; but army reasons are invariably present.

The army may long brood over its discontent, biding its time until its contemplated action coincides with a general state of anti-government feeling, as in Ghana; or it may seem oblivious to popular opinion and strike precipitately when it feels it is being affronted or brought under attack, as in Togo.

The striking feature of army interventions in politics is that to almost every coup there is a counter-coup. (Congo-Kinshasa has so far proved a notable exception.) The coup spawns other coups. Some are successful, some fail. And in a single coup cycle, each successive coup tends to be set afoot by a rank lower in the army hierarchy than the one that initiated the sequence. Causes, sequels, and the purpose to which the coup is put, alter; but once the army breaks the first commandment of its training – that armies do not act against their own governments – the initial coup sets off a process. The virginity of the army is like that of a woman, army men are fond of saying: once assailed, it is never again intact...

THE CELL

From 117 Days: An Account of Confinement and Interrogation under the South African 90-Day Detention Law

For the first 56 days of my detention in solitary I changed from a mainly vertical to a mainly horizontal creature. A black iron bedstead became my world. It was too cold to sit, so I lay extended on the bed, trying to measure the hours, the days, the weeks, yet pretending to myself that I was not. The mattress was lumpy; the grey prison blankets were heavy as tarpaulins and smelt of mouldy potatoes. I learned to ignore the smell and to wriggle round the bumps in the mattress. Seen from the door the cell had been catacomb-like, claustrophobic. Concrete-cold. Without the naked electric bulb, burning, a single yellow eye, in the centre of the ceiling, the cell would have been totally black; the bulb illuminated the grey dirt on the walls which were painted black two-thirds of the way up. The remaining third of the cell wall had been white once; the dust was a dirty film over the original surface. The window, high in the wall above the head of the bedstead, triple thick – barred again and meshed – with sticky black soot on top of all three protective layers, was a closing, not an opening. Three paces from the door and I was already at the bed.

Left in that cell long enough, I feared to become one of those colourless insects that slither under a world of flat, grey stones, away from the sky and the sunlight, the grass and people. On the iron bedstead it was like being closed inside a matchbox. A tight fit, lying on my bed, I felt I should keep my arms straight at my sides in cramped, stretched-straight orderliness. Yet the bed was my privacy, my retreat, and could be my secret life. On the bed I felt in control of the cell. I did not need to survey it; I could ignore it, and concentrate on making myself comfortable. I would sleep, as long as I liked, without fear of interruption. I would think, without diversion I would wait to see what happened, from the comfort of my bed.

Yet not an hour after I was lodged in the cell, I found myself forced to do what storybook prisoners do: pace the length and breadth of the cell. Or tried, for there was not room enough to pace. The bed took up almost the entire length of the cell, and in the space remaining between it and the wall was a small protruding shelf. I could not walk round the cell, I could not even cross it. To measure its eight feet by size, I had to walk the length alongside the bed

and the shelf, and then, holding my shoe in my hand, crawl under the bed to measure out the breadth. It seemed important to be accurate. Someone might ask me one day – when? – the size of my cell. The measuring done, I retreated to the bed. There were four main positions to take up: back, stomach, either side, and then variations, with legs stretched out or curled up. In a long night a shift in position had to be as adventurous as a walk. When my knees were curled up they lay level with a pin-scratched scrawl on the wall: ‘I am here for murdering my baby. I’m 14 years.’ The wardresses told me they remembered that girl. They were vague about the authors of the other wall scribbles. ‘Magda Loves Vincent for Ever’ appeared several times in devotedly persistent proclamation. Others conveyed the same sentiment but with lewd words and too-graphic illustrations, and in between the obscenities on the wall crawled the hearts and Cupid’s arrows. The women prisoners of the Sharpeville Emergency had left their mark in the ‘Mayibuye i’ Afrika’ [Let Africa Come Back] slogan still faintly visible. It was better not to look at the concrete walls, but even when I closed my eyes and sank deeper into the warmth of the bed, there were other reminders of the cell. The doors throughout the police station were heavy steel. They clanged as they were dragged to, and the reverberation hammered through my neck and shoulders, so that in my neck fibres I felt the echo down the passage, up the stairs, round the rest of the double-storey police station. The doors had no inside handles and these clanging doors without handles became, more than the barred window, more than the concrete cell walls, the humiliating reminder of incarceration, like the straitjacket must be in his lucid moments to the violent inmate of an asylum.

Six hours before my first view of the cell, I had come out of the main reading-room of the university library. The project that week was how to choose atlases in stocking a library, and in my hand was a sheaf of newly scribbled notes:

pre-1961 atlases almost as obsolete for practical usage as a 1920 road map – evaluate frequency and thoroughness of revision, examine speciality maps, e.g. distribution of resources and population – look for detail plus legibility – check consistency of scale in maps of different areas – indexes – explanations of technical and cartographic terms, etc., etc.

The librarianship course was an attempt to train for a new profession. My newest set of bans prohibited me from writing, from compiling any material for publication, from entering newspaper premises. Fifteen years of journalism had come to an end. I had worked for five publications and each had, in turn, been banned or driven out of existence by the Nationalist government. There was no paper left in South Africa that would employ me, or could, without itself being an accomplice in the contravention of ministerial order. So I had turned from interviewing ejected farm squatters, probing labour conditions and wages on gold mines, reporting strikes and political campaigns, to learning reference methods, cataloguing and classification of books, and I was finding the shelves poor substitutes for the people and the pace that had made up our newspaper life.

The two still men walked up.

‘We are from the police.’

‘Yes, I know.’

‘Come with us, please. Colonel Klindt wants to see you.’

‘Am I under arrest?’

‘Yes.’

‘What law?’

‘Ninety days,’ they said.

Somehow, in the library as I packed up the reference books on my table, I managed to slip out of my handbag and under a pile of lecture notes the note delivered to me from D that morning. It had suggested a new meeting place where we could talk. The place was ‘clean’ and unknown, D had written. He would be there for a few days.

The two detectives ranged themselves on either side of me and we walked out of the University grounds. An Indian student looked at the escort and shouted: ‘Is it all right?’ I shook my head vigorously and he made a dash in the direction of a public telephone booth: there might be time to catch the later afternoon edition of the newspaper, and ninety-day detentions were ‘news’.

The raid on our house lasted some hours. It was worse than the others, of previous years. Some had been mere formalities, incidents in the general police drive against ‘agitators’; at the end of the 1956 raid, frightening and widespread as it was, there had been the prospect of a trial, albeit for treason. I tried to put firmly out of my head the faces of the children as I was driven

away. Shawn had fled into the garden so that I would not see her cry. Squashed on the front seat beside two burly detectives, with three others of rugby build on the back seat, I determined to show nothing of my apprehension at the prospect of solitary confinement, and yet I lashed myself for my carelessness. Under a pile of the *New Statesman* had been a single, forgotten copy of *Fighting Talk*, overlooked in the last clean-up in our house of banned publications. Possession of *Fighting Talk*, which I had edited for nine years, was punishable by imprisonment for a minimum of one year. Immediately, indefinite confinement for interrogation was what I had to grapple with. I was going into isolation to face a police probe, knowing that even if I held out and they could pin no charge on me, I had convicted myself by carelessness in not clearing my house of illegal literature; this thought became a dragging leaden guilt from then on.

The five police roughs joked in Afrikaans on the ride that led to Marshall Square Police Station. Only once did they direct themselves to me: 'We know lots,' one said. 'We know everything. You have only yourself to blame for this. We know...'

It was about six in the afternoon when we reached the police station. The largest of my escorts carried my suitcase into the 'Europeans Only' entrance. As he reached the charge office doorway he looked upwards. 'Bye-bye, blue sky,' he said, and chuckled at his joke.

'Ninety days,' this Security Branch man told the policeman in charge at the counter.

'Skud haar' [Give her a good shake up] the policeman in charge told the wardress.

When we came back from her office to the charge office, all three looked scornfully at my suitcase. 'You can't take this, or that, or this', and the clothing was piled on the counter in a prohibited heap. A set of sheets was allowed in, a small pillow, a towel, a pair of pyjamas, and a dressing-gown, and the belt was hauled out from the loops. 'No plastic bags.' He pounced on the cotton-wool and sprawled it on the counter like the innards of some hygienic giant caterpillar. No pencil. No necklace. No nail scissors. No book. *The Charterhouse of Parma* joined the bottles of contraband brandy and dagga in the police storeroom.

I had been in the women's cells of Marshall Square once before, at the start of the 1956 Treason Trial, but the geography of the station was still

bewildering. The corridors and courtyards we passed through were deserted. The murky passage led into a murkier cell. The cell door banged shut, and two more after it. There was only the bed to move towards.

What did they know? Had someone talked? Would their questions give me any clue? How could I parry the interrogation sessions to find out what I wanted to know, without giving them the impression that I was resolutely determined to tell them nothing? If I was translucent and delivered a flat refusal to talk to them at the very first session, they would try no questions at all, and I would glean nothing of the nature of their inquiry. I had to find a way not to answer questions, but without saying explicitly to my interrogators, 'I won't tell you anything.'

Calm but sleepless, I lay for hours on the bed, moving my spine and my legs round the bumps on the mattress, and trying to plan for my first interrogation session. Would I be able to tell from the first questions whether they knew I had been at Rivonia?¹ Had I been taken in on general suspicion of having been too long in the Congress Movement, on freedom newspapers, mixing with Mandela and Sisulu, Kathrada and Govan Mbeki, who had been arrested at Rivonia, not to know something? Was it that the Security Branch was beside itself with rage that Joe had left the country – by coincidence one month before the fateful raid on Rivonia? Was I expected to throw light on why Joe had gone, on where he had gone? Had I been tailed to an illegal meeting? Had the police tumbled on documents typed on my typewriter, in a place where other revealing material had been found?

Or was I being held by the Security Branch not for interrogation at all, but because police investigations had led to me and I was being held in preparation for prosecution and to prevent me from getting away before the police were ready to swoop with a charge? At the first interrogation session, I decided, I would insist on saying nothing until I knew whether a charge was to be preferred against me. If I were asked whether I was willing to answer questions, I would say that I could not possibly know until I was given a warning about any impending prosecution. The Ninety-Day Law could be all things to all police. It could be used to extort confessions from a prisoner, and even if the confession could not – at the state of the law then – be used in court, it would be reassurance to the Security Branch that its suspicions were confirmed, and a signal to proceed with a charge. My knowledge of the

law was hazy, culled from years as a lawyer's wife only, and from my own experience of the police as a political organiser and journalist. Persons under arrest were entitled to the help of a lawyer in facing police questioning. If they would permit me no legal aid, I would tell them, whenever they came, that I would have to do the best I could helping myself. So I could not possibly answer any questions till I knew if the police were in the process of collecting evidence against me. Nor, for that matter, I decided to tell them, would I say that I would not answer questions.

After all, how did I know that, until I knew what the questions were? If they would tell me the questions I would be in a better position to know what I would do. This cat-and-mouse game could go on for a limited period, I knew, but it was worth playing until I found out how the interrogation sessions were conducted, and whether there was any possibility that I might learn something of the state of police information. If they tired of the game, or saw through it – and this should not be difficult – I had lost nothing. Time was on their side anyway. If they showed their hand and revealed by intention or accident what they knew about my activities, I would have told them nothing, and they would be doubly warned to admit nothing. If fairly soon I was to be taken to court I would consider then, with the help of a lawyer, I hoped, the weight of the evidence against me. There was just a chance they might let slip some information, and even a chance – though it seemed remote the first night in the cell – that I might be able to pass it on to the outside, toward those still free.

As I dropped off to sleep the remembrance of that neatly folded but illegal copy of *Fighting Talk* rose again. If the best happened I would be released because there was no evidence against me...and I would have withstood the pressure to answer questions...but I would be brought to court and taken into prison for having one copy of a magazine behind the bottom shelf of a bookcase. How untidy! It would not make impressive reading in a news report.

I slept only to wake again. My ears knocked with the noise of a police station in operation. The cell was abandoned in isolation, yet suspended in a cacophony of noise. I lay in the midst of clamour but could see nothing. Accelerators raced, exhaust pipes roared, car doors banged, there were clipped shouted commands of authority. And the silence only of prisoners in intimidated subservience. It was Friday night, police-raid night. Pick-up vans and kwela-kwelas,² policemen in uniform, detectives in plain clothes were combing locations and hostels,

backyards and shebeens to clean the city of 'crime', and the doors of Marshall Square stood wide open to receive the haul of the dragnet.

Suddenly the noise came from the other side of the bed. Doors leading to the other doors were opened, then one only feet away from mine, and I had for a neighbour, across the corridor, an unseen, disembodied creature who swore like a crow with delirium tremens.

'Water, water. Ek wil water kry. For the love of God, give me water.'

A violent retching, more shrieks for water, water. I caught the alcoholic parch and longed for water.

Twice again I was jerked awake by the rattle of doors to find the wardress standing in my doorway. She was on inspection, doing a routine count of the prisoners. 'Don't you ever sleep?' she asked.

Suddenly the door rattled open and a new wardress started in. A tin dish appeared, on it a hard-boiled egg, two doorsteps of bread, and coffee in a jam-tin mug. Minutes later the crow was retreating down the passage. The wardress led me out of my cell, past a second solitary one, into a large dormitory cell which was divided by a half-wall from a cold water basin and a lavatory without a seat. I washed in cold water and half a bucket of hot, put on my pyjamas and dressing-gown, was led out again into my little cell, and climbed back into bed. My first day in the police station had begun.

I felt ill-equipped, tearful, I had no clothes. No daily dose of gland tablets (for a thyroid deficiency). My confiscated red suitcase, carefully packed from the accumulated experience of so many of us who had been arrested before, was the only thing, apart from me, that belonged at home, and in the suitcase were the comforts that could help me dismiss police station uniformity and squalor. I sat cross-legged on the bed, huddled against the cold, hang-dog sorry for myself.

The door clanged open and a lopsided gnome-like man said he was the Station Commandant. 'Any complaints?' he asked. This was the formula of the daily inspection rounds. I took the invitation. I objected to being locked up without charge, without trial, in solitary. The Commandant made it clear by his wooden silence that I was talking to the wrong man. The catalogue of complaints was for the record, I decided. I would allow no person or police official to get the impression that I accepted my detention. But the end of the recital that first morning tailed off on a plaintive note: '...and I've got none of my things...I want my suitcase, my clothes, my medicine...'

‘Where’s her suitcase?’ the Commandant demanded of the wardress, who passed the query on to the cell warden.

‘Bring it. All of it. Every single thing.’

The cell warden went off at the double. Red suitcase appeared in the doorway, tied up with pink tape. The Station Commandant started to finger through it, then recoiled when he touched the underwear.

‘She can have the lot!’ he said.

The wardress, peering over his sloped left shoulder at the cosmetics, said shrilly: ‘She can’t have bottles...the bottles...we can’t have bottles in the cells.’

The Commandant rounded on her. One person would make the decisions, he told her. He had decided.

The cell warden retrieved the pink tape and the suitcase stayed behind in the cell. Nestling in it were eyebrow tweezers, a hand mirror, a needle and cotton, my wristwatch, all prohibited articles. And glass bottles, whose presence made the wardresses more nervous than any other imagined contravention of the regulations, for it was a strict rule that nothing of glass should be allowed in the cells. I was later to find out why.

Throughout my stay in Marshall Square my suitcase was the difference between me and the casual prisoners. I lived in the cells; they were in transit. I had equipment, reserves. Their lipsticks were taken from them, and their combs, to be restored only when they were fetched to appear before a magistrate in court. The casuals were booked in from the police van in the clothes they had worn when arrested, and if they wanted a clean blouse they had to plead with the wardress to get the cell warden to telephone a relative. I could go to my suitcase. I had supplies. I was a long-termer in the cells.

There was a curious comfort about the first day; I had won my battle for the suitcase. I had made up my mind how I would try handling the Security Branch. Aloneness and idleness would be an unutterably prolonged bore, but it was early to worry about that, and for as long as I could, I would draw satisfaction from the time I had, at last, to think! Uninterruptedly, undistracted by the commands of daily living and working. The wardress on the afternoon shift seemed surprised I was taking it so quietly. ‘You’re catching up on your sleep,’ she said. ‘But soon the time will drag.’

I tried to translate noises into police station geography. There were three separate sets of rattlings before the wardress stood in my open doorway; there

was a door that seemed to lead from the main part of the police station into the women's cells; about eight paces after that there was a door dividing the women's cells from a courtyard; and then there was my cell door. When I heard the first rattle of keys I could expect another two and the lapse of about fourteen paces before I lay in police view. Unless I was fast asleep I could not be pounced upon without warning. However quietly the wardress put the keys in the locks, they were too massive, the locks too stiff, the steel too ringing-loud. When I saw the keys I was transfixed by the largest of them, the one that opened the first door. Four and a half inches long, yet when I heard its rattle in the lock it seemed to grow in my mind's eye to the size of a poker.

The electric light burned constantly, day and night, but I could tell by the wardress when it was a new night shift. As on the previous night I rehearsed again the imaginary first confrontation with the Security Branch. I was warming to my role in the encounter and was becoming master of the ambiguous and evasive reply to the questions I invented for my unseen interrogators.

I pushed out of my head a jumble of ideas and thoughts of people, with a deliberate resolve to think slowly, about one thing at a time, and to store up as much as I could for future days and nights. I postponed thinking about how I would try to pass the time. That, too, would be a subject for future hours. This was a time of emergency and called for strict rationing.

I dropped off to sleep. There were the nightly inspections, the noisy intake of two drunks.

Right overhead, as though someone in the cell above had measured the spot where my head lay, a bottle broke sharply, and splintered on the concrete floor.

The next day was Sunday, but pandemonium. The cell door was flung open and the wardress, the cell warden, and a third policeman stared in, disbelievingly, I thought. There was prolonged shouting from the guts of the station, repeated banging of doors overhead. The Station Commandant had the door flung open a half-hour before the usual inspection. He said the usual 'Any complaints?' formula but was out of the cell before he could reply to my, 'What about exercise?' The wardresses were tight-lipped, on edge. A fever seemed to rage in the working part of the police station, and the raised temperature flowed out to the prisoners lying in their cells.

There were four instead of two inspections that night. Trying to reconstruct the noises of the night hours I realised that there must have been an admission

into the women's cells, and someone was in the cell opposite me, for there were two mugs of coffee in the hands of the morning-shift wardress.

Unexpectedly, a high fastidious voice said, 'I am due to menstruate, wardress, how do I get some cotton-wool?'

'Anne-Marie!' I shouted. 'Anne-Marie...you here! Wardress, I've got cotton-wool.'

The cell doors opened long enough for me to pass out the cotton-wool and to catch a glimpse of Anne-Marie Wolpe – wife of our good friend Harold – haggard and drawn, perched on her high bed.

If Anne-Marie had been taken, Harold must have got safely away. The escape had come off, I decided. Thirty-six hours before I had gone into Marshall Square a break-out of the cells was being planned...

NOTES

- 1 One month before my arrest, in July 1963, Security Police arrested Nelson Mandela and other political leaders in a raid on a house in the Johannesburg suburb of Rivonia. That house was used as the underground headquarters of the freedom struggle headed by the African National Congress. In what subsequently became known as the Rivonia Trial, Mandela and his associates were sentenced to terms of life imprisonment for directing sabotage and planning the armed overthrow of the South African government.
- 2 The African name for pick-up vans. 'Kwela' means 'jump' and this is the instruction that police shout at arrested Africans.

Her legacy







FOR MORE THAN 30 YEARS following her departure for London, Ruth First all but disappeared from South African popular consciousness. Her comrades were in exile or prison, the ANC and Communist Party had been proscribed. Every word she wrote or had written and every magazine or newspaper she had penned them for was banned. While her influence increased within the exile movement, in the country of her birth it was reduced to a trickle, then stopped. As the apartheid government intended and ruthlessly policed, the continuity with the past for those who sought to overthrow it was broken. When a new young opposition movement emerged in 1976, her name was not on their lips.

Throughout the 1960s following Sharpeville, opposition to apartheid within the country was muted. It re-emerged in the 1970s as rolling strikes and Black Consciousness, which together helped oppressed people to 'dream dreams' about democracy and justice. Together they fuelled the outrage over school overcrowding and the use of Afrikaans which was to culminate in the Soweto uprising in 1976. The following year the State banned 18 organisations. But a new political energy was rising and from about 1980 a political project began to coalesce which re-established the Congress ideologies of the 1950s and the traditions of the radical press which Ruth had helped to build. So while she was by then merely an observer from afar of the powerful re-emergence of left-wing media in South Africa, her labours in the 1950s and 1960s were important ingredients of the cartilage and bone upon which it was being built.

The 1980s opened with school boycotts which began in Cape Town and spread throughout the country. Labour action was also escalating and these

movements coalesced in mass mobilisations which coincided with Republic Day celebrations in May 1981. What was interesting was the character of these protests. At a mass meeting in Cape Town called by a committee formed to oppose the election of the State-sponsored South African Indian Council (SAIC), marshals wore green, black and gold ribbons, the Freedom Charter was stencilled on huge banners around the hall in Athlone, speakers reminded people of the traditions of resistance born out of the Congress Movement and a large ANC flag was unfurled behind the rostrum.

Similar meetings were held in Johannesburg and Durban and it transpired that their planning had taken place a month earlier at an anti-SAIC meeting in Durban which, according to an informant, paralleled the 1955 Kliptown Congress meeting. The key document at both was the Freedom Charter.

The new Congress Movement, with increasing boldness, seated itself squarely astride the history of resistance of the 1950s and the parallels were obvious: the general accord with ANC principles, the Charter, the Congress salute and veneration for older-generation ANC leaders. Indeed, the whole repertoire of struggles of the 1950s was reinstalled in the campaign structures of the 1980s. This was crystallised by the formation, in 1983, of the United Democratic Front (UDF), a loose alliance led by Dr Alan Boesak, which would come to represent more than 500 grassroots organisations.

Alongside this political ferment another tradition was maturing, which culminated in the formation, in 1985, of the giant Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). During the first nine months of that year nearly half a million labour days were lost to worker unrest. The State, going through a rare phase of political leniency due to the delicacy of its constitutional adjustments, seems to have been caught off balance by the speed and sophistication of political and union organisation. At the level of symbolic action it lost ground rapidly among the disenfranchised, who found in the UDF and COSATU a growing class unity.

In the crucible of this political reawakening, new left-wing media began to appear. In the Cape a sassy newspaper called *Grassroots* emerged and called for 'joint action on all fronts'. In Cape Town *The Call* appeared and urged 'all democratic forces to unite on the basis of the Freedom Charter, for unity in action on a broad front, and for us to build on the lessons learned in the 1950s – the decade of mass struggle – and to march forward without hesitation'.¹

These were followed by the *Weekly Mail*, *South*, *The New Nation*, *New African* and *Vrye Weekblad*.

The sudden proliferation of left-leaning media was made possible both by the space being created by oppositional political movements, but also by new technologies which Ruth, constantly tapping away on a manual typewriter through the 1950s, would have applauded. The older print systems – letterpress, photo-typesetting, offset litho – were costly and required sophisticated skills and corporate back-up. Indeed, until the 1980s the means of ideological production had largely been in the hands of white support groups or white commercial media houses. By the 1980s new, fast plain-paper copiers in industry and universities started a photocopy boom, which took another leap forward with the introduction of copiers which could expand the size of the image.

Cheaply produced pamphlets and newsletters as well as facsimiles of books became available and virtually unpoliceable. By the mid-1980s the next technological leap took place with the introduction of personal computers linked to photocopiers. Journalists retrenched from the recently deceased *Rand Daily Mail* used these innovations to start the *Weekly Mail*. Using AppleMac computers, an optical scanner and a laser printer as well as desktop publishing software, journalists were able to do the work of the entire editing and page make-up section of a normal newspaper in the space of a large desk – at a fraction of the cost.

The State, in an attempt to slam the lid back on the political turmoil and media proliferation, imposed several states of emergency but, by then, the Mass Democratic Movement's commitment to make South Africa ungovernable had become too deeply entrenched. Despite widespread arrests, torture during interrogation and killings by State functionaries and proxies, the movement for change and its Congress media became an unstoppable juggernaut and a key dynamic in the release of Mandela, the unbanning of political parties and the democratic elections of 1994.

In 1982 Ruth, watching the developments in South Africa from her office in Maputo with mounting excitement, was murdered by State operatives. How she would have loved to see, again, the rise of the left-wing press for which she had worked for so long.

In 1988 Ruth's centrality in the struggle of the 1960s entered popular consciousness by way of an acclaimed film, *A World Apart* – scripted by Ruth's

daughter Shawn, and starring Barbara Hershey – which depicted the family's last days in South Africa before going into exile. In 1997 Ruth's daughter Gillian published *Every Secret Thing: My Family, My Country*, followed by *Ties of Blood* about three generations of women in her family, and *Red Dust*, a novel about the Truth Commission which emerged as a project during her mother's funeral in Maputo. 'The seeds of [the book] were born,' she wrote, 'out of my grave-side realisation that if the country would not leave me alone, then I would have to face it.' Other books about Ruth are a biography I wrote for young people (*They Fought for Freedom*) in 1995, a 1997 version of this book, and a political biography I published in 2007 (*Writing Left: The Radical Journalism of Ruth First*).

As exiles began returning from 1990 and flooding in after the elections, they brought with them memories of their fallen comrade and stories of her part in the struggle for freedom. Ruth's film, *117 Days*, in which she acted as herself in detention, became available in South Africa. Revelations at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission pointed to counter-insurgency agents who planned her assassination at a farm named Daisy under Brigadier Piet Goosen.

There are, today, several tributes to Ruth, one of which would have amused her, the others about which she would be delighted. In 2005 the South African Navy named a high-speed coastal patrol vessel after her, two others being named after her friends Lilian Ngoyi and Victoria Mxenge. These vessels patrol the country's coastline to prevent environmental degradation and protect marine resources against poaching, overfishing and the illegal discharge of fuel oil. A year earlier, the Ruth First Trust and the Journalism Programme at the University of the Witwatersrand a fellowship to provide young journalists with the time and resources to do careful, sustained research which, in busy newsrooms, they seldom have the opportunity to do.

'At this moment of political opportunism, greed and corruption in both public and private sectors,' Professor Jacklyn Cock said at a presentation ceremony, 'we need role models to remind us of who we are, where we have come from and the price many have paid to bring us here. Ruth First is such a model. Living up to this legacy...is our current challenge.'²

In 2010 Rhodes University inaugurated a Ruth First Scholarship to support candidates 'whose work is in the spirit of Ruth First's life and work, poses

difficult social questions and who are interested in linking knowledge and scholarship and action’.

‘We believe,’ said the university’s vice-chancellor, Saleem Badat, at its launch, ‘that Ruth First personifies the qualities that we seek to cultivate in our graduates and that she serves as an inspirational role-model to young South Africans.’

In the launch booklet, Judge Albie Sachs described Ruth as ‘something of a hero to us in her lifetime. She made us feel proud to belong to a movement that had personalities like her in its ranks. We always wondered what she would think of this or that, whether a major new political initiative or a new film or novel or painting or even a dress or jacket. She lived vividly...’³

NOTES

- 1 D Pinnock, *Popularise, Organise, Educate and Mobilise: Some Reflections on South Africa’s Left-wing Press in the 1980s* (Grahamstown: Rhodes University, 1988).
- 2 Ruth First: 21st Anniversary Ruth First Memorial and Exhibition, 2007, Department of Journalism, University of the Witwatersrand.
- 3 The Ruth First Scholarship, Rhodes University, 2010.

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