Chapter Eighteen

> The great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do. James Baldwin.[1]

Exile

The landmark cliffs of Dover were grey rather than white, but the sun shone unexpectedly brightly and a cool breeze blew in from the sea over the cheerless stretches of Southampton harbour. The future may have been entirely ours to create, but we were too preoccupied with the present to see the moment as one of possibility. We had not really relaxed during the long journey, and apart from feeling the loss of friends and family that we'd left behind, we were at sea as to what next to expect. We had not arranged for anyone to meet us and no-one had. But we looked for welcoming friends anyway. The children were happy and had won prizes in the ship's fancy dress competition: Deborah dressed stunningly as Puss in Boots; Simon, adorably, in oversized black pants and a battered black hat as Charlie Chaplin. The only document we had to present to the passport officials was an exit permit from South Africa – a "passport" into the sea, as we soon learnt. The document addressed to me read "for all purposes [you would] become a prohibited person within the meaning of the Admission of Persons to the Union Regulation Act, 1913 …".[2] Fortunately Leon, then in London, had made representations on our behalf to Barbara Castle, at the time an MP in Wilson's Labour Party government. That intervention proved to be crucial. The letter she wrote (received weeks before we left South Africa) was somewhat informal, but unambiguous in welcoming us to the UK.[3]

The official at the passport control desk studied the text of the exit permits, confused at the incomprehensible legalese that masked the only relevant message in the documents that mattered. That was that whatever country we chose to enter once leaving the country, South Africa was not to be one of them. If we were to be deported to South Africa in the course of our travels, we would be considered prohibited immigrants. The official at the desk stared at us blankly and seemed to be more confused than we were: "Is that *all* you have?" he asked. I handed him the letter from Barbara Castle, typed in small print on a standard airmail letter-card. He read the contents, showed the letter to a colleague who conferred with other uniformed officials, and eventually left the wretched officer to make

a decision on his own. Fortunately, bureaucracy has its own protocol for dealing with the complicated. Unable to cope with a situation beyond the immigration rulebook, he copied the letter (avoiding any communication with the Home Office, which was likely to be lengthy and possibly unproductive), handed back the original and sent us on our way without further comment. We were too confused to appreciate the rare bureaucratic miracle we had just witnessed, and anxiously turned our attention to retrieving the nine suitcases that we had hastily packed before leaving.

The train ride into London was calming, the scenic fields and the neat farms a welcome distraction from the throbbing thoughts about where we might eventually live, work and send the children to school. I looked at Philippa and the two children in the opposite bunk, thinking how much simpler it would be if we could all sit on these seats forever and watch the green fields and homely farmhouses pass by. I realize now how anxious we were at leaving South Africa and can imagine how much greater that anguish would have been had we been aware of the objections of the special branch to our leaving the country, something I found out much later, while writing this memoir.[4] The special branch had "information", that I was already involved in working for the SACP and informed the Minister of Justice that on leaving the country I would only add to the exile agitation against the government. Fortunately, for reasons unstated in my security file, the minister eschewed this advice.

On our arrival at Waterloo station in London, we took a cab to North Wembley, where two close friends, Reuben and Alma Ruff, both of them members of COD and themselves exiles, took care of our immediate needs and temporary employment. They lived on the outskirts of London, a train's ride from Oxford Circus along one of the Underground lines, past place-names of stations like Kensal Green, Willesden and Harlesden that were soon to become familiar. The arrangements they made for our living accommodation were resourceful, if not a little bizarre. Through "friends of friends", they arranged an exchange of services in which we were to manage a men's clothing store in return for accommodation above the shop. It was payment in kind with a little extra for food. The store was originally a semi-detached dwelling, "three-up and two down". The space downstairs had been converted into a retail shop, divided at the rear-end of the front room by a blue fringe of beaded strings, serving as a curtain to conceal a primitive office and the stairway leading to the living quarters upstairs. The house and shop were a throwback to 1910, evocative of H.G. Wells' novel, *The History of Mr Polly*. In that novel, Alfred Polly, a laconic assistant in a draper's shop, was endlessly urged by the owner of the store to "look smart" and "come forward" to the front to serve the waiting customers. I was always fascinated by these quaint commands and on the rare occasions when more than one customer entered the shop, we alternated in shouting, "Forward Please!" … "Look Smart!"

The arrangement lasted for approximately six weeks when I found a temporary teaching job at a high school in Lambeth, a stone's throw from the banks of the Thames. The school was named after an educationally minded family called Beaufoy. The Beaufoys had owned a vinegar factory in the borough since the eighteenth century and the school was probably named after a nineteenth century ancestor, Mark Hanbury Beaufoy, who had fought in the South African War. At the school, each grade was divided into ten learning streams, starting with the brightest and ending with the least able students. As I was the newest teacher (on "supply") I was given the tenth stream to teach. The boys struggled to understand my South African accent and I had difficulty in discerning their clipped London speech and getting used to the rhetorical question "didn't I" at the end of each sentence: "I handed a note to the secretary, didn't I". They were curious about my ignorance of ordinary English expressions like their saying good night in the middle of the afternoon and calling supper "tea", but we eventually got on well together, especially after I realised that I needed to explain the reasons why I wanted them to do what I asked of them. This change from the command system to the request mode was a cultural shift, difficult to make.

I taught at the Beaufoy School for four days a week as a part-time history teacher. The change from salesman to "supply teacher" meant leaving the quaint clothing store in Wembley to live in a new neighbourhood and finding new schools for the children. Once again, we exchanged our services for living space. This time, we served as temporary child minders, looking after Stephen and Amanda Kitson, then aged about ten and seven respectively, while their mother, Norma, was away. David Kitson had been sentenced to life imprisonment for his participation in Umkhonto we Sizwe and we were pleased to be of help to Norma and to have a temporary place to stay in North London. He and I had shared a cell at Pretoria Local.

The accommodation near Temple Fortune in North London was grand, but although the idea of the exchange was economically sound, it was impracticable. Beaufoy School was situated across the river in South London, involving long commuting and logistical problems in taking the children to their schools in the morning and fetching them after work in the afternoon. After about five months – and not a moment to soon – the arrangement ended. The children were lively, but in our hair. Norma had returned to the flat and I was offered an interesting job as a lecturer in economic history at a college in Bromley, Kent. Added to this, Philippa was pregnant.

We left the Kitsons' apartment to live nearer the college, in Petts Wood, West of Bromley, a quaint but suffocating middle-class village along the commuting corridor that stretched from Victoria Station to Orpington.[5] Our change of location involved yet a new choice of schools for Deborah and Simon, and further adjustment to new friends and teachers. Our hands were full, especially with the arrival of Jessica Helen in August 1969.

She was named after Helen Joseph, a long time friend and comrade, whose stoic fight for human rights we all admired.[6]

At the weekends and on some evenings, I spoke at meetings of the British Anti-Apartheid Movement in and out of London. Public speaking was not my forte and I accepted as few invitations as possible. But the list of meetings I addressed was longer than I realized, for garbled reports of the meetings were sent back to South Africa by the special branch for my security files. Two of these sessions were particularly memorable. I had been out of prison for about four months and was visibly nervous, which was noticed by the audience at Ruskin College, David Kitson's alma mater. The memory of jail was still fresh in my mind and I must have spoken with some passion, because I received a generous ovation from the student audience. Quite the reverse occurred at the meeting in the Hornsey Town Hall, where I gave the same speech to the audible snores of a more elderly and less empathetic audience. Soon afterwards I addressed a session of the United Nations Special Committee on Apartheid (held in London) on the conditions of political prisoners in South Africa's gaols.[7] It was a daunting occasion with the audience bursting at the seams of the huge hall in Central London, but my fears that my presentation would be seen as overly emotional were unfounded. The response was warm and positive and the audience welcoming. After that I had little time to interact with the British public, as in August 1968 I applied to the UN for a fellowship at the London School of Economics.

It was an inauspicious time to enter any university. The LSE was occupied by protesting students – partly in solidarity with the worker and student movements in Europe and the anti-Vietnam war protests in the USA. Earlier, at the LSE, there was a more specific student challenge to the director, Walter Adams. He had been nominated for this position in 1966 in the face of opposition from protesting students for his past record as director of the University College in Rhodesia. His appointment to the LSE prompted further protests, including a five-day "sit-in" (a euphemism for the more militaristic-sounding word "occupation") and served as a dress rehearsal for the 1968 protests. The result was that when I arrived at the LSE in August 1968, it was "occupied". It was hardly the moment to read for a PhD in Economic History.

Protests that year were all around me. At the Bromley College of Technology, where I taught part-time, the administration and staff were at the mercy of students who strutted in and out of classes, either to attend the endless meetings on the campus or to return to lectures when their meetings were over. At the LSE, "student power" asserted itself in the makeshift classrooms and "teach-in's at students" homes, and at the impromptu meetings around the university's forlorn buildings. On the pavements outside the campus there were literature stands with radical newspapers, books and pamphlets on sale. At times there were formal student-gatherings on the steps of the he university's dour urban campuses, but I hardly had time to attend them.

As a result I saw little of the university at that time, except for attending economics and philosophy of history classes held in the lecturers' houses. In this way the students brought the struggle into the living rooms of their professors, raising the issues of the occupation whenever they could.

It would be an understatement to say that I found the students' situation confusing. Fresh from a struggle for basic human rights, it required an adjustment on my part to see the student protests as part of the universal conflict with capitalism, as they sometimes claimed. They seemed to me to be young and middle-class and to be neither poor nor homeless. Nor were they exploited – or fighting what I imagined to be a real revolution. On the contrary, they seemed to me to be in the wrong part of the world to feel the disempowering effects of colonialism, imperialism and racism, which they were very vocal in condemning. As far as I could see, they had the vote; they would enter the professions at the end of their studies; and if they had not already benefited from capitalism, they were likely to be the future recipients of all that the market offered. If their protest was a component of the wider struggle, I did not see it then. "Alienation" was the key word they used, identifying themselves with the workers who *were* actually alienated by their subordinate status in the labour market. In their eyes, knowledge itself had become a commodity and that the content of university education reflected only corporate need. They were outsiders in a process over which they had no control – either in the content of their courses or the determination of their curricula. They felt that they had been reduced to the status of commodities – as "so many graduates per year for the market" – and saw themselves as victims of the mindset of consumerism that they believed capitalism had created. Marcuse and Marx were their gurus.[8]

I was wrong in diminishing their action as the luxury of the well to do. Their protests were genuine, even if their rhetoric was sometimes overblown. They were angry and disillusioned with "authority". I saw this in their dismissive attitude towards their lecturers, even those who were supportive of their cause. There was no mistaking their disdain for the hypocrisy of university principals, political leaders and governments, and their attributing their wrath to the "system", and all that was "bourgeois". A poster attached to the main entrance to the Sorbonne on 13 May 1968, where huge protests occurred, captured the mood: "Imagination is seizing power. We are inventing a new and original world". It was not so much a false dawn, as a belief that the world was theirs to conquer. Their grievances were real, but I was too recent a newcomer to appreciate that reforms that were not as basic as the right to vote were also important. I better understood the wider response to the irrationality of capitalism, the Vietnam anti-war protests and the reaction to the Soviet tanks that invaded Czechoslovakia in August 1968.

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The uprising in Czechoslovakia 1968 was a revelation to me. I did not believe the Prague Spring was likely to undermine that country's socialist integrity. On the contrary, I thought the slogan of "Socialism with a Human Face" (the metaphor for the reform programme of Czechoslovakia's Communist Party), quite appropriate. This was not well received by the fellow expatriates I spoke to, and I was rapidly disabused of my gullibility. I was clearly new to the international scene and was thought to be naive about the machinations of the imperialists, the CIA and MI6. The so-called reforms of Dubchek, they told me, would make the socialist regime in Czechoslovakia unsustainable, and would undermine the socialist sector of Europe. It would also provide a point of entry for NATO and Western capital.

Ideological and political solidarity in both the South African and international scenes were important when there was so little else for us to cling to. Dissent over Soviet foreign policy was discouraged because it was felt to be tantamount to climbing onto the anti-communist bandwagon. After that I voiced my views more subtly, but there may have been repercussions, about which I was not informed. For instance, I did not hear from the SACP or receive an offer of a holiday at a *dacha* in the former USSR (many exiles who had been in jail enjoyed that consideration). When Brian and Sonia Bunting formally asked me to become a member of the SACP in London in the late 1970s, they said I had been "overlooked".[9] At the time, I did not know whether it was better to be "redlined" for being a dissident or to be "overlooked" as they said I was, but in my own head, I never separated myself from the organization. As it happened, I was initially far too involved with making ends meet financially to support a growing family, teaching at the Bromley College of Technology and starting my research at the LSE, to dwell on the SACP's enigmatic silence.

Research for my dissertation was a distraction. It was impossible to attend lectures at the LSE campus in the autumn of 1968 while the "barricades" were in place, and I concentrated on gathering data for my dissertation.[10] The philosophy of history lectures in the professor's living room (in Hampstead) were particularly advantageous, as it was from a recommendation of a colleague in this stimulating class that I began teaching this subject at Enfield College, only parting company with Bromley in September 1972. Enfield College of Technology later became a polytechnic, and after that the Middlesex University. I stayed at Middlesex during all its changes of name and form during the Thatcher years, until 1991. But for one of the chance happenings that occur only a few times in life, I would have forgotten about the college at Bromley.

I enjoyed teaching there and made friends with many of the students and teachers. It was from one of these friendships that I learnt of a students' trip to Russia in 1972 and jumped at the suggestion that I join them. The opportunity did not come unconditionally, for it involved a commitment to take co-responsibility with a lecturer/colleague for the

oversight of about 20 adult students for the month-long trip. It seemed to be a tradition at the college to take a group of final year students on an annual excursion to Eastern Europe. For this an old double-decker bus was acquired. We drove all the way to Moscow and back through Poland, Germany, Brussels and France. The bus, on this occasion, was bought from the Local Authority in Leeds at a cost of £600. I had travelled on similar buses in London many times before (as a passenger) and had no doubt that the journey would be a rough one. On this occasion the seats were removed from the upper deck to provide a furrowed space on the floor for the students to sleep on. In the oblong space downstairs, there were austerely padded seats for the students to sit on either side of a small aisle. There was no door at the entrance. We cooked, ate and slept on the bus, much to the amusement of curious onlookers who gathered en route to inspect it. On more than one occasion they sarcastically referred to the vehicle as "the British hotel". The absence of a door was not so much an inconvenience as a security hazard, especially when we parked the bus in the towns – or at the camp-sites, which we used as rest-stops. The students, however, were trusting and usually positive in their attitude towards the native communities, referring to the local people as "foreigners". But their generosity in most respects was abundant.

There were a few problems before we left. I was licensed to drive in South Africa, but not in Britain or anywhere else. My driving test had been set for the week before we were due to leave and I anticipated the test with forebodings of failure and loss of face, wondering how I would cope if I failed. All along the students behaved as if they had no doubt that I would pass. But I was less sanguine and obessed with feelings of imminent failure. On D-day I drove to the testing grounds accompanied by my driving instructor who dismissed my fears, telling me firmly that it was natural that I would be apprehensive and that he had seen these antics in other learners many times before. I baulked at the word "learner". I had been driving for years! But he turned out to be correct about my being nervous. As soon as I arrived at the testing grounds, I forgot about the students' expectations and the consequences for the tour if I failed, and took the test with the confidence of one who had been born at the wheel. The students' relief was apparent when I arrived at the college, licence in hand. They burst into loud cheers and offered congratulations from all sides. I felt a little like Walter Mitty.

They were similarly tolerant over the debacle concerning my immigrant status at the Home Office. The question of my travel documents (more pertinently the absence of them) was a problem. Sitting at the wheel of the bus, my stateless position in the UK came home to haunt me. I had been granted entry to Britain and thought my documents sufficient to enable me to travel in Europe. The students were in high spirits as we inched our way along Bromley's busy High Street, waving to the pedestrians on the pavements as we went along. Through the open window of the driver's cabin I heard an elderly

commuter say to her companion as she pointed to the sign at the head of the bus, “this is not a local bus dear, it’s going to Moscow”. The British could be endearing and prepared for anything but what followed when we reached Calais was something that neither the students nor my colleague (Anthony Collyer, a quiet chemistry lecturer), could properly comprehend. We were stopped as we drove the bus off the ferry and asked to present our travel documents to a seemingly typical bureaucratic and prevaricating French immigration official. He turned out to be nothing of the sort. In perfect English he told me quite plainly that I had neither a valid passport nor a visa and that if I wanted to travel through France or any other European country I would have to obtain proper documents – in England!

That said, I was escorted from the bus to the same ferry that I had just come from. The students looked on aghast. With the permission of my keepers, I managed a hasty conversation with my co-driver Tony Collyer, who was paler than I’d ever seen him. I agreed to get all the necessary visas from the embassies in London and re-join the group in Munich first thing on the following Monday morning. The students similarly appeared to be in a state of shock, especially as they witnessed my being frog-marched under guard and in the public view to the waiting ferry. They seemed to be as concerned over my well-being as they were anxious about the effect of my absence on the tour. As the guards nudged me away, I turned to say goodbye, but kept quiet when I saw their gloomy faces, wondering which of us felt the more humiliated.

Back in London, I rushed from one embassy to the other and obtained the visas in record time as the dates on the visas showed (see the facsimile below). I received a hero’s welcome on my arrival at the Munich train station and was proudly led straight to the waiting bus. After a brief celebration, we left immediately, heading for West and East Germany, Hungary, the former Yugoslavia and then eastward towards Bulgaria and Roumania. We entered the USSR at a small town in Moldova, where Sasha, a young Intourist guide joined us. As it was the standard practice for Intourist personnel to accompany foreign tourists, he remained with us for the duration of our stay in the USSR. He had prepared a little lecture on Moldova’s rich history, but his voice was inaudible in the open bus. He asked for a microphone and air conditioning, but soon realized that these luxuries were ludicrously out of place in this bus. Eventually he accepted our suggestion that he take a rest on one of the mattresses upstairs and socialize with the students sitting there. Before long he became indistinguishable from them, playing card games and reading. They referred to him as Slasher rather than Sasha, which familiarity he didn’t seem to mind at all. He acted as our interpreter from the Russian to the English language when we stopped at campsites in the early evenings, and was generally accepted by everyone as part of the group.

At these campsites the students challenged fellow campers to play football, a game they invariably won, only to be trounced at volleyball, the more popular sport in Russia. At the end of each game, wild flowers were graciously presented (by the "boys") to the female students, who had come to cheer the competing teams. In the evenings we joined in the singing and dancing and in the mornings had breakfast with the other campers before setting off for another day's driving.

The curiosity of the villagers at the sight of the bus knew no bounds. In the numerous towns and villages we bought fresh green vegetables, fish, sausages and fruit, which we ate in the open fields or on the bus. We paused for longer stops at places of historical interest – memorably in Orel, Odessa, and Kiev and about 130 miles outside Moscow we visited Leo Tolstoys birthplace, Yasnaya Polyana. In Moscow, Sasha temporarily left us to join his family, who lived in the city. My colleague had set his sights on parking the bus close to the Kremlin, in the middle of Red Square and promptly parked the bus there. If it were not for the traffic officials' curiosity at the bus, I was convinced that we would never have been allowed to stay there. We all filed out of the vehicle to see the basilica and cathedral on the square next to the Kremlin – and then took a walk to the metro to see its mosaic murals, marble pillars and paintings. The metro was a fascinating site for Londoners accustomed to the grime of the "tube" and the crush of bodies on the Northern Line. Later, we walked through the streets of Moscow, went into the stores, the vast bookshop on the main street, the museums of antiquity (the churches), and the monuments of historical interest.

On our return to Red Square we found the bus surrounded by soldiers and feared it would be impounded and all of us arrested. Our fears, however, were groundless. The soldiers (who appeared at closer range to be cadets) asked to be photographed standing against the bus and made us promise to send the photograph to them! We spent about five days in Moscow, sleeping at the camp-sites and mingling with Russians in the stand-up cafes, the shops and in the streets. Generally the trip was a salutary cultural experience. It was rare that tours in the USSR were as spontaneous as this one, and quite unusual for foreigners like us to mix so freely with the local people. The learning experience was from the people we met rather than any formal coaching. After Moscow we visited Smolensk and Minsk, and then Warsaw, Krakow, Budapest, Berlin and Bruges. At the Berlin wall we were ordered out of the bus while the officials carefully counted the students and examined their passports. They were mystified (as were the passport officials) at my collection of travel documents, each visa on a separate sheet of paper. But I had no major problems with immigration. I think the students expected me to be escorted away at all the borders and never seen again.

Although I was (naively) unafraid that my travel documents would be rejected in Eastern Europe, the border officials scrutinized them far longer than the passport officials

anywhere else in Europe. Personally, I felt quite at home in these countries, but the students were wary of the officialdom they met at the border posts, except for the guards at the Berlin Wall. There they grew bored with waiting for clearance from the passport officials and started up a game of football on the narrow strip of tarmac. The guards were uneasy about this but as they apparently received no orders to stop them, they simply looked on, curious at the students' indifference to their presence.

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It was nearly August when we returned to a surprisingly sultry London. My travel documents are now remnants of history. I have framed them and they hang on the wall in my study, their logos a sad memory of the failed states they symbolized. The USSR, and the socialist republics of Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Roumania and the German Democratic Republic have all ceased to exist, but the significance of the tour for me was not that my faith in socialism was affirmed or that I had seen the future and found that it worked. The countries that we visited were poor, the capital cities of Warsaw, Budapest and Bucharest – once grand and cosmopolitan – were now sadly in need of repair; the goods in the shops sparse and crudely manufactured. The smaller towns were rural and reminiscent of a simpler age. The regimes were politically rigid, isolated from the countries of the West, and economically dependant on the USSR, itself recovering from a devastating war.

For me the tour was simply an opportunity to see the socialist regimes at first hand and to make the best of the chance to meet ordinary people and (language permitting) talk to them. It was not an official tour and I had no way of gauging the countries' strengths and weaknesses. Nor did I have insight into their ideas for development; whether the planners had appropriate timeframes to implement their ideas for renewal or whether they had the resources to match the cities they rebuilt in their imagination. But I liked the informality and casualness of our trip and enjoyed the unpretentiousness of the people we met. It was apparent that they were poor, but not desperate and that they were reasonably dressed and had jobs and basic necessities. The students (middle class for the most part) were quick to notice these things and were oblivious of the constraints of the political systems they lived under, the deeper quality of their lives or the rumours of political repression. Educationally and scenically the trip was rewarding. Since then I have been to conferences in the USSR, stayed at the Party's plush Oktober Hotel, seen selected workplaces and some of the grand sites I did not see on that tour, but on none of these trips have I experienced the natural warmth and spontaneity of the ordinary people I met on that occasion.

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Settling into living in London was an enervating and friendless experience. We moved house several times, and with each new address came the need to find a new school, meet new neighbours and try to live like a normal English family. The children were slowly adjusting to the English environment and Jessica, the only native Londoner in the family was already nearly four year's old. She would wake up at the crack of dawn and sit on a stool with me at the kitchen counter, both of us preoccupied, I preparing my lectures and she doing her own "work". Sometimes she wrote on the foolscap sheets of paper I had given her, and often at the back of the pages of my lecture notes. Being the magpie that I am, I still have the penciled, cuneiform characters she drew on these pages. As she grew a little older she became adept at assembling the family's clothes after they'd been laundered. Observing how I neatly pressed and folded each item, she did the same with her little hands, just as I had learnt to crease and fold them – *in prison*. She has always been observant and is to this day a good mimic. She now makes films for commercial television in Britain.

Deborah and Simon were seasoned hands at house moves and at adjusting to the discipline of each of the many new schools they attended. Deborah had written her own story before she was fifteen, and even then her turbulent life set her apart from her peers. Subsequently she has written many plays and novels and a short story with some perplexing perceptions of her father.[11] The latter was a literary achievement, but I wished she had not written it. Simon, now an artist, has always been adept at making new friends, and even today has a collage of companions from the schools he attended. He played the French horn when he was almost too tiny to hold the instrument and later taught himself to play the trumpet and the guitar. But his forte is in painting and sculpture, which he practises in London. Tim, my stepson, a computer wizard was much older than his siblings and had already left home by 1973.

The summers were a welcome change from the strained routine of our lives in London. As a family we regularly went on an annual holiday together, usually to Cornwall, where the weather was warmer and the coast familiarly rugged. On these occasions we piled everything into our battered Vauxhall and made the long journey from London to Marazion, and sometimes to Pendene, near St Ives. Hotels were expensive, so we stayed in rented cottages. The family holidays were highlights in the children's lives, and the happy recollection of them memorable moments in their childhood reminiscences.

Sadly for the children, I left Philippa in 1974 when Simon was eleven, Deborah fifteen and Jessica five. It was not an easy decision to arrive at, but it had been long in the making. My imprisonment was her sentence too, leaving her with the burden of maintaining the family and working at a full-time job. Her unqualified support for me in jail was the admiration of many of the political prisoners with me, and her response to my needs sustained me. Her work at a lawyer's office during that time was arduous, but the

children, still young, did well under her care. She taught them to be proud of their dad and all the other fathers in prison with me, many of whose families they knew. There was some professional counselling before we separated, but as reconciliation would not have resolved the tension in the relationship, we parted. Ours was not the partnership she wanted. My own feelings were mixed and unarticulated.

After our separation I threw my energies into work at Middlesex and saw the children regularly each week, becoming what I described as a Tuesday father. I found them in good spirits and I think, as bonded with me as they could be. In the summer I took them on an annual, single parent family holiday to Cornwall, Brighton or Somerset, where we camped in a tent or hired a room at an inexpensive B&B. Back from holiday, I missed their cheerful banter and as time passed watched them become little Londoners from the distance of my weekly visits, miserable that I would not be at home for them, ready with a *structured* "tea", when they returned from school every day. Their "tea" was, of course a sandwich, yoghurt and fruit and the word "structured" was my euphemism for a balanced diet.

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Work was an excellent remedy for despondency. At Middlesex I experienced the burgeoning of higher education in Britain, something of a revolution at the time. In the 1970s and early 1980s a huge influx of students had entered the polytechnics and universities, many of them first generation sons and daughters of working class parents in higher education. The universities responded to the unparalleled increase in demand by altering the format of their traditional degree structures and repackaging their courses. They shortened their duration and widened student choices. This last was partly the academic rationale for what was primarily an exercise in shedding costs. The disciplines affected were for the most part in the humanities, but education, business and technical subjects underwent changes too. The virtues of interdisciplinary study were rediscovered and new undergraduate opportunities found for students to choose more and more of what appeared (to the older tutors) to be less and less of course content. It was not the high moment in the fortunes of "the liberal arts". Later, faculty members were re-grouped into "schools", in which they acquired a group identity and were able to create greater coherence for their disciplines.

In the School of History where I was located, we had a field day in designing "modules" that we believed to be socially important. The more politically conscious history students often opted for courses in the English, French, Russian and American revolutions (often not knowing in which centuries they occurred) and took optional subjects that were ancillary to these. I designed and taught the course modules on Colonialism and Imperialism; the Theories of the Political State; Marxism; and

(appropriately, some might say) the Russian Revolution. The students were not the only ones to be frustrated at the 10 week courses, taught at great speed to cover the syllabus. I delighted in comparing the political philosophies of Hobbes and Locke and the contexts of fear and optimism in which they were conceived, but ten weeks was a short time to resolve history's thorny problems. Class conflict as seen by Marx struck a chord with the students in the Socialist Worker's Party, then on the rise at Middlesex. We would have to wait for the philosophy of C. Wright Mills later in the programme to satisfy the more conservative students with the virtues of social harmony.

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A question often asked was: "What did you do in exile?" I'm never quite sure how to respond to this as survival is the core objective of most expatriates. In Britain, which is not naturally welcoming to "foreigners", the search for place, identity and acceptance by the native community is illusive. It took me some years to appreciate the effects of this and to regain my sense of self and identity. This occurred only when I reconnected with the struggle in South Africa. It was there that my sense of place and purpose lay. But this realization occurred to me a litle later, after a pause in my work and an unexpected trip to the US.

The visit to the United States was truly fortuitous, "a confluence of accident and luck", as an old CPSA stalwart once said.[12] The pace of my activity had slowed down a little after completing my PhD and I expressed the sheer joy of this to the Dean of the Humanities Faculty at Middlesex. Quite unexpectedly she asked me whether I was interested in an exchange professorship with a colleague at the California State University, at Hayward. I jumped at the suggestion and left for California in September 1978 after encountering a frustrating bureaucratic hassle with the US embassy in London over a visa. Fortunately, after the debacle of my Eastern European tour, when I had no travel documents, I applied for naturalization and had become a British citizen in 1976. But this was not enough to satisfy the US immigration officials. After a number of wearisome journeys to the embassy to explain the reasons for my imprisonment in South Africa, I was given a "J. Visa" for one year. The immigration authorities were clearly not convinced by my argument that a communist in South Africa meant anybody who was opposed to the apartheid government, but granted the visa for a limited period, anyway.

I lived in the Bay area in California with Irene and David McPhail, a generous and hospitable couple. Irene was a South African, whom I met by chance in California, and David a Texan. We became good friends and enjoyed each other's company.[13] From their house in Kensington I regularly commuted to Hayward, south of San Francisco for lectures. The history course there was more conventional than at Middlesex and the students more verbal than their counterparts in England. Apart from their obsession with

receiving straight As for the essays they wrote, we worked well together. The English system was different, I told them: "only Moses, Mohammed and Marx got straight As". This was not very well received. In time, I came to know some of the faculty members and through them met others at University College, Berkeley, where I gave a few seminars on the migrant labour system in South Africa. It was the end of the Reagan presidency; the Cold War was at its height and the momentum of the free-thinking counter culture of the 1960s fast receding. If university professors had been in the forefront of the protest movements in that incredible decade, they rarely displayed any rebellious traces by the end of 1970s. From protesters on the frontline, many of them had succumbed to lives of middle class respectability. As one of my colleagues put it, "from a social class on the make, they had moved to one that had made it". The faculty members at Hayward and Berkeley were no exception.

My stay in the US lasted nine months and was more a time of personal renewal and reflection than an opportunity to experience the US in a meaningful way. I enjoyed the openness of colleagues, their hospitality and their friendship but I also found the break from my usual activity a convenient opportunity to reflect on the past and all that had led to my imprisonment and exile. My hosts were curious to know about my "story".

I was as open with them as I could be and reasoned – as much for myself as for them – that from an early age I came to Socialism and accepted the view that the struggles of the ANC and the Party were interlinked. I had no idea whether the transition to a genuine democracy would be natural or forced or how long it would take, but knew that the ending of apartheid was a precondition for Socialism and that once democracy had been achieved, the next transition was likely to happen only in the distant future. By 1964, it was already evident that my career and security were in jeopardy as the security police closed in on the liberation movement. If I were arrested and imprisoned in the earlier years, when I was single, the financial consequences would have been solely mine to bear but after 1958, when I had a family to support, my personal responsibilities were more complicated.

It seemed that there were two options before me: to quit the struggle for the family's sake or continue in the underground movement. But I was already known to the security police and it was too late to consider opting out of the struggle, even if I wanted to. Like many others in the same boat, I tried to burn the candle at both ends, to be faithful to the struggle and earn enough to support the family, but it was evident for all who had eyes to see, that I would eventually go to jail. It was economically impossible for me to become a "professional revolutionary" and work in the diminishing structures of the underground organization. On the one hand it was morally unacceptable to flee, and on the other, it was almost impossible simply to get up and go! I was not alone in this predicament, and like almost everyone else in that position, remained vulnerable to arrest and solitary

confinement. There seemed to be nothing exceptional in my choice to stay the course, although the punishment would be hard.

My American friends seemed to understand my thinking, but were perplexed by my determination to continue to be active in the struggle when I knew it would be courting arrest. “Would I do the same if I had the chance to live my life again?” they asked, as if it were all a game of mental chess. The question, though hypothetical, was difficult to answer from the safe distance of another scenario, so many years later. My response was in the affirmative, but in the light of hindsight, I’m not sure that my answer today would have been quite so unequivocal

I returned from the United States in 1979, feeling physically renewed and more buoyant than I had for years, despite a heavy work schedule. Middlesex, as ever, was professionally challenging and kept me occupied. But my head was elsewhere.

Chapter 18

1 Cited by Foner, *Who Owns History?*, p. ix.

2 Correspondence, secretary for the interior, Dept of the Interior, Pretoria, 6 June 1968.

3 Correspondence from Barbara Castle MP, House of Commons, London, 5 June 1968.

4 National Archives, Pretoria, Security Police File: Norman Levy.

5 In his novel, the *Buddha of Suburbia*, Hanif Kureishi described the borough of Bromley rather more exotically than I remembered it, but his description certainly is evocative of the middle-class neighbourhood. Kureishi also describes his experiences at the Bromley College of Technology, where he was a student (about 17 years old at the time) and in my economic history class, but I doubt whether he would remember me.

6 Helen Joseph died in 1993. They had met briefly when Jessica visited South Africa in the 1980s.

7 See Report of the UN Special Committee on the policies of apartheid of the Government of the Republic of South Africa A/5825, 8 December 1964.

8 Phrases abounded from Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (Routledge, London, 1964), especially his emotive line “… they find their soul in the automobile, hi-fi set [and in] the split-level home”.

9 In a conversation with Brian Bunting in April 2008, Brian asked me whether my memoir would be explicit (he was referring to the SACP). I said it would be and asked him whether I had genuinely been overlooked. His reply was typically enigmatic: “There must have been something else,” he said. At the time I had no doubt.

10 The dissertation was published in 1982 under the title *The Foundations of the South African Cheap Labour System* (Routlege, Kegan Paul, London, 1982).

11 Deborah Levy, *My Frozen Father*, in *Granta*, 63, 1998.

12 The CPSA stalwart was Solomon Buirski, the party theoretician, who when asked to explain Hilda Watts’ election by white voters to the Johannesburg City Council in 1944, gave this answer. See chapter 3 above.

13 See chapter 1, in regard to their visit to South Africa in December 1990.